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Graphic Design • Mehmetcan Öztürk

Editorial Office • Aksaray Mah. Cerrahpaşa Cad. No: 5 D: 9 Fatih-İstanbul +90 (212) 586 72 31
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Principles of Publication

At a time when US ambitions for a unipolar world order have lost their appeal, a new order is taking shape thanks to the multipolarization of world politics and the acceleration of cooperation between developing countries, rejecting the globalism of imperialist states. Under these conditions, the new agenda of global cooperation should respond to the needs and aspirations of developing countries seeking joint development and solidarity under the guidance of public-driven projects. In particular, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) -put forward in 2013 by Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China- provides a suitable opportunity and a sound foundation for the implementation of this new agenda of global cooperation.

BRI is an epoch-making move to re-implement the concept of the Silk Road, which dates back 2,000 years, to a time when China was immensely contributing to global prosperity and the development of trade and cooperation. The revival of this concept entails a much more comprehensive approach that also incorporates rail and sea transport, and digital systems.

BRI proposes to bring together over 60 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America –together accounting for nearly half of the world's gross domestic product– for prosperity and development at the initiative of China. Unlike the Western-centered world order, BRI seeks peaceful collaboration for improving global trade and production towards common goals for humanity. It firmly rejects crude imperialist exploitation. Two thousand years ago, the Silk Road was a conduit for the flow of gunpowder, spices, silk, compasses and paper to the world. Today, it offers artificial intelligence, quantum computers, new energy and material technologies, and space-age visions to developing countries. In addition, the New Silk Road provides incentives and opportunities for the development and implementation of bio-economic schemes in stakeholder countries against the threat of climate change and other environmental threats that bring the entire ecosystem to the brink of extinction.

Turkey has a significant role –real and potential– in accelerating South-South cooperation. Turkey is conveniently located as Asia's farthest outpost to the West. It assumes a critical position as a pivotal country on BRI's North-South and East-West axes. However, China's development and BRI's contribution to the future of humanity have remained to a large extent underrecognized and superficially evaluated in Turkish academia, media, and politics. This is mainly because Turkey's academics, media professionals, and policy makers have been observing China using Western sources. In the same manner, China and BRI's other potential partners have been viewing Turkey through a Western lens.

BRIQ has committed itself to developing an in-depth understanding of the present era, with a particular emphasis on the new opportunities and obstacles on the road to the New Asian Century.

BRIQ assumes the task of providing direct exchange of views and information among Chinese and Turkish academics, intellectuals, and policy makers. In the meantime, this journal will serve as a platform to bring together the intellectual accumulation of the whole world, especially developing countries, on the basis of the Belt and Road Initiative, which presents a historic opportunity for the common future of humanity.

BRIQ is also devoted to publishing research and other intellectual contributions that underline the transformative power of public-driven economies, where popular interests are upheld as the basic principle, ahead of individual profit. The fundamental tasks of BRIQ are to demonstrate how BRI can contribute to the implementation of this public-driven model, and to help potential BRI partners –including Turkey- to realize their real potential.

BRIQ stands for the unity of humanity and a fair world order. It will therefore be a publication for the world's distinguished intellectuals, especially those from Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas: the defenders of a new civilization rising from Asia on the basis of peace, fraternity, cooperation, prosperity, social benefit and common development.

Submission Guidelines

BRIQ features a broad range of content, from academic articles to book reviews, review essays, interviews, news reports, and feature articles.

The Editorial Board can issue calls for papers for special issues and invite authors to contribute manuscripts; however, it also welcomes unsolicited submissions.

Submissions are invited in English or Turkish. All submissions are to include a short biography (150-word limit) and should be sent as Microsoft Word attachments to briq@briqjournal.com. Articles or other content that have been previously published or are under review by other journals will not be considered for publication.

BRIQ follows American Psychology Association (APA) style, 6th edition, <https://www.apastyle.org>) and uses American English spelling.

BRIQ applies a double-blind review process for all academic articles.

Academic articles should be between 5000 and 9000 words in length, including abstracts, notes, references, and all other content. Please supply a cover page that includes complete author information, and a fully anonymized manuscript that also contains an abstract (200-word limit) and five keywords.

Book reviews should not exceed 1,000 words; review essays covering two or more works can be up to 3,000 words.

News reports consisting of brief analyses of news developments should not exceed 1,500 words; feature articles combining reporting and analysis can be up to 3,500 words.

Please contact the Editorial Board for interview proposals.

EDITORIAL

The strategy of “Blue Homeland” is a strong expression of Turkey’s will to protect its territorial integrity, to strengthen its national defense, and to make full use of its maritime economic potential. This strategy aims at disabling the Atlantic plans geared towards confining Turkey to its coastlines, even though it has the longest coastline in the Mediterranean Sea. Worthy of note here is that the Mediterranean Sea is of vital importance for Turkey as its access point to the high seas.

In the present day, Turkey, China, Russia, Syria, and many other countries have started to formulate their own national maritime strategies against the backdrop of a multipolarizing world. One could thereby observe that the developing world tends to converge towards a common strategy, which consists of securing national coastlines in the first place, and then of gaining access to trade and energy routes in the open seas, while also seeking to establish a common ground for the equal sharing of energy basins among region states.

The present special issue is framed around the theme of “Blue Homeland”, which sheds light on this converging understanding in the developing world. This understanding finds a strong echo in the Maritime Silk Road as the most important pillar of the Belt and Road Initiative. The Maritime Silk Road offers an ample opportunity for developing countries to secure their national sovereignty in the seas. As such, developing countries will be able to build broader partnerships around shared interests, while preventing foreign interventions.

The will of the developing countries to pursue their own national interests, to voice their own policy demands, and to have a say in world affairs is getting stronger at the expense of the US-led Atlantic system, whose overseas activities are but a reflection of its claim to dominate the world’s energy routes and basins. The strengthening of this political will serves to resolve even the most gangrenous problems between regional countries in the developing world.

For example, while the Atlantic system represented by the USA-France axis had driven the Nagorno-Karabakh problem into a deadlock for years; Turkey and Russia, with the indirect contribution of Iran, have produced a fair solution for the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, in accordance with international law. A similar solution is underway in Syria and Libya.

Another important development that should be noted in this context is how the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) persist in their commitment to take an active part in the solution of international problems. In the Final Declaration of the 12th Summit held in Moscow on November 17, 2020, the BRICS has strongly reasserted its “demand for a fair international order”, and emphasized that they will continue to work for accomplishing this demand.

With this issue, we celebrate our first year of publication. At the launch of BRIQ, we declared the following:

“BRIQ aspires to become a center of intellectual attraction on a global scale, whose role will be to produce innovative ideas on how the developing world’s demand for a fair world order can be met! We aim to become a platform where the efforts of Turkish intellectuals –as part of a leading country in the Asian Age– will prove decisive! We are also interested in initiating a sustained dialogue that brings together academics, politicians, and the business world on the matter of possibilities and opportunities offered by the Belt and Road Initiative.”

BRIQ’s first year of existence has led to four issues that successfully fulfill our journal’s original vision and mission. These issues stand out on account of the uniqueness of their design, the scope of their special themes, the scientific depth of featured articles, and the diverse profile of contributors from different countries. Our authors include academics from prominent universities based in countries such as China, Turkey, Russia, Iran, Mexico, Australia, and Germany. Our first four issues have featured a total of 35 peer-reviewed articles, essays, interviews, and book reviews.

BRIQ will certainly advance in its quest to become a global platform for scientific exchange, giving voice to scientific perspectives that are often silenced in Atlantic-biased mainstream outlets.

FİKRET AKFIRAT
Editor-in-Chief

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(Photography Artist)

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How to Revive the “Five Seas Strategy”? The Syrian Vision



BASSAM ABU ABDULLAH

Ph.D.
Head of the Ba'ath Party's Central Party School

ZIAD AYOUB ARBACHE

Ass. Prof. Dr.
Faculty of Economics, Damascus University

Bassam Abu Abdullah holds a PhD in International Relations from the Academic of Sciences of Uzbekistan University (1993). He was a Diplomat in the Syrian embassy in Turkey (2004-2008). He is a writer and political expert who teaches at universities and other higher education institutions as a lecturer. He made public appearances at several media outlets and participated in international conferences, including the Beijing summit on “One Belt One Road” in May 2017. He served as a team leader at the Damascus Strategic Studies Center (2012-2014). He recently published a book with Dr. Ziad Ayoub Arbache and Malaz Moukada on China in Arabic (China: The Founding Act of a New World Order, Orient Printing & Publishing, Damascus, 2019). He is a visiting researcher at the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, Shanghai University of International Studies. He speaks Arabic, English, Russian, and Turkish.

E-mail: DCSSI@live.com

Ziad Ayoub Arbache holds a PhD from the Institute of Energy Economics and Policy (IE-PE-INPG), Grenoble, France (1998). He worked as an advisor to several ministries in Syria and as a consultant for international development organizations and agencies. He is a member of the Advisory Board of the Syrian Prime Minister. He is a lecturer in several postgraduate centers and a guest of several media channels. His main areas of research are geo-economics and strategic prospective studies, peacebuilding and recovery strategies, regional planning, and geopolitics of energy. He speaks Arabic, French, and English.

E-mail: ziad-ay@scs-net.org

ABSTRACT

Based on its cultural heritage and future vision, Syria launched the Five Seas Initiative in 2004, with the intention of improving regional cooperation. This initiative triggered a plethora of new paradigms and terminologies that address several developments expected to influence both the Middle Eastern conflict theater and the international landscape, particularly in the period 2010-2011. After nine years of war that served to undermine the Five Seas Initiative, and upon the failure of the hegemony of global capitalism in its crude forms, it is now time to put forward a real alternative based on common interests between regional and international actors, which would respect regional diversity away from extremism. Since Middle Eastern countries share common problems, proposed solutions to these problems would be more effective if they were formulated and carried out collectively. Ultimately, development is the only way to bring peace to the Middle East, and a lasting solution to shared problems can only be reached within the framework of "Peace Through Development". The combination of the "Five Seas Strategy" and the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) would provide such a solution by reconstructing southwest Asia and creating a network of infrastructures thanks to Syria's privileged geopolitical position at the intersection of the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Black Sea. Full engagement with this combined strategy seems to be the best way to avoid another wasted decade for the majority of Middle Eastern countries.

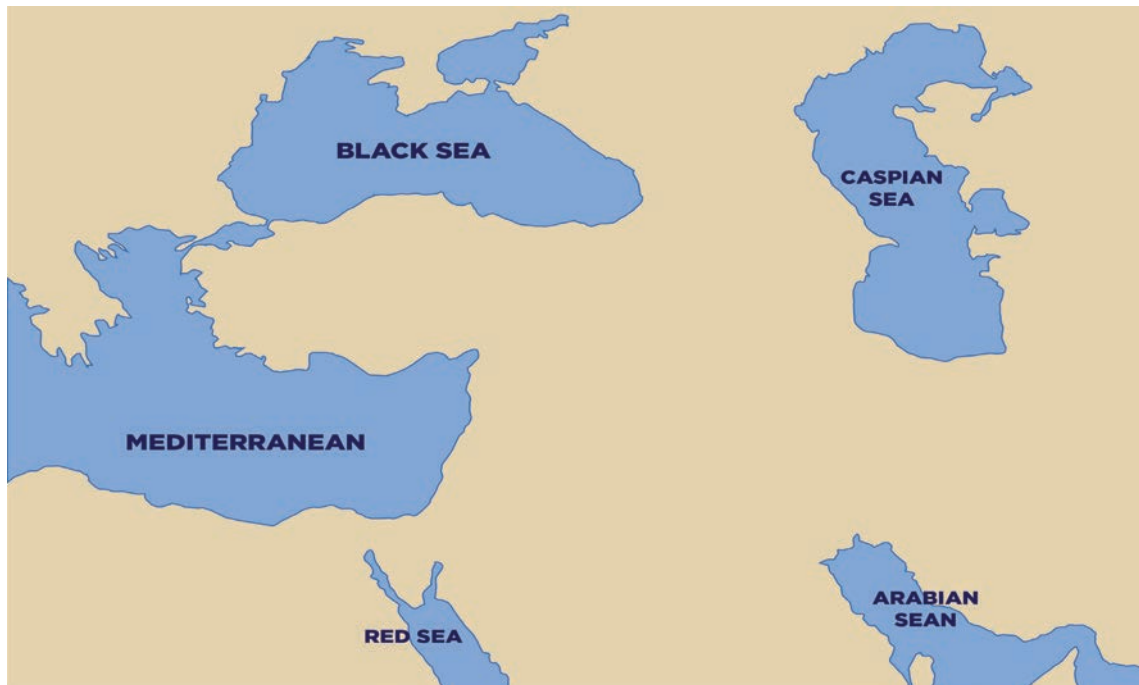
Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, five seas, geopolitics, Middle East, Syria

The Five Seas Strategy: Its Origins and Development in Context

In the period between his ascension to presidency in 2000 and the onset of the war on Syria in 2011, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad sought to shift economic policy towards *infitah* (opening). This policy aimed at reigniting economic and social development, while strengthening the international and regional alliances of Syria. With this aim in mind, President al-Assad launched his "Four Seas Approach" (Stern, 2009; Syria Aims to Become, 2009) in 2004, a vision that seeks to take advantage of Syria's geographic position to place the country at the center of a regional energy and transportation network. Gradually, Damascus promoted his strategy to transform the country into a trade hub (Lin, 2011: 13) in the regions around the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Caspian Sea. The Red Sea was also added to the list in later stages.

During the decade before the beginning of the foreign-orchestrated war on Syria, the Syrian President promoted this idea beyond the region and improved Syria's relations with many countries in the East: Iran (2001, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010), China (2004), Russia (2005, 2008). He also visited the Balkan and European regions: Germany (2001), France (2001, 2008, 2010), Italy (2002), Greece (2003), Turkey (2004) (SANA, 2010; World Bank, 2004), Azerbaijan (2009), Bulgaria, Romania, Belarus, and Ukraine (2010).

President Assad explained his expanded vision in 2009: "Once the economic space between Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran becomes integrated, we would link the Mediterranean, the Caspian, the Black Sea, and the Gulf ...we are not only important in the Middle East ...Once we link these Four Seas, we become the compulsory intersection of the whole world in investment, transport, and more" (Badran, 2010: par.5).



Syrian Five Seas Strategy (Map:  BRIQ)

Syria, therefore, aligned itself with the key countries that lie on these shores to transform itself into a trade hub, and the Ankara-Damascus-Tehran triangle would become the core of an approach to include Iraq and the Caucasus in a geographic continuum connecting the Four Seas (Lin, 2013: 4). Several bilateral agreements were concluded, including with Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Russia, China, Romania, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan. "The objective was the establishment of a network of operations, including commercial trade, infrastructure, transportation networks, and several huge pipeline projects (a gas pipeline from Iran, a pipeline into Turkey linking up with the planned Nabucco gas pipeline from Azerbaijan, and the rebuilding of the oil pipeline from As explained by Lin, northern Iraq into Syria) (Sandmark, 2015: 28). "The Syrian government, which sought to speed up its partnership negotiations with the European Union (EU), hastened Egypt to

start implementing the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), which would act as a means of access for EU countries to markets in the Arab and western Asian countries" (Lin, 2010a: par.10).

This vision signified that Syria would become the center of stability in the region, linking the Caucasus in the north with the Gulf States in the south, Iran in the East, and south of Europe. Syria as an active member of GAFTA, and Turkey, with its customs union with the EU and its reach to the Caucasus countries, would greatly benefit from enhanced partnership to turn the entire region into a mass of at least 600 million consumers, a figure that cannot be easily ignored.

The new world order, as was imposed by the US, has not let Syria (as well as other countries in the region) initiate a radical change towards building independent South-South relations, especially after the US invasion of Iraq

From a geopolitical perspective, the region's potential of at least 600 million consumers is more than sufficient to explain the reason behind the West's attempted assertion of control over the whole region.

by in 2003. Indeed, from a geopolitical perspective, the region's potential of at least 600 million consumers is more than sufficient to explain the reason behind the West's attempted assertion of control over the whole region.

Recently, Russian strategist Alexander Dugin (2020) noted that Russia, Turkey, Iran, China, and other countries including India, Pakistan, many other Arab countries, African countries, and Europe itself can secure real independence only by way of creating a geopolitical Eurasian alliance, a multipolar alliance.

A firmer understanding of this vision requires us to take into account the evolution of the global and regional context. The overall background can be understood by reference to the following principal dynamics:

- From a geo-economic point of view, the center of gravity of the world has started to move from west to east and from north to south. This process began during the 1990s with the emergence of new centers of growth and the formation of a multipolar global economic system as the weight of players in emerging markets increased. As a figurative expression: instead of the prevailing model of "Americanizing the world", China and other developing countries began "globalizing America" (Guéhenno, 1999). Semih Koray (2019/2020) describes this situation by arguing that "the new kind of globalization aims to globalize cooperation, and not to create a single global market in the absence of national borders".

- "As the global economic balance is shifting from the EU, the US, and other developed countries towards China, India, and other developing countries, economic decision-making power is shifting as well. Global cooperation mechanisms will need to recognize this shifting balance while continuing to allow the underrepresented to be heard" (The Economic Times, 2020: par.14-15).

- Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US sought to impose a new global pattern as the sole global pole by direct military interventions such as the US invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). Later, the US also promoted the concept of soft power by preaching policy and reengineering countries through paternalistic means. This went hand in hand with the use of sanctions as a weapon (Baldwin, 1999/2000; Hufbauer & Jung, 2020).

- The worldwide protests against the 2003 war on Iraq gave way to the development of an international resistance against the US-led world order, leading five years later to the formation of the BRICS Alliance.

- The failure of the Oslo Agreement between Palestine and Israel in 1994, Israeli intransigence in respecting international legitimacy, the growth of instability in the Middle East region, and its multiple challenges showed the inadequacy of the Pan-Arab security system and its governing bodies, including the Arab League. Indeed, the First Gulf War between Iraq and Iran (1980-1988), the invasion and annexation of Kuwait by Iraq (1990), the war of the coalition led by the US to dislodge the Iraqi troops (1991), and the occupation of Iraq by American troops after thirteen years of embargo, reveal the fragility of the whole region.

- "The US stake in the stability of the Middle East is a contingent interest. It only exists because of other US interests in the region. The relationship with Israel is surely among the most important priorities of the US policy of regional

alliances" (Barnes & Bowen, 2015: 6). One should note that the wave of anti-Americanism has been exacerbated not by anti-American statements, but statements such as that of Condoleezza Rice¹ during the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 2006: "The US-led interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia were not about spreading democracy, but about addressing regional security issues". The idea behind this was reviving Shimon Peres's project on the New Middle East, as was explained in his book published in 2003. "This statement has been simply reiterating the actual US policy. But rarely has a phrase caught as much attention and provoked as much anger on the part of moderates, who have seen in it as an expression of a new and more determined American strategy aimed against Arab interests" (Khalaf, 2006: par. 3).

- During the 1980s and 1990s, the Washington Consensus and the neoliberal dogma had become the dominant economic approach in many regions of the world, especially in Eastern European countries after the disbandment of the Warsaw Pact and the COMECON organization (1991) and their joining of the EU and the NATO alliance.

Starting with the 1990s, the global economic landscape has rapidly changed. For example, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) did not operate in isolation from the influence of the global political-economic environment. In the last two decades, the world's macroeconomic environment was shaken by the global recession, which caused an inward retraction of production and services. In other words, the financial crisis of 2008, coupled with retrenchment and distancing from multilateral agreements, sent ripples across the world. These factors still af-

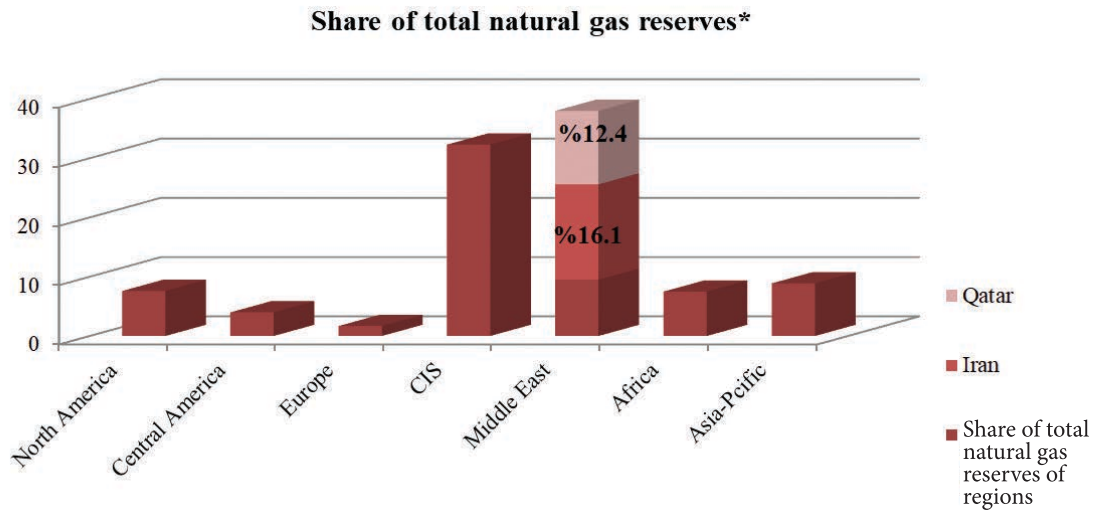
fect the discernible value and role of the WTO years later. International economic issues were largely ignored as the global attention shifted to fostering increasing levels of polarization among countries and regions across the world.

In the context of the "victory of liberalism" and the expansion of globalization, the need for regional economic alliances emerged. The new wave of regionalism can be seen as a response to the challenges of a continuously deepening polarization generated by capitalist globalization processes (Amin, 1999). A defining characteristic of international repositioning has thus been the establishment and strengthening of regional cooperation, with some important implications. Numerous alliances were formed or revived, including the completion of the economic and monetary union in European Union in 1999; the revival of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the 1990s along with the institutionalization Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989; the creation of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) in 1991 as well as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in 1992; the emergence of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 as well as the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) in 1997; and the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 (Suratman, 2020)².

The Middle East has 42% of proven global gas reserves (estimated at 199 trillion m³). Moreover, Iran and Qatar represent nearly 29% of proven global reserves.

1 Condoleezza Rice served in former President George W. Bush's administration as national security advisor from 2001 to 2005 and as secretary of state from 2005 to 2009.

2 On 15 November 2020, China and fourteen other countries (including Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and Australia) signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade agreement, which aims to progressively cut tariffs and further market access for goods and services (Suratman, 2020).



Prepared based on 2019 data by British Petroleum Company. (Graphic: BRIQ)

From the point of view of the world energy system, the Middle East is resource-rich region for hydrocarbons. It possesses more than half of the world's conventional oil reserves, estimated at 1,734 billion barrels, of which the Arab countries represent 43%. When including Iran, this percentage exceeds 52%. Also, the Middle East has 42% of proven global gas reserves (estimated at 199 trillion m³). Moreover, Iran and Qatar represent nearly 29% of proven global reserves. Worthy of note in this regard is that world energy needs still depend on oil and natural gas. Estimated at 57.3%, moreover, the region's share in world energy trade is overwhelming. Most of these regional countries therefore control important hydrocarbon reserves as well as the means to exploit and transport them (British Petroleum Company, 2020).

From the Eve of the "Arab Spring" to Aggravating Instability in the Middle East: 2011-?

The Syrian government set out its Tenth Five-Year Plan (2006-2010), which reflects as a vision

through which the country will be transformed by 2020 into a fully integrated economy into the global economy and acquire the confidence, institutions, and creative talents necessary for Syria's global competitiveness. Under this plan, strategic projects have been put in place to build the roads, ports, and pipelines that Syria needs for achieving the "Five Seas Vision".

Despite regional instability (which persisted after the US occupation of Iraq in 2003), Israel's intransigence in pursuing the peace process following Security Council resolutions, the flow of over 2.5 m Iraqi refugees to Syria since the occupation of their country in 2003, the new wave of American sanctions against Syria, and the international financial crisis of 2008, the Syrian economy had been able to record growing economic performance prior to the Western intervention in 2011. Even though the Syrian economy was in a transition phase (adoption the social market economy in 2005, after decades of central economic planning, regulatory reform and prices liberalization), the average GDP growth rate was 4.4% in the period 2000-2010 (World Bank, n.d.).

However, the conflict that began in 2011 stalled these reform efforts and ongoing fighting continues to accelerate the country's economic decline. Because of its regional location, Syria was directly targeted by Western powers in alliance with regional powers aiming to control the Syrian vital sphere. More than 20 states have been involved in the war on Syria and hundreds of different armed groups are currently waging a proxywar in the Syrian territory. This has paralyzed the Syrian economy and destroyed the Syrian infrastructure, while also curtailing foreign trade, encouraging speculation on the exchange rate of the Syrian pound, fostering a general rise in prices, and provoking sanctions. Certainly, Syria's projects are undermined by the geostrategic ambitions of intervening countries and their intention to divide the country.

Major powers have sought to control the eastern Mediterranean space as "spatial capital"³ (Lévy & Lussault, 2003). In his classic handbook, *The Struggle for Syria*, Patrick Seale argued that those who aspire to control the Middle East must first win over Syria. According to Seale (1987) "whoever controlled Syria or enjoyed her special friendship could isolate (other Arab states) and need bow to no other combination of Arab states". It is self-evident to say that the economic dynamics were and still are a major component of the war against Syria targeting its political and economic system, and, thus, its sovereignty.

Despite all unprecedented pressures on Syria, it is not easy to understand how such an economy as the Syrian economy, which was under going structural transformations⁴ before the onset of the war in March 2011, could withstand a

war that targeted its very foundations and pillars, especially with the pursuit of Western powers to control the Syrian space.

The period 2010-2011 was the so-called Arab Spring movements, which erupted in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria. Large foreign countries strongly supported Islamic groups' campaigns against governments represented by the Arab Spring countries. "A few years ago, Turkey was also subjected to a wave of anti-government protests as part of the Arab Spring process in the Middle East and northern Africa. Ankara faced significant difficulties and even serious conflicts just like almost all neighboring and regional countries⁵" (Djavadi, 2016: 2).

Zhang Weiwei first predicted the Arab Winter in his June 2011 debate with Francis Fukuyama: "My understanding of the Middle East leads me to conclude that the West should not be too happy. It will bring enormous problems to American interests. It is called 'Arab Spring' for now, and I guess it will soon turn to be the winter for the Middle East" (Guancha, 2011).

Instead of seeking a self-reliant development model and regional solidarity with mutual benefits (win-win), some of these countries tend to align with the US/Western strategy.

The Middle Eastern region finds itself reeling from the sharp resurgence of confrontation between actors allied with the US and with other allies close to Russia. From a humanistic

3 Spatial capital refers to "all the resources accumulated by an actor, allowing him/her to take advantage, according to his/her strategy, of the use of the spatial dimension of the society. It builds on the capacity of an actor to take advantage of scale and matrix and consists of the benefits gained by control of specific geographical arrangements" (Lévy & Lussault, 2003).

4 e.g. Transition from socialist planning mechanisms to a socialist market economy approach, and the shift from an economy dependent on oil, phosphates and cotton rents to an economy based on maximizing added values.

5 Turkey is considered both in Washington and European capitals as a "model" to act as a "bridge" between Western democracies and the Muslim world of. (Djavadi, 2016).

perspective, one could argue that the Middle Eastern human and economic security has deteriorated over time⁶ in ways that go far beyond military conflicts and the petty power struggles of regional and international powers. "Virtually all the countries in the Middle East suffer from a failure to modernize and open up their economies, and from demographic pressures and acute problems in dealing with a "youth bulge" and lack of jobs" (Cordesman, 2020: 3). "The overall macroeconomic indicators are more vulnerable and uncertain, because they depend on direct oil and other sources of rent, given rising inflation and unemployment, contracting investment, elevated corporate and financial sector vulnerabilities, and patchy implementation of corrective policy actions" (Cordesman, 2020: 18). Many countries in the region seem incapable of helping themselves. Instead of seeking a self-reliant development model and regional solidarity with mutual benefits (win-win), some of these countries tend to align with the US/Western strategy, which does nothing but further "prolong regional problems rather than solve them. This, instead, allows the existing problems to fester and grow, rather than generate real progress and solutions. This becomes all too clear when one looks beyond the crisis of the day" (Cordesman, 2020: 3).

After long years of escalating conflicts, Libya, Syria, and "Yemen continue to face an unprecedented humanitarian, social, and economic crisis. Significant damage to vital public infrastructure has contributed to a disruption of basic services, while insecurity has delayed the rehabilitation of oil exports, which had been the largest source of foreign currency before the war, severely limiting government revenue and supply of foreign

exchange for essential imports. This further compounds the economic crisis and humanitarian suffering from violence" (Cordesman, 2020: 34).

"Economic and social prospects in the 2020s and beyond are uncertain. They hinge critically on the state of political and economic security in the region. Access to affordable food is a rapidly growing threat to household welfare, as global food price increases and the national currencies depreciation are now exacerbated by COVID-19-related trade restrictions on the part of food exporters" (Cordesman, 2020: 34). As described by Cordesman, "these problems are not specific to any particular nation. They have become regional – made worse in virtually every case due to the impact of the crisis on petroleum export prices and the coronavirus on the local and global economy" (Cordesman, 2020: 2). Cordesman goes on to argue that "the US has failed to achieve lasting solutions because of its prolonged wars, its lack of progress in dealing with racism, and the scale of its failures to use its wealth to deal with income inequities. The EU has failed just as badly relative to its opportunities" (Cordesman, 2020: 2).

However, the main challenge in assessing each country's performance is to understand how to "emerge out of its current problems in achieving sustained progress in meeting the needs of the entire population of the region. No state in the world has come close to perfection in meeting these goals, but many nations are at least attempting to make some progress" (Cordesman, 2020: 39).

Beyond the Ambitions of International and Regional Powers

Global powers, such as the the Triad (the USA, EU, and Japan) and emerging countries like China, seek constantly to reposition themselves.

⁶ This situation is perhaps best explained by reference to Israel's annexation of part of occupied Palestinian lands, US recognition Israel's annexation of the Occupied Syrian Golan and the American failure in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s.

Syria's allies, i.e. Russia, Iran, and China, have prevented Syria's conquest by hegemonic powers mainly the US and its proxy states in the region.

Syria's allies, i.e. Russia, Iran, and China, have prevented Syria's conquest by hegemonic powers mainly the US and its proxy states in the region. Characterized by its proximity to Turkey at the crossroads between three continents of the world (Europe, Africa, and Asia), Syria (along with Iraq and Iran) seeks to regain its independence. However, it should not be deduced from this that China and Russia are acting according to a mutual and concerted strategy. While both may be driven in part by a common goal, their strategies diverge in some respects. Despite their shared desire to promote multilateralism, their priority to pursue their own interests shapes their actions.

China and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): A Newly Emerging World Order

China is an active player that connects Asia, Europe, and Africa as an engine of global economic growth. In its relations with Syria, which can serve as China's gateway to the EU, China has three main objectives: developing economic cooperation so as to advance BRI, stabilizing the entire Middle East region as much as possible, and maintaining Syria's integrity in the face of extremist threats.

China's interest in Mediterranean ports is part of a larger effort to integrate the Middle East as a stop on the Maritime Silk Road, which points to rising opportunities to strengthen the Chinese influence on the Middle East through Syria. Beijing's arrival at Syrian ports is an attractive opportunity in an initiative through which it seeks to connect itself to Eurasia and to

consolidate a foothold in the Greek Piraeus and Mediterranean ports (Dorsey, 2020)

Potential Chinese investments in Syria can be directly linked to BRI. Syria has a crucial impact on the expansion of Chinese projects to western Eurasia given that it sits at the crossroads of strategic land and sea routes for BRI (Lin, 2010b).

Syria could be the key to this route, being able to free China from its natural borders. It could also become an "unguarded back door" for China, while the US shifts towards the Pacific. The urgent need for economic reconstruction, as well as the West's disengagement from the region, makes Syria an attractive destination for China. Additionally, Syria considers China an ally and a key player for the reconstruction of its economy, which provides an opportunity to improve bilateral ties. The Chinese approach to the Syrian conflict stems from its policy of non-interference and respect for state sovereignty. This is a model that China follows with all of its partners around the world and sets it apart from the conditionalities of Western aid. Similar to Syria, China is not immune to the risks of terrorism and is keen to eradicate the risks associated with fundamentalism that may spread further in its territory. It also seeks to cooperate with its allies to eliminate threats that affect its investments in Syria.

Despite the war on Syria, China has renewed its attention to Syria as an important trading hub and partner for Chinese interests in northern Africa, southern Europe, and the Middle East. Syria is close to the EU and the Mediterranean, placed in a location close to both suppliers and consumers of products as it is a GAFTA member and trading hub via its proximity to Turkey, which operates a customs union with the EU. Chinese energy cooperation with Russia,

Iran, Turkey, and potentially Iraq, aims to stabilize the energy market and supply routes in the Middle East. As Christina Lin (2013) mentions, therefore: “there appears to be a new great game around the Greater Middle East”.



Head of Syria's Planning and International Cooperation Commission (PICC) Imad Sabouni and Chinese Ambassador to Syria Feng Biao sign an economic cooperation agreement in Damascus, Syria, on March 4, 2020. (Ammar Safarjalani/Xinhua)

As China embarks on its “look west” development through BRI, Syria’s “look east” policy seems to match with Chinese interests in the Five Seas. China’s growing footprint in the Middle East via BRI is reinforced by Syria’s vision of the Five Seas, which will also have important implications for the US, the EU, and their allies (Lin, 2013). Syria can become a key partner in China’s BRI for peaceful and harmonious development in the Mediterranean region. As Henry Kissinger states: “In the Middle East, there is no peace without Syria” (Totten, 2009). Whilst China becomes more engaged in the Middle East region, Syria is “looking east” to what it perceives as a new Pax Sinica or Chinese peace. Overall, China seems to be quietly

progressing towards economic success, thanks to the BRI strategy. Its political success will be significant in the advent of a New World Order of which China will be a part.

Russia’s Strategy: Long Term Repositioning and Access to Warm Waters

Russian interest in Syria has created a continuum of long-term strategic plans at the geoeconomic level. Through Syria, Russia enjoys an international presence alongside a range of economic and politico-strategic opportunities that will prove fruitful.

There are many direct and indirect reasons for the Russian strategy to support Syria: Strengthening the already existing Russian-Syrian alliance, preventing rising extremism, taking advantage of Syria’s strategic position, especially when it comes to securing its political and economic power in the Middle East, which represents an ideal opportunity to move closer to several powerful states in Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia (Rodkiewicz, 2017).

Russian presence in Syria allows Russia to access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea⁷ as well as to initiate a geostrategic rapprochement with Syria’s neighbors.

Russia seeks to control the energy dependence of several neighboring countries and works to create and maintain an advantage over the production, transport, and distribution of resources, especially as hydrocarbons are gradually becoming the center of energy security for most states.

Syria enjoys Russian protection both within its borders and internationally. President Putin said in February 2018 that it is crucial “to help the Syrians rebuild their infrastructure, hospitals, schools, revive industry, agriculture, and

⁷ Moreover, on the Mediterranean coast of Syria, the use of a naval base in Tartous was considered as Russia’s only Mediterranean maritime window.

commerce”. The Russian reconstruction project in post-conflict Syria is presented as his version of the “Marshall Plan”. Insisting on the “humanitarian reconstruction” of Syria gives Russia a positive image as an international leader.



President of Syria Bashar al-Assad made a visit to Russia. (President of Russia website)

The Sino-Russian alliance is moving towards the multipolarity of a New World Order. The potential of their alliance cannot be overlooked. President Putin’s vision is not only a project of Russia, but it also appeals to China. Russia knows that working with China would be the ideal solution for Moscow to gain a place among the most powerful states on the international stage. Syria has presented several new opportunities for cooperation between Moscow and Beijing, before and during the war in Syria, especially as Iran (a strategic ally of China and Russia) is subject to sanctions imposed by the west, and China is caught up in a trade war with America.

For China, cooperation with Syria is seen as a way to consolidate ties with Moscow and strengthen mutual trust. There is growing economic cooperation between the two powers. Moscow and Beijing have signed several energy

accords that make Russia and Saudi Arabia rivals in the Chinese oil market. Indeed, the Sino-Russian economic partners has grown thanks to their cooperation for the resolution of the Syrian conflict. Both countries share a similar position vis-à-vis the West.

The Five Seas region and BRI could be an advantage for all parties. For China and Russia, it is more advantageous to work together in force than to work individually, to achieve shared objectives with Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Russia is keen to consolidate its position in Syria. However, this will not be possible if the country were not rebuilt. This is where China’s role is needed. China has reportedly joined with its Russian and Iranian allies to take part in future reconstruction projects and post-conflict investment opportunities in Syria.

The US as a Destabilizing Factor

Paralyzing the domestic politics of Middle Eastern countries has been a defining feature of US foreign policy since the fall of the Soviet Union. From Afghanistan to Iraq and North Africa, it is hard to name a case in which the US has contributed to regional economic development. The American administrations have spared no efforts in inflaming the Middle East, intending to occupy its space to contain China and to exhaust the Russian forces by trying to push Russia into the quagmires of new battlegrounds (Ghatrouf, 2018a). The failure of both invasions mentioned above, and the failure of Libya, Syria, and Yemen with explicit military and political support from Washington, justify the Pentagon’s decision to redeploy away from protracted conflicts in the Middle East. Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller told US troops in a memo: “Ending wars requires compromise and partnership. We met the challenge; We gave it our all. Now it’s time to come home... To all of our Soldiers, Sail-

ors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, Space Professionals, and civilians". He added that he was "weary of war" and that "this is the critical phase in which we transition our efforts from a leadership role to a supporting role. We are not a people of perpetual war – it is the antithesis of everything for which we stand and for which our ancestors fought. All wars must end" (US Secretary of Defense, 2020). After the failure of the policy of preaching to societies and reengineering them under paternalism, the US seems that, as a world pole, it could only use the weapon of sanctions or war.

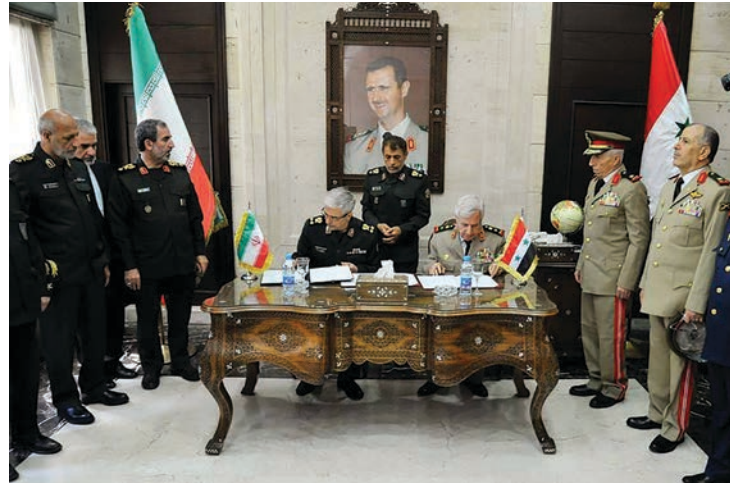
Iran: Syria As A Strategic Ally

"There is no doubt that one of the most intriguing developments in modern Middle Eastern politics has been the emergence and continuity of the Iranian-Syrian alliance since its formation in 1979" (Goodarzi, 2013a: par.1). The relationships "between Iran and Syria are quite extraordinary when one takes into consideration the volatility and shifting political sands in the Middle East" (Goodarzi, 2013b: 1).

As Jubin Goodarzi mentioned, "the alliance is of enormous importance, since both countries are situated in key locations in the Middle East, thereby contributing immensely to its geopolitical significance" (Goodarzi, 2013b)⁹. In the eyes of Syria, Iran is viewed as a strategic leader in Southwest Asia and the Gulf region.

Iran, as a close ally of Syria, is seeking with Russia and China to break the blockade and policy of containment, especially in the presence of dozens of American military bases that control the geographical space as a whole. American politician Mitt Rom-

ney has shown extraordinary candor in repeating: "Syria is Iran's only ally in the Arab world. It's their route to the sea" (The Guardian, 2012).



The visiting Iranian Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri and Syrian Defense Minister Ali Abdullah Ayyoub sign a "comprehensive" military agreement at the Defense Ministry in the capital Damascus, on July 8, 2020. (Ammar Safarjalani/Xinhua)

***Turkey's Foreign Policy Shift From 'Zero Problems' to 'Nothing But Problems': What is Next?*¹⁰**

For years, former Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's policy of "zero problems with neighboring countries" was a flagship concept of Turkish foreign policy, boosting trade with neighbours including Syria during the 2000s. When the protests in Tunisia began and expanded, the Turkish leadership began to exploit the situation and resort to unilateralism, and preparing for war on Syria by penetrating its northern borders and turning it into a hub for terrorism. Turkey's policy in favor of increasing confrontation with neighboring countries since

⁹ Like many authors, this researcher disputes the right of Iranians to adopt their technological and economic development strategy and to have access to the Mediterranean Sea in their alliance with Syria, while the Americans expand their military bases everywhere, including in the Middle East, from Afghanistan to Djibouti, passing through the countries of the Gulf.

¹⁰ (Romano, 2020)

2011 pushed Erdogan toward a more aggressive and sectarian stance. In this period, the West became openly critical of Ankara. In 2006, “when he was asked about long-time EU applicant Turkey’s chances of joining the bloc, British Prime Minister David Cameron said that Turkey would probably not be ready to join ‘until the year 3000’ based on its current rate of progress. This gave Erdogan the perfect opportunity to react and accuse Western countries of ‘plots.’ However, the Turkish president added a new element to his ‘Western plot’ when he claimed later that the West was ‘jealous’ of Turkey and ‘of our dams, bridges, and metros” (Djavadi, 2016: par.31).

Despite the discriminatory and chauvinistic statements of some European politicians, Turkey can play an important role in the region if it adheres to the principle of regional cooperation. It is likely that Turkey will be soon forced to return to regional and international cooperation after the failure of its adventurist unilateralism, especially concerning Syria. This situation will be further accelerated by rising migratory flows and extremism in Europe, which would force Turkey to be more cooperative (English Lokmat, 2020).

The two countries, Turkey and Syria (along with Iraq and Iran), are potential partners, not only in regional security issues, but also in forg-

ing closer ties with the EU, the Balkans, Caucasus, and Arab countries.

Instead of playing on international contradictions, Turkey can be a lever in the heart of the Five Seas region, which requires to implement massive reconstruction projects not only in Syria but also in Iraq (which was not helped by the American presence for two decades) and the entire region, in cooperation with Russia and China.

The Five Seas and BRI: The Myth of the Levantine Basin Come True?

Syria, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Russia, Turkey, China, and others, can rebuild the Middle East by the means of the New Silk Road and the Five Seas. The New Silk Road lies at the heart of China’s strategy for the decades to come. This will also usher in a new era for the Middle East region, which has always been an area coveted for its strategic position and its wealth, disputed between the Eurasian empires and the maritime empires (Raimbaud, 2017).

Since the end of the Cold War (1990-1991), US neoconservatives have regarded this region as a “mission land” to be controlled in order to prevent the re-emergence of Eurasian powers. The region also constitutes a major strategic stake for China, which no longer hides its geopolitical ambitions, which extend to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran. As a “geopolitical hub”, the region allows China access to key regions, such as the “fertile crescent” or the Persian Gulf, and to limit access to rivals.

From the point of view of US rivals, the region is viewed as a strategic area to be conquered,

Turkey can be a lever in the heart of the Five Seas region, which requires to implement massive reconstruction projects not only in Syria but also in Iraq and the entire region, in cooperation with Russia and China.

For the rest of the world, China's peaceful development can be seen in a positive light as long as BRI and the BRICS grouping pursue win-win cooperation.

controlled, or unraveled. This being said, the New Silk Road envisions a "green belt" in this region. It seems that the Chinese dream is already underway (Marxist, n.d.)¹¹. For the rest of the world, China's peaceful development can be seen in a positive light (Peyrefitte, 1973, 1997) as long as BRI and the BRICS grouping pursue win-win cooperation.

The five countries constituting the core of the Middle East (Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon) are interested in being part of BRI. Indeed, Syria will have a special place in BRI. Beijing has been involved in the settlement of the war in Syria since October 2011 and has appointed a special representative in 2016. However, peace can only be restored if foreign countries respect Syria's domestic laws and national sovereignty. Reconstruction cannot be conceived in the classic pattern: a pool of donors, emanating from the West, and Syria at the mercy of the "benefactors" who destroyed it.

Still, BRI can help rebuilding efforts for Syria's devastated economy on a new basis, protecting it from external threats. BRI will provide Syria with a more stable environment, with South-West Asia being structured around two corridors (with major roles in particular for Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon), whether it is the rail corridor and motorway (going from Urumqi as the largest city in western China to coastal towns

in the Middle East) or sea routes leading to the Mediterranean via Suez (Raimbaud, 2017).

Despite Syria's economic weaknesses and the hostility of the US, Syria, through its alliance with Russia and Iran, has been able to revive Damascus' political influence in recent years. Syria faces an uphill struggle for its economic strategy but as Iraq's formidable energy resources come into play, this will enhance his vision.

Based on the current alliance between Syria, Russia, and Iran, and a relative understanding with Iraq, Syria is still able to use its geographical position to facilitate the flow of natural gas from Iraq to Europe as its only outlet on the Mediterranean, adding to the possibility of Iranian gas passing through the same pipelines. One should also keep in mind the potential oil and gas capacity on the northern side of the Syrian coast.

There is no impossibility in politics. One should take into account the possibility of restoring Syria's relations with Saudi Arabia and Turkey in favor of a more prosperous Middle East that has overcome its problems of instability.

Ironically, the Trump-led US is giving up its role as the world leader and the champion of free trade and environmental protection, while China has taken over this role. Prolonged by relentless-ness, the Syrian tragedy has dispelled the West's pretenses and exposed its most devious strategies. But the worst of all has been to whitewash terrorism on the part of Western states. As Bruno Guigue wonders: "How can we resist the nausea in front of the viscosity of these politicians who,

¹¹ As Mao Tse-tung argues: "Therefore, to overtake the United States is not only possible, but absolutely necessary and obligatory. If we don't, the Chinese nation will be letting the nations of the world down and we will not be making much of a contribution to mankind" (Marxist, n.d.).

with each attack on European soil, are poured out in indignant condemnations of terrorist violence which they have fed and praised elsewhere?" (Guigue, 2020). The war on Syria has been, from the outset, a large-scale international conflict in which a rival coalition has formed (Ghatrouf, 2018b). The distinctions between "rebels", "democrats", "moderates", "seculars", "Islamists" or "jihadists" are but superficial divides promoted by Western powers and their allies. By now, everyone understands that the reality of the Syrian conflict, for the past ten years, has been the struggle between state-sponsored terrorist conglomerates and a national army that defends its country against foreign invasion. But it has also spread its miasma to the four corners of the globe, coming back like a boomerang (Guigue, 2020).

The great crisis in the Middle East can also be a great opportunity. "At the same time, there are very hopeful developments led by China and BRICS countries. It is very difficult to predict the course of the current conflicts. One thing is for certain, though: shared development is the only way to bring peace to the Middle East, and a lasting solution can only be reached through the concept of 'Peace Through Development', as the German political activist Helga Zepp-LaRouche stresses" (Hartmann, 2015: 5). This idea has already been put on the international agenda, especially with recent events in Europe, as they relate to migratory flows to several European countries and terrorist acts in France and Austria.

In this "wasted decade" (i.e. 2010-2020), Western behavior towards Syria has failed in terms of ensuring security and development. If the West desires a more peaceful and democratic Middle East, it should develop friendly relations with Syria (Phillips, 2010a) so that the West can well join the reconstruction efforts in Syria and in other countries in the region.

Conclusion

The war on Syria, which has lasted for more than 9 years, has revealed the true face of the international and regional actors involved in this conflict. It has changed the geopolitical configuration of the Middle East as well as the entire World Order. Since the problems in the Middle East are of a collective nature, any constructive solution requires cooperation. "As ever, it seems the Middle East could prove a microcosm of international changes for the better. As the age of American unipolarity is coming to an end, perhaps hastened by unnecessary wars and economic shortsightedness, it is much more likely that international relations in the Middle East will come to reflect the multipolarization of world politics. In such circumstance, regional countries will not be the only powers who will assume a key role in global change. Emerging economies such as China, India, and Brazil will all bid for a leading role, too" (Phillips, 2010b: par.10)

Each regional country would assume a stabilizing role. "A cessation of the ongoing extremism and violence, and eventual political reconciliation, including the reintegration of vital state institutions, would improve the operational environment for facilitating the reconstruction of the economy of regional states and the rebuilding of social cohesion" (Cordesman, 2020: 34). This means that regional countries would shift their alliances and move from the current state of engagement into a forthcoming state of partnership and cooperation. "The question for western states is whether their antagonistic approach towards Syria has achieved any long-term gains. After a decade of dithering, the region is no more stable than it was in 2010. The last 10 years show that western policies of bullying, threatening, and ignoring Syria have failed. Full engagement on an equal footing would seem the best way to avoid wasting another decade" (Phillips, 2010: par.10). 

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A Neo-Mahanian Reading of Turkey and China's Changing Maritime Geopolitics



EFE CAN GÜRCAN

Asst. Prof,
Department of International Relations, İstinye University

*Efe Can Gürcan is Associate Dean of Research and Development for the Faculty of Economics, Administrative, and Social Sciences at İstinye University. He is also Chair of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration and a faculty member in the Department of International Relations, İstinye University. He serves as Director of the Center for Belt and Road Studies at İstinye University and Research Associate at the University of Manitoba's Geopolitical Economy Research Group. Gürcan completed his undergraduate education in International Relations at Koç University. He received his Master's degree in International Studies from the University of Montréal and earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from Simon Fraser University. He speaks English, French, Spanish, and Turkish. His publications include three books as well as more than 30 articles and book chapters on international development, international conflict, and international institutions, with a geographical focus on Latin America and the Middle East. His latest book is *Multipolarization, South-South Cooperation, and the Rise of Post-Hegemonic Governance*.*

E-mail: efe.gurcan@istinye.edu.tr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5415-3163>

ABSTRACT

An eroding perception of maritime peace worldwide and radical questioning of global sea hegemony have emerged as a rapidly growing trend in global politics amidst the demise of *Pax Americana* and the rise of multipolarity. With US global hegemony in decline, China has developed into a leading actor to reignite international cooperation based on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In this environment, there arises a strong need for a closer reading of the changing character of maritime geopolitics within the context of BRI. To address this need, the present article aims to offer a comparative study of recently escalating tensions in the South China Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. Drawing on a neo-Mahanian conception of maritime geopolitics, this article seeks to answer the following questions: How are South China Sea and Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics shaped by the multipolarization of world politics? What are the key dynamics leading to these changes? How do such changes in one region condition those in another? In what respects are Turkey and China's geostrategic imperatives affected in this situation? The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) represents the maritime route of BRI, whose starting point is located in the South China Sea and whose final destination is the Eastern Mediterranean, conceived of as a strategic bridge between China and Europe. It follows that BRI's maritime economic potential primarily relies on South China Sea and Eastern Mediterranean security, i.e. both ends of MSR, whose prospects are intertwined together. One could observe that both Turkey and China suffer from increasing US interventionism at first hand and they have developed similar geostrategic doctrines embodied in the Turkish "Blue Homeland" doctrine and the Chinese "Blue National Soil" doctrine. China and Turkey's shared geopolitical imperatives and geostrategic conformity are to be better grasped by policy-makers for the future success of BRI.

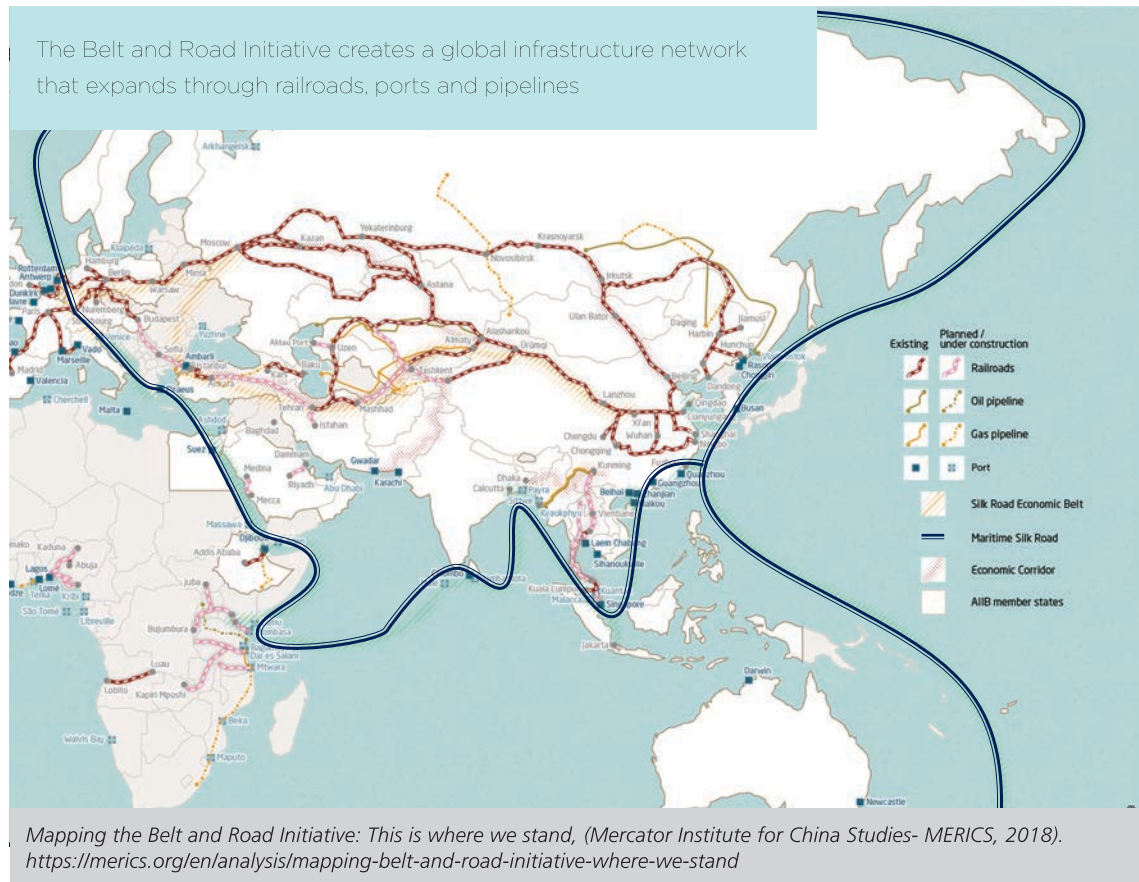
Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean, geopolitics, geostrategy, sea power, South China Sea

A Neo-Mahanian Reading of Turkey and China's Changing Maritime Geopolitics

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of maritime geopolitics in the study of international relations, even for the simple fact that the oceans cover 71% of the earth's surface. Acquiring sea power and controlling inland waterways for both economic and diplomatic supremacy have always been of indispensable value to those states seeking world domination in the history of international relations. It would not be an understatement to argue that all historical periods of global hegemony that have shaped the course of world history such as *Pax Romana*, *Pax Bri-*

tannica, and *Pax Americana* were rooted in a so-called "universal naval peace" (Reynolds, 1974).

The present epoch testifies to a radical calling into question of global sea hegemony amidst the demise of *Pax Americana* and the rise of "multipolarity" (Gürçan, 2019). On the one hand, the United States of America (US) has become a pole of instability in global politics by abusing its leadership position and renouncing its claim to be the provider of common prosperity. This situation is reflected with much clarity in the self-declared "brain death" of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the termination of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the dangerous erosion of



the United Nation's (UN) authority, the persistent undermining of the World Health Organization's (WHO) status, and global environmental governance the continuing effects of the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, and the spiraling out of control of US military interventions worldwide (Gürcan, 2019/2020; Gürcan & Kahraman, 2020).

On the other hand, one of the strongest responses to the crisis of hegemonic global governance has come from China, which launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to reignite international cooperation. Though often designated by the West as a China-owned infrastructure and investment project, BRI seeks the collective leadership and active participation of all countries in-

involved. At the heart of BRI's logic lies the concept of shared development, which represents values centered on the principles of respect to diversity and national sovereignty. BRI has now acquired the status of world history's largest and most comprehensive initiative for development and trade cooperation, with 152 countries having already signed up. In such an environment, there is a need for a comparative reading of maritime geopolitics in the context of BRI.

Considering the current state of US global hegemony in permanent crisis and China's leading contributions to shared development, this article addresses the need for a comparative reading of the changing maritime geopolitics in BRI's context. The research focus is on recent-

ly intensifying tensions in the South China Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. In methodological terms, the article uses incorporated comparison, which consists of “understand[ing] the complexity of global phenomena by addressing cross-case commonalities, mutual influences, and interdependencies in tandem with spatial or temporal variations, historical specificities, and internal tensions for a fuller understanding of a global configuration at hand” (Gürcan, 2019: 6). The main idea here is to reveal historical connections and mutual conditioning among the cases under study (McMichael, 1990, 2000). In this study, this historical and mutual relationality is reflected in the extent to which US interventionism and increased multipolarity have combined to transform Turkey and China’s geostrategic imperatives in tandem. The research questions are the following: How are South China Sea and Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics shaped by the multipolarization of world politics? What are the key dynamics leading to these changes? How do such changes in one region condition those in another? In what respects are Turkey and China’s geostrategic imperatives affected in this situation? The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) represents the maritime route of BRI, whose starting point is located in the South China Sea, opening up to its first stop in Hanoi, and whose final destination is the Eastern Mediterranean, conceived of as a strategic bridge between China and Europe. It follows that BRI’s maritime economic potential primarily relies on South China Sea and Eastern Mediterranean security, i.e. both ends of MSR, whose prospects are intertwined together. Eastern Mediterranean security is not only vital for China’s BRI but it also has the potential to affect the global geopolitical balance

(Behrendt, 2019; Pencea, 2018; Mediterranean Affairs, 2018). Keeping these questions in mind, the present article explores in greater depth the historical and mutual relationality of the South China Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean from a neo-Mahanian perspective.

Conceptual Framework

Often designated as the intellectual father of the American navy (Yoshihara & Holmes, 2008), Alfred Thayer Mahan’s thought has preserved its significance in military thinking. In his magnum opus, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660–1783*, Mahan (1999) cites sea power as one of the chief factors determining the level of national wealth and prosperity. In his view, sea power hinges on overseas trade, a powerful navy that ensures the security of trade activities, and the presence of overseas colonies (Mahan, 1999; Hattendorf & Jordand, 1989). Furthermore, the attainment of these outcomes is conditional on a set of six factors: geographical position, physical/geographical conformation, territorial size, population size, national character, and the character of the government (Mahan, 1999). The following two sections will address these conditions based on the cases of Turkey and China, while the remainder of the present section will be devoted to a conceptual exploration of the Mahanian list of the “six fundamental elements of sea power”.

Geographical position can be explained by reference to the cases of Britain and the US. To the difference of countries where land defense exigencies suppress interest in the field of naval defense (e.g. France and the Netherlands), Mahan describes Britain and the US as insular rather than continental powers who are shielded by the sea from external attack, which in turn

enables greater focus on naval defense and expansion. In this respect, US maritime geopolitics can be said to thrive on access not only to the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans but also to the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea (Mahan, 1999; Stavridis, 2018).

In Mahan's framework, sea power also requires physical, or geographical conformation, which can be maximized by the possession of ample natural resources and mild climate. Equally important in this regard are proximity to economic centers, logistical connectivity, the possession of navigable inland waterways, and the availability of well-protected natural harbors and long coastlines. One could argue that natural resource wealth can also potentially increase with territorial size. From Mahan's (1999) perspective, the "territorial size" element may offer additional potential advantages such as increased defense capacity and economic dynamism, which can even be maximized through greater "population size" (Mahan, 1999).

Finally, the real potential of these geographical/physical, territorial, and demographic advantages can only be realized if a country aspiring to become a true sea power possesses an enabling cultural foundation and political environment. In cultural terms, sea powers are to thrive on a deeply ingrained love of money and trading skills coupled with an inclination and ability to build overseas posts. Moreover, Mahan (1999) insists that these cultural characteristics are also to be combined with persistent state policies that accord due importance to naval power and maritime trade.

While Mahan's lasting imprint on maritime strategic thought cannot be easily exaggerated, Julian Corbett's (1999) ideas are often valued as

a complementary element to a neo-Mahanian framework. Interestingly enough, Corbett's work could not find widespread popularity until the 1950s and 1960s, even though he was a contemporary of Mahan (Hattendorf & Jordand, 1989). Corbett agreed with much of Mahan's emphasis on the importance of sea power, but his contributions greatly helped to expand the universe of maritime strategy by revealing that complete sea dominance cannot be easily attained and, instead, successful maritime strategies stem from sea control in the first place. In ensuring sea control, sea powers concentrate their efforts on controlling the right to passage on the sea and sea lines of communications for both commercial and military purposes rather than simply seeking the destruction of the enemy fleet and full conquest. As such, Corbett draws attention to the crucial role of constabulary force and maneuver warfare focused on littoral regions and complementing heavy combat power with frigates, corvettes, and patrol craft. In Corbett's view, a conflict situation in which neither side prevails may also be relatively advantageous for a sea power given that the enemy can be denied sea control in such situations. In this process, moreover, economic power is essential. At the end of the day, the enemy's denial of sea control would undermine its trade revenues and overall economic strength, which would eventually lay the groundwork for the erosion of the enemy resistance and its military defeat (Corbett, 1999; Kraska, 2011; Kane, 2002; Hattendorf & Jordand, 1989). In light of Corbett's ideas, one could observe that both the South China Sea and Eastern Mediterranean conflicts have brought to the forefront the relevance of constabulary force and maneuver warfare as well as that of sea control and containment strategies.

Geographical Position and Conformation in the South China Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean

It is possible to assess China and Turkey's potential of maritime power based on a Corbett-inspired neo-Mahanian framework, as was depicted in the previous section. In terms of geographical position and conformation, both countries hold the advantage of access to open seas. For instance, Turkey has the longest coastlines (1577 km) in the Mediterranean Sea. Located in the Mediterranean, Mersin and İskenderun Ports are close to Turkey's economic centers and assume an important role in regional trade and energy traffic. This being said, the strategic importance of these ports can only be fully appreciated when taken in the larger context of East Mediterranean geopolitics. Firstly, the Mediterranean Sea represents a highly strategic intersection point between Asia, Africa, and Europe, which connects the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Adding to this is the fact that the Mediterranean Sea provides the shortest route that connects the Far East to Europe and the Atlantic. As such, one could argue that the command of the Mediterranean is of extreme importance to control energy traffic and international migratory flows towards Europe (TESSAM, 2008; Çomak & Şeker, 2019). About 70% of European energy imports are transported through the Mediterranean Sea. In this region, the Eastern Mediterranean is strategically located to control migratory flows and energy traffic given its proximity to the Suez Canal.

In this respect, Cyprus Island assumes a strategic role in controlling not only the flow of international trade and energy traffic from the Caspian Basin, the Persian Gulf, and the Suez Canal but also any future military operation to be conducted in the entire region. For these reasons, it is not surprising to know that the South Cyprus government harbors the largest number

of military troops by surface area and the largest number of intelligence personnel by population size in the world. The South Cyprus government has become one of the most important bases of Britain and the US aiming to encircle Eurasian powers such as China, Russia, Iran, and Turkey (TESSAM, 2008; Çomak & Şeker, 2019). Several joint drills by Israel, the US, France, Greece, and South Cyprus such as Noble Dina, Nemesis, and Eunomia are aimed at not only containing Turkey, but also undermining China, Russia, and Iran.



Turkish seismic research vessel Oruç Reis will x-ray the Mediterranean (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, 2020)

Particularly, US authorities have officially asserted their support for Greek energy policies at Turkey's expense and framed Turkey's Mediterranean demands as a "unilateral show of force" (Berberakis, 2020). US interventionism in the Mediterranean will likely take on an even greater weight if the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act is passed by the full Senate and the House of Representatives thanks to bipartisan support. This act aims to improve cooperation between the US, Israel, Greece, and the South Cyprus government

as well as removing the ban on arms sales to the South Cyprus government, increasing US military assistance, and limiting US military cooperation with Turkey, if Turco-Russian rapprochement were to be further deepened (Litsas, 2020). Certainly, this partnership will be most detrimental to China's regional strategic interests in the longer term given that the Mediterranean is of vital importance to the continuation and development of MSR.

A stronger Turkey and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus hold the potential to facilitate Eurasian access to the Mediterranean. However, the West has been devoting special efforts to locking Turkey's maritime zone to only a small area around Antalya Province despite Turkey having the longest coastlines in the Mediterranean Sea.

Considering the strategic location of Cyprus Island in the Mediterranean, the South Cyprus government and Western military elements dominating the island will also assume a key role in limiting the Mediterranean access of Eurasian powers such as China, Russia, and Iran. Inversely, a stronger Turkey and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus hold the potential to facilitate Eurasian access to the Mediterranean. However, the West has been devoting special efforts to locking Turkey's maritime zone to only a small area around Antalya Province despite Turkey having the longest coastlines in the Mediterranean Sea. These malicious efforts are symbolized in the so-called "Seville Map", a European-made map that is often used as an official pretext by both the Greek and the South Cyprus governments. Eventually,

the successful implementation of the Seville Map would endanger Mediterranean stability alongside MSR's prospects given Turkey's dominant geographical location in the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, Turkey constitutes MSR's strongest partner from a geostrategic point of view. To the difference of Turkey, which has increasingly been adopting a more independent foreign-policy approach, pro-Western countries where China holds BRI-related investments, such as Greece and Israel (Litsas, 2020), are not likely to abandon the Western alliance in the long term.

The East Mediterranean's importance for Turkey is comparable to that of the South China Sea for China. The South China Sea is even larger than the Caribbean Sea and is considered one of the world's largest semi-enclosed seas. It is home to almost half of all global maritime trade. Similarly, half of global liquified gas traffic and one-third of global crude oil traffic passes through the South China Sea (Huang & Billo, 2015; Stavridis, 2018). 80 to 90% of China's oil imports are transported via the Malacca Strait and therefore pass through the South China Sea. Japan and South Korea's energy imports also assume similar levels of dependency on South China Sea traffic. Besides its importance for energy traffic, the South China Sea also possesses ample natural resources. Estimates suggest that this sea contains oil reserves of 17 billion tonnes and natural gas reserves of 14 trillion m³. About 10% of global fish catches come from the South China Sea. Besides these energy and trade-related features, the South China Sea's strategic importance for China also stems from its proximity to Chinese industrial centers and serves as a natural shield that protects China's demographically dense areas (Fels & Vu, 2016; Turcsányi, 2018; Bateman & Emmers, 2008; Hashmi, 2016). Fi-



The map of Blue Homeland is prepared by resigned RADM Cihat Yaycı. This map is shared here by the courtesy of Mr. Yaycı.

nally, BRI's maritime route starts from the city of Fuzhou, facing the Strait of Taiwan and opening up to the South China Sea, before leaving China for the Malacca Strait (Le, Tran & Duc, 2019).

China and Turkey's Territorial Size, Demographic Structure, and Maritime Policies Under the Threat of US Interventionism

As was discussed in the previous section, Turkey and China's geographical location and conformation offer potential advantages for improving maritime cooperation along MSR. However, this potential cannot be fully realized until certain conditions have been met. From a neo-Mahanian perspective, sea power also derives from demographic, territorial, and political-cultural factors conducive to economic dynamism and maritime expansion. In the case of Turkey, the Turkish economy has been going through a period of

marked decline since 2009, which would in turn constrain its maritime potential. Meanwhile, Turkey also inspires ample optimism about its maritime potential as one of the largest and most dynamic Middle Eastern economies. Furthermore, Turkey ranks third in the list of the largest Middle Eastern countries by surface area and those with the highest performance in human capital and innovation after Israel and the United Arab Emirates (World Bank, 2020: 27; Global Innovation Index, 2020: 16). Turkey's name is also mentioned among the world's top 10 ship-building countries including China, South Korea, and Japan, even though Turkey's position is fast regressing due to a combination of several factors including a general lack of public funding and excessive domination of the private sector in such a strategic industry as the ship-building industry (OECD, 2011). These factors speak to Turkey's maritime potential as a country surrounded by sea on three sides, regard-

less of its recently arising economic challenges. Certainly, Turkey cannot match China's potential as the world's largest country by population size, fourth-largest country by surface area, and second-largest economy. Though China is on par with Turkey when it comes to its performance in human capital, it ranks among the world's top 15 countries in the field of innovation. China's maritime potential can also be assessed based on the fact that it possesses the world's largest navy and third-largest diaspora (World Bank, 2020: 27; Global Innovation Index, 2020: 16; Lye, 2020).

In these conditions, China and Turkey's maritime efforts require even greater care and attention to non-geographical factors. For these countries to put their advantage of access to open seas into action in the fullest sense, they require greater cooperation faced with US interventionism.

To the difference of the United States and Britain, China and Turkey do not constitute insular powers, and their continental characteristics constrain their maritime potential. As was cautioned by Mahan himself, a continental connection comes with potential border security problems that lead non-insular power to divert their full attention from naval development (Mahan, 1999; Kane, 2002). In these conditions, China and Turkey's maritime efforts require even greater care and attention to non-geographical factors. For these countries to put their advantage of access to open seas into action in the fullest sense, they require greater cooperation faced with US interventionism. In this regard, the acceleration of Sino-Turkish co-

operation in the context of BRI inspires much optimism. Cheng Enfu and Li Jing (2020) remark that around 1,000 Chinese firms currently operate in Turkey and these firms have accelerated their economic activities thanks to the successful implementation of BRI. Moreover, they stress the importance of an agreement signed by Turkey and China during the 2017 BRI Forum, which is aimed at facilitating bilateral cooperation on international passenger and cargo transport (Cheng & Li, 2020). Worthy of note here is that Cheng and Li's (2020) own contributions to the debate reflect a favorable Chinese perspective into the complementarity of Eastern Mediterranean and South China Sea security as well as the potential impact of BRI in resolving maritime conflicts in these regions.

The deepening and durability of such empowering arrangements are contingent on the development of a strong political-cultural base, especially for Turkey. Certainly, China has inherited a strong maritime tradition since ancient times. In imperial times, moreover, China was able to pursue strong maritime policies under the rule of powerful emperors since the Han dynasty era (Kane, 2002). This being said, China's current successful efforts at improving its sea power also owes to external factors, which find their sharpest expression in rising US interventionism in Asia.

With Barack Obama's ascension to the presidency in 2009, the focus of US interventionism has shifted from the Middle East to Asia and the South China Sea within the framework of the "Pivot to Asia" strategy. This strategy was predicated on the idea of initiating a military buildup to contain China while isolating it from the region through a US-led free trade initiative

called Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). At this point, it is important to emphasize that rising US interventionism also triggered the acceleration of tensions as part of the South China Sea conflict involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Brunei. In the meantime, Obama declared himself as the first “Pacific President” and made frequent visits to East Asia. In her speech at the 2010 Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, Hillary Clinton, who was U.S. secretary of state at the time, asserted that South China sea stability is part of US national interests. In the Obama era, moreover, numerous official foreign policy documents revealed US interventionist intentions (Litsas, 2020; Wu, 2013; Fels & Vu, 2016; Turcsányi, 2018). In reaction to rising US interventionism, China thus decided to accelerate its

efforts at expanding its naval power and building artificial islands in the South China sea in 2013 for defensive purposes. China’s defensive reaction to US intentions of forced containment and isolation reflected a constant desire for peaceful cooperation on the economic front, which finds its strongest expression in the implementation of BRI. One could therefore deduce that China’s current position consists of improving South China Sea security to advance its agenda of improving peaceful economic cooperation in response to rising US aggression.

From a neo-Mahanian perspective, the common threat of US aggression shared by China and Turkey has resulted in the development of similar geostrategic doctrines. Faced with rising US interventionism under the Obama administration, China adopted the doctrine of



the “national blue soil” (蓝色国土 *lanse guotu*), which is represented by the “nine-dash line” map on China’s maritime zone in the South China sea (Richardson, 2015). This doctrine claims Paracel, Spratly, and Pratas Islands as well as Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal as part of China’s homeland. The “national blue soil” found initial mention in the 2010 Ocean Development Report prepared by the State Oceanic Administration, which also included China’s official statement on the development of a carrier fleet (Cheng, 2013; Fels & Vu, 2016; Lanteigne, 2016).

The “Blue Homeland” doctrine was put into effect following a pro-US failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, as a result of which Turkey decided to delink from the Greater Middle East Project and adopt a more independent foreign policy approach.

To the difference of China, Turkey has inherited a weak maritime legacy. As Cem Gürdeniz, a retired Turkish admiral, argues, both the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey were shut off from maritime civilization due to domestic policy failures and external pressures, which explains the current state of Turkey’s maritime power (Gürdeniz, 2020). Worthy of note in this regard is that Turkey’s maritime trade fleet globally regressed from the 18th to the 22nd rank in the period 2000-2012 (Kanat, 2016). This being said, Turkey’s “Blue Homeland” doctrine presents a new homeland imaginary whose reach extends to its inland waters, continental shelves, and exclusive economic zones.

The “Blue Homeland” doctrine was put into effect following a pro-US failed coup attempt on

July 15, 2016, as a result of which Turkey decided to delink from the Greater Middle East Project and adopt a more independent foreign policy approach. In the pre-coup era, pro-US elements had infiltrated into the Turkish bureaucratic and political apparatus and used their influence to launch “witch-hunt” trials based on fabricated evidence such as Ergenekon and Sledgehammer, which led to the imprisonment of high-ranking military officials, politicians, and intellectuals with anti-imperialist and anti-US leanings. These trials also helped to paralyze the Turkish military and the navy command structure, which was the key target of the 2010 Sledgehammer operation. Interestingly enough, the timing of this trial targeting the Turkish navy coincided with the discovery of natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean before the Syrian conflict in 2011 (Gürcan, 2019). However, Turkey’s navy took a great leap forward following the adoption of the “Blue Homeland” doctrine, which led to a massive mobilization campaign for national warship and submarine construction. Such drills as Blue Homeland and Determination demonstrated the increasing deterrent potential of the Turkish navy in the period 2016-2020. This adds to the signing of a Turkish-Libyan maritime boundary deal in 2019, which dealt a heavy blow to Western interventionism symbolized by the Seville Map. It is important to know that this agreement determines the southwestern end of the Blue Homeland (İşeri & Bartan, 2019; Akfırat, 2019; Aydınlik, 2019). In the final analysis, one could argue that Turkey’s pro-Western foreign policy in the pre-2016 era – which supported the Anan plan for the de-militarization of the Turkish side of Cyprus Island and land concessions – has

left its place to a more responsible foreign-policy attitude that reclaims North Cyprus sovereignty and the Turkish maritime zones.

Conclusion

Initiated at China's initiative in 2013, BRI has emerged as a strong force amidst the crisis of US-led hegemonic governance and the deepening of global economic and military chaos. However, BRI's real potential cannot be realized without maritime security along MSR. Turkey and China appear as key actors in ensuring maritime security, whose mutual ties are increasingly being consolidated in the context of rising multipolarity. The present article has examined the consolidation of these objective ties from a neo-Mahanian perspective. This analysis reveals that maritime security in the South China Sea –as MSR's starting point– and in the East Mediterranean –as MSR's final destination until it reaches Europe– are mutually conditioned and contingent on each other for the development and prospects of BRI. Both countries constitute the key players in their respective maritime regions connected through BRI and therefore have a vested interest in providing mutual support for enhancing maritime security. Certainly, Turkey assumes a critical role as part of MSR given its status as a Mediterranean country that has the longest coastlines and possesses strong demographic and economic dynamism in its vast territory. In the meantime, both Turkey and China suffer from increasing US interventionism at first hand. In the Mediterranean case, US interventionism is further consolidated through a stronger pro-Western alliance that includes Israel, France, Greece and the South Cyprus government. This is an important risk factor

that threatens to contain the peaceful development of China in the longer term. Under these conditions, one could observe that China and Turkey have developed similar geostrategic doctrines embodied in the Turkish “Blue Homeland” doctrine and the Chinese “Blue National Soil” doctrine. China and Turkey's shared geopolitical imperatives and geostrategic conformity are to be better grasped by policy-makers for the future success of BRI.

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The Formulation of the Blue Homeland Doctrine^{*}



TEVFİK KADAN

Journalist

Tevfik Kadan was born on April 27, 1990, in Isparta/Turkey. After completing elementary and secondary schools in Nazmiye Demirel Elementary School, he started at Heybeliada Naval High School in 2004, passing the military high school exam. After finishing his high school education, he studied Computer Engineering at the Naval Academy for three years and dropped out of the military academy to study Electrical and Electronic Engineering at Selçuk University, graduating in 2014. He has been pursuing a second BA in International Relations at Anadolu University since 2018. Tevfik Kadan, who has also been working in the field of journalism since 2010, served as Head of the Patriotic Party Press Bureau and news manager in Aydınlık Daily for 2 years. He still serves as Editor-in-Chief of Aydınlık.com.tr.

E-mail: tevfikkadan@gmail.com

^{*} Translation: Anil Solmaz

ABSTRACT

The Blue Homeland Doctrine expresses Turkey's legitimate maritime rights within the framework of international law. Efforts to protect these rights make an important contribution to global and regional peace in terms of both implementing international law and the possibility of regional countries benefiting from all resources equitably. Contrary to allegations made by the detractors of the Blue Homeland Doctrine, it seems that not only Turkey but also all countries in the region can reap immense gains from the full implementation of this doctrine. Moreover, this doctrine is far from promoting an "expansionist" policy, especially considering how the Blue Homeland Doctrine anticipates the creation of cooperation mechanisms with riparian states in the Eastern Mediterranean. The implementation of this doctrine will greatly contribute to the development of international trade and the more efficient use of energy resources. Regarding those countries whose attitude is still inspired by "maritime piracy," one should take into account the fact that Turkey possesses a superior naval fleet to protect its rights and up-to-date military-industrial infrastructure.

Keywords: Aegean Sea, Blue Homeland, Greece, EEZ, maritime

Although the West brands Turkey's re-landing in the open sea as 'Neo-Ottomanism', Turkey's Blue Homeland Doctrine is a 21st-century geopolitical reality which was expressed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a survival necessity of a democratic, secular republic and whose borders are drawn according to the universal law of the sea.

The seas are an inexhaustible supply of wealth and power. Seamanship may not be in the nature of the Ottoman nation. However, considering its strategic, political, and economic situation, the empire resides in a territory that can only be held if sea domination is ensured. Ottoman Asia will not be able to overcome the reign of chaos until it acquires such a domination. People cannot survive if they do not obey the laws of nature. Ottoman Turks are doomed to be either sailors or shepherds in the hot deserts of their old homeland (Alpagut, 1913: 168).

This quote was written in 1913 by famous naval historian Ali Haydar Emin Alpagut right after the Balkan War. The Ottoman Empire had endured the pain of being without a navy for many years and had to face bloody consequences. Not a single ship was found to deliver aid to Tripoli, Thessaloniki, or the Balkans. The empire was collapsing. The Greek cruiser Georgios Averof could come and occupy the 500-year-old Ottoman islands alone. We would either sail or shepherd in hot deserts. History was forcing the Turks to sail once again.

Mustafa Kemal personally witnessed the strategic impact of naval power in Çanakkale. He had seen the great firepower of British and French battleships and was amazed by the game-breaking roles of German U-boats. He realized that Nusret's mines would not be enough for the ultimate victory and realized the vital importance of naval power. Following the Anafartalar Victory, he told a German journalist:

We have been trapped on land. Just like the Russians. By blocking the straits, we kept the Russians in the Black Sea and doomed Russia to collapse sooner or later. Because we have cut ties with its allies, yet, we, too, are destined to collapse for the same reason. Although we are on the foot of the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Indian Ocean, we cannot sail to any ocean. As a land force devoid of naval forces, we can never defend our peninsula against a naval force that can bring land forces (Kinross, 2018: 123).

Thereby, the historical origins of Turkey's Blue Homeland strategy can be traced as back as to a century ago. In Atatürk's view, a Turkey that cannot navigate the seas is doomed to collapse. With the creation of the Republic, the wounds had to be healed quickly and a "strong Turkish Navy" had to be created.

The total tonnage of active ships taken over from the Ottoman Empire in 1923 was 13 thousand tons. Their ages ranged from 11 to 30 years (Eker & Bahtiyar, 2019: 17). The 25,000-ton battleship Yavuz hit three mines and lay in port for years. The Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits did not allow it to be repaired. During this period, the Straits were demilitarized and the Golden Horn Shipyard was closed to the navy. Mustafa Kemal, on the other hand, was determined to bring the Turks back to sea despite all of these difficulties.

Nobody, especially Marshal Fevzi Cakmak, believed that Turkey needed a large fleet. There was Alfred Mahan next to President Roosevelt, who made the USA a sailor nation, and Wilhelm II had Admiral Von Tirpitz, who led Germany to sail. However, Mustafa Kemal was all alone.

Despite all the objections, Mustafa Kemal provided a significant budget to the navy from 1924 onwards. He raised the battleship Yavuz by having a 25-thousand-ton huge pool built in Gölcük. On December 30th, 1924, he gave full support to the Ministry of the Navy and ensured the creation of an independent Ministry of Maritime Affairs. He had non-active vessels maintained and repaired in a short time and increased naval strike capacity with the order of new submarines and corvettes. With the Law of Cabotage in 1926, he saved the country from the scourge of capitulation, and in 1936 he gained absolute control over the Turkish Straits with Montreux. Using the cannons of the Yavuz, he had the Greek and Bulgarian King sign peace treaties. With the Nyon Conference, he brought the Turkish Navy to the west of the Mediterranean. When he passed away, he left the immortal spirit of the Turkish navy with the 80-thousand-ton modern Republic Fleet. He laid the foundations of the Blue Homeland strategy, which is doctrine today, on November 1st, 1937, through the following speech at the Turkish Grand National Assembly:

Seamanship will be understood not only as a transportation business, but as an economic business, and shipyards, ships, ports, and piers will be built, sea sports clubs will be established, protected, and developed. This is because the boundaries of the power and talent of the people draw the borders of its nation, which extend to the sea. With its industry, trade, and sport, Turkey is located in the most suitable geographical location and is surrounded by sea on three sides. Therefore, it has the ability to raise a most advanced

maritime nation. We must know how to take advantage of this ability. We should think of seamanship as the great national ideal of the Turks and achieve it within a short time (Turkish Naval Forces, 2019).

The NATO Wedge Forced Into the Blue Homeland

Mustafa Kemal's great maritime ideals were interrupted with Turkey's entry into NATO. The Turkish Navy was excluded from the high seas and deployed in line with NATO needs. Soner Polat, one of the great Turkish admirals, explained NATO's negative effects on the Turkish Navy with the following words:

They brought Turkey to the Black Sea saying that there is a Soviet threat. They even had a submarine base set up in Ereğli. What happened when we were locked in the Black Sea? They left all the initiative in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean to Greece. Greece then began to use these areas as a sovereign right against us in NATO missions. Then we noticed that we were stuck here, we realized that, maybe we would not be able to improve our conditions without Cyprus, so we immediately sailed to the Aegean and the Mediterranean ... We established the Aksaz Naval Base, established the Foça Naval Base, and expanded Mersin. We once fell into the trap of NATO and life has taught us to travel from the Black Sea to the Aegean and the Mediterranean (Kadan, 2019a: 14).

The Cyprus question pointed out by Admiral Polat was a turning point for Turkey. The bru-

ality that the Turkish Cypriots suffered in front of the whole world forced the Turkish Navy to land in the Mediterranean. It was foreseen that neither NATO nor the United Nations (UN) was going to help Turkey. So we had to take matters into our own hands.

Turkey, which was not able to protect the safety and future strategic interests of its kin during the crises in Cyprus Island in 1963, 1964, and 1967, rapidly improved its force projection ability in the period up to 1974.

With the island of Cyprus under threat and unable to protect the safety of its kin there, in 1974, Turkey showed its ability to increase its strength and persevere against external pressures. When the Nikos Sampson coup from the Greek side took place on July 15th, 1974, it was time for Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus. The Turkish Navy performed a difficult amphibious assault landing, holding the beachhead in Kyrenia within 120 hours and completing the operation with great success. Few armed forces in the world history have achieved this (İkiz, 2020).

Right after Operation Cyprus Peace, the international pressure on Turkey increased. Admiral Cem Gürdeniz described what happened during this period:

After this operation, global hegemony punished Turkey in various ways. First, Armenian terror was resurrected. ASALA, a bloody terrorist organization, was created to increase the violence and scope of terrorism. Then came the U.S. embargo. Between February 5th, 1975, and September 26th, 1978, the U.S. applied an arms embar-

go against the Turkish Armed Forces, completely stopping the flow of weapons and spare parts into Turkey. Along with the Air Forces jets, the infrastructure of the Naval Forces' destroyers and submarines hit the bottom. However, the lessons learned from this difficult period had a positive and profound effect on the Navy armament strategy. By 1974, all destroyers and submarines of the Turkish Naval Forces, with the exception of the TCG Berk escort destroyer, were US-made. The weapons used and the materials required for the planned maintenance and repair of the ships in Gölcük Shipyard were imported from the USA at high prices. The difficulties created by the arms embargo in the maintenance of equipment and systems made it necessary and inevitable to use national capabilities and to turn to other countries for modernization (Gürdeniz, 2019a: 142-143).

"Following the US arms embargo, Support Foundations for Land, Air Force, and Naval Forces were established. In 1987, all foundations were united under the name of the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation, and the procurement processes of major projects for the modernization of the Turkish Armed Forces were managed" (Kadan, 2019b: par.4).

The National Ship Project as A Stepping-Stone

Turkey's national weapons and ammunition production capability can be traced back to the

first years of the Republic. With the encouragement of Atatürk, the foundations of the national defense industry were laid, and aircraft and submarine bombs were made in the factory built by Şakir Zümre. However, our national defense industry was collapsed with the Marshall Plan¹, because it was designed suitable for the USA along with NATO. At the time, even our own Air Force generals believed that national aircraft production was too costly, hence Turkey's perceived need for buying from outside. Şakir Zümre's bomb factory was converted into a stove factory, which is the most painful indicator of the blow struck to Turkey.

By the 1990s, the idea of building ships had begun to mature and the Turkish Naval Forces signaled that they were not going to fit into NATO's mold.

But the Republic Navy never lost its spirit. In as early as 1978, computer technicians were recruited and R&D studies started. Scientific education was emphasized in the Naval High School and the Naval Academy, and those who came out as officers were sent abroad to continue their engineering education. By the 1990s, the idea of building ships had begun to mature and the Turkish Naval Forces signaled that they were not going to fit into NATO's mold. An interesting development took place during this period:

In the years following the Cold War, the Soviet Union collapsed and the United States remained unrivaled as the only global power.

¹ Marshall Aid, offered military and financial aids to 15 European countries and also Turkey under colour of "threat of communism" in 1947 by the US President Harry Truman. At the outset Turkey was not included in Marshall Plan by the reason of not going to war, not being destroyed, and having foreign currency. Thanks to the bureaucratic efforts, Turkey was accepted to Marshall Plan under the condition that Turkey would accept to be grain elevator of Europe and ignore its industrial development. The US donated war material at 95 million dollars to Turkey by "the Marshall Aid", but received £ 400 million from the budget every year for the maintenance of these materials (Sezen, 2018).

According to Fukuyama, the “End of History” had arrived, and liberalism had gained the final victory. A new world order had to be built on the ruins of the old. For the USA, it was the time for bringing “democracy” and “freedom” to the world. The government in Turkey at that time shared the dreams of the Atlantic. President Turgut Özal wanted to enter Iraq alongside the United States. The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) showed resistance, though. The resignation of General Necip Torumtay, who upset the apple cart, revealed the attitude of the army. The USA, from then on, faced a great challenge.

Meanwhile, the foundations of federated Kurdish state were laid in northern Iraq. Turkey’s resistance to the U.S. plan was punished by a German arms embargo once again (Serdar, 2018). During this period, Turkey was asked to give support to the coalition forces in the Persian Gulf. The matter was proposed as an item for the agenda in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, but considering the relations with Iraq, no ships were sent to the region. On top of that, when two US helicopters were dropped, this drove a wedge between them.

Turkey, who did not send ships to the Persian Gulf, attended a NATO exercise in the Gulf of Saros with a TCG Destroyer. The date was October 2nd, 1992, around 11 pm. Two Sea Sparrow missiles were launched from the U.S. aircraft carrier USS Saratoga in the “Green Period” non-exercise section. The missiles hit the TCG Destroyer at its deckhouse. Consequently, five sailors were martyred and 22 were injured, along with the ship’s commander. US Deputy Secretary of State Eagleburger gave the news to Washington Ambassador Nüzhet Kandemir with the following words: “We sunk your ship, we apologize.” (Ertürk, 2019).

After the attack, the U.S. claim that this was an accident, because its personnel were

under-trained and some of them were even intoxicated. However, a Sea Sparrow cannot be fired by accident. 6 different safety phases would be overcome, permission would have to be obtained from the ship’s commander, and these operations must be completed from different rooms. What is worse, is that the Sea Sparrow is an air defense missile. It is not the “Fire and Forget” type. After the missile was fired, it needed information to hit its target. The target had to be illuminated to fire. Moreover, both missiles had hit with full accuracy (Ertürk, 2019). It was clear that this was a major operation.

The USA’s message was crystal clear: They wanted to get Turkey “in line” and wanted Turkey to adopt the new world order. But besides this, they had another purpose. The U.S. wanted to sell Turkey its Knox class frigates for some time. The Turkish Naval Forces stated that they did not want the ships. The idea of building our own ship was expressed concretely for the first time. Of course, after the USA had hit TCG Destroyer, compensation was discussed. The U.S. notified Turkey that they could give Knox frigates at a reduced price to Turkey. Afterward, 8 Knox were granted to Turkey (Öztürk, 2018). Thus, the national shipbuilding project would be shelved, and the Turkish Navy would once again become dependent on American weapons, until the project was reconsidered in 2003.

The Turkish Naval Forces did not give up. The Research Center Command (ARM-ERKOM), founded in 1998, became the center of critical studies for national capabilities. With Admiral Özden Örnek becoming the Commander of the Turkish Naval Forces in 2003, all projects were re-opened and the button for the national ship-building project was pressed. Turkey’s idea of making his own ships had also created discomfort inside, as well as in the West

(Örnek, 2017). But this time, there was an unyielding pressure against them.

2003-2005 were the golden years of the Turkish Naval Forces. Admiral Özden Örnek's close colleague Admiral Cem Gürdeniz describes the years as follows:

It was Özden Örnek who resurrected the National Ship (MİLGEM) project with a completely different spirit during the period of the Force Command between 2003-2005. The establishment of ARMERKOM has accelerated thanks to his forward vision. He is the one who was able to reduce the external dependence of the Republic Navy not only by the design and construction of warships but also by the production of national surface and underwater weapons, fire control systems, war management systems, especially the Ship Integrated Combat Management System (GENESIS). During the two-year period of force command, he had his signature under all of the projects for the participation of more than 50 ships and the main system in the inventory with national capabilities and opportunities. During his 17-year admiralty, he came to the fore not only with its initiatives and projects aimed at the equipment and force structure of our naval force. He provided great value in the fields of strategy, tactics, concept, doctrine, and above all, marine culture. He brought the analytical methodology known as the Naval

Forces Measurement System for Combat Readiness to the navy (Gürdeniz, 2019b: par.6)

The Naval Force Peels Away From Its Shell

It was time for the Turkish Naval Force to peel away from its shell by MİLGEM. First, an exclusive cooperation mechanism with riparian countries against NATO was created in the Black Sea. With Operation Black Sea Congruence (KUH²), the ground was laid for landing in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, while the north was secured. During these years, hydrocarbon assets were discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC) unlawfully declared Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the region (MFA, 2007). In 2002, Greeks tried to enter the Turkish continent by chartering the Northern Access ship from Norway (Başeren, 2007). A great fight started when the Greeks joined the European Union in 2004 and announced the EEZ in the same year.

Turkey took rapid measures in response. In 2006, Operation Mediterranean Shield was launched (Turkish Naval Forces, 2015). Within the scope of this operation, Turkish ships would raise a shield around our continent to proclaim that aggressive moves against our rights would not be tolerated. Over the course of 14 years from now, 14 foreign drillships were sent back, unable to enter the region (Yaycı, 2019a). The Aegean and Mediterranean islands problem, which arose with the Kardak crisis, had evolved into a new dimension with the discovery of hy-

2 "After observing the contribution of KUH to the security and stability in the Black Sea, Turkey initiated the efforts to turn the Operation into a multinational structure invite the whole countries that are coastal states in the Black Sea to participate in the operation. Three coastal states consisting of Russian Federation, Romania and Ukraine have officially responded to Turkey's invitation" (Deniz Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı, 2016).

drocarbon deposits in the Mediterranean. Now the struggle of Turkey in the sea was crucial to creating a prosperous society. Seawater was to be defended as much as the land. In 2006 Admiral Cem Gürdeniz conceptualized this issue as the “Blue Homeland” based on Mustafa Kemal’s great maritime ideals.

The response of the USA was, again, without delay. This time, the Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) took action on behalf of the USA. It was unacceptable to the USA that Turkey derailed from the Atlantic alliance. The Turkish Army had to ‘get in line’. In 2007, the button was pressed with the Ergenekon plot. The target was anti-NATO officers of the Turkish Armed Forces, leaders of the Workers’ Party of Turkey (Vatan Party) challenging America, and Turkey’s patriotic intellectuals. The Navy, which they saw as the brain of the TSK, would also be subjected to massive attacks. “On September 21st, 2012, 36 Admirals, 115 officers, and 5 petty officers from the Navy were sentenced to severe sentences ranging from 13 to 18 years with false evidence from the Balyoz conspiracy. In many lawsuits opened with fabricated evidence other than the Balyoz case, the number of naval military personnel who were the subject of false accusations reached 300” (Gürdeniz, 2013: 289-290). The ‘derailed’ command line was eliminated overnight without a single bullet fired. Members of

the FETO terrorist organization infiltrated into the Army were quickly given the ranks of admiral/general, and the struggle for the Blue Homeland was shelved. Until July 15th, 2016³.

After the coup attempt, with the removal of FETO members from the army and bureaucracy one by one, the Blue Homeland struggle resumed.

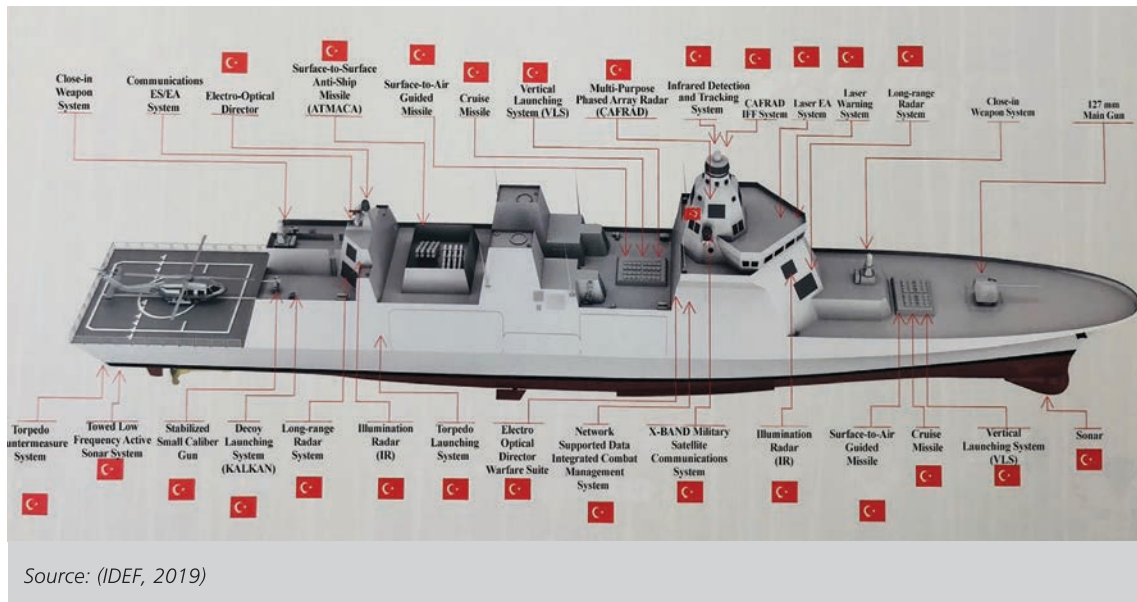
On the night of July 15th, 2016, the American Gladio⁴ took action to take over the administration. People were run over by tanks, some were shot, the National Assembly was bombed, assassination squads were sent. But they failed! Turkey fought back and won the struggle for independence with its army and nation once more. After the coup attempt, with the removal of FETO members from the army and bureaucracy one by one, the Blue Homeland struggle resumed⁵.

The Turkish Navy recovered rapidly and set sail again. In February 2019, a joint exercise in three seas was planned for the first time. The name of the exercise in which 103 ships participated was “Blue Homeland” (Anadolu Ajansı, 2019a). Just three months later, this time with the participation of 131 ships, ‘Denizkurdu’, the biggest exercise in the history of the Republic,

3 “15 July coup attempt or military coup attempt in 2016, Operation Lightning or Operation Peace at home named by the coup plotters, is the military coup attempt by a group of soldiers that identifies themselves as Peace At Home Council within the Turkish Armed Forces on July 15th through 16th 2016. As a result of the trials, it was revealed that these soldiers were members of FETO, led by Fetullah Gülen, who resided in the USA” (15 Temmuz darbe girişimi, n.d.).

4 Doğu Perinçek: “An underground organization is being created within the states participating in NATO. An armed force called Gladio is being created. When the situation does not go the way it wants, the US stages a coup by mobilizing its forces within the army. This was the case on March 12th and September 12th. There was another American-centered coup attempt on July 15-16, but this time it was failed. For the first time in a NATO country, the Gladio organization was suppressed by the armed forces of that country.” Doğu Perinçek wrote on *Aydınlık Gazette*, July 15th 2020 (Aydınlık, 2020a).

5 More than 125 thousand people have been expelled from the public institutions since the 15 July coup attempt. The Minister of Internal Affairs Süleyman Soylu said in a statement in March 2019 that 511 thousand people were detained and 30 thousand 821 people were arrested in the period after July 15th 2016. A total of 19,583 personnel were expelled from the Turkish Armed Forces, which includes the Army, Navy and Air Forces, from July 15 to June 2020. 87 generals from the Land Forces Command, 33 admirals from the Naval Forces Command, 32 from the Air Forces Command were expelled. After July 15, 44 percent of 198 army generals, 59 percent of 56 admirals, and 45 percent of 72 aviation generals were expelled (Aydınlık, 2020b).



Source: (IDEF, 2019)

was held (Anadolu Ajansı, 2019b). Meanwhile, Turkey had accelerated the national ship project, Reis-class submarines and Istanbul-class frigates were laid on the stocks. Turkey's first Multi-Purpose Amphibious Landing Ship TCG Anatolia was begun to be constructed. While a new era was opened in the Navy with the Atmaca missile, national strike capability was increased with the Orka and Akya torpedoes. With GENESIS ADVENT, the entire command control system was taken under the management of Turkish officers. Today, Turkey is not just a country that can only design and produce ships. It can also sustain its naval forces with national facilities from arms and ammunition to command and control systems.

The Blue Homeland Has Become An Implemented State Doctrine

The Blue Homeland Strategy, whose original framework was drawn by Mustafa Kemal, has become a state doctrine after the suppression of the attempted July 15th coup. In this context, legal, military, and diplomatic steps were taken

simultaneously. While the Turkish Navy was waving the flag in our sovereign areas with giant exercises, the Memorandum of Understanding on the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdictions was signed with Libya and our western border in the Eastern Mediterranean was drawn (Yaycı, 2020a). A national energy fleet consisting of 3 drilling and 3 seismic research vessels was formed. The search and rescue responsibility area has been expanded to include the Blue Homeland map (Vatan, 2020). A change in perception of the federation demands that would lead to a two-state solution in Cyprus had taken shape. The national defense industry had been structured to meet 21st century geopolitical needs. Navy Diplomacy launched against moves threatening peace in the Mediterranean.

How Were the Blue Homeland's Limits Determined?

Although Turkey was not a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982, it identified its maritime jurisdiction according to this convention's criteria. Today, according to the principles of UNCLOS

and the decisions of the Court of Arbitration and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Turkey's maritime jurisdiction areas are determined by the following principles, as stated by Admiral Cihat Yaycı (2020b: 160):

(1) Equity (States with opposite coasts share the seas fairly.)

(2) Superiority of Geography (Based on the mainland as the delimitation means that the islands that are on the opposite side of the bisector line have sea authority as much as their territorial waters.)

(3) Proportionality (In the delimitation, it means that the maritime jurisdiction states will have is proportional to their coastal lengths.)

(4) The State of 'Not closing' (means that the islands close to the coasts of another state should not prevent this coast from sailing.)

Turkey has opposite coasts with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Libya, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon, and a side maritime boundary with Syria in those drawn nautical maps. The gnomonic and geodetic maps used in these calculations were used in the maritime delimitation of other countries before. Thus, Turkey is not a country in the east-west axis extending straight over the world. It is a country with a first-degree slope, and it has been scientifically proved that this situation created an 18-degree perspective (Yaycı, 2019b). The Blue Homeland map drawn by Admiral Cihat Yaycı in light of these principles includes an area of 462 thousand square kilometers. Turkey's struggle to rightfully claim its exclusive rights over all living and non-living resources in this area, is called the Blue Homeland Struggle.

How are Turkey's claims challenged? The next section will explore this question.

Greece's Preposterous Thesis

First of all, it is necessary to understand the basis of Greece's maximalist claims. At the root of the

Greek claims lies the thesis that there are "Archipelagic States". Article 46 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea stipulates that "archipelagic State" means a State constituted wholly by one or more archipelagos and may include other islands". In other words, for a country to become "Archipelagic States", it must be completely or largely composed of islands (UNCLOS, Article 46).

Basing on these statements, Greece argues that the most extreme points of its borders are Crete, Kerpe, Kasot, Rhodes, and Meis and that it can make a deal with other countries on a midline basis by drawing a border over this line. Furthermore, it adopts all water between the islands as its internal water. Not to mention the claim that each island has its own Exclusive Economic Zone.

But Greece is not an "Archipelagic State", contrary to its claim. Only 17 percent of the country's surface area consists of islands, islets, and cliffs (Çubukçuoğlu, 2020). In UNCLOS, in the decisions of the International Court of Justice and the Arbitral Tribunal, there are no principle or decision that can make Greece an "Archipelagic State".

The Blue Homeland's Aegean Front

Many problems have arisen from this mind-blowing thesis by Greece. Here, it is necessary to categorize these problems into the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, since their legal status is different.

It is seen that disputes are starting with the territorial water in the Aegean, continuing with the continentality, the EEZ, search and rescue responsibility area, FIR Line (Flight Information Zone) and islands, islets, and rocks whose sovereignty has not been legally transferred to Greece (known by the acronym in Turkish, EGAYDAAK).

Looking at the historical background of these problems, the theses of Greece and Turkey differ mainly due to the different interpretations of Article 16 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty. "Greece alleged that Article 16 is a general waiver provision for the islands three-miles out of the Anatolian coast. Therefore the islands given to Italy and Turkey are counted as 'limiters'. Additionally, Greece also asserted that the boundary between Italy and Turkey was drawn by the treaty on January 4th, 1932, and the document on December 28th, 1932 was put forward as an extension of the treaty. It was also alleged that this boundary was valid between Turkey and Greece, since Greece was the successor to Italy. Thus, all islands supposedly belong to Greece, except the ones left within 3 miles in the Lausanne Peace Treaty" (Başeren, 2006: 138).

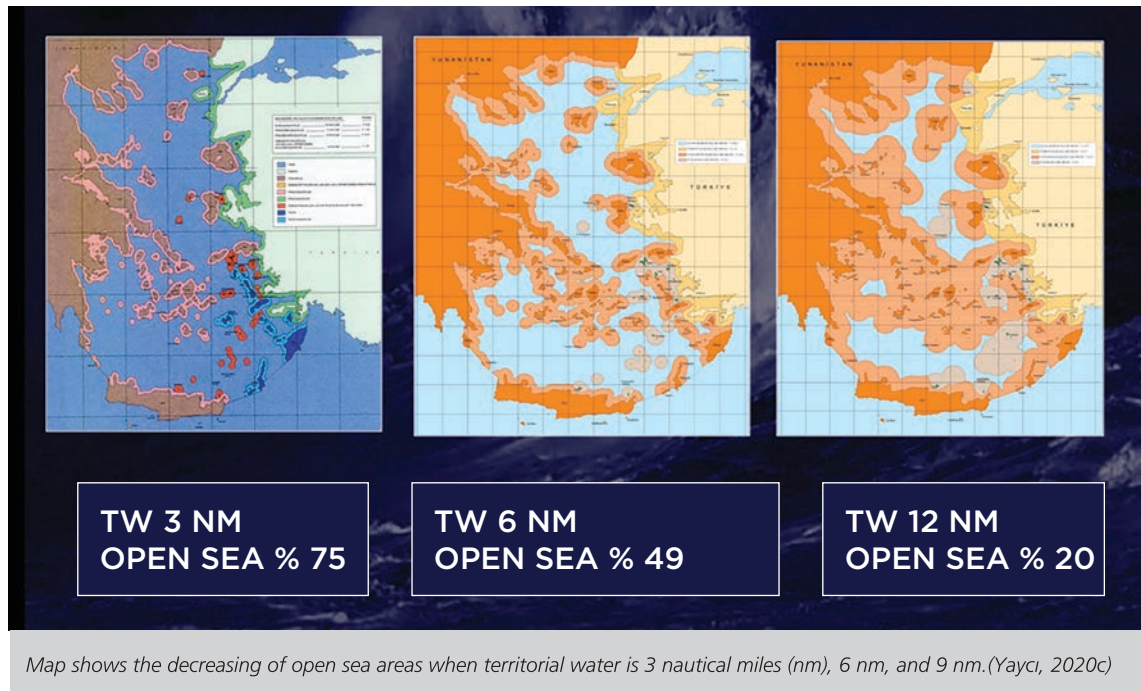
In addition to this, Greece asserts that the maximum width of the territorial waters is determined as 12 miles by Article 3 of the UNCLOS, and the sea areas of the islands are also regulated in Article 121. Thus, Greece can supposedly make arrangements on the islands as in the mainland, and can also determine the airspace in parallel. In other words, Greece states that every island ought to have 12 miles of territorial waters and airspace (Akkutay, 2018).

However, this is not a general and uniform rule that can be applied to any case, according to both customary law and Arbitration Decisions. "In other words, Article 3 states that the territorial waters are not 12 miles, but can be increased to 12 miles, if geographically and legally possible. Indeed, Turkey does not have a conventional obligation caused by Article 3, since it is not a party in the UNCLOS" (Akkutay, 2018: 202). Considering the special situation of the Aegean Sea, it is seen that the sea restrictions here must be made by mutual agreement. "Article 15 of the

Convention and customary law also show that it is possible to give less or no effect to the islands than other territorial countries given the presence of special circumstances in the delimitation of territorial waters" (Akkutay, 2018: 203).

Again, "in the 3rd Maritime Law Conference, as was understood from the explanations regarding draft article 121, it is seen that the condition of evaluating the territorial waters of the islands according to the other provisions regarding the land countries is determined for the areas where there are no restriction problems and aims to set a general rule. Therefore, when it comes to delimitating the territorial waters, it is possible to give limited or no effect to the islands according to the mainlands in case of special circumstances, according to Article 15 of the Convention" (Akkutay, 2018: 198). It is seen that Article 16 of the Treaty of Lausanne is not a waiver provision, that the three-mile principle does not terminate their rights over the islands outside this distance. Therefore, the islands transferred to Italy and Greece are counted as 'limiters' in Articles 12 and 15. The document of December 28th, 1932 has never turned into a valid international treaty, and the Greek practices cannot change the borders determined by international treaties, as was indicated in the international court decisions (Başeren, 2006).

Ultimately, since the sea is subject to the land, it does not seem possible to determine any maritime boundaries without registering ownership of the islands in the Aegean. So, the top priority question to be solved in the Aegean is the question of islands, islets, and rocks. The primary issue of the property problem is its territorial waters. By breaking the balance of Lausanne, Greece has increased its territorial waters to 6 miles in 1936 and reduced the open sea area in the region to less than 50 percent.



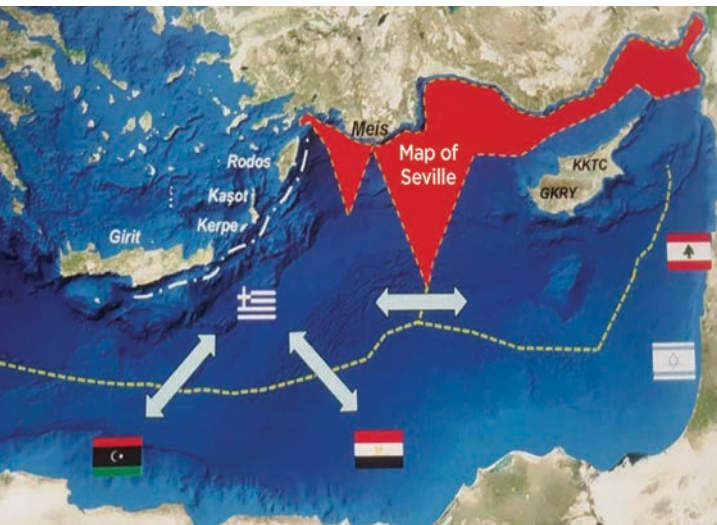
According to the 6-mile regime, there is only one open waterway going down to the Mediterranean. This regime cannot pose a problem for other countries, but the size of the continental shelf offshore areas sharing is critical to Turkey. So Turkey should make legal preparations for the return of point 3-mile regime, and begin an official call (Yaycı, 2020c).

Since all problems in the Aegean are related to each other, discussing these problems as a package would be beneficial for Turkey. Greece has blocked the way to the International Court of Justice, claiming they do not have any problems with Turkey in the Aegean, except the continental shelf. Thereby, Turkey's government needs to start applications for the approximately 152 island group in the Aegean when the time comes. But the problems in the Aegean frozen by the Agreement of Bern in 1976, allows Turkey to intensify the priority of rights and interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Today, while the to-

tal maritime jurisdiction area of the 152 Aegean island group is 15 thousand square kilometers, the size of the sea area of Turkey attempted to be usurped by Greece in the eastern Mediterranean is 150 thousand square kilometers.

The Seville Imposition in the Eastern Mediterranean

The problem in the Eastern Mediterranean is more concerning than that of the Aegean. In 2003, a map of maritime jurisdiction prepared by the University of Seville calculated the territory of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean as 41 thousand square kilometers, and GCASC announced its EZZ according to the map in question. According to the map, Greece and Southern Cyprus are seen as neighbors from the sea. Greece's islands overlooking the Eastern Mediterranean were given full effect, and Turkey's sailing to the open seas was blocked (Yaycı, 2019b: 43-53).



Source: (Yaycı, 2019b)

Greece's coast length in the Eastern Mediterranean is 167 kilometers. On the other hand, Turkey's coastline is 1870 kilometers. Consequently, according to the principle of equity, Turkey must obtain maritime jurisdiction 13 times more than that of Greece (Yaycı, 2020d).

In the law of the sea, there is the principle of mainland supremacy. In other words, the restriction should be made between the Asian continent and the African continent. According to the decisions of the ICJ, the islands on the opposite side of the middle line have only territorial waters. At this point, decisions on the islands of Filfla, Serpents, Qit'at Jaradah, Alcatraz, Djerba, Saint Pierre & Miquelon can be examined. Also, islands within 200 miles of the mainland do not have a maritime jurisdiction. The islands of Greece remain within their continental shelf (Yaycı, 2019b: 43-53).

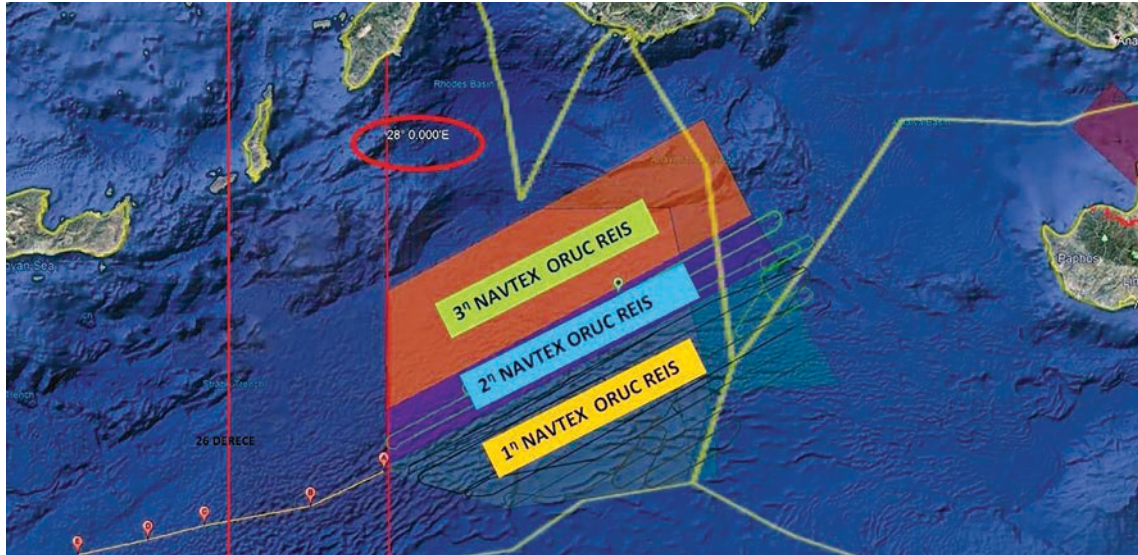
What is worse, Meis Island, which is two miles off Turkey's shores, was given 40 thousand square kilometers of maritime jurisdiction. However, Meis, Karaada, and Fener

Island are not even an island but more accurately a rock. It was stated in the South China Sea Arbitration Case that islands that cannot produce their own economy and do not have a settled population cannot possess maritime borders. What matters in maritime law is the situation before modification. In other words, the settlement policies initiated by Greece towards the islands cannot change the maritime jurisdiction of these islands (Bayıllıoğlu, 2019). Besides, Karaada and Fener Island have never been transferred to Greece: ownership of the islands still belongs to Turkey.

In summary, it will be seen from any perspective that Greece does not have a say in the Eastern Mediterranean. The EEZ agreements signed by Greece with Italy and Egypt did not give full effect to the islands, and Athens has thus given up its theses.

The Duplicity of Europe and the USA

Today, the European Union and the US are making statements that the Seville Map has no legal validity. However, both use this map and shape their policies around it. Today, the Seville map is displayed in all units of the European Union, from the Progress Reports to Agriculture, Fisheries, and Energy Agencies. Every objection against Turkey's seismic survey in the eastern Mediterranean is based on the acceptance of this map. Although the Oruc Reis seismic research ship has never passed the west of 28° longitude, almost the whole of Europe has begun to discuss sanctions, alleging that Turkey violated the maritime jurisdiction. The territory covered by the Oruc Reis seismic research ship within the continental shelf Turkey has repeatedly been declared to the United Nations (MFA, 2004, 2013).



The operation areas of Turkish Oruç Reis vessel in the Eastern Mediterranean. (Bankingnews, 2020)

Conclusion

Turkey has re-discovered the importance of the seas. It has drawn its maritime borders following all norms of international law. It is on its way to becoming a regional energy player with its national fleet of seismic and drilling ships. It transports goods all over the world with the Turkish mercantile fleet. The Republic Navy is in the most powerful period of its history. Turkey is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of national opportunities and capabilities. It provides aid to friendly and brotherly states beyond the borders of the Blue Homeland and contributes to global peace.

If the world wants to preserve peace at sea, it should cooperate with Turkey. Otherwise, Turkey does not have a drop of water from the Blue Homeland to give away. The Blue Homeland struggle is Turkey's struggle for existence. Tearing down imposed maps is a Turkish tradition. If anyone still bears hope for the Seville map, they should remember the fate of the Sevres and the maps of the Greater Middle East Project. 🌍

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From “Mare Nostrum”¹ to International Maritime Cooperation: How History Can Offer Constructive Answers to Future Prospects in the Mediterranean



DOMINIK PIETZCKER

Prof. Dr.
Public Relations and Communication's Management,
Macromedia University of Applied Science

Since 2012, Dominik Pietzcker, Dr. phil., is a fulltime professor at Macromedia University of Applied Sciences, Hamburg and Berlin Campuses and a member of the Media Faculty. He studied comparative German literature, philosophy and history at the University of Freiburg/Br., Trinity College Dublin and in Vienna. From 1996-2010, he worked as a creative director for political institutions (E.U., the German government's Federal Press Department) and taught at Universität der Künste (UdK) Berlin, Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft (HTW) Berlin and Technische Universität (TU) Dresden. Since 2014, he is an honorary juror at the Foundation of German Entrepreneurs (Stiftung der Deutschen Wirtschaft, SDW). Since 2017 he holds lectures at universities in China, at Zhejiang University City College (Hangzhou) and Tongji University (Shanghai). He publishes regularly on intercultural, Sino-German, and socio-economic topics.

E-mail: d.pietzcker@macromedia.de

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1420-9396>

¹ Editor's Note (Ed.N.) Mare Nostrum is the Roman expression for the Mediterranean Sea.

ABSTRACT

Since antiquity, the Mediterranean region witnessed the rise and fall of all kinds of political and economic systems. It has always been the laboratory of human societies, a melting pot of different religions, philosophies and ethnic groups. Mediterranean countries saw astonishing cultural and aesthetic achievements, but also experienced destruction and acts of barbarism. The Mediterranean gave birth to one of the most powerful political concepts, the idea of the occidental and oriental hemisphere. With the beginning of global capitalism and transatlantic trade, the Mediterranean lost much of its strategic importance and economic momentum. But stagnation is never an option. Today, with the rise of China as the new global player, the Mediterranean and its regional powers gain new options, too. Participation is the key, and mutual understanding a possible beginning. Only international cooperation, global trade and cultural exchange will help to stabilize the vulnerable equilibrium in the Mediterranean. So, what lessons can be learned from history to better understand and explore today's political and economic potential of the Mediterranean? Some historical figurations persist or have a surprising coming-back, indicating some striking parallels between the Mediterranean of history and the present day.

Keywords: Atlantic Ocean, eastern hemisphere, hegemony, Mediterranean Sea, new world order

*J'ai sur ma table une potiche
Chinoise, et du goût le plus fin,
Qu'avec l'extase d'un fétiche
Plus d'un contemplerait sa fin.*²

– Théodore Hannon, *Chinoiserie* (cit. Décaudin, ed., 1992, 335) –

*Die alte Ordnung ist tot, die neue noch nicht gefunden.*³

– Thomas Mayer, *Machtkampf in Europa* (2020, 2) –

The Mediterranean as a Cultural and Political Catalysator

Since prehistoric times, the Mediterranean gave birth to a magnitude of societies, cultures and religions, to different political ideas and economic systems. From the Minoan culture to Hellenism,

from Carthage to Rome and from the Venetian Republic to the Osman Empire: the Mediterranean has always been (and still is) an arena for the rise and fall of various power systems, and a playground of antagonistic strategic ambitions. Geographically, the Mediterranean Sea has been an ideal platform for trade and free exchange of goods. Since antiquity, moreover, connectivity and communication were the prerequisites of cultural, if not political dominance. In one of his dialogues, Plato describes how Greek colonists set along the Mediterranean Sea «like frogs around a pond» (Plato, 1991), engaged in a never-ending circle of communication. The Athenians, always pragmatic in politics, encouraged democracy at home, but advocated tyranny in their Sicilian colonies (Finley et al., 1986).

2 On my table stands a piece of Chinese pottery / Of the finest taste / And in fetishistic ecstasy / More than one contemplates his end. (author's translation)

3 The old order is dead; a new one not found, yet. (author's translation).

In antiquity, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Etruscans, Persians, Greeks and Romans (only to mention the most prominent civilizations) all settled, lived, explored, dreamed, made war, prospered and died along the Mediterranean shores (Braudel, 1990; Braudel et al., 1986; Abulafia, 2011). Regional battles for exchange and competition led historically to different alliances and new forms of power balances. The Greeks destroyed the Persian fleet at the famous sea battle of Salamis⁴ (480 B.C.). But the Mediterranean is not only defined by water. It is part of Eurasia, and therefore also defined by its continental relations to the Middle and Far East.⁵ For the states of ancient Greece, the continental East was as natural a political option as the maritime West. Athenian aristocrat Dionysius became tyrant of Syracuse in Sicily, whereas his compatriot Alcibiades negotiated for military support in Persia to overrun his hometown (4th century B.C.). He was later murdered at the Persian court.

The defeat of the Persians against the Greek military forces encouraged some generations later Alexander the Macedon to challenge again the Persian kingdom and Darius II. With astonishing success; the Persian armies were destroyed, Darius II killed, and Alexander's troops entered Babylon in triumph through the imperial Lions' Gate. For the first time in history, occident and orient were united under one ruler. Alexander's famous mass wedding in Susa (324 B.C.) was one of the rare occasions, where East and West melt-

ed together. Short after Alexander's death, his empire imploded. Alexander's successors were his former generals (the famous *Diadochi*⁶), who founded their own dynasties, but never achieved Alexander's visionary East-Western unity.⁷ The precarious balance between the *Diadochi* led to various wars and weakened consequently all parties involved. Cleopatra, who surrendered to the Romans, was the last Ptolemean ruler. Her capital Alexandria, once founded by Alexander and still keeping his grave, became Roman.⁸

In the years that followed the decline of Hellenism, the influence and military power of the Roman Republic grew continuously. Rome was a newcomer, heiress of mythical Troy and usurp of the old Etruscan kingdom. The Roman republic was reckless in war, disciplined and highly organized, and became within two centuries the rising power in the Western part of the Mediterranean. In its ambition towards total control and superiority, Rome dominated already the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic Sea. But only after the destruction of Carthage (146 B.C.) and the fall of Corinth the same year, Rome became for nearly 600 years the unchallenged hegemon and military power dominating both, the occidental and oriental parts of Southern Europe and West Asia. The Mediterranean Sea became the «mare nostrum», our sea, reaching from the pillars of Hercules⁹ (strait of Gibraltar) to the Aegean Sea.

Rome's political and military hegemony did not lead to cultural or religious homogenization.

4 Ed. N. The battle of Salamis has been seen as the turning point in the course of Graeco-Persian wars.

5 On the map (not in political reality!), the strait of Otranto between today's Italy and Albania is as close to Syria as to Spain.

6 Ed.N. It means successors.

7 The Ptolemean dynasty reigned over Egypt, the Seleucids over Babylonia and the Middle East, and Cassander over Macedonia and Greece.

8 Today, Alexander's grave lies still somewhere hidden under the pulsating modern city of Alexandria. In the course of history, the grave became a mythical idea, something like the Holy Grail or the treasure of the Nibelungen.

9 Ed.N. Pillars of Hercules are the two promontories at the eastern end of the Strait of Gibraltar. The northern pillar is the Rock of Gibraltar; the southern pillar is Jebel Musa in Morocco.

Its long-lasting and expanded system was based on military dominance, strict fiscal rules and the unconditional acceptance of its political authority. But religion in its various forms and expressions, different practices of arts, craftsmanship and culture were free; tolerance was considered as a virtue. Assimilation to Roman culture was neither desired nor demanded.

Rome, for the first time in history, gives us the *idea of a truly pluricultural global society*, where the differences between occident and orient can be transformed into a maybe even higher form of civilization.

Roman citizenship remained a privilege to the old aristocratic or nouveau riche families. The Roman elites themselves practiced a cosmopolitan lifestyle. Greek was the preferred language of the well-educated upper-class. Rhetoric skills, philosophical ideas and aesthetics were also deeply influenced by Greek culture. Leisure activities were inspired by Etruscan rites, luxury goods like silk and perfume were imported from the Far East (Fox, 2006). Rome, for the first time in history, gives us the idea of a truly pluricultural global society, where the differences between occident and orient can be transformed into a maybe even higher form of civilization. After all, dialectics, too, were invented in the Mediterranean!

The religious pluriverse of the Roman empire included deities from Egypt and the Middle East. Dionysus was revered in Rome, but also Isis¹⁰ and Mithras¹¹, esoteric religious cults that

originated from the South-East of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the Roman concept of «mare nostrum» included the coexistence of many cultures and political regimes, united by one idea, the «pax romana».

Universalism is a truly Mediterranean idea, embracing all kinds of differences and self-contradictions under one supreme idea (Morin & Ceruti, 2018). An ancient concept, universalism can be easily adapted to today's global trade. Isn't the idea of free exchange of goods, and the mobility of people and ideas just another expression of universalism? It must be clear, though, that there is no leading power anymore in the Mediterranean. All players have to treat each other as equal partners, not as rivals or antagonists. In a postcolonial world, only universal partnership is an acceptable concept for all parties involved. Yet, Western political concepts still tend to be biased by Eurocentric ideas.

Alliances, Conflicts and New Constellations

The Mediterranean region has never fallen victim to a power vacuum; it has rather been characterized by a fragile equilibrium of rivals, partners, friends and adversaries. In this power game, the weakness of one player always leads to the rise of its antagonist or – often enough – to the rise of a third party.

Rome held its position as supreme ruler over the Mediterranean for more than six centuries. In the 5th century A.D., while the Western parts of the former Roman empire were devastated and overrun by the barbarian hordes from the North East, Constantinople – the Second Rome – out-

¹⁰ Ed.N. Isis is the most important of all goddesses of ancient Egypt.

¹¹ Ed.N. Mithras or Mehr is a divinity, responsible for covenant, light, and oath in the Zoroastrian religion. In addition to being the divinity of contracts, Mithras is also a judicial figure, an all-seeing protector of truth, and the guardian of cattle, the harvest, and of the waters.

lasted the crisis. But the political and religious divide between the Western and Eastern hemisphere irrevocably weakened the unity of the empire.

The ambiguous situation between Rome and Constantinople, their weakened positions, offered on the other hand unexpected opportunities for other religions, popular movements and military powers. The irresistible rise of a new, vital and powerful religion, Islam, changed from the 7th century onwards the political map of the Middle East and the Southern part of the Mediterranean. Arab troops overran only within decades Northern Africa and the South of Spain. Finally, in 1453, Mehmed II and his armies conquered, after an epic siege, Constantinople. It was one of the most decisive and historically relevant victories in the Mediterranean. Istanbul became the new epicenter of the Ottoman empire and the Muslim world. Mehmed II challenged Western Europe with his armies and fleets as well as with his inventiveness and discipline.



Bombardment of Algiers (August 1816), painted by Martinus Schouman. (Wikipedia)

Until now, even after more than 500 years, the cultural and religious divide between the oriental and the occidental hemisphere persists; it is

the consequence of many antagonistic conflicts since the fall of the Roman empire and the implosion of its centralized power. *Ever since, the Mediterranean is a politically fragmented region.*

In retrospect, only a handful of geopolitical developments were decisive for the deep historical change of the Mediterranean after the fall of Western Rome (Abulafia, 2011; Braudel, 1986). (1) The schism between the roman-catholic and the orthodox church divided the Mediterranean, once for all, in two different maritime and continental hemispheres. But it left both sides, East and West, weakened and destabilized. The early centuries of Christianity marked a dramatic downfall in literature, high culture and aesthetics. Christianity, the religion of suffering and guilt, was a dubious spiritual progress, compared to the worldly and hedonistic body culture of antiquity. But what is called the dark Middle Age turned out to be, seen from a different perspective, the beginning of the golden age of Islamic culture. (2) The rise of Islam in Arabia and its victorious spread led to a power shift along the North-African coastline, in the South of Spain, on the Balkan peninsula, in the Levante¹², along the Black Sea and in the Middle East. (3) The crusades from the 11th to 13th century A.D., with all their religious fanaticism, their greed and cruelties, were the reaction of occidental alliances to defeat the new spiritual movement and its strong military forces. The outcome of these bloodsheds in the Levante (today's Lebanon, Syria and Israel) was paradoxical. The weakened European dynasties, exclusively concerned with internal struggles, witnessed (4) from the late 13th century onwards the rise of the

¹² Ed.N. It is a western term which derives from the root of levare, meaning "rising" (rising of the Sun). The region is known as city of Sham (Bilād-Ūs(ēl)-Sām) in Ottoman Period and it is also equivalent to the term al-Mashriq in Arabic, meaning "the eastern place, where the Sun rises".

Ottoman empire to the new ruler of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. As the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation (5) was in steady decline, and papal Rome lost much of its worldly influence, the state republics of Genova and Venice stepped into the Western power vacuum.

If land and sea can become one, why not East and West? It is worth mentioning, that the Belt and Road Initiative follows the same historical idea, combining maritime and continental lines of communication and infrastructure.

It is worth mentioning, that both republics, Venice and Genova, built their strengths on *transnational sea trade*. They were eminent maritime powers. Their territorial claims were rather modest, trade and finance their true strongholds and sources of wealth. Military power was only the necessary means to protect their trade routes. Genova ruled over the Tyrrhenian Sea, Venice over the Adriatic Sea, and the islands of Crete and Rhodes. Until today, Venice is one of the most magnificent and impressive cities in Europe; a living witness of the possibility to overcome geographic barriers and cultural prejudices.

If land and sea can become one,¹³ why not East and West? It is worth mentioning, that the *Belt and Road Initiative follows the same histor-*

*ical idea, combining maritime and continental lines of communication and infrastructure.*¹⁴

But back to history! Even during the Middle Ages, the noble idea of a tolerant, multireligious and multiethnic society was not completely utopian. The Swabian¹⁵ emperor Frederic II, king of Sicily (1194-1250), encouraged Muslim scholars, craftsmen and soldiers to settle within the realm of his kingdom. He understood and maybe even spoke Arabic, loved to hunt with falcons and preferred a Muslim guard for personal protection (Kantorowicz, 1994). After his death, the Muslim population in Sicily and Puglia was murdered. Obviously, it takes more than the will and the vision of one progressive ruler to establish a truly tolerant society, and to overcome, once for all, religious, ethnic and cultural prejudices.

The conquest of Constantinople, today's Istanbul, by Mehmed II (1453) opened a new and decisive chapter in the Mediterranean history. Once again, Western dominance was restricted to the Adriatic Sea. Dubrovnik (Ragusa), once a Venetian colony, was now ruled by the Ottomans. Venetian fleets were not only challenged by Ottoman armadas, but also by pirates from Algeria and Morocco. The romanticized barbery corsairs, courageous sailors and cruel fighters, stepped into the tradition of pirates and privateers. As in ancient times, the Mediterranean Sea became the arena of epic sea battles and sieges: Otranto (1480), Lepanto (1571) and Aboukir (better known as battle of the Nile,¹⁵ 1798); Mal-

¹³ Until the end of the Venetian republic, the citizens celebrated every year the highly symbolic spiritual unification with the sea (*spozalizio del mare*). The doge threw from his galore (*bucentoro*) his ring into the lagoon (Abulafia, 2011). Carl Schmitt (1981, 10) writes (author's translation): What is our element? Are we children of the land or of the sea? This question cannot be answered by a simple either-or.

¹⁴ Just as an illustration: The Chinese Silk Road Fund holds a minority of shares of the Autostrade per l'Italia, which runs motorways in Italy and Southern Europe. Autostrade recently rebuilt the St. George's bridge in Genova. A highly profitable financial engagement – and a catalyst for Italy's suffering economy.

¹⁵ The sea battle of Nile at Aboukir became famous not only for the British victory, but maybe more for the golden artefacts that were found close to the sea in 1902. They are now exposed at the Bohde museum in Berlin and the Calouste Gulbenkian museum in Lisbon.

ta (1565) and Algiers (1816) were heavily bombarded from the seaside. The *dramatis personae* changed, but the lines of conflicts were quite similar: military dominance over strategic positions, conquest of ports and, most importantly from an economic viewpoint, the organization of safe and profitable trade routes. Berber privateers and barbary corsairs from the Rif mountains, Ottoman admirals, Genovese adventurers and Venetian businessmen; crusaders, prophets, soldiers, slaves, noblemen and plebeians – they all followed their individual careers and faced their destinies in the Mediterranean arena.



Alexander The Great, golden coin found in Aboukir (Bohde Museum, Berlin)

Atlantic Hegemony, High and Low Tide

The Mediterranean Sea is not an isolated pond. It was – and still is, today! – exposed to global change. The decline of Mediterranean culture and its shrinking global influence are intrinsically linked to the growing importance of the Atlantic Ocean as the new prospering field of trade and exploration.

The discovery and, soon after, colonialization of the Americas in the late 15th century marked not only a new historical age in the West, but also the decline of the Mediterranean as the epicenter of European history. The prof-

its from the import of gold and silver, agricultural products and cotton from the Americas exceeded by far the profits of Mediterranean trade. The export of slaves over the Atlantic sea routes proved to be even more profitable than the import of silk and spices from the Far East (Pétre-Grenouilleau, 2004). The Mediterranean lost its supreme position as the main arena of European history; hegemony shifted westwards. In the late 15th and 16th centuries, the kingdoms of Portugal and Spain – the first explorers and exploiters of the riches of the Americas – outshined any other Mediterranean power. But it was a short period of triumph. Already in the 17th and 18th century, the British Empire gained economic and military strength. Its power relied on two strong pillars, the colonial exploitation of India by the East Indian Company, and the tight transatlantic relations. The predominance of the transatlantic trade – mainly cotton, slaves and sugar – marked the beginning of globalization. The rising Atlantic powers, the British Empire and, after their independence, the United States of America – rather than the European continental empires – were the driving forces of economic change and technological progress.

Thanks to its dominance over the strategically important strait of Gibraltar and the strength of its navy, Britain gained decisive advantages in the Mediterranean Sea. On several occasions, Britain destroyed Spanish and French ambitions of maritime dominance and eventually proclaimed its global influence. Since the middle of 19th century, Britain controlled both, the Western and Eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea. Even the Suez Canal (1869), initially a French-Egyptian project, became in the end a British business affair. The British government under Benjamin Disraeli bought in 1875 the shares of the bankrupt Egyptian khedive Ismail (Abulafia, 2011).

Yet, global power relations are not centered in the Eurasian region anymore. New markets, economic potentials, sources of wealth and worldly powers emerged in the Atlantic West. The United States of America, with their huge homogenous home market, became the economically leading nation in the late 19th century. It took the U.S. no more than 100 years after independence to become not only a global player, but also a genuine hegemonial «super-power» with strong strategic interests on every single continent following World War II.

America's strategic and military interests reach deep into the Mediterranean. The harbor of Taranto in Puglia, a former colony of ancient «Magna Graecia»¹⁶, became one of the important bases of the U.S. Marine Corps. Atlantic predominance, represented by the U.S., developed into a political and military reality in the whole Mediterranean Sea. In 2020, the American fleet bombarded targets in Syria.

China's Rise and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

But what about China during all these years and centuries of dramatic change in the Mediterranean? Already in the early 14th century, the imperial fleet under its admiral Zheng He sailed along the East African coast. Chinese ships, technically the most advanced of their time, might have passed the African coast and reached Europe, but the Ming dynasty stopped the costly naval expedition (Vogelsang, 2013). China's policy became self-centered; focused on continental, not maritime developments. It took another 600 years before China reinvented itself as a maritime power.



A replica of a treasure ship that Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433) sailed in. (Song Qiao / China Daily)

Today, China runs the biggest shipping companies worldwide, owns a hypermodern aircraft carrier and is, unsurprisingly, also a major economic player on the Mediterranean scene. In a global study on Chinese economic and strategic capacities, U.S. think-tank German Marshall Fund (GMF) concludes (Lesser et al., 2018):

China is already a leading stakeholder in Mediterranean affairs, and is set to become a more visible actor in political and security terms in the years ahead. (...) China has made substantial investments in Mediterranean port facilities and has a significant stake in the security of Mediterranean lines of communication, including the Suez Canal. Looking further ahead, even modest progress on the ambitious belt and road project will bring China into closer contact with the Mediterranean security scene over the next decade.

¹⁶ Ed.N. Magna Graecia or Great Hellenic Lands is a geographical designation used to describe the south of Italy and the island of Sicily at the time when the ancient Hellenes colonized. It is emphasized that these lands were part of the Hellenistic cultural site, with reference to the Hellenic colonies in the area.

With the rise of China began a new era in global trade, technology and geostrategy. As the U.S. influence, after almost 80 years of semi-feudal hegemony, is dramatically in decline, China steps in. The Mediterranean Sea is only one scene of this geopolitical power shift from West to East. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strengthens the maritime and continental routes for trade, exchange and communications. The Mediterranean Sea as a broad bridge between Europe, Africa and Asia offers promising perspectives for China, being involved on all three continents.

The Long Way to a Multipolar Mediterranean Order

A brief look on a contemporary map conveys the enormous political diversity of the Mediterranean. It connects Europe with Africa and Asia. Ever since, it is a melting pot of ideas and goods. People always travelled on the sea routes and along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea – whether they were soldiers, traders, scholars or, in the last decade, refugees. From Turkey to Morocco, from Trieste to Port Said, from Ceuta to Iskenderun, the Mediterranean embraces East and West, North and South. Different countries, languages, religions and traditions overlap along the Mediterranean coast and build a unique and remarkably colorful human universe.

During the Cold War, the Mediterranean became once more the arena of rivaling antagonists. Bloody and long-lasting postcolonial wars, the rise of Arab nationalism in the 1950s, revolutions in Egypt and Libya, the civil war in Lebanon which also affected Syria, not to mention the unsolved conflict between Israel and the Arabic world – all these frictions and often undeclared wars since 1945 prove until today the

fragility and instability of the political system in the South Eastern part of the Mediterranean. Lebanon's tragic decline also reveals the vulnerability of this region. Equilibrium is totally lost.

Nevertheless, economic growth through infrastructural projects and the intensification of global trade look like a promising concept for the Mediterranean. Paradoxically, the E.U. neglected for many years this option. During the European financial crisis, it was China's COSCO shipping company – and not a European consortium – that invested huge sums in the Greek port of Piraeus, now the biggest container port in the Mediterranean (Piraeus Port Authority, 2019).

The growing influence of China in the Mediterranean is only one of the geostrategic effects of globalization and, generally speaking, the rising global relevance of East Asia. The Mediterranean is also affected by this historical power shift. As always, East and West struggle to find a new equilibrium. Europe could have played the role of an arbiter – the third party –, profiting from both sides. This role would require true political, economic and military independence, a quality that Western European states and institutions have lost in the course of the 20th century. But Behemoth and Leviathan¹⁷ are not the only mythical metaphors in geopolitics. Undeniably, the Dragon has also stepped into the arena.

Today, mass migration from the Global South and the Middle East to Europe is one of the biggest unsolved problems of the Mediterranean. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic of migration played a major role in shaping European politics and media. Migration to Europe is, under the given political circumstances, an endless humanitarian tragedy. The only realistic option would be the economic stabilization of the Global South and the Middle

17 Ed.N. Behemoth and Leviathan are two mythical beings in the bible, representing the land and sea.

East. Europe has ignored economic options for several decades, whereas China has identified new opportunities for business and geopolitical influence. The Belt and Road Initiative, with its heavy infrastructure investments in Africa and the Middle East, has already made a difference. China's economic and strategic interests in the Mediterranean are strong and evident. Europe, in its historic skepticism, avoids giving an adequate answer – a very costly attitude.

A possible Renaissance of the Mediterranean?

Today, the Mediterranean has long lost its supreme historical and economic importance. Southern Europe is not an economic or cultural hub anymore, but simply the favorite destination of sun-seeking tourists from all over the world. If you are looking for fun in the sun, the Mediterranean coast in Southern Europe might be the favorite choice. Drunken teenagers and adipose pensioners dominate the scene. The heroic times of intellectual, aesthetical and geographical exploration are long over.

Today's European self-confidence suffered from the extreme bloody conflicts of the 20th century. Humanitarianism, the central idea of Renaissance's thinking, is nowadays reduced to an ethical dilemma posed by mass migration. It turns out to be poisonous for the political climate of Western societies and Europe has become the prisoner of its own colonial past. But political paralysis leads directly to societal decline. The dramatic economic breakdown in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic makes the situation even worse. So, what about the future prospects of the Mediterranean?

Thinking about the singularity of the Mediterranean, there is one prominent feature that reappears again and again over the course of history. The Mediterranean was always *open to new cultural influences and economic developments*. In other words, it is a highly perceptive culture. Mobility and the openness towards change are its main characteristics. The ability to absorb and transform new influences is maybe the main reason for the survival of the Mediterranean culture until today.

Without any doubt, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also some strong Mediterranean features. Furthermore, the natural gas basins in the Eastern Mediterranean, claimed – so far – by Egypt, Israel, Turkey and Cyprus, offer new economic potentials for the whole region.

It does not come as a total surprise that since the beginning of the 21st century China, too, stepped into the Mediterranean arena. Chinese companies invested heavily in Mediterranean maritime infrastructure. The Greek port of Piraeus is controlled by the Chinese state-owned shipping company COSCO. China invests, among others, in infrastructural projects in Italy, Greece, Turkey and Albania (Hermann, 2020). China is also engaged in several railway projects on the Balkans. Without any doubt, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also some strong Mediterranean features. Furthermore, the natural gas basins in the Eastern Mediterranean, claimed – so far – by Egypt, Israel, Turkey

and Cyprus, offer new economic potentials for the whole region (ISPI, 2018). China's politics of infrastructural engagement and security might have come at the right moment.

Yet, the growing possibility of an open trade war between China and the U.S. change the geopolitical prospects of the Mediterranean, too. Financial Times political analyst James Kynge writes (Kynge, 2020, 9):

A bipolar change is starting to take shape (...). Around one pole are those countries that welcome Chinese technology and the multi-billion investments of its corporations. Around the other is the US-led west that is closing its door, in varying degrees, to a lengthening list of what are regarded as sensitive Chinese technologies and investments.

Whose side are you on? The falcons of foreign policy in Europe and the U.S. demand a clear decision, favoring transatlantic relations (Lesser et al., 2018). But this would only prolong Europe's weak position under the umbrella of the United States. The long, ambiguous history of the Mediterranean teaches a different moral. In a multipolar world, Europe would be much better advised to build up a *third option*, and to be open, like the sea, to all parties involved.¹⁸

In a recent conversation with English journalist Charles Powell, Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union, describes China as "partner, rival and competitor" (Borrell, 2020) and stresses the complexity of the Sino-European relations. Handling complexity

could be a start: Independence and cooperation seem to be a wiser and more peaceful concept than the struggle for dominance and superiority.

Summary

The antagonism of occidental and oriental cultures, East and West, is deeply rooted in Mediterranean history. Hegemony, sought by many Mediterranean powers over the course of history, always was an exception. On the other hand, times of flourishing culture and prosperity in the Mediterranean were marked by mutual exchange, cooperation and tolerance. Today, in times of a globalized economy, the Mediterranean becomes again the arena, where East and West meet. China's investments in Mediterranean infrastructure, both maritime and continental, prove the geostrategic and economic relevance of the Mediterranean. Europe therefore must rediscover its own political potential; independence is the key. In its long history the Mediterranean experienced all imaginable power constellations. There is always the possibility to overcome prejudices and biased ideologies. The antagonism of East and West may even turn out to be the last historical chimera.¹⁹ 🐉

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¹⁸ China is already the second most important trading partner for the EU. Attention needs to be paid to EU-Chinese trade relations (European Parliament, 2020).

¹⁹ Ed.N. Chimera is a creature known in the Iliad for its eternal fire.

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Gas Hydrates: The Energy Source of the Near Future^{*}



GÜNAY ÇİFCİ

Prof.Dr.
Department of Geophysics, Dokuz Eylül University

Prof. Dr. Günay Çifci completed his undergraduate studies at Yıldız University Geophysics Department, his master's degree at Dokuz Eylül University (DEU) Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology (DBTE), and his doctorate at Trieste University / Italy and DEU the Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences. He participated in UNESCO-supported Floating University Training through Research (TTR) in 1991, 1995, 1996, 2000, and 2001 in the Mediterranean and Black Sea international waters. In 2001, he was a visiting researcher for post-doctoral studies in the Department of Earth Sciences at Virginia Tech University, USA. In 2003, he was appointed to DBTE as a full-time professor. He served as a project partner coordinator in various EU projects, and Horizon 2020, as a member of the Turkey in Representative Executive Committee of Marine gas hydrate - an indigenous resource of natural gas for the Europe: (MIGRATE) Cost Action. He also completed more than 10 TUBITAK projects. Additionally, he continued his research on gas hydrates and marine geology and geophysics between 2005-2018 as the coordinator of the Geophysics Seismic Laboratory (SeisLab), which started its activities with the support of DPT. In 2019, he has been temporarily assigned to the Department of Geophysics at DEU.

E-mail: gunay.cifci@deu.edu.tr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4380-8056>

ABSTRACT

Gas Hydrates (Methane Hydrates) are ice-like crystalline solids formed by the trapped of gas molecules in a lattice by water molecules. They are formed under high pressure and low-temperature condition. They usually contain methane gas, which is the main component of natural gas. Water molecules surround the methane molecules trapping them in a 'cage' of water molecules to form gas hydrates (GH). They are commonly found in the continental margin (continental slope), seafloor sediments, and near-polar frost (permafrost) areas. Today, marine GH deposits, which can be defined as a type of shale gas on the seabed in economic terms, are seen as a "relatively clean energy source of the near future" and will be an important energy resource as part of the world's unconventional hydrocarbon revolution. Looking at Turkey, GH occurs at high-pressure and moderate temperatures in the Marmara, Mediterranean, and Black Sea. To carry out work in this area, the Geophysical seismic laboratory established within Dokuz Eylul University with the support of the State Planning Organization (DPT) served as a focal point in many research activities and conducted exploration studies between 2005 and 2018 by mapping GH and taking samples from the seafloor for the first time. Among these studies, the first phase of the National Gashydrate project has been completed and a priceless discovery with a national team has generated decades of energy potential.

Keywords: Black Sea, unconventional energy source, gas hydrates, geophysics, Mediterranean Sea

SHALLOW GAS HYDRATES (GH) ZONES are important for earth sciences and economics for three main reasons. First, the methane leaks that occur in these zones are a direct indicator of the presence of hydrocarbon reserves in the depths, and they form cover rocks suitable for the accumulation of methane gas in the layers beneath them. Second, methane hydrates themselves are also an important source of energy. They are called "zipped gas" because they contain 164 times more gas than its volume. Third, the formation and migration of methane in sediments can cause intense slope slides, resulting in tsunamis. GH formations can pose security threats in offshore operations and offshore structures such as gas pipelines and oil platforms. For these reasons, detailed research is essential.

GH deposits present in the world are mostly found in areas of thousands of square kilometers, under the seafloor, covered with sediments

above. GH reserves will be the energy source of the near future due to the large methane volume they contain. 1 m³ GH contains 164 m³ gas and 0.8 m³ water under standard pressure and temperature. Estimates of the total amount of GH stored under the seabed on a global scale range from 0.2 x 10¹⁵ m³ to 7,600 x 10¹⁵ m³.

Due to its great potential, GH, which contains, economically valuable hydrocarbon gases as energy raw materials, is now in the interest of many governments and leading oil/energy companies. Considering that existing oil and natural gas reserves are about to decline, the importance of GH reserves becomes clear. "Shallow GH Zones" in the marine environment can be detected by marine geophysical seismic surveys and other geophysical methods. Studies conducted in Japan have demonstrated through systematic studies that the GH accumulations/formations in marine sediments are sufficient to

meet the gas requirement of Japan for 90 years. Other countries in South East Asia (China, India, South Korea) and the United States are exploring GH reserves located in national waters. A field drilling study conducted by the Japanese in 2013 showed that natural gas can be produced from offshore GH reserves. Similarly, comprehensive projects in the Gulf of Mexico, offshore production tests in Canada and Alaska, and offshore production tests carried out by China since 2017 have played a role in forming a widespread opinion that GH will be the energy source of the near future. It should be emphasized once again that Japan and China have started production at sea and will start production on a commercial scale by 2023. Similarly, some countries with economically significant power have targeted GH research with significant budgets for commercial production after 2023.

“Zipped” Gas Which is Lying Deep in the Seabed

When the near-future scenarios in the field of energy are examined, it is understood that coal-based energy/electricity production will reach its maximum level in a short time, particularly when power plants to be installed are taken into account alongside the existing resource-based installed power capacity. By the 2040s, it is predicted that natural gas-based energy production will outperform coal alongside a rapidly increased share of renewable energy resources (IEA World Energy Outlook, 2019).

Non-Conventional energy sources include GH, shale gas, geothermal energy, hydraulic, nuclear, solar, wind, and biomass. Alongside increased investment in alternative energy sources, new technologies in the energy field

are rapidly being developed. Due to the large volume of methane they contain, it seems GH reserves will stand out as the main alternative/non-conventional (coal-oil-natural gas) energy source in coming years.

Shale gas (SHG) was not included in the conventional class of fossil fuels formed by the coal-natural gas-oil trio, which was relatively cheaper to extract at the beginning of the twentieth century when it was first discovered. The main factor determining this choice was the cost factor in obtaining these resources. In two examples, natural gas production has been carried out at competitive costs from SHG since 1905 in Louisiana in the United States, from GH in Messoyakha region (permafrost area) in Russia, from 1970 to the present day. On the other hand, it has been ignored for many years by oil companies. In general terms, in the energy sector, SHG and GH both can be an alternative in natural gas production. However, "these two unconventional energy sources have been thoroughly investigated in recent years and appropriate production technologies have been developed over time. As a result, since the 2000s, SHG has taken its present place in the oil industry and has become a “game-changer” energy source in terms of countries’ policies towards energy sources" (World Energy Council Turkey, 2018: par.4)

The formation of the ice-like, crystalline GH composed of hydrocarbon gas molecules and water molecules surrounding them under the seafloor in high pressure and low-temperature environments depends on the combination of four factors: low temperature, high pressure, water, and natural gas which mainly consists of methane. These are the conditions required for the formation of gas hydrates and some modifiers (parameters) that control the formation process:

- Formation temperature (low temperature)**,
- Formation pressure (high pressure)**,
- Pore water salinity,
- Gas composition (biogenic/thermogenic methane),
- Presence of water and gas (fluid flow),
- Reservoir presence (porosity) as listed like these (Sloan & Koh, 2007; Max et al., 2013).

When the conditions above are met, gas hydrate formation will begin in the sedimentary environment. In contrast, the absence of any of these conditions formation prevents gas hydrate formation.

Looking at the general features of GH, the stability curve stands out as a key characteristic. "The stability condition of GH is expressed by high pressure and low temperature, and these conditions are called 'thermobaric conditions'" (Gas hydrate, n.d.) If the temperature increases and/or the pressure drops, the GH structure decomposes into gas and water and passes into a two-phase state. There are 3 types of GH structures: structure I, structure II and structure H:

Structure I: these porosities can only hold small gas molecules (methane, ethane) whose molecular diameters do not exceed 5.2 angstroms.

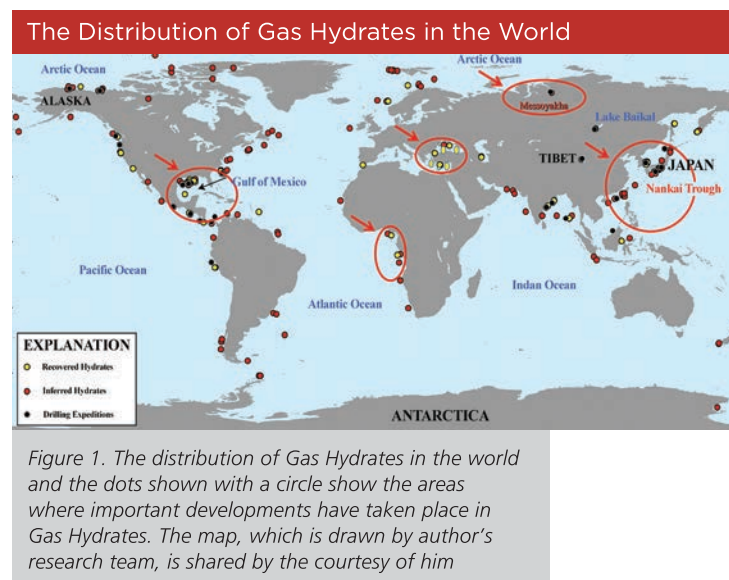
Structure II: these can hold gases such as propane, isobutane with molecular dimensions of 5.9-6.9 angstroms. This type of structure was first produced in the laboratory and was first detected in nature in 1983 in an area with a water depth of 530 m.

Structure H: This type of structure was first found in nature in 1993 at depths similar to Structure II, in Joliet, a large oil and gas production area in the Gulf of Mexico.

To summarize, the structure I gas hydrates may contain biogenic origin gases with structure II gases of biogenic origin, thermogenic origin

gases, and structure H may contain biogenic origin gases and thermogenic origin heavy hydrocarbon gases. For this reason, the gas discovery of thermogenic origin in the region is an indicator of the large gas reserves deeper below GH.

The amount of methane gas captured/stored in GH all over the world is estimated to be twice the carbon held in all fossil fuels in the world and more than fifty times the oil and natural gas resources. Existing GH deposits have been determined with up-to-date technology, only a small part of them have commercial potential, the real reserve and its contribution to the country's economy are much higher. The available resources are enormous. Figure 1 shows the distribution of GH around the world.



The areas within the circle in the figure show the Messoyakha area which is the first land production area in the world, GH areas in oil and gas fields such as Alaska, Gulf of Mexico, Angola Bay, and the Eastern Mediterranean, and GH areas such as the Nankai Trough where the first production was realized in the sea and the South China Sea. The potential to be obtained

from the work to be carried out in the exclusive economic zone of the Black Sea, Marmara, and Eastern Mediterranean, which has an important place in terms of marine gas and GH accumulation, is one of the most indispensable resources to the Turkish economy.

GH is important economically, as it is important for Earth Sciences. Methane leaks on the seabed are a direct indicator of the presence of hydrocarbon reserves in the deeper layers. In addition to being an indicator of the presence of oil and natural gas deposits, GH is an energy source that expands 164 times against 1 unit on its own due to its transforms to natural gas. GH can be formed by leaks from which natural gas exits, and other oil and gas expulsion. The main risks that arise in shallow gas zones are slope slides (submarine landslides) that can lead to a tsunami, and the accumulation of GH just below the seabed creates unstable and loose ground stabilities. In this case, unfavorable conditions will occur for offshore structures such as natural gas pipelines, oil platforms, etc.

Methane gas has 20 times more global warm absorption capacity compared to carbon dioxide if it is released into the atmosphere. In other words, methane gas is a very dangerous greenhouse gas due to its contribution to climate change. GH-induced emissions as a methane sequester have been found to play a major role in triggering ice ages throughout geological cycles.

In this case, the fact that gas hydrates, which are stable in terrestrial and marine areas, begin to dissolve for any reason and reach the atmosphere can create a global catastrophe in the sense of climatic cycles and global warming. For this reason, the realization of gas production from natural GH and the consumption of produced gases are interpreted as the only way to prevent a catastrophe that can occur in a climatic sense. One of the most

One of the most likely propositions that will remain unchanged in the coming short and medium term is that GH, which is much cleaner in terms of greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventional fossil fuels, will replace coal and oil.

likely propositions that will remain unchanged in the coming short and medium term is that GH, which is much cleaner in terms of greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventional fossil fuels, will replace coal and oil.

Additionally, the presence of natural gas was also determined as a result of investigating the core samples taken to determine the free gas deposits under the GH zone. A detailed study of these natural gas reserves has not yet been researched in Turkey, and this area is open to Priority Research.

The importance and main characteristics of GH can be summarized as such:

Apart from and as an alternative to conventional fossil fuels (coal-petroleum-natural gas), GH is a new energy source that can be described as “unconventional”. As the energy source of the near future, GH is of great economic importance and also has a function as the main indicator, especially in oil and gas exploration.

GH is a good seal for hydrocarbons. As a hard impermeable underground layer, GH can create a reserve, allowing oil and gas to accumulate beneath it. GH, sampled on methane leaks, gas chimneys, mud volcanoes, and similar structures, is the most obvious sign of the presence of oil and gas in the depths with this GH-specific image, with the determination of the hydrocarbon presence at depth and the GH signature on marine geophysical seismic sections. The GH asset to be detected before drilling will consti-

tute the most important indicator in terms of the positive results of offshore drilling, one of which costs hundreds of millions of dollars. Drilling in the right location due to the presence of GH will create an important variable in minimizing costs.

The most commonly used geophysical methods in gas hydrate research include:

- 2D / 3D seismic methods (conventional but more than high resolution)
- Multi-beam bathymetry depth measurement methods
- Side Scan Sonar Methods
- Seabed Heat Flux Measurement Method
- Well log geophysical measurements
- Electromagnetic Measurement Methods
- Ocean Bottom Seismometer (OBS) can be listed as geophysical methods

The presence of bottom-simulating reflections (BSR) is a direct hint of GH in Geophysical seismic sections. Since BSR reflections represent the base of the gas hydrate stability zone, these markers are also an isothermal boundary and therefore offer the ability to mimic the seabed, which is also considered the most typical feature of BSR markers.

Discovery of Gas Hydrates and Gas Hydrate Studies in Turkey

Before natural gas and oil discoveries in the Levantine Basin and Egyptian offshore areas in the Eastern Mediterranean, indicators of GH areas were already discovered. In the Mediterranean Sea, the GH structures in the Gulf of Antalya and the Anaximender submarine mountains in the west of Cyprus were determined by seafloor sampling. Additionally, structures such as the mud volcano, which also indicates the presence of GH, have been identified around the south-east of the island of Crete (Çifci et al., 1997).

Technological development efforts to obtain methane gas (and therefore energy) should be carried out in parallel with other countries of the world that are making progress in this regard. In addition to GH Reserve determination extraction-drilling and transport technology development should be started in parallel. Countries with oil and gas reserves often do not have the technology to extract their reserve. “Western countries”, on the other hand, gain rights and great gains on these reserves as they hold suitable technology. For this reason, it is of great importance to conduct both reserve- and technology-based studies .

Especially in the territorial waters of Turkey, the search for GH and the establishment of technology and systems that will enable them to obtain energy are seen as a priority target. It is very important to determine the amount of proven and accessible natural gas and GH reserves on the seabed and coast, to develop and implement current technologies in the necessary exploration and operation areas, as well as to create policies for the benefit of the country in the short, medium, and long term. Turkey is to formulate a general policy to develop hydrate-derived hydrocarbon focused on search technology for determining the reserves.

The development of technologies and methods for obtaining methane gas (natural gas) from GH is in the final stage, and recent improvements are being made on pioneering methods.

At the beginning of the century, oil deposits in the region were discovered as a determining factor in drawing of Turkey’s southeastern borders. Western companies intensively researched these resources, which are today in the south of the country borders, in the second half of the

Similar to the early 20th century impositions, Turkey may encounter threats such as the deprivation of wealth in the seas surrounding Anatolia.

19th century. The areas were determined as a result of researches made by foreign geoscientists and were later shaped as country borders. Today, the same situation is repeated in the seas. Similar to the early 20th century impositions, Turkey may encounter threats such as the deprivation of wealth in the seas surrounding Anatolia. The current situation also points to developments in this direction. Therefore, the importance and urgency of focusing on marine research for Turkey is evident. Otherwise, if the Blue Homeland strategy and the research and exploration studies are not completed with determination, Turkey may be faced with imposing jurisdiction on the high seas. Lack of knowledge will also create a condition that weakens Turkey's position among other political factors. The results obtained in the projects we have conducted for GH research prove the accuracy and justification of the determinations and analyses made for the future of Turkey in the intervening period.

The most concrete step for GH studies in Turkey was an advanced research project supported by the State Planning Organization in 2003 called "seismic investigation of gas-saturated sediments and GH in the Eastern Black Sea shelf and slope of Turkey", coded 2003K120360. With this project, a Geophysics Seismic Laboratory (SeisLab) was established within Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology (DBTE), whose main purpose is to conduct GH research (Çifci et al., 2003). With the support of TUBITAK, DPT, European Un-

ion (EU) and projects carried out together with some energy companies, the laboratory's infrastructure has been strengthened the laboratory is became only one in Turkey and intertanional level in the world. With additional knowledge and experience, they have acquired staff and researchers who have served in Seislab, taking part in research studies with Turkey's research, explaration and drilling vessels and making important and valuable contributions.

Along with the discovery and mapping of GH reserves, at the end of a joint collaboration of different academic units conducting coordinated studies in a multidisciplinary structure, the presence of GH was determined with certainty and reserve calculations were carried out.

With the discovery that GH, which is Turkey's domestic resource spread over an important area in the Black Sea, it seems that Turkey can become a "game-changer" center with its own energy resources. In addition to the fact that this discovery was made by Turkish researchers, thanks to the highest level of interest of our state in this issue, important opportunities will arise from the point of view of both our country and the region, without being limited to the framework of a project aimed only at research and discovery. At the first stage, the presence of GH reserves should be determined, mapped, and estimated in all potential areas. Later, new and original technologies should be developed to produce natural gas (mainly methane) from these reserves through coordinated efforts between different disciplines. In addition to determining this potential, the technologies needed to obtain gas from hydrates at the laboratory stage should be investigated and implemented. Studies show that the depressurization technique is more effective in these methods.

This is the first phase of the National GH



President Erdoğan is in the Fatih drilling vessel. (TCCB, 2020, October 17)

project from the point of view of our country, successfully implemented in certain areas and “know-how” was created on this issue far beyond its economic dimension with a team consisting entirely of notional researchers.

Apart from purely geophysical methods for GH research, within the scope of multidisciplinary studies (geological, chemical, geochemical, microbiology, and Palynology), important observations and results related to GH accumulations/formations were obtained from the results of the analysis. It is possible to view the presence of GH with BSR fields and hydrate-containing core samples obtained from geophysical analyses.

By analyzing various hydrocarbons and metals in sediment samples with marine chemistry studies, information about the conditions of the areas where GH exists can be obtained. By determining the gas components in the amount of dissolved gas in water and mud samples, it can be determined that the gas is of thermogenic or biogenic origin. Furthermore, conducting analysis for the determination of biomarkers in geochemical samples and evaluating the results in

this direction will provide information about the origin and source rock of hydrocarbons.

By microbiological analysis, numerical evaluations of organisms to determine the groups of microorganisms that use methane and other hydrocarbons as carbon sources are made and information about methane production in sediments is obtained. Studies conducted with microbial processes are strong candidates for potential GH fields, and in the long term, it is important to receive support from biological processes in the production of GH.

As part of the data obtained from geological and geophysical measurements, core analysis, and analysis of gas samples, the amount of gas in the place in the hydrate structure can also be calculated using estimated probability methods.

In this context, the objectives are (I) mapping the distribution of GH, (ii) determination of approximate reserves in the field, (iii) modeling of drilling and production techniques, and (iv) determination of possible production potentials and technology. In advanced projects, a

team will explore and map reserve areas, while the engineering team will work in the field of production technology.

In the future, GH's share and role in the energy sector will be determined by the contribution of the financial sector and its support for possible investments.

The energy and the financial sector are developing together in this area. In the future, GH's share and role in the energy sector will be determined by the contribution of the financial sector and its support for possible investments. Research investments of countries other than Turkey in the energy source of the future can be seen. The developments observed in this regard between 2004-2020 are noteworthy. In this process, the budget spent solely for research exceeds billions of dollars. Many countries, such as oil and gas-deprived China, Japan, South Korea, India, and Germany, as well as the oil- and gas-rich United States, Brazil, Norway, and Iran have invested in this area.

The existence of GH is not unique to our planet (Mousis, 2020). In solar system, it is considered that gas hydrates are more abundant than the rocky materials. Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Mars and Europa might include huge amounts of gas hydrates (Choukroun, 2020). For instance, on the surface of Titan (the largest moon of Saturn), the clathrate hydrates formed by multicomponents (i.e. ethane, xenon, methane and other preferred clathrate formers) are available. Due to harsh conditions in these planets, new types of clathrate structures (i.e. Type T) are discovered different than clathrate hydrate structures in Earth's nature. These hydrate

structures are considered to be the most important indicator of water existence in the planets.

After the introduction of natural gas production from GH, various studies related to GH, gas production techniques, numerical, and experimental gas production simulations, as well as field trials, were continued. Advances have been made on key issues such as factors, efficiency, and economic value that govern the process of gas production from GH.

The government of Japan established a national program in 1995, and the Japan National Oil Corporation (JNOC) conducted its first production phase in the Nankai Trough in 2013 (Jiji Press, 2013). Again, drilling has been carried out in Canada's McKenzie Delta and plans to produce on a commercial scale starting in 2023 (Oyama & Masutani, 2017).

The first gas hydrate studies in the deep seas in the 2000s were carried out by Japan. Studies in Japan consist of three phases annually. It covers exploration, modeling, field testing, development technology, environmental safety, and work safety, and health plan. 2D and 3D geophysical seismic measurements were carried out in east Nankai Trench. In the second phase of the research, between 2009-2015, offshore GH production test preparations and the drilling of production test wells were planned and carried out in a 6-year plan. The first production test study was carried out in 2013, and the second stage production test study was conducted in 2017. Within the scope of the 3rd phase, it targeted production works on a commercial scale after 2018 and continued to work towards uninterrupted production.

The Hydrate Ridge located on the coast of Alaska, the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Continental Margin, Southern Mexico, the Central American Trench extending from Mexico to

Costa Rica, the Atlantic Continental Margin, the Blake Outer Ridge, the southeastern and western active margin of the United States shows that GH is spreaded in sediments. On the Blake Plateau on the southeastern continental slope of the USA, only one area of approximately three thousand km² has methane reserves equal to approximately 30 times the annual gas consumption of the USA. In 2018, it was combined with an expanded gas hydrate production test with stratigraphic testing in the western part of the Hydrate-01 well in the Prudhoe Bay area. The final goal of this project is a long-term (12-24 months) gas hydrate production test (Collet, 2018). After many projects such as the northern slope of Alaska, the US has planned a new drilling and pressure coring project in the Gulf of Mexico in early 2022 (Collet, personal communication, 2020).

In South Korea, GH research was conducted in a three-phases project between 2000-2014 on a long-term basis in marine geophysics. Later, core and log work and drilling work were carried out. Additionally, following the collection of 2B and 3D seismic data, the GH production test was carried out in the 3rd phase in 2015 (Ryu et al., 2013).

Similar to these examples, India conducted Geophysical Research in 2006 to find target points for production testing purposes and conducted its most comprehensive research on GH in 2009 with drilling for GH purposes and 5 months of drilling and log studies in 2015 (Rogers, 2015). India has scheduled production tests in 2021 and 2022 with the National Gas Hydrate program.

Figure 2 shows the 15th (TTR, 2006) of the UNESCO-supported Research and Training Cruises in the Black Sea, and the burning of GH sampled from the seafloor together with oil. Besides the Black Sea, there is a dense Reserve in



Figure 2. The 15th (TTR, 2006) of UNESCO-supported Research and Training Voyages in the Black Sea, along with oil on the ship deck, the burning of GH sampled from the seafloor is seen. The photograph, which is taken by author's research team during the fieldwork, is shared by his courtesy.

the Marmara Sea and especially in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is thought that 71.8 trillion m³ methane is included in the methane hydrates in the Black Sea. While the potential in the Black Sea (assuming that a 1 m GH layer exists) can be calculated as 8.0×10^{10} m³. In another study, depending on the geothermal gradient of 6.89×10^{13} and 9.66×10^{13} , the standard m³ level (Parlaktuna & Erdoğan, 2001) was 13.6 trillion m³ (Meray, 2019). The huge scale of gas potential that could theoretically be produced is noted. In the Eastern Mediterranean, it has been calculated that 552.3 trillion m³ of methane hydrate can be found with the prediction that 98.16 standard trillion m³ gas is the least producible part (Meray & Longinos, 2018; Meray, 2019). After high-resolution 3D geophysical seismic and test drilling, the amount of gas that can be produced can be calculated more accurately.

Turkey, thanks to its unique production technology, will become a global player in the field of energy with the potential to meet its needs for annual gas consumption.

The potential to be determined by exploration studies within the Black Sea, Marmara, and Eastern Mediterranean exclusive economic zone, which has an important place in terms of marine gas and GH accumulation in Turkey, is of great importance for the country's economy. The Black Sea, in particular, is a special sea with high amounts of methane production and GH accumulation. Therefore, Turkey thanks to its unique production technology, will become a global player in the field of energy with a potential to meet its needs for the annual gas consumption (Küçük, 2018).

China, which is the first country to achieve reliable continuous and stable gas production, carried out the same studies in different pilot areas within the scope of China's National GH Program. In 2007, GH drillings were carried out in the Shennu area in the South China Sea, the Pearl River delta in 2013, and the South China Sea in 2015 (Zhang et al., 2014; Shengxiong et al., 2017.) The first production drilling was completed in 2017. The daily maximum production was 35,000 m³, the average daily production was 16,000 m³, and 99% methane was produced from the extracted GH. The test production study carried out in the South China Sea has been completed with a 203-277 m drilling at a depth of 1,266 m. Test production took 7 days, 19 hours. During this period, 120,000 m³ of methane gas was produced. The Government of China continues to work with determination to produce GH in the South China Sea, which has the most

promising sediments in the world, within the scope of the 5-year plan, between 2016 and 2020. In line to produce natural gas from GH, with the production drillings carried out between May 10, 2017, and July 9, 2017, the entire oil industry has turned its eyes to China.

China managed to extract 861,400 m³ of natural gas from "burning ice" in the South China Sea in March this year. The production process started on February 17 and was completed on March 18 with two world records.

China's Ministry of land and Natural Resources has reported that the volume of fuel obtained from gas hydrate in total is a new world record. It was noted that the month-long trial also established "a solid technical foundation for commercial use". Gas was extracted from a northern area in the South China Sea at a depth of 1,225 meters. The second world record is the highest gas production of 287,000 m³ in a single day. In addition to being the first country in the world to evaluate gas hydrates using a horizontal drilling technique, China has also come to the fore with the most patents among other gas hydrate research countries. Associate professor Praveen Linga, from the Department of Chemistry and Biomolecular Engineering at the National University of Singapore, noted that China is the most advanced country in this field, compared to the results seen from Japanese Research, Chinese scientists have managed to extract much more gas. Therefore, he reported that this was a big step towards making gas extraction from gas hydrates feasible. China's Economy Diary newspaper reported in 2017 that China's Burning Ice (gas hydrate) reserves are equivalent to about 100 billion tons of oil, of which 80 billion tons are located in the South China Sea (Xie, 2020).



China Geological Survey (CGS) brought successfully off the natural gas hydrate extraction test project, which started on May 10 and lasted for seven days and 19 hours (CGTN, 2017)

It has long been known that intensive academic and industrial studies on GH are carried out in China. China currently has the appropriate technological tools/methods to extract GH from under the seabed in deep water. Undoubtedly this is a breakthrough that provides grounds for developing field projects all over the world.

Gas Hydrate Studies in Turkey

Long-term cooperation between Turkey and China can be realized to explore and extract GH resources in the seas surrounding our country. The vast cooperation potential in the seas and oceans surrounding three continents between the countries of the 21st Century Marine Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt is of great importance and priority. There is a wide range of opportunities and possibilities for joint projects that can be carried out in the seas for the Blue Planet and the Blue Homeland. Among these, joint research

and engineering projects with equal participation of third countries at coasts in the oceans are the first to come to mind. Among the large-scale projects that can be included in the scope of possible studies between countries, GH deserves special attention among other joint applications and projects due to the high economic gains provided to participating countries on the Marine Silk Road.

Especially when it comes to GH, it is seen that “Mother Nature” behaves much more equitably in the distribution of GH resources in the world, unlike traditional fossil fuels. The “Western civilization” can be described as the “coal-oil-natural gas” civilization since the “First Industrial Revolution” which started with the invention of the steam engine 250 years ago. “Nature” has been very selective in choosing the places rich in conventional fossil fuels mentioned above. It is a known fact that oil and natural gas resources are limited to some regions of the world. From this point of view, GH resources

are much more evenly distributed compared to oil or gas and offer much more independence for countries near these resources.

Gas Hydrates, Renewable Energy Sources, and Global Warming

It is a clear fact that all countries worldwide need to reduce their use of fossil fuels and preferably eventually terminate them to mitigate the negative effects of climate change caused by human actions (anthropogenic climate change). Almost everyone in the world, relevant management bodies, non-governmental organizations, state and private sector organizations, etc. recognize that renewable energy sources should replace fossil fuels in the future.

However, the complete replacement of fossil fuels by renewable (clean and inexhaustible) resources can not be suddenly done. There will be a “pause and decrease interval” in the intervening time. From this point of view, it should be noted that the existence of GH and the opportunities it offers indicate a transition phase because it is a much cleaner source of energy compared to coal and oil. However, in the latest analysis, carbon stored in the geological layers of the Earth millions of years ago is released into the atmosphere in a way that increases the effects of global warming. In this context, using GH as a suitable option against oil and natural gas can provide great advantages and independence in terms of vital issues for a society such as eliminating external dependency in energy and ensuring supply security in energy.

Economic activities to be carried out in the marine environment are also an integral part of the talking mission. Life on this planet was born from the seas. The seas have been and will continue to be an indispensable resource for sustaining life on earth.

As the basis of all human activities, maximum care and diligence should be shown to protect the marine environment. In this case, the marine Silk Road refers to another area of cooperation along with possible cooperation mechanisms and business models for the achievement of energy companies and academic institutions, the private sector, and government agencies between China and Turkey. As a starting point, Turkey and China can form a partnership to conduct future activities together. This can be considered as the main axis in a wide range of economic activities to be carried out jointly on the continental shelves and Exclusive Economic Zones. Research and extraction of GH can be one of the best examples of cooperation to be realized.

In summary, the above-mentioned project ideas can be considered to be an integrated project package that will be implemented following the main principles and goals of the Belt and Road Initiative. To provide energy resources to our country, a joint agreement can be reached on the continuation of further stages of the project or new pilot areas. In addition to the above mentioned, it is known that some developed countries are targeting commercial-scale production with fairly large budgets for GH research in 2023. It is necessary to be ready to cooperate with countries that want to work on joint projects on this issue and not trail behind. Blue Planet and Blue Homeland concepts may include GH exploration and research in the Black Sea, Aegean Sea, Mediterranean, and all continental borders of the world.

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Problems and Solutions in the Karabakh Conflict: From the Beginning to Today*



ARİF ACALOĞLU
Dr.

Dr. Acaloğlu was born in 1956 in Kapanakchi, Georgia. After finishing high school in his hometown, he completed the philology program at Baku State University. He began working as a research assistant in the Department of Mythology of the Institute of Literature in 1986. From 1983 to 1986, he pursued his Ph.D. studies in semiology at Tartu University, Estonia. During this period, his thesis supervisors were Juri Lotman and Leo Gumilev. He worked as a researcher in the Department of Ethnography from 1987 to 1990 and then became a lecturer at Baku State University in 1990. He served as an advisor to the president of Azerbaijan between 1992 and 1993. In mid-1993, he left his position and settled in Turkey. He joined the Russian language program at Istanbul Bilgi University and worked as a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Yeditepe University between the years 2008-2019. His academic works are mainly on mythology, folk literature, and the cultural heritage of Eurasian peoples. He has published two books and around forty articles during his academic career. In his career, he has undertaken research in Southern Caucasia, Central Asia, and Siberia, and given many conferences and public lectures. Along with his academic and political career, he has also taken part in several TV programs, published many interviews and popular articles, and translated over thirty books.

E-mail: arifacal@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Karabakh conflict –which had preoccupied regional and global powers for a prolonged period– has once again become the center of attention with the Second Karabakh War that started on September 27, 2020. Despite the end of military operations, it is clear that this conflict, which lasted for more than 30 years, will not be solved immediately, and that there will be long arguments during the peace negotiations until the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is secured. From the very beginning of the conflict, long-drawn meetings were organized, and many works have been published in academic and popular literature about the issue. However, there is a significant lack of studies that holistically address the historical, ethnic, cultural, religious, political, and legal aspects of the problem. One could argue that the matters of foreign relations, political history, ethnic composition, religious characteristics, and the economic life of the people living in Karabakh are of particular importance in understanding not only the background of the conflict but also its trajectory and possible outcomes. Such matters have shaped a large part of the arguments of the opposing sides, especially in the early days of the conflict. Despite the difficulties in dealing with these matters all at once, it is possible to establish an overall opinion on the causes and the progression of events by revealing the connections between the major topics at hand. In this work, an attempt is made for a more holistic approach to the matter by taking into consideration certain points that are often overlooked in the heat of political arguments.

Keywords: Armenia, Azerbaijan, conflict, Karabakh, peace building

SINCE THE LATE 1980s, KARABAKH HAS BEEN one of the most frequently discussed regional conflicts in the international arena. Yet, despite the visibility of this issue, Karabakh as a topic remains fairly distorted, either due to lacking information or as a result of differing perspectives. This situation is closely linked with the legacy of historical processes as well as today's political atmosphere.

Before examining the historical background of the Karabakh conflict, it should be noted that as a result of the political preferences of intervening external powers, the conflict was not resolved fairly since 100 years and was left to fester until it finally broke out once more in 1988. Thus, the current conflict is a natural consequence of a one century-long political and military enforcement. This historical process is of great significance considering that the same players are in the field today.

Another set of important factor to consider is today's political alignments along with the conflicting interests and prejudices (e.g. Turcophobia, Islamophobia, fears about a unified Eurasia) of the countries involved.

This study adopts a holistic approach to evaluate this issue by reference to historical and current political alignments.

Geography, History, and Anthropology

Nagorno Karabakh (otherwise known as Upper Karabakh) was not the historical name used to describe this area and was first used in 1920. Karabakh was a whole until then with its valleys, mountains, and high pastures. The valleys, and high pastures, and mountainous regions, which are known as summer (*yaylak*) and winter (*kishlak*) camps, respectively, in pastoral nomadic terms, constituted two different but inseparable

elements of the same living space as they did in many other regions of the Turkic world. Each clan, tribe (*boy*), and tribe confederation had a designated area to occupy during two (sometimes even four) seasons. The size of the territories might change with the size of the population and the herd, certain historical claims, and political and military power. But the main principle (dual summer-winter life) remained unchanged. For this reason, the owners of each area were well-known and the territories were mostly named accordingly (someone's summer camp, winter camp, etc.)

Naturally, the same situation could be observed in the Caucasus region. The range of seasonal migration of the Turkic tribes of Southern Caucasus ranged between 30-40 km and 100-150 km. The longest migration route was between Borchali and Ganja, while the shortest were within the Karabakh region. The tribes who passed the winter around the low valley regions moved toward higher altitudes with spring's coming thereby avoiding hot temperature and disease, as well as providing far better grounds for their animals to graze. Out of this way of living emerged a specific type of civilization and socio-economic structure which, in the past, was defined under different terms such as the Horse-mounted Nomadic civilization, the Nomadic civilization, the Steppe civilization, or Turan civilization.

For many Turkic tribes of Karabakh, the region seemed whole, with its wide, fertile valleys and high pastures. The ownership of these pastures and valleys belonged to these tribes. Lower regions were called "aran", and the upper regions, "yaylak" or simply "the mountain". In other words, Nagorno (Mountainous) Karabakh was not the term used by the locals and could not be used as a political or administrative term either.

Turkic tribes had been living in the lower region for much of its known history. In the upper region ("Nagorno Karabakh"), there were pastures that belonged to these tribes and among these (also partly in the lower region), lived Christian communities. Thus, the lower and the upper regions of Karabakh constituted a socio-economic whole and belonged to the Turkic tribes. Therefore, the absence of permanent settlements in the upper region (*yaylak*) means that the land is neither "vacant" nor idle. When compared with the sedentary village organization, the valley settlement (*aran*) could be defined as "the village", and the high pastures, as "the area of economic activity".

Christians in Karabakh

The Christian communities mentioned earlier are also important in the context of this topic. Beginning with the late Middle Ages, there is a mention of "five *meliks*" (lords) in Karabakh, referring to the small administrative units of five Christian communities, largely located in the Upper region. Territory under the control of one of these *meliks* would be called *meliklik*. There were five *meliklik* in total and therefore they were called *hamse* (five) *melikleri* in local sources (e.g. *Ferzeliyev, 1989; Ahundov, 1991*). The local ruler was called *melik*. While these rulers, who sometimes had limited autonomy, were appointed officials initially, the title of *melik* later became hereditary and remained in the family. The territory under the rule of a *melik*, even in relative comparison, was not a large domain and could be described as a town or a district in today's language. Among these domains which were comprised of ten to twelve villages on average, and there was only one (Khachin) that had two to three times the number of villages in other *meliklik*s. This historical background would help to

better illustrate the current administrative and demographic conditions by taking into account the fact that the number of Turkish villages in the regions of Karabakh today is between 80-100. Authentic information on the meliks – collectively called “Karabakh-nama” – is found in many sources of the time dealing with the history of Karabakh.

All 5 of these *meliklik*s were Christian and, for this reason alone, are defined as Armenian today. However, historical data reveals that none of these have significant ties to Armenianness in origin. This was an indisputable fact for the serious and non-politicized researchers of ancient times. Among the Melik lineages, only the Meliks of the Cross were indigenous, and the others were those who came to Karabakh from other regions (Melikstvo, 2020). However, it is clear from the sources that one of them is from the village of Nic in the province of Şirvan in terms of ethnic origin, and the others are from Christian Turks. However, European and Russian researchers who interpret belief as the main identity element and present-day Armenian sources (regardless of sectarian differences, cultural traditions, naming, and other linguistic features) present all these as Armenian. (Calalyan, 1989: 3-4). A significant part of the disagreement regarding this subject arises from these distortions.

In light of these data, it is necessary to focus more, not on the ethnic differences in the region, but on the differences of religion and sect. The translation of these differences into ethnic and religious conflicts began with the interest of the European states and the Russian Empire in the region in the early 1800s. Just before this period, however, important developments took place in the territory of Karabakh. The establishment of the Karabakh Khanate and some related events coincide with these years.



Asgeran Castle, built by Khan of Karabakh Ibrahim Khan in 1787. (Virtual Karabakh website)

Karabakh Khanate

The Karabakh region was subordinate to the Turkish states ruled by the Safavid dynasties in the 16-18 centuries and later by the Afshar dynasties. In the middle of the 18th century, Nadir Shah made some administrative and demographic changes in the region. Panah Ali Khan, who was previously in the service of Nadir Shah, was an aggressive and entrepreneurial person who provided important services in the military field. When Nadir Shah died in 1747, the central power weakened and the administrative stability was shaken, which led to territorial disintegration. A total of around 20 independent or semi-independent states were established. In this atmosphere, Panah Khan came to Karabakh with 200 warriors and laid the foundations of the Karabakh Khanate. He enabled local Turkish tribes who had been exiled to Khorasan and other regions during Nadir Shah's period to return to their homeland. Panah Khan was able to dominate the whole of Karabakh (including 5 meliks) from the first years when he established the khanate.

Panah Khan took measures to develop the region and to strengthen regional military capabilities. In this context, he established several castles and fortresses. The first of these was Bayat Castle, which was constructed in 1748. Later, Şahbulak Castle (1751-1752) was constructed. Panah Khan barely survived in late 1748 after defending Bayat castle for a month, which was besieged by neighboring khanates. After those events, he looked for a more advantageous position in a strategic sense, after Bayat Castle proved itself strategically insufficient for the defense of the region. Finally, he built a fortress on a plain on a mighty rock between mountains. The castle, which was originally called Penahadad, was soon named Shusha. The foundation of Shusha, which today people call “our thousand-year-old city”, was laid by Penah Khan in 1752.

In the following period, the Karabakh khanate established close relations with the Ottoman, Qajar, and Russian administrations as well as with neighboring Turkish khanates and Georgia, facing periods of both war and peace.

The Russian Occupation of the South Caucasus

At the beginning of the 1800s, the first troops of Russia, which had been interested in the Caucasus for some time, began to land in the region. Previously, an alliance agreement (1883) had been made with Tbilisi. On May 14, 1805, a treaty was made with İbrahim Halil Han, who was the current Karabakh Khan. According to the treaty, which declared in the first line that it was signed by “*Şuşalı ve Karabağlı İbrahim xan ve Bütün Rusiya orduları infanteri generali, Qafqaz müfettişliyinin infanteri müfettişi kont Pavel Sisianov*”,

İbrahim Khan was attached to Russia and the Russian Emperor accepted the integrity of the state and the country in return, as well as

pledging that İbrahim Khan and his successors would remain in power in Karabakh (The Treaty of Kurakchay, 2020).

Later, two more important treaties were made. After the Russia-Iran war in 1804 through 1813, the Treaty of Gulistan (October 12, 1813) and the Treaty of Turkmenchay (February 10, 1828) were signed between the Qajar State and Russia. These treaties determined a significant part of the state borders that have been preserved since then.

Of course, Tsarist Russia, which was much more active against the small states in the South Caucasus, did not care about the sovereign rights of these states and turned them into provinces despite the relevant treaty articles. Instead, the members of the dynasty were granted some privileges in the fields of education and career.

Russian Revolutions, the USSR and Karabakh's Disintegration

After that, there was no significant change in regional administrative or power structures until 1918. When the central authority collapsed in Russia as a result of the February and October revolutions in 1917, separatist tendencies accelerated in the region, and finally, independent states were established. In the South Caucasus, first a joint administration, and in May 1918, the states of Georgia (May 26), Azerbaijan (May 28), Armenia (May 29) declared their independence.

In these circumstances, Zangezur (the area between Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan today) and Karabakh came to the fore for the first time as a topic of discussion between Armenia and Azerbaijan. To put it briefly, the Azerbaijan National Council, which made an agreement with the Armenian National Council on giving Yerevan and its surroundings to Armenia so that it can estab-



Map of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, 1918-1920. (Virtual Karabakh website)

lish an independent state, did not make any more territorial concessions, and in the end, the entire Karabakh remained within the boundaries of the People's Republic of Azerbaijan, which was officially recognized by the great states participating in the Paris Peace Conference. Armenians revolted in Karabakh on March 22, 1920, and serious conflicts took place. Finally, on April 28, when Russian (Bolshevik) troops occupied Azerbaijan and entered Karabakh, a new situation occurred.

Before the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), on July 5, 1921, at the meeting of the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party, it was decided that "Nagorno-Karabakh would be considered to be within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and granted autonomy along with making Shusha the administrative center." But at the time this decision could not be implemented. After the establishment of Soviet control in all

three states in the South Caucasus, the Southern Caucasian Federation was established and autonomy proposals regarding Nagorno-Karabakh were brought to the agenda in this context. The South Caucasus Federation had issued official decisions dated October 27, 1922, and December 22, 1922, to accelerate the agenda.

After the establishment of the USSR, the process took momentum and Azerbaijan accepted the situation and announced on July 7, 1923, that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was established within the borders of the Azerbaijan Republic.

Although there has been no development regarding the administrative or legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh for a significant time after this date, some revisions were made regarding the powers of the autonomous government within the scope of a decision taken by the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR on June 16, 1981 ("Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast").

The Final Days of the USSR: The Games of Gorbachev and Yeltsin's Russia

In the period of “glasnost and perestroika”, which was initiated by Gorbachev’s leadership of the USSR in 1988, Armenia and the Armenian diaspora led important initiatives. For this purpose, many organizations were established and intensive propaganda activities were initiated. The idea that Nagorno-Karabakh should be given to Armenia was first expressed semi-officially by the Armenians towards the end of 1987 in some national and international platforms and thus the Armenia-Azerbaijan tensions were initiated. On February 20, 1988, at the extraordinary meeting of the Soviet Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast a decision was made to take DKMV from the Azerbaijan SSR and connect it to the Armenian SSR; ergo, the trigger of separatism was pulled. On December 1, 1989, the Armenian SSR and the Karabakh National Council announced in a joint meeting that the DKMV was linked to Armenia.

As a result of these developments, an administration called the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province Special Administration Committee, which is directly subordinate to Moscow, was established by the initiative of Gorbachev personally to reduce the tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan, to improve the region, and to preserve peace. Gorbachev appointed Volski to lead this initiative. The efforts of this Special Administrative Committee resulted in the further strengthening of the Armenians in the region and the escalation of the conflict. Thus, the initiatives of Gorbachev’s Moscow, who first fanned the fire of the conflict and then became a mediator, played into the hands of the separatists.

In a period when developments of this type often turned into armed conflicts, the Azerbaijani side thought that separatism had reached

advanced stages and tried to take hard decisions to cancel the autonomy of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1991. The Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians declared the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic on September 2, 1991, with Khankendi being the center. Azerbaijan declared that this initiative was illegal.

In parallel with the developments in Karabakh, pressures were applied to the Azerbaijani Turkish people living within the borders of Armenia. The Turkish population, who could not bear the pressure and inhumane deeds, started to migrate to Azerbaijan from the beginning of 1988. By the end of the same year, there was no longer a Turkish population in Armenia. According to official data, 310,000 people, and according to the evaluations made by Azerbaijani activists based on local sources, more than 500,000 people were displaced and degraded into refugees. Therefore, while the Azerbaijani administration was trying to cope with separatism in Karabakh on the one hand, it was forced to deal with the problems of the large mass of immigrants coming from Armenia on the other. (In a short time, Turkish immigrants from Georgia were added to this problem, and the reason for their displacement was also the extremist Armenian groups operating in the region claiming that Southeast Georgia belongs to Armenia.)

Having to fight against Armenian aggression and separatism at home and abroad, and dealing with the problems of refugees who flocked from all sides, the Soviet administration at the head of Azerbaijan, unfortunately, could not overcome these difficult challenges. Poor decisions were made and the solution to these problems was sought from Gorbachev’s administration, which was the very source of these problems in the first place. Civil society initiatives and constructive solutions were all blocked.

Starting from the end of 1989, the APF became an important authority that deals with the solution of almost every problem that Azerbaijan was facing and which the public looks to with hope, sometimes in cooperation with the government, sometimes by guiding it, and sometimes despite it.

In this complex atmosphere, a process called the “population operation” started to occur spontaneously in Azerbaijan. Intellectuals, who formed the core of this operation, first started to organize in associations, then realized that this was insufficient as the challenges increased and the situation became more difficult, and the view of gathering in a single, broader-based organization prevailed. Thus, the Azerbaijan People’s Front (APF) was established, which later gained a notable reputation.

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The APF formed defense battalions in the areas subjected to Armenian military attacks. Similar units that were formed before the APF later joined the APF and continued to fight.

As a result of many socioeconomic, political, and military processes throughout the Soviet era, the state began to break down in mid-1991. The states that formed the union began to decide whether to continue in the USSR by holding referendums. The Declaration of Independence was

published on October 18, 1991, in line with the results of a popular vote held in Azerbaijan. In December 1991, the USSR was formally dissolved.

The Karabakh Problem in the First Years of Independence

After the dissolution of the USSR, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict did not stop, but it was no longer a “domestic issue” of a state like the USSR and acquired an international status. From 1991 to February 1992, conflicts continued along almost all of the Azerbaijan-Armenia borders in Upper Karabakh. Especially in early 1992 when Armenian attacks on Nakhchivan could only be stopped at the expense of great loss. On February 26, 1992, Armenian troops, acting together with a Russian mechanized regiment, carried out the Khojaly massacre (which, according to many, was more than a genocide).

After the Khojaly genocide, Azerbaijan’s Soviet-era President, A. Mutallibov, could not withstand the reactions of the people and fled the country, taking refuge in Moscow. The President of the Assembly acted for the state administration for 3 months. The period until the election was held was the darkest in the recent history of Azerbaijan, the most open to external manipulations, and full of excitement for the idea of achieving real independence and opening to the Turkic World. During the negotiations with the National Assembly and the Government throughout March, the APF insisted on forming a coalition of the existing government, and thus resolving the crisis the country was in, without holding an election for a year. In the end, the Assembly, which made a decision that was not useful to the conditions of the period, found it appropriate to hold the presidential elections. The elections were decided to be held on June 7, 1992.



Ebülfez Elçibey, President of Azerbaijan between 1992 and 1993.

Meanwhile, Mutallibov, who recently fled the country and took refuge in Moscow, returned to Azerbaijan early on May 15 with the support he received from Moscow, hoping to regain power. The next day, popular reactions led by the APF expanded to the streets. On May 16, Mutallibov had to leave Azerbaijan once again. It soon became clear that these disturbances were intentional and planned by the Armenians and their partners in Moscow. During these turbulent days, two extremely important cities, Shusha (May 8) and Lachin (May 18), which had resisted for a long time, were captured by the Armenians. Those incidents further increased tensions. People took to the streets and started to demand immediate action and liberation from occupation.

The president of the Azerbaijan People's Front and presidential candidate, Abulfaz Elchi-

bey, won the elections held under these difficult conditions and took over the country's administration. Shortly after he took office, Elchibey quickly started to implement firm decisions on Karabakh. In July-August 1992, Azerbaijani troops cleared many regions of Upper Karabakh from the invaders and took up positions in front of Khankendi. But after that, it was almost impossible to move forward. The most important reasons for this situation were the inadequacy of the regular army units that were just being formed and the sabotage of foreign-linked senior officers.

In the following period, some negotiations and diplomatic moves were made. But there was no real progress.

In March 1993, Armenians, again with Russian-backed troops, launched intense attacks on Kalbajar. Within days, they made significant progress, and eventually, the townspeople were forced to leave the area. The Armenians only allowed 10 hours to leave the region, which of course was impossible. Therefore, great massacres occurred. Within such an atmosphere, Elchibey asked Turkey to send several helicopters to evacuate people. This request, however, was rejected.

The US Intervention

After that, the Elchibey administration, which intensified its diplomatic efforts, succeeded in taking the UN's resolution 822 dated April 30, 1993. According to this decision and three decisions adopted in the following months (no. 853, 874, 884), the entire region was defined as Azerbaijani territory and the Armenians were required to evacuate the region. Although these decisions, which are still not fulfilled, were an important diplomatic success, they did not produce actual results and the clashes resumed.

The so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which was not recognized by any state (but openly supported by countries such as the USA, France, Iran, Russia, etc.), became the base of activities such as drug trafficking, terror training, and smuggling.

In June 1993, a coup attempt was launched in Azerbaijan, and when this coup, which is known to be supported by Russia, progressed and the country faced a civil war, Elchibey left the capital and withdrew to Nakhchivan to wait for events to settle down. In the meantime, the National Assembly, citing the absence of Elchibey in the capital, discussed the proposal to transfer the powers of the president (as required by the constitution) to Heydar Aliyev, who was the President of the Assembly at the time, and in line with the decision taken, Aliyev was deputized to act as president. Elections were held after a short time and Aliyev was elected president.

Shortly after Aliyev took over the powers of the president, Armenians resumed attacks in Karabakh, and districts such as Akdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Zangilan, and Gubadli were occupied by the Armenian army within a few months. Thus, almost all of Karabakh was captured by the Armenians. The Azerbaijani people became immigrants in their own country. Armenians were brought from Armenia first and later from Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which was not recognized by any state (but openly supported by countries such as the USA, France, Iran, Russia, etc.), became the base of activities such as drug trafficking, terror training, and smuggling.

The last important attempt to liberate the Azerbaijani lands was made in early 1994, nonetheless, after the violent clashes, no result was achieved. In this atmosphere, the parties were convinced of a ceasefire agreement and that agreement was signed on May 5, 1994. This cease-fire agreement has been violated continuously from that day until September 27, 2020, and sometimes by large-scale clashes (such as April 2016 and July 2020).

A Failed OSCE Project: The Minsk Group

In this process, the Minsk Group was established, and its status and activities have always been controversial. When the peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was proposed for the first time at the Helsinki meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Council of Ministers on March 24, 1992, the view of holding the Minsk Conference for this purpose was adopted. During the OSCE Summit held in Budapest on December 5-6, 1994, the co-chair system was adopted for the Minsk group. While different countries were presided in the first 3 years, since January 1, 1997 (until today) the co-chairmanship of the Institution was held by three states: the USA, Russia, France. The countries, who joined the group as the conflict parties of Azerbaijan and Armenia, are as follows: Germany, Belarus, Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Turkey, and Finland.

During its existence, the Minsk group brought 3 different packages to the agenda, the first two of which were not accepted by Armenia, and the last that was not accepted by Azerbaijan. However, it is stated that certain principles have been determined within the scope of the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The work of the Minsk

Group, which produces continuous round definitions and complex solutions, has been mostly criticized, especially in the Azerbaijani public opinion as it is considered as “swinging the balance”. Particularly commentators and observers, acting on the fact that the pro-Armenians predominate in the press and diplomatic circles of the group co-chair countries, often stated that this system would not yield results. Indeed, in 27 years, unfortunately, not even a single step has been taken. And finally, the UN resolutions were realized by the force of the Azerbaijani army.

The Karabakh Problem in the Context of Regional and Global Powers

Since the region in question was within the borders of the USSR, the USSR and then its successor the Russian Federation, after 1991, played a primary role in the incidents. The person who stated in a semi-official voice for the first time that “Nagorno-Karabakh” should be given to Armenia, was Professor Abel Aganbegyan, who also served as an economic consultant to the Kremlin at that time. Aganbegyan explained this at length in a speech he gave in Paris in November 1987, and when the sound recording of the speech reached Azerbaijan, important protests took place in the capital Baku centered on the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (AMEA). The author of these comments, who worked in AMEA at the time, participated in all relevant processes and had the opportunity to observe from the very beginning.

In the following days, when conflicts broke out in Karabakh, the economic situation of the Armenians in Karabakh was extremely poor and the Kremlin, alleging that people wanted to leave the region because of this, made large monetary transfers to the regional budget. Ergo, they supported the separatist terror, knowingly

or unknowingly. Subsequently, by establishing the Special Committee headed by Volski, mentioned above, they reset the sovereignty rights of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic over its territory. After the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Russia, which exploited the military and economic opportunities in the region, supported the separatist movement, both economically and militarily. Finally, Russia became Armenia’s partner in Khojaly massacre. This may not have been a state policy, of course, but since none of the military personnel involved in the incidents were investigated, different interpretations will always exist.



Russian President Vladimir Putin with President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, March 5, 2020. (President of Russia website).

During the 27 years that followed, Russia expressed its approach in a way that would not upset both sides, “accepting the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan” like other countries, without however making any attempt to ensure this integrity. To most observers, Russia did not want the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to be resolved

so it could maintain its influence in the region. Meanwhile, they tried to make Armenia fully dependent economically. On the other hand, Russia watched over Azerbaijan, keeping it close by different means (strengthening personal ties with the administration, granting it important privileges in Russia, being “generous” in arms sales, etc.) As a result, although Russia was closer to Armenia, it tried not to alienate Azerbaijan.

In fact, under normal circumstances, Russia –a Russia “looking at its roots, searching where it came from”, as Putin recently stated– should not have trouble with the Turkish states by giving such support to Armenia. However, it seems that there are pressures of various circles on the Kremlin, and the more Russia will lose blood as it yields to the influence of these circles.

The way in which the Russo-Turkish cooperation in that period has overcome this deadlock created by Western-collaborationist elements within Kremlin circles offers hope to the entire region.

Those who ruled Russia during the late 1980s and 1990s –as prominent Russian commentators often say– did not act in the country’s interests, but from Western-based discourses and EU-US interests. In this respect, the Gorbachev-Yeltsin period was a dark period for the USSR and all of its balances, but especially for the peoples of the Asian region. During the 1990s, called the “transition period”, the interests of these nations –as well as the Russians themselves– were ignored, and their collaborationist approach accelerated and deepened regional conflicts, economic collapse, and cultural degeneration. In this atmosphere, not surprisingly, the

incidents in Karabakh were made more complicated, and the problem quickly gained an international character. Developments show that this was a planned operation, not an accident.

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Another important state related to the Karabakh question is Iran, which has not been mentioned up to this point. Iran was an observer of these incidents and attempted to intervene from the beginning. Iran deals with the issue in several ways. First of all, what is happening in a neighboring country is of course important to Iran. Also, the Azerbaijan question is Iran’s most sensitive issue, possibly even its weakest spot. Even referring to the name of Azerbaijan disturbs many circles in Iran (same with Greece and Macedonia). This is because a larger part of historical Azerbaijan was located within the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, the renewal movements and nationalist movements that were seen in Northern Azerbaijan throughout recent history had quickly resonated in South Azerbaijan and affected the Iranian state significantly.

Considering that Iran was ruled by the Turks for about 1,000 years, it was impossible that the establishment of an independent state in Northern Azerbaijan would not affect the Turks in Iran. Given that this group constitutes approximately half of the total population and is the largest ethnic element of the country, it was unthinkable for the Iranian state to remain indifferent to the developments. Armenia was unconditionally supported exploiting the problems of the Republic of Azerbaijan with Armenia and deploying the same official discourse for the

management of Azerbaijan on South Azerbaijan as a legitimizing excuse. These were indeed excuses because Iran always regarded Azerbaijan as a potential threat and gave support to both Armenia and the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh republic during the later period. For years, negative broadcasts have been made regarding Azerbaijan through Iran's official and semi-official media organizations. (Such broadcasts even mentioned that Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were "martyred" in the first days of this last war).

Additionally, each rapprochement and joint work between Azerbaijan, Turkey, and other Turkish Republics has been labeled by Iran as "Pan-Turkism". However, one should note that Azerbaijan and other Turkish states have not attempted to prevent Iran from establishing very close relations with Tajikistan in Central Asia, without accusing Iran of pursuing a "Pan-Iranist" policy of expansionism. Iran's approach, while trying to base its relations with Azerbaijan on Shiite sectarian policies that deny Azerbaijan's national identity, has always encouraged and supported separatist terror in Armenia and Karabakh. Of course, some joint projects have been carried out with Azerbaijan from time to time, but these initiatives have not been capable of changing the general trend. In the latest war that started on September 27, 2020, Iran supported Armenia with its words and actions in the first days. However, this support was not continued as Iran felt the need to develop a relatively stronger discourse on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Although Georgia initially tried to remain neutral, especially in the period 1989-1992, and especially with the influence of Armenian circles within the central administration, the Armenians in the South and Southeast regions close to Armenia as well as Georgia witnessed serious

attempts to evacuate the Turkish population in Georgia and forcefully encourage their immigration - like in the case of Armenia. These policies failed with the active involvement of the APF, and soon it was seen that Georgians began to support the Azerbaijani thesis. This was because the Armenians had begun to make territorial and autonomy claims in Georgia, too. In subsequent years, Georgia tried to maintain a positive relationship with both Azerbaijan and Turkey to find allies in the struggle against Armenian allegations and to overcome the economic problems. In the last war, both the Georgian public and the state administration supported the struggle of Azerbaijan.

Pakistan is among the first countries to support Azerbaijan, which already is the closest supporters of both Azerbaijan and Turkey in key issues.

One of the countries close to the region, Ukraine, has been supporting Azerbaijan for the last 5 years. Ukraine has taken a firm stand in favor of Azerbaijan since the first day of the last war and provided explicit support, not only against Armenia but also by criticizing Russia's influence in the region and its sensitivity towards Armenia. The reason is obvious: with a similar process, Ukraine first lost Crimea and has been facing a separatist threat in its eastern provinces for a long time.

Pakistan is among the first countries to support Azerbaijan, which already is the closest supporters of both Azerbaijan and Turkey in key issues. It should be said that this support is a great source of morale for the Azerbaijani people.

Turkey's situation is perhaps the most interesting issue in this context. There is an image of cooperation for reasons such as neighborhood, ethnic and cultural affinity, and shared strategic interests. But almost all the people in Azerbaijan and the majority in Turkey, have adopted the slogan of "one nation, two states" and have outgrown the limits of mutually beneficial cooperation. There is now solidarity between the two parts of one nation.

There were not many surprises in the approach of the EU member states to the incidents in the region. In particular, Greece and France unconditionally supported Armenia. Armenia's relations with the EU are essentially regulated through these states. Additionally, France uses its influence on the Armenians in Russia through the Armenian diaspora in the country and tries to lead the pro-Western, liberal, and collaborationist circles in Russia in this way. Considering the Armenian factor while examining the pro-Western circles in Russia and considering the pro-Western influences when evaluating the situation of the Armenians is, therefore, important. Ergo, the EU, and especially France uses the Western and liberal circles within the Armenian diaspora in Russia. An important part of Russia's support to Armenia stems from the consistent pressure of these circles put on Moscow. A similar situation is valid for pro-American circles in Russia; they also have an important share in Russia's support to Armenia.

As expected, the most active global power in the region is the USA. The USA was involved in the region from the very beginning. It gave open support to the Armenians after 1991, and deprived Azerbaijan of annual grants for newly established independent states on the pretext

of "blockading Armenia". It thus imposed sanctions on Azerbaijan, whose international trade was interrupted due to the war. Subsequently, the United States made substantial annual grants to the Nagorno-Karabakh Administration. The U.S. Armenian diaspora, of course, played the most important role in this process.

These are the main players in the region regarding the Upper Karabakh conflict. Germany was not mentioned because its position is unclear and unlike France, it usually acts under the umbrella of the EU. Of course, there are certain accounts of other important actors such as China, India, and Arab states, but for the time being, they have not sided with any party or expressed an explicit interest formally.

New Era: Determinations and Expectations

What can be said about the current situation and its aftermath, after a glance at what has been taking place since the recent history of Karabakh, i.e. separatist activities and recurring conflicts?

The active conflict that started as a result of the violation of the ceasefire regime by Armenia on the morning of September 27, 2020, turned into widescale war and lasted for 44 days. The war, which was ended with the trilateral declaration of Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia in the morning of November 10, changed the 27-year status quo, and a new era has begun

- Many problems, which have been the subject of 27 years of talks and negotiations, were solved after 44 days of war (7 districts around the Upper Karabakh were rescued by Azerbaijan.)
- A part of Upper Karabakh and the city of Shusha, which is the most important settlement for Azerbaijan, were saved.

- Demands in UN resolutions have been fulfilled and, in this case, nothing contrary to UN principles was done.
- The Minsk Group, whose efforts for 27 years have not yielded any results, has continued to be ineffective during this latest war.
- Turkey has stepped in assertively as a balancing power against Russia, which has been active in the field so far.
- It has been observed that the EU does not intervene in the actual situation and cannot change the situation in the future.
- Although the United States of America has not put forward a clear stance so far, it will affect developments in the Russia-Turkey axis requiring them to take a stance accordingly.
- By continuing its policies to support Armenia, especially at the beginning of the war, Iran has lost all its influence and prestige on the Azerbaijani public.
- On the other hand, the prestige and importance of Israel in Azerbaijan have enhanced.
- Azerbaijani people's interest in Pakistan has increased and friendship ties have been improved.
- Azerbaijan-Turkey unity and integration were realized on the base.

It was understood that the anti-Azerbaijan-Armenia opposition would continue in the 2 + 2 format, which has been voiced by some circles right after the Ceasefire Agreement on November 10. Here, the Armenian party's insistence on rejecting Turkey's constructive role seems to be a problem.



The latest situation in Karabakh on November 25, 2020.

It is seen that some challenges have been expressed both by Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the content of the agreement, in terms of the visible gaps and the way it has been implemented. Without belaboring the details since the incidents in Armenia have been widely covered in the media, it would be sufficient to remember that the Armenian population defines this agreement as “submissive”, “loss of gains”, “betrayal”, etc., and that the Armenian people took to the streets to protest the government.

For the Azerbaijani party (especially in the first few days), the only dissatisfaction was related to the halting of the operation “2-3 days before complete victory”, and the postponement of the liberation of the entire Upper Karabakh to an uncertain date. Nevertheless, the people interpret the military operation as successful, acknowledging that an important military victory has been achieved. However, during the one-week implementation period, Russian power in the region, trying to pursue a supplementary agenda other than peace-making under the name of a “humanitarian package”, have triggered negative repercussions on the Azerbaijani population. In addition to this, the upcoming arrival of the Turkish forces that are expected to serve in the region arouses concerns on the part of Russia. But it would not be too optimistic to say that doubts and concerns will disappear soon. The fact that at the time of writing, the draft regarding the duty of Turkish soldiers in Azerbaijan was accepted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

Possible Results of the Three-Way Agreement and Building Peace

When it comes to the possible outcomes of the agreement, it should be said that there are different expectations for Azerbaijan and Armenia, and the events that will develop will take shape accordingly.

Moreover, to promote Turkey-Russia cooperation by spreading it to wider areas will be beneficial for the region, and ultimately the world. Otherwise, it is impossible to establish peace and talk about sustainable development and peace in these lands.

In the next steps of the peace process, more progress towards the normalization of Turkey-Russia cooperation is a fundamental prerequisite. Although it seems likely that this cooperation may encounter some difficulties at first, as in the case of Syria before, it is undoubted that it will settle in time and can be successfully carried out with the efforts of both sides.

Ultimately, there is hope to see the benefits of the 2 + 2 format for the region, to minimize the interference of external forces that are unaware of local conditions and fundamental problems of the people in the region. Moreover, to promote Turkey-Russia cooperation by spreading it to wider areas will be beneficial for the region, and ultimately the world. Otherwise, it is impossible to establish peace and talk about sustainable development and peace in these lands.

The inclusion of Iran in this format is also mentioned from time to time, especially by Iranian officials. However, in the context of Iran's approach towards Azerbaijan, it seems difficult for this to take place for the moment. At the current point, it seems impossible for the Azerbaijani public to accept Iran's involvement in the process. This is always going to be difficult unless Iranian elites mentally accept the existence of Azerbaijan as a sovereign state and nation, and their independent, Turkish, secular identity. However, if the problem is overcome, of course, as an important power of the region, Iran will be able to use its power to contribute positively to the process.

Regarding the recognition of the “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”, Armenia has desired from the beginning to preserve a “security belt” consisting of seven districts around it. Of course, this request is impossible. It is the product of an approach incompatible with international law.

As for the Upper Karabakh and the situation of the Armenians living there, this is Azerbaijan’s domestic issue. Here, Armenia can establish similar relations to those with larger Armenian communities living in other countries (Russia, France, USA, Argentina, etc.) To go beyond this would be to interfere with the internal affairs of Azerbaijan, which is legally unacceptable.

Azerbaijan’s key demands following the declaration of the peace agreement can be summarized as follows:

- Armenian troops will be removed from all points within the borders of Azerbaijan.
- The Upper Karabakh will not be given any special status. All residents who will live there –Armenian or Turkish, no matter what– will live freely as citizens with all the rights and obligations accepted by Azerbaijan.
- Armenia is meant to pay indemnity to Azerbaijan both in return for the last war and in the amount to be determined by taking into account the illegal income obtained from the underground and aboveground resources of Karabakh for 30 years.

This indemnity issue is very important for Azerbaijan because the mineral deposits –including gold and silver deposits– and agricultural areas of Karabakh were used extensively and the revenues from these sources were determined as 53.5 billion USD according to UN sources.

Additionally, hundreds of cultural monuments including temples, libraries, and museums were plundered and destroyed. Mosques were either demolished or used as pig barns. Almost all the buildings in the region were dismantled to their foundations, and their materials were transported and sold. All this has a price according to international law, the Azerbaijani side insistently demands that it be paid. One could also imagine that the total amount, including the costs of the last war, could reach several hundred billion.

It would be the most important guarantee of peace and prosperity in Armenia if it establishes friendly relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia by abandoning its unjust territorial claims on these countries –as well as the allegations of genocide against these countries, Turkey in particular.

Azerbaijan, which saved its lands from 30 years of occupation and ensured its territorial integrity, will certainly advance towards the rule of law and democracy, which the people have long missed, and will provide an environment for the smooth development of all religious and ethnic identities not only in Karabakh but throughout the country. 🌸

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PHOTOGRAPH

Ömer Burhanoğlu (Photography Artist)



Söğüt / Marmaris

Ömer Burhanoğlu was born in 1960 in Trabzon. He graduated from Boğaziçi University, Department of Mechanical Engineering. He pursued his master's degree in the Department of System Analysis in Istanbul Technical University and earned Ph.D in Management Engineering. He is one of the leaders in automotive industry with his experiences of more than 37 years. He has transformed Farplas, his work shop in Bayrampaşa, into one of the leading companies in a short time thanks to his innovative, creative attempts since 1983. He still serves as CEO and a member of Executive Board of Farplas. He is also founder partner and CEO of the other companies under the Fark Holding (Fark Labs, Farel, Faraero, Farform, F+ Ventures, Comodif). As a photography artist, Burhanoğlu follows the philosophy of living a “whole life” with a harmonious balance of allocating his time among family, art, sport, social responsibility and business. His photography work is collected in “AYNI AYRI”. All incomes of the book is dedicated to Ömer Burhanoğlu Hospital which is assigned to the Ministry of Health in Trabzon. Ömer Burhanoğlu takes initiative in various platforms and is actively involved in the startup ecosystem. Currently, he is member of Executive Board of Uludag Automotive Industry Exporters' Association (OIB/UIB), member and former President of TOSB Organized Industrial Zone, member of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) Automotive Industry Council, and member and former President of Automotive Suppliers Association of Turkey (TAYSAD).

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