



NATO's New Frontline The Eastern Mediterranean

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BRI: New Driving Force for
Regionalisation and Globalisation

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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.

Türkiye has a significant role –real and potential– in accelerating South-South cooperation. Türkiye 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 Türkiye'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 Türkiye 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 Türkiye- 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 Eastern Mediterranean is the Frontline against NATO's Aggression

Russia's special military operation in Ukraine has created a new momentum for the developing world. Over the past 30 years, developing countries have started to take action against the Atlantic aggression in reaction to the devastating consequences of the Atlantic system. Their resistance has finally put an end to the unipolar world and paved the way for a multipolar system. The agenda ahead is to joining forces and establish a fair, egalitarian fair world order. Today, a new wave of national sovereignty has been spreading from Asia to the rest of the world across Africa and Latin America. On the other hand, the USA has not abandoned its claim to be the sole master of the world and insists on imposing the continuation of a hegemonic international system. In this direction, the Atlantic Alliance seeks to prevent developing countries from enacting policies based on national sovereignty and, more importantly, from advancing South-South cooperation at the expense of to the Atlantic system.

This struggle between the Atlantic and the developing world continues on many fronts. The main fronts include the Bering Strait and the Arctic Ocean, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Yemen Sea, the Istanbul and Dardanelles Straits, Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Black Sea.

The US military build-up in the Balkans, Greece, and Ukraine and the policy of expanding NATO eastward are targeting not only Russia but the remainder of developing countries. It is seen that the USA is also trying to undermine Europe's relations with Russia and China. In the meantime, it aims to prevent the success of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is paving the way for an equitable and just world through shared development, from Europe to Africa via West Asia.

Among these fronts, the Eastern Mediterranean, where Türkiye serves as a tri-continental bridge, is of key importance. The rationale behind the US piling up its forces in the Eastern Mediterranean is to stop Türkiye's turn towards Asia. Türkiye's integration with Asia is part of its vital interests in every field, primarily national security. However, it is clear that the success of this integration will cause irreparable damage to US global hegemony. The USA has been stepping up its military threats against Türkiye in order to prevent such an outcome. Today, Türkiye is seen as an obstacle to NATO's strategic orientation even though it retains its NATO membership.

The Eastern Mediterranean is currently NATO's most critical front of attack. As a result, the threat that the United States poses to Türkiye via Cyprus and the Aegean is actually directed toward the developing world as a whole. Therefore, repelling the Atlantic aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean will benefit the national security interests of not only Türkiye but also Russia, China, and Iran, among others. Particularly, the establishment of regional unity in the lead of Türkiye, Russia, China, and Iran will be a historical turning point on the road to an egalitarian and just international system.

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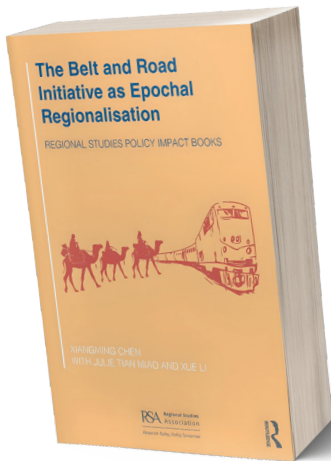


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The Necessity of Recognizing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in Light of the Latest Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean

Ersin Tatar

President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus



Ersin Tatar was born in 1960 in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. He completed his primary and secondary education in Cyprus and his High School and University education in England. After graduating from Cambridge University in 1982, he worked in the UK Headquarters of Price Waterhouse, the most important auditing and financial consultancy company in the world, until 1986. He worked as the Finance Manager at Polly Peck Company in England between 1986-1990, at FMC-Nurol Defense Industry Inc. in Ankara between 1990-1992, and as Financial Affairs Coordinator at Show TV between 1992-2001. In 1996, he founded "Kanal T", the first private television channel of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In the 2009 general elections, he was elected as a deputy from the UBP and entered the parliament. Ersin Tatar, who served as the Minister of Finance in 2009, was elected as the Chairman at the UBP Congress held in 2018. He became the Prime Minister of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on May 22, 2019. He became the 5th President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus by winning the first round on October 11 and the second round on October 18, 2020.

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SUMMARY

The details of the Cyprus issue are not very well known except for experts working on this issue, but it is a vital subject for the Turkish World. The honorable struggle of the Turkish Cypriot people for centuries is not just a struggle for existence. It also includes many global and local struggles. It is not correct to see this struggle only as a Turkish-Greek struggle. This struggle, at the same time, is the struggle for the existence of Turkishness on the island, the heroic struggle of an oppressed people, who are numerically a minority, against the aggressive majority, a struggle for a civilizational conflict, and in a way, it is the question of the West's domination over the East, which has been going on for centuries in different dimensions. Turkish Cypriots defended their destinies by giving great struggles on the island, gained their freedom as a result of the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which we established in 1983, became the second Turkish state in the Turkish World to gain its independence other than the Republic of Türkiye. Cyprus is of great importance in terms of the security of the Republic of Türkiye, the continental shelf, the Exclusive Economic Zone, the control of the airspace, and the strategic defense depth of Türkiye. The TRNC is not simply a piece of land for Türkiye and the Turkish world. The point that the honorable struggle of the Turkish Cypriot people with their blood and life for more than half a century should reach, is an internationally recognized, sovereign, and independent state. A new era has begun, in which new decisions will be implemented and the equal sovereignty of the Turkish Cypriot People will be at the forefront.

INTRODUCTION

WHILE ENTERING THE PRESIDENTIAL elections of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) held in October 2020, my main goals in my presidential candidacy declaration titled "A New Era, A New Vision" are; the TRNC should be kept alive and glorified, the Turkish Cypriot People should live in prosperity and security, our relations with the Motherland Türkiye should be developed in a healthy way, our State should take the place it deserves in the world and the possible solution in Cyprus should be based on the existence of two separate sovereign equal states. I explained this vision to our people and asked for their support. Our people have shown their support for this vision-based solution by electing me as the President of their own free will.

I sincerely believe that our solution proposal, based on the confirmation of our sovereign equality and equal international status, which I put forward before and during the Presidential elections, and which envisages institutional cooperation between the parties, is just and necessary not only in the Island but also in the Eastern Mediterranean region, considering the latest developments in the broader region and beyond. I firmly believe this will be

understood by everyone that it is the only key to lasting and sustainable peace in Cyprus.

The details of the Cyprus issue are not very well known except for experts working on this issue, but it is a vital issue for the whole Turkish World. The honorable struggle of the Turkish Cypriot people for centuries is not just a struggle for existence. It also includes many global and local struggles. It is not correct to see this struggle only as a Turkish-Greek struggle. This struggle is also the struggle for the existence of Turkishness on the island, the heroic struggle of an oppressed people, who are numerically a minority, against the aggressive majority, the struggle to protect our culture, religion, and identity, a struggle for a civilizational conflict, and in a way, the domination of the West, over the East which has been going on for centuries in different dimensions.

Deriving from these points, in this article I will try to explain the political future of the TRNC and its vital importance for the Turkish World in light of the latest developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, through three main interrelated topics: Cyprus negotiation process and a solution based on the existence of two sovereign equal states, TRNC's political future in the Eastern Mediterranean, its importance for Türkiye and the necessity of recognizing the TRNC.



Geographical location of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (BRIQ , 2022)

The Cyprus Negotiation Process and the Solution Based on the Existence of Two Equal Sovereign States

The first point to be underlined regarding the Cyprus issue is the emphasis that the Republic of Cyprus, which was established on 16 August 1960, has a sui generis character, which is unique and has no other example, since it is not similar to the founding treaties of any other country. Contrary to many other states in the world, the Republic of Cyprus was founded on principles and regulations, based on the vested equality of the Turkish and Greek Cypriot peoples on the Island, where one side cannot establish superiority over the other. This point is very important and constitutes the essence of the Cyprus issue.

Archbishop Makarios, the Greek leader and the President of the Republic of Cyprus at that time, did not accept the political equality of the Turkish Cypriots since the establishment of the Republic, insisted at every opportunity that "Cyprus is a Hellenic island" and that "the Turkish minority cannot interfere with the political will of the Greek majority". According to Makarios, the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus was a stepping stone for the Greeks' eternal political goal, enosis the annexation of Cyprus to Greece.

It soon became clear that Makarios words were not just rhetoric. In the December 21 attacks, which went down in history as the "Bloody Christmas" attacks, the Greek army, equipped with heavy weapons, systematically attacked the Turks.

As a result of these attacks, more than a quarter of the Turkish Cypriot population was forced to leave their homes in mixed villages and migrate to villages and areas inhabited only by Turks. Turkish Cypriots were condemned to live in 39 isolated areas spread over the island, surrounded by Greek armed forces. The Greek-occupied government did not provide any services to the areas protected by the Turkish Cypriot mujahedeen, and thousands of Turkish Cypriots were deprived of their most basic needs. Moreover, dozens of Turks, who had to leave their regions to work and meet their other needs, were kidnapped and murdered by the Greeks. After 1963, the so-called Republic of Cyprus turned into a Hellenic state, in violation of the constitution and international treaties.

As a reflection of all these, the Cyprus negotiation processes, which started in 1968, have not reached a positive result until today due to the uncompromising and negative attitude of the Greek Cypriots. The main reason for the deadlock in Cyprus is the Greek side's never-changing obsession with being the sole

ruler of the Island and its unwillingness to share the administration and wealth with the Turkish Cypriots.

What the Greek side understands from a federal-based agreement is to patch the Turkish Cypriot people as a minority into the so-called Republic of Cyprus, which turned into a Hellenic state after Turkish Cypriot people were expelled by force from the Republic of which they were a founding partner. The Greek position is the removal of Türkiye's guarantorship and thus by removing Turkish soldiers from Cyprus to reach its final political objectives. With the self-confidence of being an internationally recognized government on the island, the Greek Cypriot administration will never give up on this policy. The results of the 2004 Annan Plan Referendum and the collapse of the 2017 Crans-Montana talks despite all the concessions made by the Turkish side showed the whole world that a bi-zonal and bi-communal federal solution in Cyprus has now been exhausted.

It is a necessity to go beyond stereotypes and established parameters in order to achieve consensus in Cyprus.

All these facts show that the Turkish and Greek peoples of the island, who have a bloody past, different languages, religions, cultures, and lifestyles, cannot live together with a federal solution, and even if this is achieved with a forced treaty, this will not last long. Therefore, it has become evident which solution model cannot work in Cyprus. Until today, the solution in Cyprus has always been perceived by the international community as satisfying the wishes of the Greek side and the so-called "reunification" of the Island. However, the changing international and regional conjuncture shows that this perception is wrong day by day.

It is a necessity to go beyond stereotypes and established parameters in order to achieve consensus in Cyprus. A just, sustainable, and lasting solution in Cyprus can only be achieved by the reflection of the equality of the two sovereign peoples on the Island

in their international status, which is recognized in accordance with international treaties. This can only be possible with the existing two-state reality and arrangements that will not impose the sovereignty of one side on the other.

After I was elected as President, I brought up our solution proposal which envisages institutional cooperation between two sovereign equal states, also supported by the most powerful country in the region, that is Motherland Türkiye. I have consistently emphasized that there will be no turning back from our proposed solution, and this is the only solution based on the realities of Cyprus that not only benefited both Sides but also the regional countries.

In the informal Cyprus conference in 5+1 format, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland on 27-29 April 2021, under the leadership of United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, with the participation of the Turkish and Greek Cypriot Parties and the guarantor countries of Türkiye, Greece and the United Kingdom, I presented a 6-item proposal for a permanent solution in Cyprus to the United Nations and all the interested parties. With this proposal, for the first time, our solution proposal based on the sovereign equality and equal international status of the two Sides was put on the table.

The essence of the Turkish Cypriot proposal is the UN Secretary-General taking the initiative and passing a new UN resolution and reaffirming the recognition of the inherent sovereign equality and equal international status of the State of the Turkish Cypriot people, through which a cooperative relationship can be established between the two existing States on the Island. This would pave the way for results-oriented, time-framed negotiations toward a realistic and sustainable settlement. Such a cooperative relationship needs to be based on the following principles and arrangements:

1. The Secretary-General is to take an initiative so that the Security Council adopts a resolution in which the equal international status and sovereign equality of the two sides is secured. Such a resolution will form the new basis for the establishment of a cooperative relationship between the two existing States.



President Erdoğan welcomed President Ersin Tatar with an official ceremony. (October 26, 2020)
(Website of the Presidency of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, 2020)

2. Once the equal international status and sovereign equality of the two sides is secured through the above-mentioned arrangement, they will enter into results-oriented, time-framed negotiations, on this new basis, under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General to establish a freely-reached and mutually acceptable cooperative agreement.

3. The negotiations will focus on the future relationship between the two independent States, property, security, and border adjustment, as well as relations with the EU.

4. The negotiations will be supported by Türkiye, Greece, and the UK, as well as, where appropriate, the EU as an observer.

5. In the context of any agreement the two States will mutually recognize each other; the three Guarantor States will support this.

6. Any agreement to be reached as a result of these negotiations will be submitted for approval in separate simultaneous referenda in the two States.

In Geneva, we both recorded these proposals in the official UN records and announced them to the whole world. In the closing speech of the informal conference, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sta-

ted that a bi-regional and bi-zonal federal solution has now become a Greek thesis and that the Turkish side's solution proposal passes through a new solution based on sovereign equality and equal international status. Therefore, our vision has also been announced by the highest UN representative.

At the meetings I held with Guterres in Brussels on June 25, 2021 and in New York on 25 September 2021, and at the informal tripartite meeting held in New York by Guterres on 27 September 2021 and in the presence of the President of the Greek Cypriot Administration Nikos Anastasiades, I once again expressed our views on the Cyprus issue and once more confirmed that the equality and international status of the Turkish Cypriot people is essential for the start of official negotiations.

If the Greek-Cypriot side can get rid of the obsession of being the sole ruler of the island and evaluate the Turkish side's proposal with a pragmatic mentality, it will gain great benefits from such a solution. The only way for the Greek Cypriot side to normalize its relations with Türkiye and for all sides to benefit from the rich hydrocarbon resources around the island is to make an agreement with the Turkish Cypriot side.

The Importance of the TRNC in the Eastern Mediterranean

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean after Sicily and Sardinia. The island has a unique strategic and geographical location and importance in the Eastern Mediterranean. Due to this special location, the geo-strategic importance of Cyprus, which has been a center of attraction for many civilizations throughout history, has always remained constant. 68% of the world's known oil reserves and 41% of natural gas reserves are located in the Middle East region, which is connected to the Mediterranean. 70% of Europe's hydrocarbon consumption passes through the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, Cyprus Island is in a geography where energy resources in the Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia are open to the outside world. The importance of Cyprus has increased even more recently with the natural gas resources discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Cyprus also acts as a jumping-off point, supply facilities, and forward base for intervention in crisis areas in the Middle East. The island of Cyprus is a valuable base for military build-up, and air and naval forces. For this reason, the UK maintains its bases in Cyprus, despite closing many of its bases around the world. To summarize, Cyprus has often been described as a "submarine that never sinks", due to its proximity to the Middle East and the Suez Canal, its strategic location in the Mediterranean.

Cyprus also occupies a particularly important strategic position for the security of the Republic of Türkiye. Cyprus is only 40 nautical miles (70 km) from Türkiye. The island of Cyprus is of great importance for Türkiye in terms of providing a safe exit to the Mediterranean from the south, controlling the maritime transport lines in the region, controlling the territorial sea, continental shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone, airspace, and strategic defense depth of Türkiye.

The fact that Türkiye is surrounded by Greek islands in the Aegean Sea and all the islands except Gökçeada and Bozcaada have been lost to Greece further increases the importance of Cyprus for Türkiye. Greece, which currently controls about 44% of the Aegean Sea,

will control about 72% of the Aegean Sea if it extends its continental shelf to 12 miles. If Cyprus comes under Greek-Cypriot sovereignty with a federal structure, both Türkiye's security will be in danger and Turkish ships will become virtually unable to sail to the open seas.

Again in this context, strategic products, and oil imports will be of vital importance in case of any crisis or armed conflict in which Türkiye could be involved. If a single country controls the whole of Cyprus, as in the Aegean, Türkiye will have difficulty in ensuring the security of its supply routes.

An indispensable dimension of the importance of Cyprus for Türkiye stems from the Turks living on the island. The island remained under Turkish rule for approximately 350 years between 1571 and 1914. In this period, Turks brought to Cyprus from various parts of Anatolia formed the ancestors and origins of today's Turkish Cypriots, and Cyprus became a Turkish homeland.

The necessity of Recognition of TRNC

In recent years, there have been critical developments in Cyprus and in the region. In this connection, the geopolitical situation in the Eastern Mediterranean has turned into a new struggle over hydrocarbon resources.

While Türkiye which has the longest seashore on the Eastern Mediterranean and is only 70 km far from Cyprus, is trying to be excluded from the political equation in the Eastern Mediterranean while some regional actors and global powers continue their efforts to establish dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean. This situation led to an intense and complex political struggle, as well as the intensification of tension and military activities in the region.

From the Turkish side's point of view, the "Blue Homeland" lies at the heart of this struggle. Considering Türkiye's homeland, the Blue Homeland corresponds to more than half of these lands. Blue Homeland is a challenge to the policies that try to isolate Türkiye and the TRNC from the seas. There is no difference between claiming any land in Türkiye and the TRNC and claiming a territory within the Blue Homeland.

Despite their limited population, land area, and military and economic power, Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA) follow an expansionist policy in the Eastern Mediterranean by using the islands, which are their only trump card in the political sense. At every opportunity, they show their aim to shrink Turkish territorial waters by 3.5 times and reduce it to 41 thousand square kilometers and therefore, confine Türkiye to the Gulf of Antalya by ignoring the rights of Türkiye and the as envisaged in the Sevilla Map.

The TRNC State meets all the conditions for being a state and has the capacity to establish relations with other countries.

At this point, the importance of the TRNC emerges once again. The Blue Homeland doctrine can only survive if the TRNC exists. For Türkiye to defend its legal and political rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, recognition of the TRNC's sovereignty over land, sea, and air is essential. Again, in this context, this is the only way to prevent the maximalist and expansionist steps that Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration will take by ignoring Türkiye's Exclusive Economic Zone.

As a result, the dissolution of the TRNC, which is the mainstay of Turkish sovereignty in the Eastern Mediterranean, will mean that Türkiye is isolated from the Eastern Mediterranean and imprisoned in the Gulf of Antalya. In other words, the recognition of the TRNC has now become a must for Türkiye. It has gained great importance to ensure the international recognition of the Turkish Cypriot State, which has maintained its existence effectively with its institutions since 1974, in order to protect the rights of Türkiye and the TRNC in the Eastern Mediterranean in an effective and de facto manner.

At this very point, the President of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in his speech at the 77th UN General Assembly on September 20, 2022, in New York, called on all countries to "recognize the TRNC", while creating a new era for the TRNC, and on the way to recognition which was the first step taken. After

this historic call, the inclusion of the call to "recognize the TRNC" in the declaration of the National Security Council of the Republic of Türkiye dated September 28, 2022, gave very important messages that irreversibly changed the paradigms in Cyprus politics. All these developments show that the elements put forward by Mr. Erdogan on behalf of the Republic of Türkiye are not a temporary position but a state decision.

The TRNC State, which meets all the conditions of being a state defined by international conventions, also has the capacity to establish relations with other countries. TRNC has representations in 20 different countries, including its Embassy in Ankara and Consulate Generals in Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Mersin, Trabzon, and Gaziantep. Although the international community does not officially recognize it, there is the TRNC reality on land, at sea, and in the air. Every country in the world, especially the Greek-Cypriot side, knows very well where the sovereignty of the TRNC begins and ends. There are two separate States on the island of Cyprus, which are different from each other and have been separated for half a century, with their own institutions, legislative, executive, and judicial organs.

The issue of how the future of the TRNC should be shaped is now one of the common issues that the Turkic World needs to solve. We believe that the closer, collaborative and intense relations Türkiye developed with the Turkic World in this period triggered important dynamics in every field, especially in the political and economic fields. The key to paving the way for our two-state solution proposal will undoubtedly be the further development of our existing relations with Motherland Türkiye and friendly and brotherly countries. It is of great importance that the Turkic World, which shares the same values as the TRNC, under the leadership of Türkiye, establish a strong coalition and actively implement the policy understanding for the recognition of the TRNC.

In this context, if the Organization of Turkish States was established under the leadership of the Republic of Türkiye, TRNC should naturally take its rightful place as the second Turkish State that gained its independence in the Turkic World. I have consistently expressed our wish and desire on this matter. We are so happy that

at the 9th Organization of the Turkic States Leaders' Summit held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, the observer membership of the TRNC was unanimously accepted. Our state gained this status for the first time in an international organization with its constitutional name, namely the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This milestone that will go down in the pages of history is an additional source of pride for us.

Again, as a start, the participation of Turkish Cypriot Youth in sports and cultural activities to be held in the Turkic World and increasing their visibility will act as a pioneer in eliminating this shame of humanity. The Organization of Turkic States can undoubtedly be the main part of the bridge we will build from the Eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia in order to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood between us, protect the Turkic World from common dangers, and support this rightful struggle of the TRNC in search of status.

Concentrating on initiatives for the recognition of the TRNC by the Turkish World will facilitate the establishment of a permanent and fair peace agreement between the parties. Increasing recognition and visibility will ease the pressures on the TRNC and Türkiye, change the ground of negotiations and meetings, and cause the Greek Cypriot Administration to adopt a more constructive and conciliatory attitude.

Conclusion

Turkish Cypriots defended their destinies by giving great struggles on the island, gained their freedom as a result of the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which we established in 1983, became the second Turkish state in the Turkic World to gain its independence after the Republic of Türkiye. Cyprus is of great importance in terms of the security of the Republic of Türkiye, the continental shelf, the Exclusive Economic Zone, the control of the airspace, and the strategic defense depth of Türkiye. In other words, Cyprus is not simply a piece of land for Türkiye and the Turkish world.

On the other hand, recent developments in the Mediterranean have increased the importance of the region. Especially the developments after Russia's invasion of Ukraine showed once again the

importance of trust and stability, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean. There is no doubt that there is a solution to all the problems experienced on the continental shelf and energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. For this, all neighboring countries should seek solutions in common sense by showing the necessary respect for each other's rights.

In this context, a fair, realistic, practical, and sustainable agreement in Cyprus can only be reached with cooperation based on the existing realities on the Island, namely two separate Peoples and two separate States, and the sovereign equality of the two States and their equal international status. With this new solution proposal based on a "win-win" approach, both sides will gain many political and economic gains. This model will also not only ensure that the island is an island of peace, tranquility, and stability but also act as a catalyst for solving the problems in the Eastern Mediterranean and the region.

Although the international community does not officially recognize it, there is the TRNC reality on land, at sea, and in the air. According to international law, the TRNC has a legitimate state structure that meets all conditions. We see that the TRNC, which has full-fledged institutions and organizations, is in a much better situation than the well-known state, which deals with many socio-economic and political problems. In addition, when we see many people who want to become a state in the world but have not succeeded, we once again understand how important our state is and that we cannot take a step back. At this point, where the interests of Türkiye and the TRNC completely coincide, it is of great importance for the TRNC to be strengthened internally and externally.

As a final word, I would like to express that the honorable struggle of the Turkish Cypriot people with their blood and life for more than half a century should reach to the attainment of an internationally recognized, sovereign, and independent state. The fire of struggle has been started. A period has begun when new decisions will be implemented, the equal sovereignty of the Turkish Cypriot people will be at the forefront and the equal international status of the Turkish State in Cyprus will be established. 🌸

Retired Brigadier General Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel

“Türkiye, Russia and China should cooperate against US encirclement”



Fahri Erenel graduated from the Military Academy in 1980 in the department of economics. He completed his BA in Sociology and International Relations; his MA in National and International Security; Educational Administration and Supervision; Occupational Health and Safety; and his PhD in Human Resources Management. Between 1980 and 2010, he served at various levels in the Turkish Armed Forces. He is a B-class occupational safety specialist. He became an Associate Professor in Management and Strategy in 2017. He held various positions on the administrative and academic staff at Altınbaş and Kent Universities. He is still working as a lecturer at Istinie University, Department of Political Science and Public Administration. He is also the author of six books.

"America is doing the same, both in the South China Sea and in the Eastern Mediterranean. We can see that America's containment strategy also aims to block China's Belt and Road project. The fact that the Zangezur corridor will be opened means that Türkiye can use the middle corridor more easily through Central Asia while China can use it more easily through Türkiye, which the USA wants to avoid. As a soldier, I have been expressing for years that Türkiye should leave the NATO's military wing, but I think it should stay on the political wing as much as possible. There should be cooperation with Russia. The US's goal is to create a fault line between Russia and Türkiye and to cut off Türkiye's connection with Russia over the Black Sea. in a planned process where the Turkish Army stands strong, I think that Türkiye should take initiatives for the recognition of Cyprus independence with the support of China and Russia. There are critical theories and so on in international relations, but today I believe that all these problems can be solved in more realistic ways, namely by force. For this, close regional cooperation is needed. This is exactly what Türkiye should do. In this context, I consider the development of relations with Shanghai Cooperation Organization a very positive move."

Istinye University Lecturer Retired Brigadier General Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel answered BRIQ Managing Editor Onurcan Balci's questions.

What's your evaluation of the US's recent focus on boosting its military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean?

Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel: The US has always been increasing activities in Eastern Mediterranean through terrorist organizations and proxy governments. I have also started to use the concept of the Eastern Mediterranean as the Extended Eastern Mediterranean. You know, there is a concept that America uses for its projects in the Black Sea, the Extended Black Sea. Likewise, in this regard, the Eastern Mediterranean should not be evaluated only as the east of the Mediterranean. The East-

tern Mediterranean issue also covers the regions included in the USA's strategic activities. It is necessary to consider the region from Iraq and Syria to Crete, the Greek islands and a part of the Aegean Sea, and even Egypt and the Red Sea. America's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean can also be seen as a continuation of the containment policy put forward by George F. Kennan.

In this context, America does the same thing in the South China Sea against China as it does in the Eastern Mediterranean. We know that the United States is engaged in similar activities against any actor that may pose a threat to its strategies.



Retired Brigadier General Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel (right), BRIQ Managing Editor Onurcan Balcı (left). (BRIQ 🇹🇷, 2022)

The basic logic here is not only to surround Türkiye but also to take advantage of Russia's concentration in Ukraine, to break Russia's increasing influence in Syria, Egypt, Libya, and especially in the Sahel region, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, in the Eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, when we consider that Syria is also included in the Belt and Road project with a cooperation agreement signed by the Chinese Foreign Minister with Assad during his visit to Syria, and China's increasing investments in Damascus and Iraq, especially in the oil industry, we can see that this is also a strategy being pursued to thwart China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Preventing the Eurasianization of Europe

China's sea routes pass through the ports of Africa, and the USA is trying to prevent the Eurasianization of European countries by cutting these routes. You know, preventing the Eurasianization of European countries is a concept put forward by Alexandr Dugin in Russia. The USA has the idea of gaining an

America-based hegemonic power in the military industry and other fields by stopping the westward march of Russia and China and cutting the relations of the European Union countries with these countries, as it was during the cold war period.

With the detection of hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and the fact that new ones are being added to them every day, the importance of hydrocarbon resources in this region is increasing, especially in this period where energy exchanges between European countries and Russia are minimized. Therefore, if you notice, the USA announced that it withdrew its financial support from the line that would carry the gas to Europe when its relations with Türkiye slightly improved. However, when we look at the increasing activities of the USA, we see stimulating activities such as the lifting of the arms embargo on the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA), the signing of a cooperation agreement with the Greek Cypriot Administration last year, the increase in the activities in the port of Suda in Crete and the expansion of the port, the presence of two or three base areas here toget-

her with the Alexandroupoli base. There are defense cooperation agreements signed with Greece. This extends north, including Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland, and from there, the Baltic countries are also included in these activities.

The USA is currently using Poland as a proxy actor against Europe. Apart from that, there were concerns in America that Germany was secretly buying natural gas from Russia. Leaks in Nord Stream lines are very worthy of attention in this context.

Therefore, we see the steps of a line that excludes Türkiye. It may not seem very connected to the Eastern Mediterranean at the moment, but Poland is the key player in the US containment strategy. The increase in the number of American soldiers in Poland and the attitude of the Polish government towards Russia, as you know, aims to eliminate Poland's dependence on Russia by signing a natural gas agreement with Norway.

The USA is currently using Poland as a proxy actor against Europe. About 2-3 weeks ago, just as the countries were trying to come together and form a front against Russia, Poland demanded their reparations from the Second World War to be paid. Apart from that, there were concerns in America that Germany was secretly buying natural gas from Russia. Leaks in Nord Stream lines are very worthy of attention in this context. It is not a coincidence that Poland is at the forefront of Europe. Poland has always aimed to enlarge its territory with the concept of three seas: the Black Sea, the Adriatic and the Baltic Triangle, for a great Poland. Poland will never give up on this. When we talk about Poland, we're talking about a kingdom that includes parts of

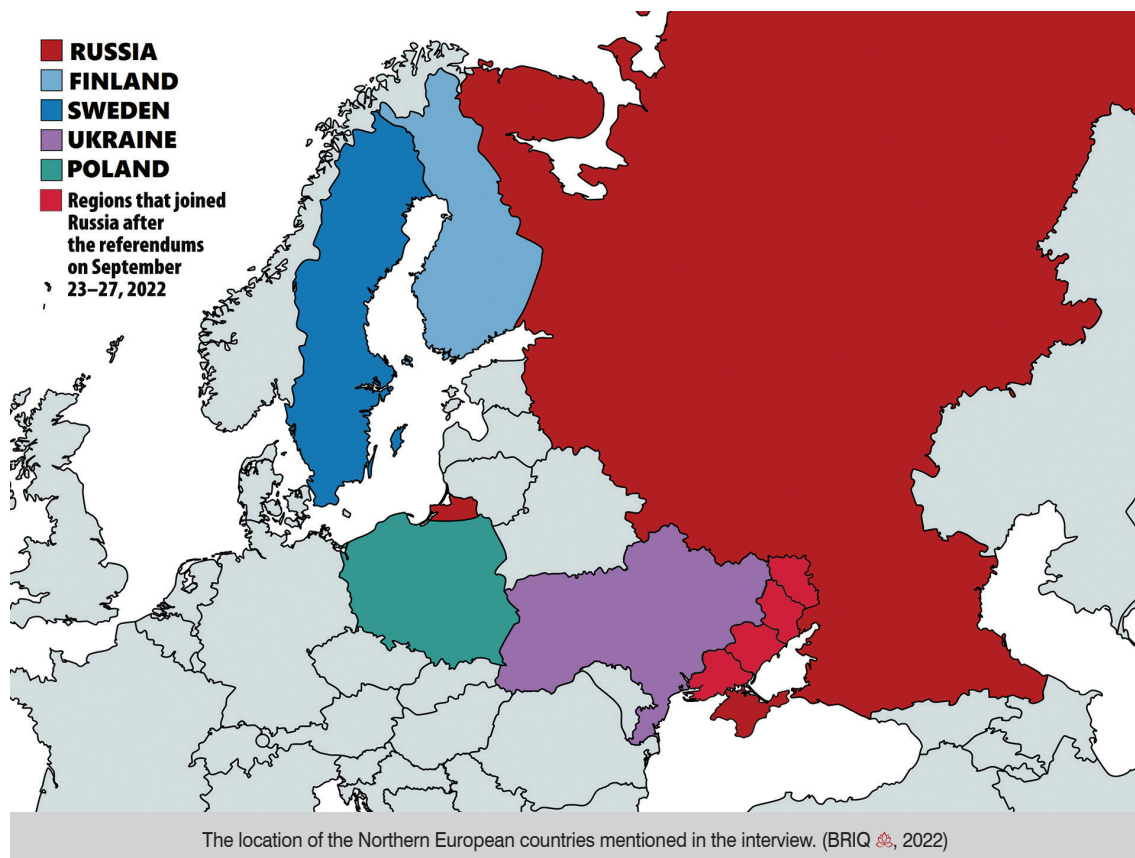
Ukraine and Lithuania. This is an important historical fact. In other words, Poland tends to be one of the most critical countries in Europe.

In fact, the Polish Foreign Ministers and the Romanian Foreign Ministers held two separate meetings with the participation of our Foreign Minister in Türkiye two months ago under the coordination of the United Kingdom. That was actually an agreement made for these lines; it was a meeting to persuade Türkiye as well. But Türkiye is not convinced about Alexandroupoli. Alexandroupoli is the most critical point of the line going north and south with Crete now that Cyprus has been added. As I mentioned, this region is important to prevent China's westward march. Why? Because the northern corridor is now closed through Ukraine. On China's main route, a middle corridor comes from the Caucasus and passes through Türkiye. We can say that the USA has the idea of closing this line by provoking the Armenia-Azerbaijan war again and supporting Armenia.

The Aim of the USA to Cut off the Mediterranean Connection and Imprison Russia in Its Own Region

Russia attaches great importance to the Eastern Mediterranean in the recently accepted naval doctrine. In the naval doctrine published by Russia in 2015, while the primary external threat was NATO's advance towards Russian lines, the main danger is recorded as "the USA and its allies" in the new document. How do you evaluate this?

Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel: The new naval doctrine emphasizes the importance of Russia's dealing with all international problems outside the region and having a naval force that will protect Russian interests.



I also see this doctrine as one of the most important proofs that Alfred Mahan's concept of "The Influence of Sea Power upon History" is still valid. The increase in investments in the naval forces of China and Japan in the South China Sea is remarkable. In fact, regarding the question you asked, I think that one of the most important reasons for the US intervention in the Eastern Mediterranean is the naval doctrine announced by Putin. This doctrine enlarged the ports of Latakia in the Mediterranean and the ports of Tartus.

Considering the Ukraine war, we can also think that the USA plans to cut Russia's Mediterranean connection and push Russia back into its territory. I see the Arctic where Putin

mainly started to practice the naval doctrine. I do not think that Russia gained enough power during the Ukraine-Russia war, especially in the navy sharing of the Black Sea navy with Ukraine, with the ships coming from the Baltic and the Caspian navy. Especially if we consider that Sweden and Finland recently joined NATO, the Baltic and Arctic regions gain more importance.

In terms of future maritime trade routes, the USA thinks that the southern line has stopped. There is uncertainty in the Mediterranean, while in the Caucasus, the northern line is also blocked. The new route in the north, where the ice will melt, is gaining importance. Taking this fact into account, Putin

stated that Russia is increasingly focused on the Baltic navy and has accelerated this process by building new ships. In addition, we can see the training of soldiers resistant to -50 C in the Arctic region under the control of Russia and the increase in the number of bases there as steps towards ensuring the security of this region and the maritime trade routes that will pass through it. China and Russia also cooperate in the Arctic.

The fact that the Swedish and Finnish navies are organized in accordance with the situation and their ability to operate in cold climates is one of the main reasons for convincing these countries to join NATO.

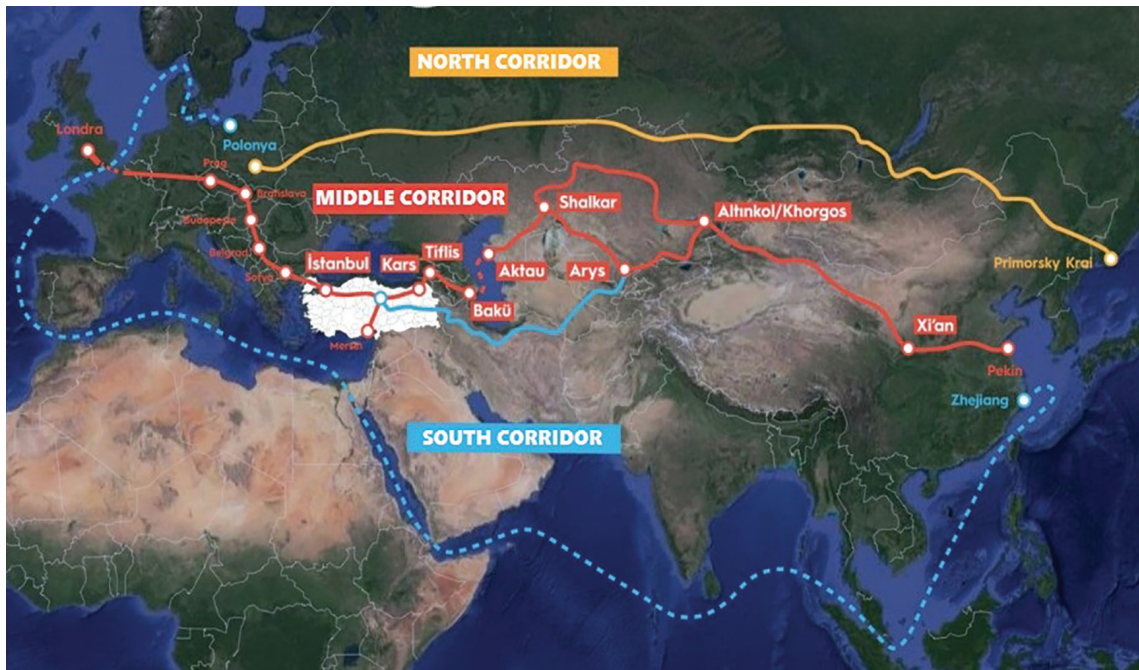
When we look at all this, we see that Russia has given its weight to the Arctic and wants to preserve its current gains in the Eastern Mediterranean. The USA must have realized this situation because the 11th American Division started training in Alaska about two months ago to fight in the cold climate. America has no power to fight Russia in the Arctic region. NATO has no such capacity. The fact that the Swedish and Finnish navies are organized in accordance with the situation and their ability to operate in cold climates is one of the main reasons for convincing these countries to join NATO. In other words, it can be said that the expectation of the USA here is to balance Russia's superiority with the help of Sweden and Finland if a NATO-Russia war takes place in the Arctic.

Türkiye-China Cooperation in the Middle Corridor

How do you evaluate China's relationship with the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and the region within the Belt and Road Initiative framework?

Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel: Relations between China and Syria are not new. In Syria, we can think of Xi Jinping's statements about Syria, the visit of the Foreign Minister later, and the increasing Chinese investments in the Damascus region. Iran also has serious investments there. We know that there is an agreement between Iran and China. Some situations include opening an energy corridor to China in the south of Iran. China is operating hydrocarbon resources there, transferring these resources directly to China's industrial zones via Pakistan at discounted prices, and Chinese security forces protect the region. Considering the recent conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, I think that China should give the Syrian issue more importance.

We can currently use the Arctic as a transit route for 18–20 days because the ice has not yet melted to the required extent. The northern corridor was closed by the Ukraine-Russia war. In fact, it killed two birds with one stone. Türkiye's cooperation is required for the middle corridor to be used more actively. Azerbaijan has completed building 57% of the corridor's land roads within its territory. Think about it; it is possible to reach Europe directly from China using this line. Another line passes through the South but is not preferred by China due to the chaotic structure in Iraq and Syria. It was difficult to use the line safely and sustainably due to the continuing turmoil in Iraq, the conflict among the Sunnis, the presence



Trade routes of the Belt and Road Initiative. (T.R. Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2021)

of PKK and ISIS, the presence of the United States in the region, and the inability to form a government.

Considering these, the southern line passing through Syria is more reliable. We can say that China-Syria relations have developed in this context. At the same time, China-Israel relations are also important. According to the latest data, between 5,000 and 7,000 Chinese engineers cooperate with Israel in several fields, including the defense industry. Regarding Middle East policy, we can consider the visit of Biden to Saudi Arabia right after Xi Jinping and the cooperation agreements between the United Arab Emirates and China over the last two years. In this regard, allegations were made that the United Arab Emirates gave a secret base to China. Likewise, before

the Ukraine war, Putin visited these regions and explained the doctrine about the gulfs. I think China and Russia are one step ahead in the Middle East. Both, especially Russia, have serious investments in northern Iraq. China also has very serious investments, especially in the Persian Gulf region, which continue to increase. Most of these investments are related to oil production.

On the other hand, China will take the oil to the east because the oil transported through Latakia would be difficult for China. But the oil transported from Iran, from the Persian Gulf, would be able to meet China's needs more securely. That's why there is a railway line in the agreement. You know, Iran wanted it to pass through Iran, from the south of the Caspian Sea, then to connect to Türkiye from there or to the Mediterranean

via Iraq and Syria. I think China is doing as Iran hoped, but the middle lane is still open. As long as the US is east of the Euphrates, I'm not sure if China can activate these rail lines. Frankly, I don't think China will invest more before the region is stabilized to a certain degree. Of course, the US has other plans.

The fact that the Zangezur corridor will be opened means that Türkiye can use the middle corridor more easily through Central Asia while China can use it more easily through Türkiye, which the USA wants to avoid.

After taking the Golan Heights, America established a huge base at the junction of Jordan, Syria, and Israel called Al-Tanf and has been massing forces for the past months. What is the significance of this base? The US planned to pass the oil extracted from northern Iraq and Qamishli through northern Iraq and Syria when the region was under PKK control. But since they saw this was impossible, they tried to create a new line from the south. That's why they keep El Tanf strong. They are trying to establish a line connecting the Golan Heights from El Tanf to the Mediterranean via the Druze. After establishing this line, I think the USA will gradually cut off its relations with elements such as the PKK and concentrate these forces on the route through which the pipeline and highway lines will pass. Of course, it should be stated that the naval forces of Russia and China in this region are insufficient to protect it from the sea.

Türkiye Should Leave NATO's Military Wing

What kind of strategy do you think Türkiye should follow, considering the US's containment strategy, Russia's measures, and China's policies?

Assoc. Prof. Fahri Erenel: The United States was progressive on containment. In general terms, Türkiye's cooperation with Azerbaijan and its influence in the Caucasus were reconstructed with the Second Karabakh war. In addition, the railway line from China bypassing Armenia and entering Türkiye via Baku, Tbilisi, and Kars is an extremely important detail. Of course, the fact that the Zangezur corridor will be opened means that Türkiye can use the middle corridor more easily through Central Asia while China can use it more easily through Türkiye, which the USA wants to avoid. That's why the US re-entered this region, recognizing its importance. But in this region, I think Azerbaijan, Türkiye, China, and, because of its relations with China, Iran have a clear advantage over the USA.

On the other hand, measures of Armenia to completely eradicate its relationship with Russia, which supplies 80% of its nuclear energy from a poorly functioning power plant with 600 Russian employees, brings the necessary uranium from Russia by planes and cannot pay its debts to the Russians even if it gives all its underground resources, will also fail. Another aspect of the events is the use of Greece as a proxy. This is not new. I think it was 2018 when the American Naval Academy discussed a war scenario in this region. In military exercises, we call it the "red-blue states." The USA has used the names Türkiye and Greece openly for the first time here, and in fact, we can see that the problems we are experiencing in the Aegean right now when this scenario is



read in detail, are within those assumptions. In other words, we can say that the current situation for the USA is deliberate rather than the current geopolitical or global circumstances that have arisen spontaneously.

Considering that this is a book written with the foreword of the Naval War College and the Commander of the Naval Forces, we can say that the strategic plan of the USA is reflected here. In the scenario, the tension between Türkiye and Greece gradually rises. Eventually, Türkiye sinks one of the Greek ships, and the USA intervenes in Türkiye based on its Defence Cooperation Agreement with Greece. It intervenes not only in the Aegean but also in Cyprus and attacks Türkiye's military units with long-range missiles

with ships off Cyprus. While doing all this, the economic situation in Türkiye is expected to make Türkiye unmanageable with turmoil by scratching the polarizations in civil society and causing a civil war in Türkiye by using all the actors in its hands, especially the PKK, in the south. It supports an idea that we call the Megali Idea in Greece, ensuring that Greece has a certain line. All of these have been revealed in the scenario we are discussing.

Greece has been arming the islands for 40 years. So far, I think we haven't reacted as we could because of our relationship with NATO and the idea that relations in the process of joining the European Union should not be strained or stopped. As you know, Türkiye needs a vote from

Greece in order to enter the European Union. Greece also takes advantage of this. In this sense, the USA made a mistake by including Türkiye and Greece in NATO at the same time. However, this mistake was not made regarding the European Union, and even the Greek Cypriot part was admitted to the EU, bringing the problems between Southern Cyprus, Greece, and Türkiye to an unsolvable point. As it provides a wall for immigrants, as Frontex suggests, Greece is more reliable for the EU than Türkiye.

There should be cooperation with Russia. The US's goal is to create a fault line between Russia and Türkiye and to cut off Türkiye's connection with Russia over the Black Sea.

Moreover, it is bound by the financial resources from Germany and the EU when it is in trouble. The method of sending immigrants to the borders, which Türkiye did two or three years ago, seriously worried the European countries. I think this is one of the biggest reasons why relationships get strained. That's why, in the tension between Türkiye and Greece, you know that the EU univocally expressed its support for Greece. Therefore, Greece may lose these islands within a few days if a real war occurs in the islands, including Chios, Lesbos, and Samos. Since Greece knew this, it made a provocative move by expressing that the armored vehicles given by the USA were deployed to some islands recently. In addition, the world's 4th largest air base, established in Bulgaria, is also noteworthy.

At this point, Türkiye should take advantage of Russia's blacklisting of Greece and the Greek

Cypriot Administration and act together with Russia to formulate regional policies. Some say, "Can we act against NATO?" It is not in NATO's history how any force against NATO or behavior contrary to NATO agreements was dealt with. If necessary, Türkiye can leave its military wing and maintain its presence in its political wing. Because if it leaves its political wing, the first country to join NATO will be the Greek Cypriot Administration, and then Israel. Thus, America will complete its siege by including NATO. As a soldier, I have been expressing for years that Türkiye should leave the military wing, but I think it should stay on the political wing as much as possible.

Partnership with Russia and China in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean

There should be cooperation with Russia. The US's goal is to create a fault line between Russia and Türkiye and to cut off Türkiye's connection with Russia over the Black Sea. The same is done in the Caucasus. The US is trying to undermine Türkiye-Russia relations through Armenia. Türkiye, Russia and China are also affected by the same process. I think Türkiye should put all its weight on Cyprus here. The Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus are the soft underbelly of Greece. Since America knew this, it thought and lifted the embargo on the Greek Cypriot Administration. Because if we consider our military power there, our ability to intervene quickly and at a distance of 70 kilometers from Türkiye and the practice of an event that took place in 1974, Türkiye is more advantageous. The Aegean Sea is an area where Greece gathers power under the influence of the USA. Unless the US intervenes, Greece cannot be a threat whatsoever.

The Turkish Armed Forces may also suffer some damage against Greece, but Greece has no chance of success in the Aegean.

Considering the current situation, taking action against Türkiye is difficult, but Cyprus is not like that. In Cyprus, there is a ceasefire, and as in Armenia, the ceasefire could break at any time. Therefore, in a planned process where the Turkish Army stands strong, I think that Türkiye should take initiatives for the recognition of Cyprus independence with the support of China and Russia, and if this is not possible, the TRNC should take a decision to join Türkiye with a referendum as Russia did in Donetsk and Luhansk. The USA never intends to give Cyprus to Türkiye. It neither consents to a federation nor a two-state structure. Due to the increasing importance of Cyprus, the USA wants Cyprus to be under the control of the Greek Cypriot Administration and, therefore, Greece. Because the way of the siege and the US domination of the Eastern Mediterranean passes through Cyprus, which is like an unsinkable aircraft carrier. Let's not forget that the British have military bases in Agratur and Dhekelia, which the USA can use. And, of course, Türkiye should also cooperate with Syria and China. Here, measures must be taken to seize the presence of America in the region. This siege needs to be broken, and the US presence in Iraq should be stopped by including Iraq and Iran in cooperation.

The size of the carriers no longer matters. The US has 11 large carriers, but carriers have become vulnerable with current missile systems. For example, a Russian missile called Sarmat can reach 6 thousand kilometers in a very short time. It can go at a speed of about Mach 20 (Mach 1=1235~km/h), and you can

see where it fell after being shot. They even hit Russia's cruiser with shore-fired missiles. The 6th and 7th fleets of the USA do not pose a great danger in this context. We can say that today's systems create a weakness for the navy. For this reason, the use of unmanned sea vehicles in the navy is increasing. Türkiye is also advantageous in this respect.

Türkiye should cut its relations with the EU and NATO in this context. They already have many practices, such as keeping Turkish trucks waiting and not giving visas. NATO will somehow remove Türkiye from NATO. Today they say, "We signed the Washington agreement; no one can remove us from NATO if we don't want to". No one implements international agreements. Why did the USA not implement the Minsk agreement against Russia? Why did they not intervene and allow the war to happen despite the three UN Security Council resolutions between Armenia and Azerbaijan? For the Washington agreement, they will say, "Yesterday is yesterday, today is today." Whom will you complain to? The era of international agreements in the world is over. Nobody follows the rules. If they had been followed, Israel would have come under the control of the UN today. There are about 20–25 Security Council and United Nations resolutions on Palestine and the occupation of the Arabs. There are critical theories and so on in international relations, but today I believe that all these problems can be solved in more realistic ways, namely by force. For this, close regional cooperation is needed. This is exactly what Türkiye should do. In this context, I consider the development of relations with Shanghai Cooperation Organization a very positive move. 🌸

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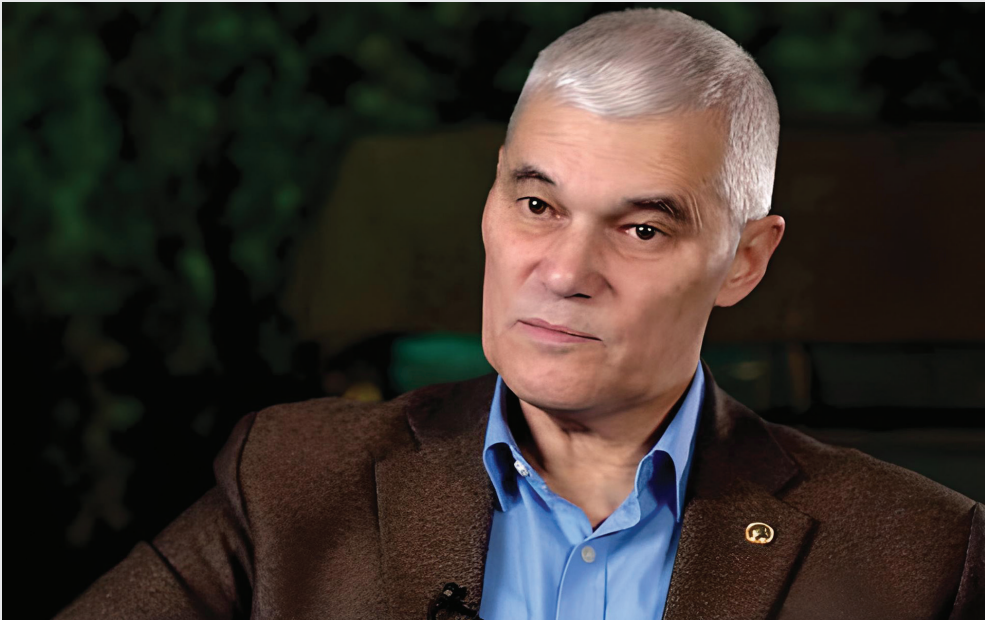
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Retired Admiral Dr. Konstantin Sivkov

"US build-up in Greece targets both Türkiye and Russia"



After graduating from the A.S. Popov Higher Naval Radio Electronics School in 1976, he served in the USSR Navy from 1976 to 1985. After graduating from the Naval Academy command faculty in 1987, he gave lectures in the A.A. Grechko Department of Naval Management. In 1992, he graduated from the main course of the Military Academy of the General Staff, after which he was asked to enter the doctoral program at the academy. After completing his doctorate studies, he worked at the RF Armed Forces General Staff Military-Strategic Research Center between 1995 and 2007. Since 2012, he has been working as a columnist for the weekly Military Industrial Courier magazine. He holds a doctorate in military sciences. Between 2013 and March 2015, he was the President of the Academy of Geopolitical Issues. He is the Vice President of the Russian Academy of Missile and Artillery Sciences.

“The common strategy of all multipolar world countries, including Türkiye, Russia, China, India, and Iran, has an element of joining forces against the Western bloc. And I believe this union is the one that will stop a nuclear World War III. Türkiye does not obey the orders of the USA, establishes independent policies, and maintains good relations with Russia, all of which the USA does not like at all. Under these circumstances, the US wants to take the reins of Türkiye back into its own hands, and for this purpose, it organized a coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2016. This coup attempt was defeated with the support of Russia as well, but the USA began to besiege Türkiye from every angle. Türkiye has started to take some measures against this siege passing through Greece and Southern Cyprus. This siege aims to engulf both Türkiye and Russia. This should be clearly understood. These bases are primarily aimed at Türkiye, then towards Russia. The containment of Russia is also achieved by other means, but at this point, Türkiye is a key target in the eyes of the United States.”

Retired Admiral Dr. Konstantin Sivkov, Vice President of the Academy of Missile and Artillery Sciences of the Russian Ministry of Defense, answered Kubilay Çelik’s questions.

In the naval doctrine adopted by Russia in August, the Eastern Mediterranean was counted among "regions that significantly affect the country’s economic development, people’s welfare and national security". What is the significance of the Eastern Mediterranean for Russia today?

Dr. Konstantin Sivkov: The Mediterranean is of great importance to Russia. The first factor here is, of course, the safety factor. Underneath this lies the fact that the famous 6th Fleet of the USA is located here. Long-range missiles from these ships can be used to target Russia. In the event of an attack against Russia, destroying and disabling these aircraft carriers is a critically important task in eliminating a threat formation.

For this reason, the presence of Russia in the region is also very important from a military point of view. The second important point is that the leading countries of the Arab world in the region follow a more friendly policy towards Russia, and I think Russia-Türkiye relations are now of great importance for Russia. We are Russians. We remain true to the principle of supporting our allies under any cir-

cumstances. To support this union, Russia provided military and economic support to many countries, even though it is not officially an ally. Because under the leadership of our country, there are people, peoples and states who hope for help from us. The Islamic world is experiencing a new renaissance, but the ideas of extremists in the region, which are hostile to Russia and Islam, are trying to portray Islam as a destructive religion. They are parasites, and this understanding only brings destruction. Hiding behind the Islamic flag, they form terrorist organizations such as the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), which is banned in Russia, and other similar structures. These are the most active at the moment.

Under these conditions, the Arab world continues to get closer to Russia, primarily for security reasons, and it turns out that there are people who fear Russia’s suppression of such terrorist acts. Economically, the Mediterranean has always been one of the centers of economic development of human civilization since the Ancient Romans. The Mediterranean is also of great economic importance today. Therefore, economically, Russia is interested in being in this region.



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, where he was attending the 6th Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). (October 13, 2022) (Official Website of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2022)

Moscow's Intervention in Ukraine is in the Interest of Türkiye's Sovereignty and Independence

It is seen that the USA is trying to build a front with Greece, Israel and Southern Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean. What do you think is the goal of this? How does this affect the objectives set by Russia in its strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean?

Dr. Konstantin Sivkov: Recall that until a while ago, before the current President Erdogan came to power in Türkiye, there were no problems with Greece. Türkiye mainly maintained this stance. The policy adopted in the previous period was the most important thing that kept Türkiye and Russia apart in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye started to follow a more inde-

pendent roadmap. Yes, sometimes, many people can be uncomfortable with this situation. Russia, too, can sometimes be disturbed by President Erdogan's policy in relations with republics such as Azerbaijan, which was established after the Soviet Union. However, in general, Recep Tayyip Erdogan follows a dominant Türkiye policy, and at this point, Türkiye and Russia are among the few countries that can achieve this. Türkiye does not obey the orders of the USA, establishes independent policies, and maintains good relations with Russia, all of which the USA does not like at all. Our Honorable President Putin pulled a new rabbit out of the hat at this point and said that they wanted to establish a natural gas hub in Türkiye. This project not only gives Türkiye economic power but also makes Türkiye a key state in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean in general.

So, these are all indications that Russia is advocating Türkiye's full sovereignty, as it should, even if there are some existing frictions between Russia and Türkiye. Under these conditions, the U.S. wants to take the reins of Türkiye back into its own hands, and for this purpose, it organized a coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2016. This coup attempt was defeated with the support of Russia, but the USA began to besiege Türkiye from every angle. Türkiye has started to take measures against this siege passing through Greece and Southern Cyprus. This siege aims to engulf both Türkiye and Russia.

This should be clearly understood. They tried to stage a coup in 2016 and failed, but they will continue to work in this direction. It will change shape, but they will continue to work to make Türkiye controllable again. Russia is launching a special operation against Ukraine because the U.S. targets in Ukraine and Russia are the same. In general, the USA and the Western world set the goal of making Russia a controllable country. Putin launched a special operation against the puppet state of Ukraine to secure Russia's maritime zone.

Nevertheless, there are other means of controlling Russia. They want to take control of the Russian nuclear potential and impose impositions on everyone, including Türkiye, using combined American-Western nuclear power. That is why today, Russia is entering Ukraine. This war is fought not only for Russia's independence and sovereignty but also for Türkiye's independence and sovereignty. This needs to be well understood. The pressure on Türkiye continues not only with the siege in the Eastern Mediterranean but also economically.

US Military Buildup in the Eastern Mediterranean Against Türkiye More Than Russia

The United States expanded military cooperation agreements with Greece and deployed troops to 22 separate military bases in the country. It activated a large-scale naval base in Crete and

started the construction of a land and naval base in Alexandroupolis on the Turkish border. Finally, the U.S. administration lifted the military embargo on Southern Cyprus, which it had maintained for 35 years. There is a debate in Türkiye: While some argue that the USA is putting a military siege against Türkiye and Russia with this military buildup, another segment argues that the target of the USA is Russia, not Türkiye. What do you think the USA is aiming for?

Dr. Konstantin Sivkov: All these measures mentioned, namely the deployment of U.S. military bases in the south of Crete, and the deployment of 22 military bases in Greece, are concrete examples of the U.S. policy of isolating Türkiye from the Mediterranean and North Africa. This is the natural direction of movement of the Turkish state in North Africa during the Ottoman Empire. Later, Western countries took control of these countries in North Africa and naturally, they do not allow Türkiye to return to this region. Due to objective factors, the Eastern Mediterranean region is important for Russia and Türkiye. That's why these military bases are against both Türkiye and Russia. The West does not want Türkiye's political and economic influences to extend beyond its geography.

The West finds the concept of a Turkish society loyal to its traditional values to be promoted not only in the country but also in foreign policy by President Erdogan as hostile to itself and adopts a confrontational approach. Therefore, these bases are primarily aimed at Türkiye and, to a lesser extent, Russia. The containment of Russia is also achieved by other means, but at this point, Türkiye is a key target in the eyes of the United States. I want to remind you that the United States has supported and continues to support several Kurdish terrorist organizations that threaten Türkiye's territorial integrity. So much so that this is not only verbal support but also the support of money and weapons.



The SCO summit took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on September 16. (Li Tao/Xinhua, 2022)

The Common Strategy of the Countries Defending the Multipolar World is to Join Forces

In addition to the Eastern Mediterranean, the United States creates instability through direct military interventions in major seas such as the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Arctic Ocean, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, the Yemen Sea, and many other seas and waterways, large and small. Russia, China, Iran, Türkiye and other countries in the mentioned regions are struggling with similar threats coming from the same source, originating from the USA. What strategy should these countries follow in their relations and against the USA to eliminate these threats?

Dr. Konstantin Sivkov: Today, the 3rd World War has started and continues at full speed. The proxy wars that the USA started against Russia over Ukraine, which was the beginning of the 3rd World War, are coming to an end. The United States considered the shooting of the Ukrainian forces showing maximum loyalty to the U.S. as an attack against it and launched a challenge against Russia. On the other hand, European countries continue to give credit to this chal-

lenge, leaving them in very difficult conditions next winter. Remember that any world war is always waged by alliances. The US-led Western alliance has already been formed and is running smoothly. The name of this alliance, which includes all Western civilizations but is actually the military organization of a single country, the USA, is NATO. Western civilization is acting very clearly in this war against Russia.

This situation continues, albeit partially, against Türkiye. However, the forces trying to build a multipolar world have been fighting these forces without compromise and fiercely for a fair world order and a beautiful future, not for one year, not for ten years, but for a century. Countries that support a multipolar world order still adhere to this principle. As it claims, Türkiye is truly an independent and sovereign state within the global system. It does not accept to be a dependent power to the USA and therefore, it is a target. In other words, these are the countries that believed in the multipolar world model and acted faithfully to it, the countries that needed to be consolidated for the USA.

But here, there is a positive alternative to the USA: SCO and BRICS. These organizations, accepted by the whole world, create a tendency towards for-

ming a multipolar world. They transformed from purely economic organizations into organizations with a certain political and military-political stance. We can see this, especially at the summit in Samarkand. In the Samarkand Declaration of the SCO, all member countries declared that they would engage in an active joint struggle against various types of hybrid wars and economic aggressions from third countries.

Moreover, it's a very strong magnet. In other words, the common strategy of all multipolar world countries, including Türkiye, Russia, China, India and Iran, aims to join forces against the Western bloc. I think this union is the one that will stop the 3rd World War, which has already started, before it turns into a nuclear war. Therefore, the struggle in this direction continues.

The Astana Platform, formed by Türkiye, Russia and Iran, has achieved very important progress in ensuring the territorial integrity of Syria in the last five years. What role does the Astana partnership play in resolving conflicts between these three countries and regional problems in Western Asia? Can it play a greater role? What needs to be done about this?

Dr. Konstantin Sivkov: This is a very important model, of course, because these three countries, Russia, Iran and Türkiye, are the key players that determine the overall policy and situation. For example, the role of this trio in the Middle East determines the situation in the region. This alliance has defeated all U.S. attempts to infiltrate the region, allowing it to escape Afghanistan shamefully. But of course, certain frictions and problems continue within this trio. In addition to situations where everyone is united in their interests, they are often separated for petty personal interests. Common interests are establishing a multipolar world order, establishing friendly relations in the Middle East in general, and confronting the West, a very serious and formidable enemy that claims to dominate the world.

I must indicate that, unfortunately, the Turkish government hasn't shown its resolve to end the Syrian

conflict. It is unthinkable to ensure the security of the countries of the region within the scope of this policy of Türkiye. Maybe this is not the best solution, but Russia is ready to do anything to establish a common policy in this Idlib cauldron. However, it seems that the Turkish side is not ready for this yet, and time is passing.

The SCO Will Become the Largest World Club that Determines World Peace for the Next Decades

The SCO aims at economic cooperation and security and has taken important steps in this area. In addition to the SCO, the Belt and Road Initiative, initiated under China's and Russia's leadership, aims to build the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century. Stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, an important sea route between Asia, Europe and Africa, is also important within the scope of KYG. Considering the position of the Eastern Mediterranean within the scope of the KYG, what kind of a relationship can be mentioned between the interests of Türkiye, Russia and China in the region? In this context, is there an overlap or antagonism between the interests of the mentioned countries?

Dr. Konstantin Sivkov: There are different contradictions, and there will always be contradictions, but the decision to jointly defend all member states against threats from third countries in the published declaration shows that all these contradictions have been pushed aside. The Belt and Road program is being developed against common threats that may come from now on.

I want to remind you that Russia not only supports the development of the Eastern Mediterranean on the Belt and Road Initiative but also cooperates with China to develop the Northern Sea Route. Stretching from the North and the South, from Europe to China, the goals and future of this organization are much more important than the small disagreements between us. The SCO will develop and become the largest world club that truly determines world peace for the next decades and maybe even centuries. 🌸

China's Proposal for the Eastern Mediterranean Conflict Resolution: A "Developmental Peace"*



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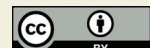
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ABSTRACT

The Eastern Mediterranean is one of the epicenters of Middle Eastern conflicts ranging from internal and bilateral to multilateral disputes. Outside powers adhere to diverse outlooks of peace initiatives. The western liberalists highlight "democratic peace", emphasizing that "democracy deficit" causes conflict. China favors the "developmental peace" proposal and argues that conflicting parties can achieve peace through domestic and regional development. China dispatched peacekeeping forces to Lebanon for humanitarian rescues for the Republic in 2020, offered developmental aid and economic assistance to Lebanon, Syria and Palestine to improve their capacity with key infrastructure and livelihood projects as the centerpiece, and participated in post-war reconstruction in the three war-torn countries as well. The "developmental peace" argument is based on China's four-decade-long Reform and Opening-up experience, a potentially new scenario for the Eastern Mediterranean conflict resolution.

Keywords: China's Middle East diplomacy, conflict resolution, democratic peace, developmental peace, Eastern Mediterranean

Introduction

THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN, CONSISTING of Türkiye, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt, is trapped with prolonged and thorny issues related to security dilemmas and economic slowdowns, such as the decade-long Syrian crisis, the four-decade Lebanese political discords and the seven-decade Palestine-Israeli conflict. In recent years, the discovery of gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has added a new layer of complexity to the region already marred with decades-old conflicts. Amid increasingly competitive gas markets, the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) offers a platform to coordinate efforts among the various players in the region to lower costs and improve regional integration. However, Türkiye and Libya are excluded from the Forum, causing escalating rivalry (Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2021). The Eastern Mediterranean interwoven traditional and non-traditional conflicts are both local and international,

both endogenous and exogenous, and both internal and external with complex contexts.

The above conflicts were not created by China, a newcomer. However, Beijing is a stakeholder and an important player in the Eastern Mediterranean conflict resolution because it is the second-largest trading partner of the League of Arab States and the third-largest trading partner of Türkiye and Israel, respectively. Located at the cross-road of the Belt and the Road, the Eastern Mediterranean secures a predominant position in China's Middle Eastern and Mediterranean policy.

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2021, President Xi put forward the Global Development Initiative in the United Nations and in 2022, President Xi raised the Global Security Initiative. These initiatives are more than economic and development initiatives. Indeed, they are economic means for security in the Eastern Mediterranean and the developing world. This is a China-styled peace initiative of "developmental peace".

“Developmental peace” is an important proposition of China in its participation in the security governance in the Middle East by economic measures. In his speech made at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo in 2016, President Xi Jinping formulated the assumption of “developmental peace”: “The key to overcoming difficulties is to accelerate development. Turmoil in the Middle East stems from the lack of development, and the ultimate solution will depend on development, which bears on everyone’s well-being and dignity” (Xi, 2016). According to his remark, states may achieve economic development and social stability without changing their political system.

Development is the common interest and universal value of all conflicting parties. Thus, it is easier to find a developmental solution to the political predicament step by step.

Unlike the western liberalists’ assumption of the Middle Eastern conflict resolution, which highlights that “democratic deficit” is the root cause of regime failure, China emphasizes material factors of conflicts. The “development deficit” stems from the imbalance of development and income distribution brought about by globalization, resulting in the widening gap between the rich and the poor, insufficient resilience to economic and financial risks, and the intensification of global energy and food security problems (Wang & Han, 2022: 10). Based on its experience of the Reform and Opening-up since the late 1970s, China underlines that “development deficit” is the root cause of the upheaval in the Eastern Mediterranean and the

Middle East. The political systems of the Middle East are diverse, and their ideological divides are huge, which are hard for conflicting parties to compromise. However, development is the common interest and universal value of all conflicting parties. Thus, it is easier to find a developmental solution to the political predicament step by step.

What is China’s “developmental peace” hypothesis? What are the differences and similarities between this initiative and Western peace initiatives?

Indeed, existing literature has shed light on the conditions and advantages of implementing “developmental peace” in the Middle East, Africa and other regions. Wang Xuejun, a Chinese expert on African studies, stresses that China’s “development first” policy determines its approach to peace and security as “developmental peace,” which is different from the liberal peace idea based on Western countries’ experience (Wang, 2018: 67-82). In the area of UN peacekeeping, Richard Gueli and Sybert Liebenberg argue that the concept of “developmental peace missions” aims to challenge the traditional view that short-term military security is a necessary precondition for long-term development. They offer a first cut at substantiating this claim by exploring how initial civilian reconstruction efforts can enhance military peacekeeping and create the momentum needed for successful transitions” (Gueli & Liebenberg, 2007: Chapter 5).

Arguably, there have been more empirical than theoretical studies and more macro-level than micro-level studies concerning the topic in question. There is still a shortage of detailed clarification of the concept and connotation of “developmental peace”. Moreover, relevant theoretical and case studies of China’s “developmental peace” moves in the Eastern Mediterranean are insufficient.

Therefore, this article starts with the connotation of "developmental peace" and attempts to understand the internal dynamics and external roadmaps for China to put forward the peace initiative of "developmental peace" in the context of China's diplomacy towards the Eastern Mediterranean.

Democracy vis-à-vis Development: China's "Developmental Peace" Proposal

In the post-Cold War era, peace and development remain the two themes of the world, the former being the foundation of the latter and the latter the driving force of the former. In its comprehensive cooperation between China on one side and African, Arab and Latin American countries on the other side, "developmental peace" is becoming an important diplomatic concept because peace and development have been a significant objective for the cooperation between China and other developing countries. In May 2017, when addressing the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, President Xi Jinping pointed out that peace deficit, development deficit and governance deficit are grave challenges to humankind and peace. Development and governance have become the targets of Chinese diplomacy in the new era. Facing up to the main hot issues of the world in the 21st century, the doctrine of "developmental peace" is of theoretical and practical significance regarding how to effectively alleviate regional conflicts and realize permanent peace and common development.

So far, there are at least two competing doctrines concerning the root cause and solutions to international conflicts. The first doctrine is characterized by western liberalism. It advocates "democratic peace". That is, conflicts

derive from dictatorship and "democracy deficit", while the legal system in democracies means there is a whole set of beliefs which prevent military conflicts in advance (Owen, 1994: 87-125). The democratic peace theory states that countries with liberal democratic forms of government are less likely to go to war with one another than those with other forms of government. Proponents of the theory draw on the writings of German philosopher Immanuel Kant and, more recently, US President Woodrow Wilson, who, in his 1917 World War I message to Congress, stated, "The world must be made safe for democracy" (Longley, 2022).

The second doctrine is characterized by materialism. It advocates "developmental peace". That is, conflicts primarily derive from scarcity of material wealth, and "development deficit" is the main cause of conflicts. "Developmental peace" implies that the dividend brought about by development can benefit the whole community and help promote political stability and resolution of social contradictions and regional conflicts, turning the economic dividend produced by development into a security dividend at both the national and regional levels (Sun & Zhang, 2019: 116).

As Table 1 shows, "developmental peace" includes an open hypothesis: compared with democratic governance, economic governance has less risk but better effect. Under the precondition of domestic political and social stability, whatever political institution is chosen, it can achieve peace as long as it is capable of pursuing development with economic construction at the center and it can drive economic growth through state-dominated investment (as well as foreign investment) (He, 2017: 25-26).

Table 1. Two Peace Initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean

	Democratic Peace	Developmental Peace
Diplomacy Approaches	Liberalism	Materialism
Source of Threat	Authoritarian Regimes	Backward Socio-economy
Critical Problems	Lack of Democracy	Underdevelopment
Strategic Goals	Establish Democracy	Enhance Domestic Economic Development
Central Tasks	Democratization	Economic Reconstruction
Strategic Priorities	Promotion of Democratization	Removal of Obstacles to Economic Development
Governance	Democratic Governance	Economic Governance
Institutional Buildings	Construction of Democracy and Rule of Law	Economic Development
Trajectories	Top-bottom	Bottom-top
Risk Expectation	Risk Acceptance Model	Risk Avoidance Model
Type of Interference	Reformation	Modification

Source: Degang Sun & Jieying Zhang, 2022.

China favors “developmental peace” because it believes that the major contradiction in the Middle East is under development. In other words, poverty is the root of the major Middle Eastern problems, as China’s development has told the leaders. Since 2012, China’s total economic output has increased from 11.3% to more than 18% of the world economy in 2021. Its GDP per capita rose from \$6,300 to more than \$12,000, forming the world’s largest middle-income group with more than 400 million people, and nearly 100 million rural poor people have been lifted out of poverty. To build a moderately prosperous society in all respects, China’s economic, scientific, technological, and comprehensive national strength has leapt to

a new level (People’s Daily, 2022). Thus China highlights that development and security are two wings of one body and two wheels of an economy.

In February 2019, during the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, an editorial in People’s Daily pointed out that “among the problems in the Middle East, only development is the master key to all the problems. More peaceful efforts should be made to create conditions for development. With more developmental cooperation activating peace, development and peace will form a cycle of mutual coordination and promotion. Therefore, more efforts should be made to explore a governance path of promoting developmental peace for the Middle East” (Zhong, 2019). Starting from the

dialectical relationship between development and peace, China highlights the fundamental role of development in resolving conflicts in the Middle East. Indeed, domestic and regional conflicts in developing countries and regions are primarily a result of the "development deficit" problem, which is embodied by sluggish economic growth, backward infrastructure, a high unemployment rate, and a high inflation rate.

China's "Developmental Peace" Proposal in the Middle East

China's proposal of "developmental peace" in the Middle East is an experience that the Communist Party of China has learned from its domestic governance, including its domestic development and opening-up. The concept of "common development" with Chinese characteristics has broadened from domestic to international, benefiting the Chinese people to people worldwide (Guo & Gao, 2017: 60-65).

The proposal of "developmental peace" combines the agenda of economic development with conflict settlement.

As a rising economy among the permanent members of the UN Security Council, China practices "developmental peace" to the best of its ability and promotes the peaceful development of the countries along the "Belt and Road". China advocates "developmental peace" in the Middle East for reasons as follows:

First, the "development deficit" problem in the Middle East demands prompt resolution. According to the International Monetary Fund, there are only 39 developed economies today but 154 emer-

ging markets and developing economies (IMF, 2022). The Middle East, with a relatively high natural birth rate, is one of the most populated areas among developing countries. The average unemployment rate of the Middle East amounted to 9.8%, two times higher than that of the world (International Labour Organization, 2022). The high birth and unemployment rates and low economic growth rates have triggered successive economic and social contradictions in the Middle East, posing an even more severe threat to the fragile peace in the region.

Second, democratic governance of the US and Europe faces hurdles. In the post-conflict era, Middle Eastern countries did not move towards stability or peace. Instead, many of them underwent a "second revolution". Worse, some old conflicts rolled back due to the new geopolitical gaming (Hudson, 2013: 37; 43). In light of the failures of "democratic peace", Middle Eastern countries turned to alternative means of realizing peace, that is, economic and social development. After the decade-long "Arab Spring", it seems that transitional Arab states have returned to their historical origin, and more Middle Eastern countries are showing interest in the Chinese initiative of "developmental peace".

The proposal of "developmental peace" combines the agenda of economic development with conflict settlement. Integrating the forces in the international community and regional actors allows all members to play the role of responsible stakeholders. Moreover, it combines strategic goals with operational and tactical goals, integrating peace, politics, humanitarianism, development and the process of human rights. It attempts to break away from the war economy by promoting the capacity building of the new government and economic growth to reduce the possibility of renewed conflicts (Olivier, 2013: 115; 118).



On September 21, 2022, the Second Middle East Security Forum was held in Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. (Tengxun Net, 2022)

China argues that lack of development is the root cause of the Middle Eastern conflicts. In 2019, the global average unemployment rate was 5.4%, and the countries in the Middle East were twice that of the world, ranking first in all regions. In 2020, the unemployment rate in the Middle East soared to 11.7%, ranking the highest among all regions in the world. Development issues such as unemployment are the top priority for these countries. According to the 2021 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, launched by the UNDP, among 109 countries, Multidimensional Poverty Population is as large as 1.3 billion, representing 21.7% of these countries' total population, and about half are children under the age of 18 (Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Program, 2021: 4-5).

China advocates that the easiest way to halt war and stop conflict is to eradicate poverty and fos-

ter development. In March 2021, Foreign Minister Wang Yi put forward a “five-point initiative” on achieving security and stability in the Middle East: 1. advocating mutual respect, 2. upholding equity and justice, 3. achieving non-proliferation, 4. jointly fostering collective security, and 5. accelerating developmental cooperation.

“Developmental cooperation” is actually an economic means for security ends, the same as “developmental peace”. Wang Yi stressed that long-term stability in the Middle East requires development, cooperation and accommodation. The international community should unite to overcome COVID-19 and achieve economic and social recovery as soon as possible. Efforts should be made to combine different resource endowments of Middle East countries, help post-conflict countries in reconstruction, support diversified economic growth of oil-producing countries, and help the Middle East countries develop and achieve re-

vitalization (China Daily, 2021). The China-Arab Reform and Development Forum and the Middle East Security Forum are two important mechanisms for China's "developmental peace" initiative.

On September 21, 2022, the Second Middle East Security Forum was held in Beijing. Vice Foreign Minister Deng Li attended the opening ceremony and delivered a keynote speech, proposing "promoting security through development", the essence being "developmental peace".

Achieving peace through development has become an important part of communication between China and Middle Eastern countries since the outbreak of "the Arab Spring".

"To achieve long-term stability in the region, China is willing to assist the Middle East countries within its capacity in terms of post-COVID-19 economic recovery and food and energy security, and support countries in the region to improve people's livelihood and maintain stability. China is willing to strengthen the docking of development strategies with the Middle East countries, integrate their respective production capacity technology and resource market advantages, jointly build the 'Belt and Road' with high quality, and promote free trade negotiations. China is willing to strengthen cooperation in such fields as green innovation, food and energy, health, investment and finance based on traditional cooperation in trade, energy and infrastructure to promote sustainable security with sustainable development and lay a solid foundation for Middle East security" (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

It is common sense that security and development are two sides of a coin, and the former is the basis of the latter. However, "developmental peace" may reverse the relations, for it argues that "development" may be potentially a precondition for security. From theory to practice, "developmental peace" has become an important approach to China's participation in the peace initiative in the Middle East. In July 2018, during his visit to the United Arab Emirates, President Xi Jinping pointed out, when meeting with Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, then Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE, and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, that "at present, the peoples in West Asia and Northern Africa all long for security and stability. Apparently, it is an unstoppable trend to pursue peace, reform and development. China would like to deepen its bilateral strategic cooperation and seek a governance path featuring developmental peace in the Middle East" (People's Daily, 2018). It was the first time the Chinese government has spoken of "developmental peace" in terms of a peace initiative in the Middle East, which was echoed by the UAE counterparts.

In February 2019, when meeting Mohammed bin Salman, the visiting Crown Prince of the UAE, President Xi pointed out, "China is ready to work with Saudi Arabia to jointly explore a governance path in the Middle East featuring the moves of promoting "developmental peace" and working toward a solid foundation for peace and stability in the region through jointly building the Belt and Road and strengthening regional development cooperation" (Xinhuanet, 2019). Achieving "peace" through "development" has become an important part of communication between China and Middle Eastern countries since the outbreak of "the Arab Spring".



Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets with his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad in Damascus, Syria, July 17, 2021. (Xinhua, 2021)

The Eastern Mediterranean is an important arena for China to put its “developmental peace” into practice. The paper chooses Syria, Palestine and Lebanon and sees how China implements its “developmental peace” proposal. The three countries are all oil-poor, war-torn and regime-fragile Arab countries located in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, it is easier to have a comparative study.

China’s “Developmental Peace” Proposal in Syria

Syria is experiencing a protracted political and socio-economic crisis that has severely deteriorated living conditions. Outside powers are involved in Syria’s civil war through proxy means. The civil war in Syria is regarded as the most brutal conflict in the world,

which started in 2011 and is still ongoing (ClearIAS, 2017). The already fragile health system is overstretched with additional strain from the COVID-19 pandemic. As the crisis enters its twelfth year, 6.9 million people remain internally displaced, and 5.6 million have fled the country as refugees, the vast majority to neighbouring countries (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Unlike other permanent members of the UN Security Council, China does not have troops in Syria, nor does it seek geopolitical interest or sphere of influence in the war-torn country. Chinese government nominated a special envoy for the Syrian issue in 2016 who has been exploring peace proposals through joint international efforts. China’s special envoy to Syria, Xie Xiaoyan, explained China’s

position on the Syrian issue at the point of the 10th anniversary of the Syrian proxy war. Xie said China calls for a comprehensive approach from political, security, humanitarian and reconstruction aspects to help settle the Syrian crisis once and for all (Liu, 2021). Unlike Russia, the US and European powers, China emphasizes economic reconstruction for political reconciliation, arguing that the international community should seek common ground while putting aside differences. Economic recovery might be the breakthrough for the Syrian political deadlock.

China's "developmental peace" is initiated by the Chinese government but is implemented by Chinese state-owned and private enterprises, a model of "the government setting the stage while the enterprises are acting".

In the past decade, China has been calling for peace, protecting the Syrian people's interests, and lifting sanctions on Syria imposed by the United States and Europe for the sake of the country's humanitarian situations, such as tackling the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, China's "developmental peace" initiative is down-top, starting from the grass-root level of economic and social reconstruction. China's funding and announcement of giving humanitarian aid to Syrians is a case in point. Since it does not have proxies, China cooperates with the United Nations and the Syrian central government for emergency humanitarian assistance and economic cooperation (Ding & Sun, 2021: 57).

The Syrian conflict is divided into two stages. In the first stage of military hostility, China adhered to its principle of non-interference in Syrian internal affairs and sought conflict resolution through the

UN framework. In the second stage of political reconciliation and economic reconstruction, China attempts to play a bigger role. In the field of post-war reconstruction, China steadily carries out various exchanges in which Chinese enterprises participate in the reconstruction of Syria, and Chinese enterprises also hold an active attitude of participation.

China encourages its enterprises to participate in the implementation of its "developmental peace" proposal in Syria. As early as May 2017, the China-Arab Exchange Association hosted a seminar titled "Security Situation and Reconstruction Opportunities in Syria - Briefing on the China-Arab Exchange Association's Visit to Syria", which released various reconstruction projects in Syria, such as food, water, infrastructure reconstruction, electricity, building materials, and agriculture, which were positively responded to and supported by the participating enterprises. In May 2017, the China-Syria Enterprises Matchmaking and Exchange Conference, organized by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, was held in Beijing. More than 150 Chinese and Syrian enterprises from the infrastructure, energy, manufacturing and other fields of China and Syria attended the conference, which was the first time for China-Syria enterprises to communicate with each other.

In August 2017, more than 20 Chinese enterprises participated in the 59th Damascus International Expo, and the products on display covered energy, building materials, automobiles, furniture, mechanical equipment, household appliances and other fields (Economic and Business Department of the People's Republic of China Embassy in Syria, 2017). From September 6 to 15, 2018, the 60th Damascus International Fair, the largest and oldest trade and industrial exhibition in the Middle East, was held. As many as 1,722 enterprises from 48 countries participated in the fair.



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad holds talks with Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Damascus, the capital of Syria on July 17, 2021. (CGTN, 2021)

Chinese and other entrepreneurs from all over the world saw important business opportunities in Syria (Wang & Zheng, 2018). China’s “developmental peace” is initiated by the Chinese government but is implemented by Chinese state-owned and private enterprises, a model of “the government setting the stage while the enterprises are acting”.

China also strengthens humanitarian assistance to implement its “developmental peace” proposal. On May 15, 2017, the Chinese Ambassador to Syria, Qi Qianjin and the Director of the Syrian Plan and the International Cooperation Agency signed, on behalf of the Chinese and Syrian governments, an economic and technical cooperation agreement on providing emergency assistance to Syria (for humanitarian purposes). China offered emergency food aid to Syria as well. On February 14, 2018, Ambassador Qi Qianjin and the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Syria inked an

agreement on the transfer of assistance on behalf of the Chinese government and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Per the agreement, on May 15, 2017, the Chinese government provided assistance to support the International Committee of the Red Cross in providing water, food, temporary shelter and medical services to displaced persons and returning refugees in Syria.

At present, the relevant assistance projects have been successfully implemented. On November 20, 2017, the Chinese Ambassador to Syria and Syrian representatives jointly attended the handover ceremony of China’s emergency food aid to Syria at the port of Latakia (The Economic and Commercial Office of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Syria, 2017). Humanitarian assistance is important in China’s “developmental peace” proposal in Syria.

On August 16, 2018, the Chinese Ambassador to Syria and the Director of the Syrian Plan and

the International Cooperation Agency signed two exchanges of letters on humanitarian assistance cooperation on behalf of the two governments, involving public transport, food, housing and other fields. On October 10, 2018, the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Chinese Embassy in Syria and the Deputy Minister of the Syrian Ministry of Electricity jointly attended the handover ceremony of China's assistance to Syria's power equipment project held in Syria and signed the handover certificates on behalf of the Chinese and Syrian governments (Sina News, 2018).

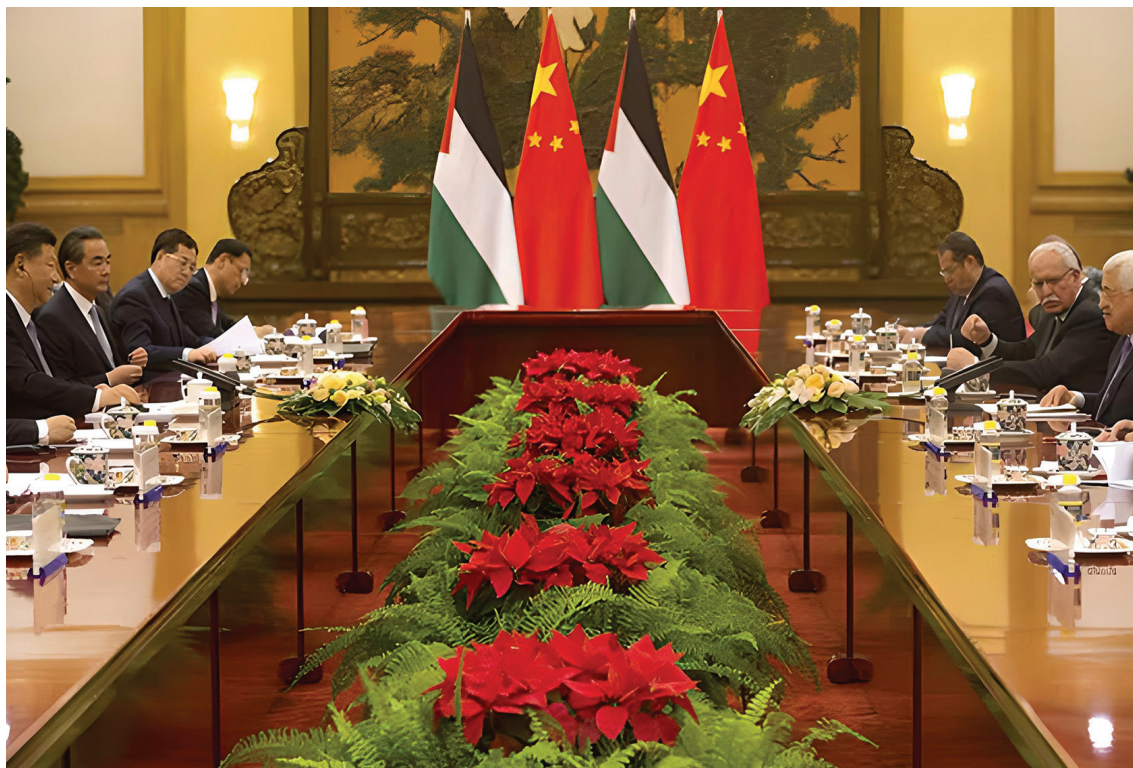
Chinese enterprises' economic engagement in Syria is also conducive to Syrian political reconciliation.

Economic and technological assistance is important to China's "developmental peace" proposal in Syria. In March 2020, the Chinese Ambassador to Syria, Feng Biao, and the Director of the Syrian Plan and the International Cooperation Agency, Imad Sabni, signed an Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation between China and Syria. Feng said that China attaches great importance to and actively promotes the development of China-Syria friendly relations. Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, China has actively provided humanitarian assistance to the Republic and carried out technical training for its personnel, which is a concrete manifestation of their friendship. China is willing to continue to provide assistance and support to Syria within its capabilities, actively participate in the reconstruction, and strive to promote the steady development of China-Syria friendly cooperation (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in

Syria, 2020).

China's "developmental peace" proposal is successful. It encourages Chinese enterprises to get involved because they can get economic benefits, and more importantly, these enterprises' economic engagement in Syria is also conducive to Syrian political reconciliation. In July 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited the Middle East, and Syria was his first stop. In Damascus, Wang summarized a "four-point proposal" for the Syrian issue: first, persisting in respecting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Second, letting the Syrian people decide their future and destiny. Third, adhering to the principle of putting people's livelihood first, accelerating reconstruction, and immediately lifting all unilateral sanctions and economic blockades against Syria. Fourth, persisting in effectively combating terrorism (Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, 2021). Among the "four-point proposal", the third point reflects China's "developmental peace" ideation.

In "Joint Statement of the Consultations of Deputy Foreign Ministers/Special Envoys of BRICS Countries on the Middle East and North Africa," May 2022, China and other BRICS members stressed that the key to solving the Syrian issue is to follow the "Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, UN-facilitated political process" steered by the UN Security Council, respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to support the role of the UN as the main channel of mediation. China and other developing countries emphasized the importance of prioritizing people's livelihoods and accelerating early recovery projects (Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, 2022). In implementing its "developmental peace" initiative, China proposes to "give priority to people's livelihoods and economic recovery".



Xi Jinping and Mahmoud Abbas exchanged views on the bilateral relationship and other issues of common concern on July 18, 2017. The two sides signed a range of agreements following the presidents' meeting. (CGTN, 2017)

China's "Developmental Peace" Proposal in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The Chinese government argues that the Palestinian issue is the most fundamental in the Middle Eastern conflict resolution; the "Two-State Solution" is the only realistic way to solve the issue. The parties concerned in the Palestinian question and the international community should make practical efforts to promote the "Two-State Solution" based on United Nations resolutions and the Arab peace initiative.

As for the solution to the Palestine-Israeli issue, China also suggests seeking common ground while reserving differences, enhancing political mutual trust and ultimately advancing the peace process

in the Middle East by proceeding from economic cooperation. In July 2017, President Xi Jinping met with Mahmoud Abbas, President of Palestine, during which President Xi put forward a "four-point proposal" on the solution to the Palestine-Israeli issue: efforts should be made to advance political settlement based on the "Two-State Solution" steadfastly and to restart peace talks as early as possible. Further attention must be paid to development to promote cooperation between Palestine and Israel. To China, both Palestine and Israel are important partners along the "Belt and Road". China stands ready to carry out mutually beneficial collaboration following the idea of developmental peace and continue to support Palestine's cause to accelerate its development. China proposed to launch a tripartite dialogue mechanism

with Palestine and Israel to advance major projects to assist the Palestinian side (People's Daily, 2017). Arguably the Chinese initiative of "developmental peace" puts forward new thoughts and ideas for solving the Palestine-Israeli conflicts.

To achieve "developmental peace", the Palestine authority should be empowered and consolidate its capacity building.

In 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had a new proposal for a solution to the issue. He raised the following three ideas: first, the Palestinian National Authority should be strengthened, and it should be empowered to exercise its sovereign functions in security, finance and other fields to achieve effective control over autonomy and the occupied territories. Second, the international community should support the Palestinian government to strengthen unity, achieve internal reconciliation through consultation and dialogue, and form a unified negotiating position on resolving the Palestinian issue. Third, Palestine and Israel should be encouraged to restart peace talks based on the "Two-State Solution" (Sohu, 2021). Judging by the "three-point proposal", it is apparent that a weak government of Palestine is not conducive to the peace process. To achieve "developmental peace", the Palestine authority should be empowered and consolidate its capacity building.

Palestinian refugees are the central consideration of China in implementing its "developmental peace" initiative. On January 13, 2021, Ambassador Feng Biao attended the handover ceremony of anti-COVID-19 materials provided by the Chinese Government to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near

East and signed the handover memorandum with the Agency's representative in Syria. Feng said that since the outbreak of the epidemic, China has provided many batches of medical materials to Palestinian refugees in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and other countries through the Agency and has also sent medical groups to Palestine to share China's anti-Covid-19 experience. Feng stressed that in the future, China was willing to strengthen cooperation with the Agency further and make greater contributions to improving the well-being of the Palestinian people (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Syria, 2021). After the outbreak of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in May 2021, China, as the rotating President of the Security Council, actively promoted the Security Council to issue a strong voice for cease-fire and cessation. China provided \$1 million in humanitarian assistance to Palestine and contributed \$1 million more to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

China nominated Ambassador Wang Shijie as the Middle East special envoy of China in 2002, the first one in China's Foreign Ministry. As one of its efforts for diplomatic mediation, on July 15, 2021, the Chinese government held an online seminar for Palestinian-Israeli peace talks. Representatives from the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the People's Struggle Front, the Israeli Minister of Justice and initiator of the "Geneva Initiative", and activists from both Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations attended the meeting. In his speech at the Seminar of Palestinian Israeli Peacekeepers, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi pointed out that the Palestinian humanitarian situation was worrying and seriously eroding the social foundation of peace.



Palestinian Health Minister Mai al-Kaila meets with the Chinese medical expert team in the West Bank city of Ramallah, on June 10, 2020. (Nobani, A./Xinhua, 2020)

China would continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestine and support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). China is not a member of the Middle East Quartet (the US, Russia, Europe Union and the United Nations). Thus, it prefers to play a role in humanitarian and economic assistance in its mediation endeavors.

On November 29, 2021, the United Nations held the commemoration conference of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. President Xi sent a congratulatory message to the conference, as the Chinese leader has done for the past ten consecutive years. President Xi pointed out that the international community should adhere to objectivity and impartiality, advocate inclusiveness and mutual understanding, and take the 30th anniversary of the Madrid Peace Conference as an opportunity to provide more help for the Palestinian and Israeli sides to restart

equal dialogue based on the “Two-State Solution”. In his congratulatory message, Xi appeals that the international community should continue to help the Palestinian people fight against COVID-19 and effectively improve the Palestinian economy, people’s livelihood and humanitarian conditions (The Office of the People’s Republic of China in the State of Palestine, 2021). That is a reflection of Beijing’s “developmental peace” as well.

China’s “developmental peace” initiative is welcomed by the special envoys of BRICS. In May 2022, China and other BRICS countries’ Middle Eastern special envoys issued a joint declaration encouraging Palestine and Israel to resume peace talks based on a negotiated “Two-State Solution”. These special envoys called on the international community to intensify its efforts in support of UN-led international peace conferences to achieve a comprehensive, lasting and just settlement that allows Israel and Palestine to live side by side in peace and

security (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

In the joint declaration, China, in particular, stressed "developmental peace" and underscored that efforts should be made to leverage respective strengths, actively promote peace talks, and help Palestine contain the COVID pandemic, develop its economy, ease its humanitarian situation and improve its people's welfare. China commended the extensive work carried out by UNRWA to alleviate the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people and called on the international community to provide developmental assistance to support UNRWA activities to enable it to increase its reach amongst the Palestinian community (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). From the text, we can find that in "developmental peace", capacity building is key to the peace process. The weak regime of Palestine, like that of Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Lebanon, may not be able to propel economic development, thus hindering political reconciliation as well.

On March 10, 2022, the Chinese Special Envoy for the Middle East, Zhai Jun, visited Palestine. President Abbas of Palestine met Zhai and his delegation at the Presidential Palace in Ramallah. The two sides exchanged views on bilateral relations, the Palestinian question and other international and regional hotspot issues (The Office of the People's Republic of China in the State of Palestine, 2022). The China-proposed "three-point" on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict centers on "developmental peace", with development and capacity building as the crux, was welcomed by the Palestinian counterpart.

China's "Developmental Peace" Proposal in Lebanon

Lebanon was stable and prosperous in the 1950s and 1960s, but the brutal civil war lasting from 1975 to 1990 caused a heavy loss of a quarter million. Since

then, Lebanese politics has been polarized, and society has been divided. Affected by sectarian discord, the Lebanese economy is almost at a standstill with high inflation, serious currency devaluation and soaring unemployment. From October 2019 to June 2021, food prices in Lebanon increased by 404% (The Geopolitics, 2021). Facing such a security and economic predicament, China does not launch political mediation among Lebanese political parties; instead, it seeks to play a positive role through "developmental peace".

As Chinese Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chen Weiqing wrote in an article titled "China's Commitment to its People Behind Remarkable Development," China's argument for "development and peace" at home is based on its contemporary development (Chen, 2021). As the theme of the times and the orientation of national policies have changed, China has experienced three stages in dealing with the relationship between development and security, namely, survival-oriented development (from the founding of the PRC to the dawn of the Reform and Opening-up), development-oriented security (from the Reform and Opening-up to the start of 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012), equal emphasis on development and security (since the 18th National Congress of the CPC), and promoting high-quality development (Zhong, 2022: 74). Before China's Reform and Opening-up was launched in 1979, China was politically divided and ideologically controversial at home. Deng Xiaoping's proposal for "economic development first" finally became the consensus of all factions. This has become the historical legacy for China to carry out its "developmental peace" proposal in less developed countries.

Economic cooperation and humanitarian assistance are China's tools to promote Lebanese peace. On the one hand, China is the major trading partner of Lebanon, and it accounts for 40% of Lebanon's imports, amounting to \$2 billion per year (The Geopolitics, 2021).



China's military donated to the Lebanese Army medical supplies needed in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. (Xinhua, 2020)

China has recently begun investing in the Republic's power grids and highways. Railways are an essential part of the country's infrastructure as well. China began operating railways linking Beirut with Tripoli in 2019. It was further linked to Damascus in Syria, which has created jobs and reduced unemployment. Promoted by "developmental peace", China can connect roads and railways to realize its BRI vision. Hariri's government showed signs of cooperation and FDI inflows in this region, with China being the best choice (The Geopolitics, 2021).

As a poverty-stricken regime, Lebanon is proactive in cooperating with China on the Belt and Road, expecting to achieve economic takeoff. In August 2022, China exported \$261 million and imported \$5.59 million from Lebanon, resulting in a positive trade balance of \$255 million. Between August 2021 and August 2022 the exports of China have increased

by \$123 million (89.6%) from \$137 million to \$261 million, while imports decreased by \$-1.76 million (-23.9%) from \$7.35 million to \$5.59 million (The OEC World, 2022). China's business activities are market-oriented but are encouraged by the Chinese government to expand its political influence.

On the other hand, China provides humanitarian assistance to Lebanon. In August 2020, Beirut was struck by a deadly chemical explosion that displaced approximately 300,000 inhabitants and killed over 150 civilians. The one-thousand Chinese UN peacekeepers quickly organized themselves and began rescue operations. China offered \$1 million in emergency aid as well. At the video conference on international assistance to Lebanon held on August 9, 2020, Zhai Jun, Special Envoy of the Chinese Government for the Middle East, announced that China would provide further assistance to Lebanon to support the

Republic in treating the injured people in the explosion, and provide assistance to families suffering huge losses or displacement (Guangming Net, 2020).

The Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music, funded by China, is a token of China's "developmental peace" as well. The conservatory began its construction in December 2020 and will take three years to finish. With an expected cost of \$62 milli-

China's "developmental peace" proposal, starting from improving people's well-being and the government's capacity, might provide a new trajectory for Lebanese political reconciliation.

on, the conservatory covers an area of 39,000 square meters with a capacity of 1,200 people. The conservatory, near Lebanon's capital Beirut, will be a center of attraction for the Middle East region, said Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati (Global Times, 2022).

In cooperation with other developing powers, China attempts to carry out its "developmental peace" initiative in Lebanon through a multilateral arena. In May 2022, China and other BRICS members echoed their support for Lebanon's efforts to safeguard stability, security, sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity, and the Lebanese people's rights to pursue a development path suited to their national conditions. The BRICS special envoys for Middle Eastern Affairs unanimously called upon the international community to continuously assist Lebanon without political conditions to help the Mediterranean Republic restore political, social and economic stability as soon as possible. They welcome the staff-level agreement signed between the Government of Lebanon and the IMF to take all necessary measures

and undertake long overdue economic reforms to address the severe economic challenges faced by the people of Lebanon (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). China's "developmental peace" proposal, starting from improving people's well-being and the government's capacity building, might provide a new trajectory for Lebanese political reconciliation.

Eastern Mediterranean and China's "Developmental Peace" Proposal in Prospect

As the only country in the world that has enshrined "adhering to the path of peaceful development" in its Constitution, China has never been actively involved in the Middle East war, occupied an inch of the Middle East, nor engaged in proxy wars. Up to now, China has solved the land border issue with 12 of its 14 neighboring countries by peaceful means (Wu & Zhang, 2022: 54). President Xi Jinping asked during his visit to Egypt in 2016: "The Middle East is a fertile land. We are saddened that so far there has been no escape from war and conflict. Where is the Middle East headed?" (Liu, 2022: 19). Chinese answer to the question is: "developmental peace" might be one of the solutions.

Since the Eastern Mediterranean is a conflict-prone region, it is a key area for the practice of "developmental peace". The rivalry between the US and Russia in Syria, the Cold War between Israel and Iran, the disputes between Palestine and Israel and the security deficit facing other transitional Arab countries in the region are all closely related to the "development deficit". In January 2016, "improving people's livelihood" was mentioned three times in China's Arab Policy Paper, which also promised that "China is willing to cooperate with Arab states to promote the new type of cooperation mechanism featuring openness and reciprocity, mutual benefit and win-win results.



Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, Culture Minister Mohammad Mortada and the Chinese ambassador to Lebanon Qian Minjian visit the construction site of the China-funded National Higher Conservatory of Music in Dbayeh near Beirut on October 6, 2022. (Xinhua, 2022)

According to Arab states' needs, China will continue to assist Arab states through bilateral and multilateral channels, to help them improve self-development capability and people's livelihood" (Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, 2016).

In terms of mechanism, China and the Eastern Mediterranean countries are strengthening their communication on governance, making "developmental peace" a common vision and ideation. The spirit of "developmental peace" can be seen in the "Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum" and various documents concerning the joint building of

the "Belt and Road" by China and Syria, Lebanon and Palestine.

First, to the best of its ability, the Chinese government provides development aid to unstable countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, which helps alleviate the tension in the region. The political factions in the countries are short of consensus in terms of national development paths, and their enduring economic and social problems also aggravate their upheaval and that of the region. China's developmental aid to these countries, which is conducive to alleviating regional conflicts, is a manifestation of "developmental peace".


Second, China actively participates in the capacity building of the governments in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Chinese idea of "developmental peace" insists that government laxity often leads to chaos and conflicts, and the enhancement of capacity building of the governments of middle and small countries contributes to their internal cohesion and stability. China's support to the capacity building of Eastern Mediterranean countries includes support to the capacity building. It includes the target countries' capacity for law enforcement, police training and stability maintenance.

Third, China offers humanitarian aid to Eastern Mediterranean countries. After the outbreak of the "Arab Spring", the traditional and new hotspot issues in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine remain more or less unsolved. After ten years of chaos, the situations are still full of uncertainties. The assistance that China provided to the conflicted countries under the frameworks of the UN, the Arab League and the African Union and through the platform of bilateral cooperation promoted peace and development in the region and helped to de-escalate the hotspot issues in the region.

Finally, efforts are needed to improve the idea of "developmental peace" in practice. In implementing the idea of "developmental peace", China will be more open and inclusive. Apart from China, other actors, such as the United States Agency for International Development, the Official Development Assistance of Japan, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Official Development Assistance of the European Union are also cooperative partners of China in fulfilling "developmental peace" in practice (Sun & Zhang, 2019: 128-129). Only when outside powers can complement and coordinate can peace and stability be realized in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Conclusion

China and the Eastern Mediterranean countries all belong to the developing world, sharing similarities in national conditions. Unlike developed countries, which tend to define security by external threats, the main task of developing countries is development, and their domestic socio-economic challenges are enormous. Therefore, the latter's security is defined by development (Zhong, 2013: 16). In the context that the idea of "democratic peace", driven by Western powers, has failed to achieve substantive headway, the idea of "developmental peace" is expected by Eastern Mediterranean countries. Based on its experience of reform and opening up, the China-proposed idea of "developmental peace" is a product of thinking over possible solutions to regional conflicts. Although this idea has not taken shape and remains to be tested and enhanced in practice, it at least functions as an alternative for transitional countries to restore peace. It is more inclusive, for it embraces plural values and competitive peace initiatives, arguing that each country can choose its political and economic institutions according to its national situation (He, 2017: 28).

The Eastern Mediterranean countries are confronted with "growing pains". The security and development problems in the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be solved immediately. The economic governance advocated by "developmental peace" and the West-led "democratic peace" are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Although underdevelopment is a major cause of the complex and accumulated security problem in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is never the sole one. Thus it is imperative for the international community, acting from the perspective of "taking comprehensive measures", to apply economic, political and military means to build a community of shared interests and a shared future in the region. 

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The Challenge of The Karaman Sea (Eastern Mediterranean) Through The Defense Expenditure Equation of Türkiye, Egypt And Greece



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ABSTRACT

Among the ten states with coasts on the Karaman Sea (Eastern Mediterranean), Türkiye's power, which can affect world trade with its unique geography, is from the Turkish Straits, Egypt's power is from the Suez Canal, and Greece's power is in the Islands Sea, which the waterways between them come from thousands of islands that can be broadly considered as straits. It is impossible for the ships using the waters of these three states not to perceive these sharp geopolitics. It is another fact that these three states could not sufficiently use this unique power due to the competition between them and even mortgaged it to imperialism. This article aims to understand the geopolitical power losses of these three states, which act with the equation of armament against each other.

Keywords: Defense expenditures, maritime geopolitics, Islands Sea, Karaman Sea, Türkiye-Greece-Egypt

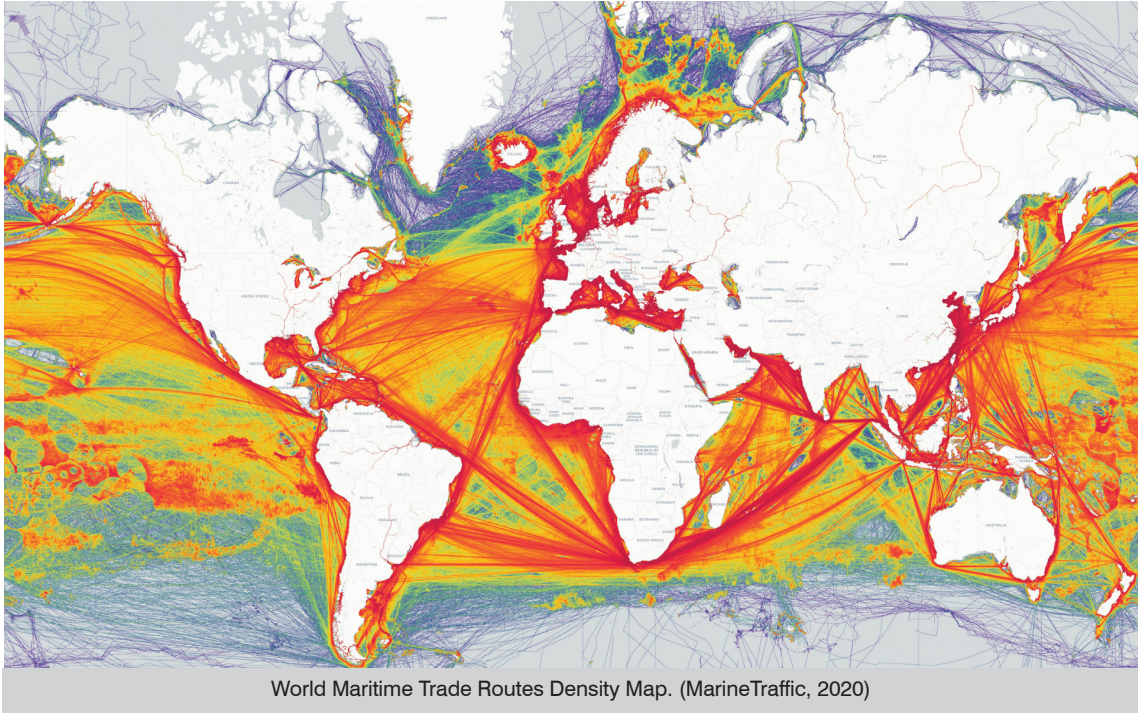
An Introduction to the Unique Geopolitics of the Islands Sea and the Karaman Sea

STATES ARE AS STRONG AS THEIR POWER at sea. History has never given land empires a chance in the struggle between land empires and sea empires. Therefore, the race for power takes place in the seas. The Islands Sea and the Karaman Sea, which constitutes the critical legs of this power race, are also a vital struggle area between Türkiye and Greece. Since it is not applicable in semi-enclosed seas, Greece, with its imposing attitude over the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), to which Türkiye is not a party, has now brought the tensions to an uncontrollable point. In this complicated process, Greece also put the European Union (EU) in a difficult position, which it forced to support itself. Türkiye, which lost its enthusiasm and interest in EU membership due to the losses caused by unlimited abuse, is a state that the EU

has difficulty managing in terms of its market size.

The volume of trade ships entering and leaving the Mediterranean waters through the Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal and the Turkish Straits is one-third of the world's maritime trade today. On the transit route of 30% of the world's oil transportation, the Mediterranean is also a basin where 31% of the world's tourism activities occur (Ruffie, Gros, & Turret, October 2018).

Due to the excessive demands of Greece and the Southern Cyprus Administration (GCA) in the Islands Sea and the Karaman Sea, located in the east of this critical maritime geography, wide areas of discussion have emerged in terms of maritime jurisdiction areas. In recent years, especially in the Karaman Sea, the struggle for attractive areas of interest over energy has begun, but it should not be forgotten that the wars in these seas were always fought for the dominance of trade routes. Beyond the heap



on world maritime trade, the Karaman Sea is a sea route where 35% of the European Union's (EU) natural gas requirement and 50% of its oil requirement are met (Tziarras, 2019). To summarize, this waterway, which is almost an artery for Europe, is a geography where Europe, which requires energy flow continuity, has to risk war if necessary.

The equitable sharing of the Islands Sea that resembles a ball of straits with a land surface of 23,000 square kilometers, which is the sum of thousands of islands, and a sea surface area of 214,000 square kilometers, has not yet been completed between Türkiye and Greece. With a situation similar to a spontaneous and unsigned "modus vivendi", that is, a temporary peace is maintained over six nautical miles of mutual territorial waters, which both sides are not satisfied with, even though it is not signed.

The Geopolitical Break in the Defense Industry in the Islands Sea and Karaman Sea Caused by the Unstoppable Rise of "Türkiye"

Instead of forcing its limits in the armament equation, a state's consent to the limitations set by the imperialists means it renounces its geopolitical power. Türkiye, which has attached itself to NATO, has experienced exactly this and has broken away from its geopolitical reality. In the recent period when Türkiye was trying to break away from NATO, as it produced domestic and national weapons by pushing its borders, it became independent and realized its real geopolitical power. If we put the subject on the table from an analytical point of view, Table 1, which takes a picture of Türkiye's arms imports and sales between 1950-2021, mirrors

the information that will make it easier for us to understand Türkiye's relationship with imperialism.

Between 1950 and 2000, Türkiye spent an average of 850 million TIVs of its national income annually to purchase weapons from abroad and could sell only 173 thousand TIVs annually in the same period. Türkiye, which had no weapons to sell, spent huge sums of money buying weapons from the imperialists. Several major factors forced Türkiye to purchase arms between the years 1950-2000: Soviet Russia, which was made hostile and provoked through the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO); Greece, which is armed and encouraged to pursue a re-expansionist policy

to maintain imperialist-controlled tensions over the Islands Sea, Karaman Sea and Cyprus; and the PKK and FETO terrorist organizations, which are kept alive with unimaginable secret or direct global support and used to wear down Türkiye. The West, led by the USA, set up a fertile environment for arms sales and left Türkiye no choice but to buy the older generation weapons of the imperialists at inflated prices until the 2000s.

When we examine Table 2, in the first 21 years of these 51 years, Türkiye was 80-85% dependent on the USA. In the next 30 years, despite efforts to diversify the states on which it was dependent on purchasing weapons, it could only reduce its dependence on the USA to the band of 42-70%.

Table 1. Türkiye's Weapons Imports-Exports and Rates Between 1950-1921

Period	Türkiye's Weapons Imports (Trend Indicator Value-TIV) ¹	Türkiye's Weapons Exports (Trend Indicator Value-TIV)	The Ratio of Türkiye's Weapons Exports Covering Weapons Imports
Between 1950-1970 (20 Years)	9.198 million (<i>Annual average: 460 million</i>)	0	%0
Between 1971-1990 (20 Years)	16.586 million (<i>Annual average: 829 million</i>)	34 million (<i>Annual average: 1,7 million</i>)	%0,2
Between 1991-2000 (10 Years)	17.560 million (<i>Annual average: 1.756 million</i>)	71 million (<i>Annual average: 7,1 million</i>)	%0,4
Between 2001-2010 (10 Years)	6.171 million (<i>Annual average: 617 million</i>)	522 million (<i>Annual average: 52,2 million</i>)	%8,5
Between 2011-2016 (5 Years)	5.365 million (<i>Annual average: 1.073 million</i>)	1.043 million (<i>Annual average: 210,6 million</i>)	%19
Between 2017-2019 (3 Years)	428 million (<i>Annual average: 143 million</i>)	169 million (<i>Annual average: 56,3 million</i>)	%38
Between 2020-2021 (2 Years)	365 million (<i>Annual average: 183 million</i>)	613 million (<i>Annual average: 306,5 million</i>)	%168

Source: Export Values, 2022.

It can be said that Türkiye, which moved away from Atatürk's philosophy of fighting against imperialism and was made to believe that it became westernized with NATO, was transformed into one of the world's leading arms buyers in the half-century between 1950-2000, without being able to sell weapons. Between 1991 and 2000, when the need to fight the Kardak Crisis and the PKK reached the highest level, Türkiye broke a record and reached an annual average of 1.756 billion TIVs in arms imports, and 66 percent of this import came from the USA. The remaining 34 percent is made from other Western states, primarily Germany. For imperialism, this was gratifying. Türkiye had been made dependent on Western weapons for 50 years; therefore - on its own initiative - Türkiye fell into geopolitical blindness. Since it could not realize its real geopolitical power, it started to perceive imperialist impositions as a necessity of its foreign policy.

After the US-backed failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, all state institutions, particularly the Turkish Armed Forces, began the process of clearing FETO quickly.

Nevertheless, between 2001 and 2010, a national upheaval in Türkiye affected the arms imports and sales. In the ten years from 2001 to 2010, when US imperialism first felt that Türkiye would take a hit over the arms market, Türkiye's imports fell sharply from \$1.756 billion to \$617 million annually (Table 1). The difference was met through the national defense industry instead of purchasing weapons from abroad. Additionally, Türkiye has gained a state identity that has started

to sell high-tech weapons by selling weapons abroad for 52.2 million TIVs annually. The USA wanted to intervene in this situation without delay. As a matter of fact, with the 2007-2008 Ergenekon, 2008-2009 Poyrazköy / Assassination of Admirals / Cage Action Plan, 2010-2011 Sledgehammer, 2012-2013 Espionage and Prostitution conspiracy cases, many officers who were determined to fight imperialism and worked hard to break Türkiye's dependence on the West for weapons were arrested in the Turkish Armed Forces.

The Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO), which greatly increased its effectiveness in the Turkish Armed Forces along with many state institutions in the five years between 2011 and 2016, increased the TAF's foreign arms purchases, which had fallen to 617 million TIVs annually, to 1.073 billion TIVs annually. They also pioneered the transfer of 61 percent of high defense spending to US arms companies. In this period, the national defense industry, which FETO slowed down, started to bear its first fruits by making an annual export of 210.6 million TIVs, thanks to the sales agreements of the previous period, despite the strong US-led impediments. While trying to regress the Turkish national defense industry using FETO's elements within the state, there was an unsuccessful coup attempt by the US-backed FETO on 15 July 2016, and then, all state institutions, particularly the Turkish Armed Forces, began the process of clearing FETO quickly.

In the 2017-2019 period, which is the first three years after the liquidation of FETO, Türkiye's average annual defense expenditure fell from \$1,073 million to \$143 million, a sharp decline compared to the 2011-2016 period controlled by FETO. On the other hand, because FETO, which controlled the previous period, undermined arms

Table 2. US Share in Türkiye's Arms Purchases Between 1950-1921

Period	US Share in Türkiye's Arms Purchases
Between 1950-1960	%85
Between 1961-1970	%80
Between 1971-1980	%70
Between 1981-1990	%42
Between 1991-2000	%66
Between 2001-2010	%21
Between 2011-2016*	%61
2017	%35
2018	%25
2019	%17
2020	%16
2021	%9

Source: Export Values, 2022.

sales agreements, arms sales abroad decreased from an annual average of 210.6 million TIVs to an annual average of 56.3 million TIVs in the 2017-2019 period. Nevertheless, we should say that during the 2017-2019 period, which was the period of overcoming the trauma of FETO, defense expenditures were made using domestic rather than foreign resources. From 2017 through 2019, the share of the USA in defense imports decreased to 35% in 2017, 25% in 2018 and 17% in 2019 (Table 2).

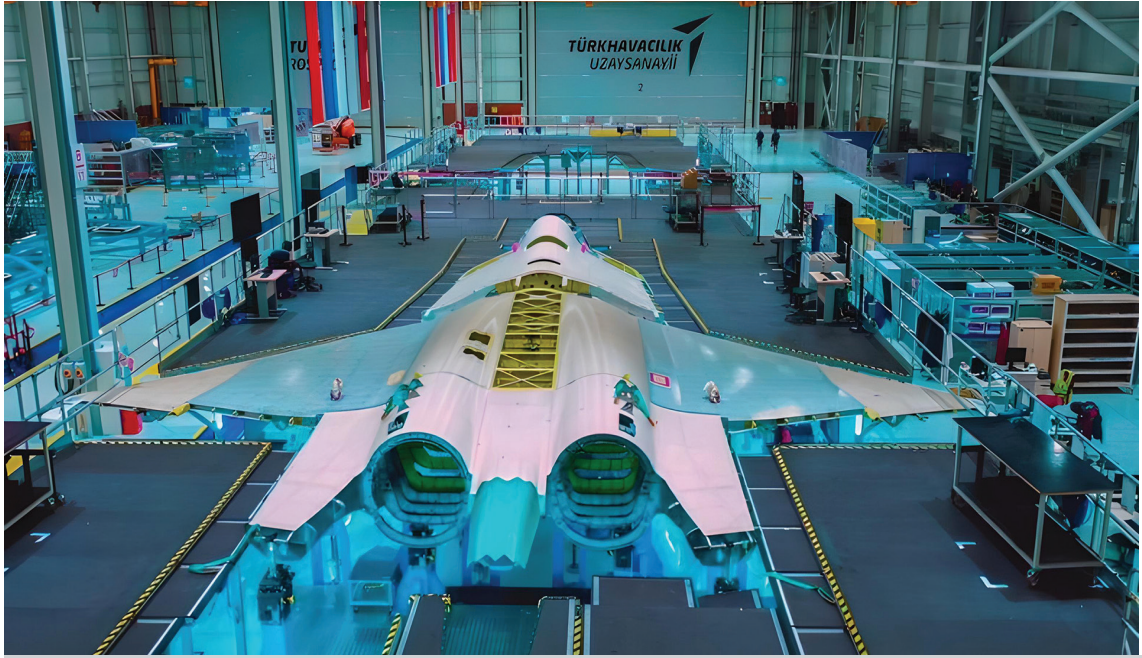
In the period between 2020-2021, when the trauma of FETO was overcome, a first in Türkiye's history was experienced. In these two years, annual defense imports averaged 183 million TIVs, while

annual defense exports climbed to an annual average of 306.5 million TIVs. To summarize, for the first time, export exceeded imports. Moreover, the overshoot rate was 68%. In 2020 and 2021, a large part of the defense needs of the TAF was met by the national defense industry, and the financing of a small part that could not be met was easily made through foreign sales². Preliminary performance evaluations for 2022 show that the Turkish defense industry is in a much brighter year than 2020 to 2021.

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, the share of the USA in Türkiye's arms imports, which has decreased to a very low level of 183 million TIVs annually in the last two years, fell to 16% in 2020 and 9% in 2021³. It has gone down to a low level, which is unbelievable for the USA. To make an analogy, "The bird escaped from the cage and came back as an eagle." Alternatively, as a more accurate analogy, "The USA could not prevent the bird in its cage from escaping, and this bird began to fly high as an eagle." This phenomenon, which seems irreversible, is one of the important signs that Türkiye intends to break the submissive ties that it has established with the West in the past and that it wants to approach Asia to integrate without compromising its geopolitical freedom.

F-16 Block 70 and modernization kits, which are the last arms sales that the Turkish Armed Forces can make to Türkiye through the field of "fighter aircraft", where progress is relatively slow compared to other fields, is the last trump card that the USA can use to control Türkiye through the defense industry. The USA, after using this trump card, calculates that Türkiye's war power will be destroyed by a war that may arise from the tensions over the Islands Sea and Karaman Sea, and thus it will be made dependent on itself as in the old days.

*The Peak Period of FETÖ Control in Turkish Armed Forces



The prototype of the Turkish Fighter developed by TAI was shared for the first time on 23 November 2022. Turkish Fighter is planned to leave the hangar next year. (Turkish Defence News, 2022)

At this point, in a parenthesis, we should say that with the two seismic surveys and four drilling vessels that the Turkish Petroleum Corporation added to its inventory between 2012 and 2022, Türkiye has broken its dependence on imperialism in energy exploration and extraction capabilities, just like in the defense industry.

Having recovered from its dependence on U.S. weapons, Türkiye has also begun to embrace its geopolitical power in the defense of the “Blue Homeland”⁴. Acting in accordance with this purpose, Türkiye has made great progress in the critical “Turkish Fighter (TF) Project”, which it plans to start mass production as of 2030.⁵ The engines to be used in the prototypes of the TF were quickly presented to the Turkish defense

industry by the USA and the UK. This initiative can be perceived as the sabotage of the Turkish defense industry, which has made a leap. Turkish national capabilities should be challenged for 100 percent locality in national fighter jet mass production; For advanced fighter jet requirements expected to be felt by the 2030s, Russian and Chinese options should be considered as a priority. In fact, in order to facilitate the development of fast-growing Turkish national defense industry, the issue of whether to buy F-16/F-35 or aircraft engines from the United States, which has declared Türkiye an enemy with CAATSA⁶ sanctions, should be carefully considered. Türkiye’s option of a trade retaliation that “prohibits the purchase of military equipment from the United States” is an issue worth discussing.

Turkish-Greek Relations in the Islands Sea and the Karaman Sea That Cannot Establish Their Balance

Historical Foundations of Turkish-Greek Relations

Shortly after the Turks dominated Anatolia, the Catholic world, which conquered and settled the Sea of Islands and Karaman, prospered between the 11th and 14th centuries by plundering the coasts where Muslim Turks and Orthodox Greeks lived together. The Greeks, who could not resist Catholic plunder because they were quite regressive in seafaring, came under the protection of the Turks, who responded to Catholic plunder by becoming sailors, who became stronger as they became sailors, and who drove Catholics from the "Blue Homeland" to the Western Mediterranean at the cost of hundreds of thousands of martyrs.

The Greeks, who were Ottoman nationals from the 14th century onwards, used the Turks as a defensive wall against the predatory West until the beginning of the 19th century.

The Greeks, who were Ottoman nationals from the 14th century onwards, used the Turks as a defensive wall against the predatory West until the beginning of the 19th century. This great mistake of the Ottoman State, which did not go out to the oceans and closed itself to the Mediterranean and Red Sea basins, resulted in the confrontation of imperialism and its buffers, which carried the power they gained from the oceans to the Mediterranean, with the attacks of the Turkish "Blue Homeland" since the 18th century.

After the Napoleonic attacks on Egypt, the

Ottoman Empire abolished the maritime trade privileges it had granted to France and gave the privilege of maritime trade in Ottoman waters to the Greeks. Thanks to this last-minute privilege granted by the Ottoman Empire, the Greeks quickly became sailors instead of defending the Turkish "Blue Homeland" against imperialism together with the Turks. Since their rebellion in 1821, they have turned into a hybrid state supported by imperialism and have begun to seize the Turkish "Blue Homeland" piece by piece through massacres and wars. Tens of thousands of Istanbul and Izmir boatmen, who could not remain insensitive to the massacres of Turks and Jews in Tripoli⁷, the entire Peloponnese and the Sea of Islands in 1821 and 1822, had enlisted themselves as galleonists⁸ in the Ottoman Navy, which was trying to suppress the Greek rebellion.

With a resolution taken by the Greek Parliament on 24 February 1994, the Greeks declared 19 May 1919 as the (so-called) "Pontic Genocide Remembrance Day" with the claim that "the Pontic Greeks living on the Black Sea coast during the First World War and the War of Independence were subjected to systematic genocide by the Ottoman Turks". It is time to confront the Greeks, who formalized this baseless claim to distort history with real history. Türkiye should erect a huge "Commemoration Monument of the Turks Massacred by the Greeks" on one of the "Islands, Islets and Rocks Whose Sovereignty Has Not Been Transferred by Treaties" (EGEAYDAAK) with a ceremony on 6 April and organize commemorative events in front of this monument on 6 April every year.

The Ottoman State, which had to accept the independence of Greece in 1830, tried to gain time with variable balance policies through the conflicts of interest of the imperialists among themselves.



The US's military presence in Greece. (BRIQ, 2022)

The Ottoman State, which was lost in the balance games, could not prepare a qualified naval force due to foreign dependence and a debt spiral. It was eroded between Tsarist Russia and Greece, the buffers of imperialism, and first reduced to the status of a semi-colony. At the end of World War I, it lost its entire "Blue Homeland", including the Turkish Straits.

After the War of Independence was won on land, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM), which went to Lausanne without a navy⁹, was forced to leave most of the Boğazönü Islands and Saruhan Islands, which were on the Blue Homeland and were subject to Greek occupation, on the condition that they would be demilitarized in the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty. In addition, the Italian-occupied Menteşe Islands in Lausanne were left to the Italians. Italy, one of the losers of World War II, signed the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 and left the Menteşe Islands to Greece instead of Türkiye – on the condition of demilitarization – in violation of the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923. While Türkiye should be the aggrieved party due to the loss of the vast majority of the Aegean Islands with the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923, on the contrary, Greece adopted an attitude that did not

recognize Lausanne against Türkiye.

Türkiye accepted the "real" situation in Lausanne and pursued a policy based on "good neighborliness", but Greece, despite its unjust and extreme gains even in Lausanne, has not given up on its "expansionist ideals" (Megali Idea). Greece, which has been displaying piecemeal behavior since 1936¹⁰ to recognize the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923, a peace treaty that determines the conditions that ended the Turkish-Greek War, openly challenges Türkiye with this attitude.¹¹ Türkiye, on the other hand, despite having lost land, is in favor of preserving the Lausanne balance and sharing the seas peacefully and fairly within the framework of this balance.

The first wave, in which Greece unilaterally increased its territorial waters from 3 nautical miles to 6 nautical miles in 1936, has now turned into a tsunami threatening the entire Turkish "Blue Homeland". Türkiye, which does not want to be under this tsunami, is kept under control with artificial imperial tensions that smell of the "Megali Idea" and inconclusive diplomatic struggles that have been going on for years in vain. When we look at the examples in human history, it is impossible to avoid wars that come to the door at stages when diplomacy cannot give results. To put it in its most succinct form, the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, which was based on "3 nautical miles of territorial waters", "the demilitarization of the Boğazönü, Saruhan and Menteşe Islands", and "the acceptance of the belonging of formations with a very small surface area that are not handed over by name" to Türkiye, is the brake on a possible Turkish-Greek war. It is understood that Greece, which has exhausted all its diplomatic opportunities to erode these main factors that are the conditions of Lausanne's peace, is not yet aware that happy peace days can end by attacking the Turkish "Blue Homeland" for 201 years, ignoring Lausanne for 86 years and challenging Türkiye militarily for 67 years.

The main reason underlying this lack of vision in Greece stems from the belief that Türkiye's "defensive" stance, which it had taken up until 2005 due to the fear of not being able to cope with imperialism, continues. Indeed, Türkiye, which did not gain power at sea until 1952, had to act with a defense strategy based on its coasts. From its entry into NATO in 1952 until the early 2000s, it accepted being an ideal and easy-to-control proxy of US imperialism. Starting from the beginning of the 21st century, Türkiye, which started to develop its domestic and national defense industry by jumping over the resistance mechanisms of US imperialism, let down its guard for a short time with the dream of becoming an EU member until 2004. However, after 2005 it started to focus on an independent defense industry infrastructure again, realizing that the EU deceived it.

According to "Global Fire Power", which presents a comparison model of the armed forces in the world using more than 50 parameters, the Turkish Armed Forces are 2.3 times stronger than the Greek Armed Forces.

Greece, which has started to see Türkiye as an effective power in Libya in recent years¹² and has almost zeroed its dependence on the West in defense expenditures, has realized that it cannot solve the crisis alone. With the thought that the USA and EU¹³ will not allow a stronger Turkish presence in the Karaman Sea, Greece's behavior against Lausanne and illegal sea area demands continue in line with the suggestions of the West. Greece is a state stuck between the imperialist interests of the USA and the EU, the ambition of the "Megali Idea"¹⁴ that it cannot give up, and the Turkish defense capabilities that have become independent.

Aside from finding a solution, Greece's capacity to cope with this trauma is an issue worth examining realistically and impartially if the 67-year tense period, in which the problems deepened, turns into war.

Greece's Capacity to Face Military Tensions That Might Evolve and Turn into a War

Territorial waters, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), strict demilitarization issues in some islands, and Cyprus issues in the Islands Sea and Karaman Sea, which is the subject of many academic studies, are the main tension issues. At this point, it would be useful to evaluate the capacity of Greece to face a Turkish-Greek War, which may be caused by increasing these tensions, by making comparisons.

According to "Global Fire Power", which presents a comparison model of the armed forces in the world using more than 50 parameters, in 2022, the Turkish Armed Forces are 2.3 times stronger than the Greek Armed Forces (Comparison of Greece and Türkiye Military Strengths, 2022). If qualitative scoring such as the level of operational readiness training could be made, it would be possible to see that the superiority of the Turkish Armed Forces over the Greek Armed Forces reached up to 5 times.

When we examine the arms purchases made by Türkiye and Greece from abroad in the last five years, although Türkiye meets most of its defense needs from domestic production, according to Greece, which does not have a defense industry, it spent 4.75 times (approximately five times) more than abroad. Türkiye, which has reduced its purchase of weapons from the USA, has brought Italy, Spain and Russia to the fore in the list of countries from which it purchases weapons and defense materials. Greece continued its dependence on the USA and France to purchase weapons and defense materials.

Table 3. Turkish-Greek Weapons Purchases and Sales for the 2017-2021 Period

Purchase/ Sale	Greece	Türkiye	Rate of Türkiye/ Greece
Purchase	429 million TIVs	2.040 million TIVs	4,75 times
Received Weapon/ Material Category	291 million TIVs <u>War Plane</u> (%68)	1.133 million TIVs <u>War Plane</u> (%56)	3,9 times
	34 million TIVs <u>Guided Missile</u> (%8)	386 million TIVs <u>Guided Missile</u> (%19)	11,35 times
	15 million TIVs <u>Machine</u> (%3)	227 million TIVs <u>Machine</u> (%11)	15,13 times
	<u>Air Defense System</u> (%0),	130 million TIVs <u>Air Defense System</u> (%6),	-
	30 million TIVs <u>Sensor</u> (%4)	82 million TIVs <u>Sensor</u> (%4)	2,73 times
	50 million TIVs <u>Battle Ship</u> (%12)	<u>Battled Ship</u> (%0)	-
	5 million TIVs <u>Armored Vehicle</u> (%1)	22 million TIVs <u>Armored Vehicle</u> (%1)	4,4 times
	3 million TIVs <u>Naval Weapons</u> (%1)	62 million TIVs <u>Naval Weapons</u> (%3)	20,7 times
	States of Purchase	%40 France, %37 USA, %12 England.	%30 Italy, %22 USA, %21 Spain, %17 Russia.
Sale	30 million TIVs	1.252 million TIVs	41,73 times

Source: Export Values, 2022.

The fact that warplanes are the largest purchases of defense materials by both Türkiye and Greece shows that warplanes are the most sensitive and deficient area of defense of both states. The fact that so many current examinations of the F-16, Rafale and F-35 aircraft are so intense these days is mainly due to this sensitivity.

When we look at Table 3 regarding Turkish and Greek armament performance, Greece does not have the potential to enter an arms race with Türkiye. This is because almost all categorical ratios on armament seem to be between 2.73 and 41.73 times in favor of Türkiye. To continue the tension policies of Greece, which cannot give up on its ideals, it is to seek the help of imperialism to be even more buffered and hybridized.¹⁵ Naturally, such a quest

also puts the exploitation mechanisms in Greece into action – ruthlessly. Greece has had difficulty finding a budget for defense expenditures in the last five years. The increase in the Turkish-Greek tension, even turning it into a war, forced the Greek people to purchase more American and French weapons. The imperialist pressures of the USA and France, which target Greece rather than Türkiye, will cause the Greek people to pay more taxes for their defense expenditures for the next five years.

Possible Effects of USA and Israel on Turkish-Greek Tension

At the peak of imperialism, the USA was based in Alexandroupoli, thinking that Türkiye might want to seize Western Thrace due to the settled

Turkish population in a possible Turkish-Greek War. It also adopted a radical base policy under the guise of reinforcement of the weak Greek Armed Forces. However, when the world is moving towards multipolarity, it is highly unlikely that the USA, which does not want to wear out its armed forces, will be directly involved in a Turkish-Greek War. Instead, the United States, Britain and France plan to establish a high-level military presence in Cypriot waters, forcing Türkiye to shift some of its power to Greece in the Karaman Sea is an option with a higher probability.

In these games played through the sale of weapons, apart from the USA, the world's leading arms dealer, France, also plays the leading role.

By adjusting its presence in the Karaman Sea to the level of tension, the United States can continue to control maritime trade routes through the "surprise effect", which is the most important weapon of war.

On the other hand, the escalation of the tensions between Türkiye and Greece are the facts that will trigger the arms needs of both Greece and Türkiye. The USA offered to Greece, which has economic difficulties, to sell 4 Multi-Purpose Surface Warships (MMSC), a modernization package for Hydra (MEKO-200 HN) class frigates¹⁶ and 20 F-35 fighter jets. It also offered to sell 40 F-16 Block 70 and 79 F-16 Block 40/50 modernization kits to Türkiye at the same time (M5 Dergi, 2022) (SavunmaSanayiST, 2022). Imperialism always benefits from tensions, so it is necessary to look for imperialism in the background of all tensions.

Possible Effects of France on Turkish-Greek Tension

Recently, in parallel with the discovery of new energy sources in the Karaman Sea, economic-based cooperation models of some countries in the region have been tried to be developed. For these economic-based cooperation models to be functional, they must have a strong image and even present a strong image with military demonstrations attended by many states. In this atmosphere, some weak military demonstrations, contributed by the USA, some EU countries, Israel and Egypt, which feared the Turkish geopolitical dominance in the Karaman Sea, became an annual routine. On the other hand, while these weak military exercises could not create a serious psychological impact on public opinion in Türkiye, which was declared a rival, it gave morale to the Greek and Greek Cypriot public. With this motivation, Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration, determined to maintain tensions over geopolitics and geoenergy, act with the motive of armament by forcing their conditions. In these games played through the sale of weapons, apart from the USA, the world's leading arms dealer, France, also plays the leading role.

France is more present in the Karaman Sea than before, with the belief that the USA has relatively withdrawn from the Mediterranean, thus creating a great power vacuum to be filled. The effort underlying the demonstration-based French military effort aims to establish a French hegemony under the name of "Pax Mediterranea" in this geography. However, this ambitious effort by France has not yielded any results so far (Jabbour, 2021).

The last demonstration, which was held to keep the Turkish-Greek tensions fresh through the Greek public, triggering the arms sales, was held between 24 September and 1 October 2022, in the form of a Greek-French bilateral exercise under the name ARGO-22 (Athens News Agency, 2022), located in the north of the Islands Sea. It was exhibited in a small area between the islands of Bozbaba and İskiri.

The ARGO-22 Dual Exercise¹⁷, resembling tactical training rather than an exercise in its most minimal and most economical way (Özsaraç, Doğu Akdeniz'de Savaş Senaryoları, 2022), has achieved its purpose by causing a holiday joy in the Greek public and convinced the Greek citizens to pay high taxes for 24 Rafale fighter jets and 3 (+1 optional) prototypes FDI the Belharra type frigates that France wants to sell to Greece.

Competing with Türkiye's geopolitical power, extending to North Africa, even to the sub-Saharan SAHEL, and believing that it can balance it with its economic power, this time France, intends to use the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum as a carrot that can be extended to Türkiye because the carrot for entry into the European Union is not as effective as before.¹⁸ In addition, France is acting cautiously as it thinks that Türkiye will be the most important market for natural gas in the Karaman Sea (Segantini, 2022).

As can be understood from the roles it wants to give Türkiye such as "balancing Russia and China in the Central Asian Turkic world", "assuming the security of the Black Sea", "supporting the stabilization of Libya", and "providing humanitarian aid to Syria", France is approaching Türkiye with an imperialist mentality that might bite (Segantini, 2022). From the current policies of France, it is understood that Türkiye, which has successfully made its defense industry independent, cannot adequately perceive (or ignore) its new defense capabilities, act with the thought that

this power fluctuation in the east of the Mediterranean is temporary, and underestimate the power of the Turkish Armed Forces with arrogance. However, compared to the French Army, the fourth strongest armed force in the world, the Turkish Armed Forces is only 34.57% underpowered in quantity. Moreover, Türkiye is completely independent of France in terms of defense materials, as it does not use the weapons of the French, who are among the leading arms dealers in the world. To summarize, France does not have an armed force that can crush Türkiye.

Possible Effects of Egypt on Turkish-Greek Tension

The former president of Egypt, Mohammed Morsi, abolished the natural gas delivery agreement between Egypt and Israel in April 2012 and annulled the EEZ agreement signed with the Greek Cypriot Administration in 2003 in March 2013. The choice of the Morsi administration was to establish the Levant Cooperation, of which Türkiye would be a part. However, General Sisi, who came to power with the coup, re-enforced the previous agreements. It should be considered that Egypt does not have a clear Karaman Sea policy and has become fragile with power changes. We should also note that with the onset of the General Sisi period, Egypt entered into a formidable armament effort.

To summarize, Egypt is a silent giant in the Karaman Sea, which does not show its teeth for now, but cannot resist the wishes of the West today. The Turkish Armed Forces are quantitatively weaker than the Egyptian Armed Forces by 4.7% (Global Firepower, 2022). The main reason that Egypt, which does not have a national defense industry, has the strongest armed forces in the Karaman Sea is because of the excessive purchase of weapons since 2015. As seen in Table 4, this excess is four

Table 4. Turkish-Egyptian Arms Purchases and Sales for the 2015-2021 Period

Purchase/ Sale	Egypt	Türkiye	Rate of Türkiye/ Egypt
Purchase	10.915 million TIVs	2.807 million TIVs	0,26 times
Received Weapon/ Material Category	4.758 million TIVs <u>War Plane</u> (%44)	1.695 million TIVs <u>War Plane</u> (%56)	0,36 times
	1.045 million TIVs <u>Guided Missile</u> (%10)	454 million TIVs <u>Guided Missile</u> (%16)	0,43 times
	95 million TIVs <u>Machine</u> (%1)	260 million TIVs <u>Machine</u> (%9)	2,74 times
	230 million TIVs <u>Air Defense System</u> (%2),	130 million TIVs <u>Air Defense System</u> (%5),	0,57 times
	196 million TIVs <u>Sensor</u> (%2)	82 million TIVs <u>Sensor</u> (%4)	2,73 times
	3.677 million TIVs <u>Battle Ship</u> (%34)	<u>Battle Ship</u> (%0)	-
	851 million TIVs <u>Armored Vehicle</u> (%8)	52 million TIVs <u>Armored Vehicle</u> (%2)	0,06 times
	14 million TIVs <u>Naval Weapons</u> (%0,1)	64 million TIVs <u>Naval Weapons</u> (%2)	4,6 times
	50 million TIVs <u>Satellite Systems</u> (%0,5)	<u>Satellite Systems</u> (%0)	-
	Received Weapon/ Material Category	%31 Russia, %30 France, %12 USA, %11 Italy, %10 Germany	%33 USA, %28 Italy, %18 Spain, %12 Russia.
Sale	23 million TIVs	1.741 million TIVs	75,7 times

Source: Export Values, 2022.

times that of Türkiye. It is understood that the aim of these astronomical military expenditures of Egypt, which used most of it for the navy and air force, was to balance Türkiye in the Karaman Sea. Egypt has started to make its impact felt in the region with the defense expenditures it has made for the last seven years and has not slowed down.

Egypt, which has participated in many exercises with Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA) in recent years, is a powerful state that should be considered in a possible Turkish-Greek War. In addition, it should not be forgotten that in the event of such a war, even if Greece does not participate in the war on its side, if the Suez Canal

is closed to Turkish merchant ships, it may have a dangerous effect against Türkiye. This geopolitical power is not to be taken lightly.

Both Türkiye and Egypt have to extend a hand of friendship to each other. It is especially worth noting that Egypt needs Turkish friendship because Egypt's dependence on the West in defense evokes Türkiye's situation in the 1990s. Egypt, located on one of the busiest waterways in the world, will want to meet its defense needs with domestic and national resources, as Türkiye did, as soon as it realizes that being connected to the West is a weakness. The day Egypt decides to seek its interests in Asia instead of the West, Türkiye will be a model country.

Non-Combat Options

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

It is not only Türkiye and Greece that have maritime jurisdiction disputes worldwide. About 180 of 420 disputes have been brought to the International Court of Justice in the Hague. It should be accepted that it is an ideal solution for Türkiye and Greece to bring all their disputes to the International Court of Justice in the Hague. However, based on the previous decisions of the Court of Justice, Greece, which understands that the court will most likely make decisions in favor of Türkiye, does not want to take the disputes to the Hague. Waiting patiently for a period when the conjuncture will change in its favor legally, Greece is making efforts to postpone the option of the International Court of Justice as much as possible without neglecting to take measures per the existing case law. It would be incompatible with realism to think that Greece could abandon this asymmetrical behavior that avoids the application of international law.

Although the exclusive economic area in the Islands Sea is shown as 89,000 square kilometers in the current "Blue Homeland" maps, the fair situation for Türkiye is that an economic area equal to half of the sea and land total is requested from the International Court of Justice. If Greece continues to resist going to the International Court of Justice, Türkiye should begin to unilaterally and boldly implement the requirements of its interests. In other words, Türkiye must abandon its policy of silence to a situation similar to the current "modus vivendi". Adopt the option of unilaterally declaring an exclusive economic zone based on the westward extension of the midline to include a marine area of 118,500 square kilometers (half of the combined sea area and land area – about 55% of the sea) in the Islands Sea.

1988 Athens Consensus

Greece always chooses the winter months to escalate tensions because tourism, which intensifies in the summer months, is vital for the country's economy. Türkiye and Greece, with the Athens Agreement, signed on 27 May 1988, guaranteed each other not to conduct military exercises in the Islands (Aegean) Sea between 1 July and 1 September. On 1 July 2006, this period was extended to cover the period from 15 June to 15 September. Türkiye has made a great contribution to Greek tourism by following this moratorium so far. However, it is illogical to prioritize Greek tourism revenue when so many problems have been waiting for a solution for 67 years. It is clear that it will be in favor of Türkiye to cancel this moratorium rather than pause military activities during the summer months and to carry the tensions experienced in the winter in the Islands Sea to the summer months.

1936 Montreux Straits Convention

The term of the Montreux Straits Convention, a 20-year contract, expired on 9 November 1956. However, since none of the signatory states took a step towards annulment of the convention, it has remained valid until today. To 17% of all merchant ships in the world as DWT, Greeks, who own 30.25% of crude oil and petroleum products tankers, benefit from the special transit regime provided for merchant ships by the 1936 Montreux Convention. To summarize, the state that uses the Turkish Straits and the Sea of Marmara most, which is a Turkish inland sea, is Greece. For example, Greek-owned tankers carry most of the oil transported through the Turkish Straits. At least 49% of the oil that Greece uses in its own country has come through the Turkish Straits for the last 20 years. This rate was 91% in 2020 (IEA, 2022). To create a solution to Turkish-Greek tensions that favors Türkiye, the geopolitical power of the Turkish Straits, which has contributed to the prosperity of Greece for decades, should be activated. It is the right time to open the 1936 Montreux Convention for discussion.

Conclusion

Tensions in the Islands and Karaman Sea that are evolving into war have not been resolved through diplomacy to date. The easiest way to solve all the problems under discussion is for Türkiye and Greece to go to the International Court of Justice by mutual agreement and respect the court's decision. If Greece, which has blocked this road until now, continues to flee from the International Court of Justice, Türkiye must operate unilateral decision mechanisms, considering war.

When considering the Islands Sea, the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty is a very strong text in international law, which cannot be violated unilaterally by both states. The clauses of peace treaties do not become obsolete until a new war. The only way to change, other than war, is by mutual consent. Atatürk's Türkiye, which wanted to get rid of the restrictions of Lausanne regarding the Turkish Straits, solved this problem with the conference held in Montreux in 1936 and convinced all the signatory states of Lausanne, including Greece, to a new convention. There is only one peaceful option for Greece, which wants to get rid of the provisions of Lausanne's "3 nautical miles territorial waters", "demilitarization of islands far from the Greek mainland but very close to the Turkish mainland", and "return to Türkiye of formations whose sovereignty has not been transferred to Greece" to request "a conference". Any situation to the contrary means risking a war.

Therefore, after Greece was suggested to apply for a conference to the signatory states of the Treaty of Lausanne for its demands beyond Lausanne, with full consideration of the balance of Lausanne, a law should be outlined which:

- Does not recognize the territorial waters and airspace of Greece greater than 3 nautical miles
- Protects the Islands, Islets and Rocks (EGEAYDAAK) whose sovereignty has not been transferred by treaties, by name and practices,
- Takes into account the imbalances caused by the


large number of islands in the Islands Sea, together with 3 miles of territorial waters, unilaterally declaring and implementing the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) so that at least 55% of the entire remaining sea area belongs to Türkiye. This should be discussed in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and, if necessary, submitted to a public vote.

For the Karaman Sea, the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye should discuss a law that provides a conference invitation to the 10 riparian states, ignoring the demands of Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration in case of failure of the conference solution, and declaring and applying the borders of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Karaman Sea. If necessary, it should be submitted to a public vote.

In this process, with the cancellation of the 1988 Athens Agreement and the 1936 Montreux Convention, the issues of whether to continue the voluntary contributions made through the Turkish geography to the tourism and maritime trade areas, which are the most important income items of Greece, should be opened to a comprehensive discussion by the public.

Thanks to the development of its national defense industry, Turkish dependence on weapons from the imperialist states trying to interfere with our geopolitical power in the Karaman Sea has largely disappeared. This momentum should not be missed, and a trade embargo should be applied to Western weapons, including purchases of warplanes and engines. Mandatory weapons requirements must be met through Asian options such as Russia, China, and Iran.¹⁹

Asia's coping with imperialist pressures depends on Asian control of interconnected maritime trade routes, starting from the Kerch Strait in the Black Sea, through the Turkish Straits, the Suez Canal, the Babülmandep Strait, the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and the Bering Strait. For this purpose, a new defense structure should be considered based on the

control of these trade routes from the sea by the Asian states, which are not the buffer of the West. Of course, for a defense structure that will protect Asia from the seas against imperialism, Türkiye, Russia, China, Iran, and even Egypt must show their will together if they can break away from the West. It is possible for Asia to get rid of imperialism by giving a breath to the sea trade routes around it. The maritimization of Asia in cooperation and its giantization in the oceans should be prioritized. Otherwise, Western imperialism, which can directly or indirectly use its power in the seas, including the Karaman Sea, will not end its attempts to shape Asian maps with soft or hard power instruments through its theories of reshaping the world. 

Notes

1. TIV (Trend Indicator Value); Developed by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute for the purpose of comparing military capacity rather than financial value, under the name of "trend indicator value". It is a standard international valuation unit applied in the analysis of arms sales.
2. Zachary Paikin and Caroline Rose believe that Türkiye, the third most arms importing state in the world in the 1990s, has succeeded in being 14th in world arms exports today despite limited economic conditions. They point out that although it was once the most popular customer in the arms market, it has reduced its arms imports by 59% from 2011 to the present (Paikin & Rose, 2021).
3. The remaining 91% of arms and defense equipment purchases were from Italy and Russia (Export Values, 2022).
4. Many Greek academics believe that a group of high-ranking soldiers have been putting forward and developing the "Blue Homeland" doctrine since 2006, provoking the Turkish government and Turkish public opinion and persuading them to act outside the basic principles of international law in the Eastern Mediterranean (Grigoriadis, 2021).
5. The first prototype of the Turkish Fighter (TF), which continues its production activities within the body of TAI, is planned to exit the hangar on 18 March 2023 with the engines running and start ground tests. By the end of 2026, 3 TF Block 0 prototypes will be produced and the first flights will be made. It is aimed to deliver TF Block I fighter jets to the Turkish Air Force by 2029. 10 F-110 engines are to be procured from the United States for the prototypes of these aircraft. For the Block I aircraft, Rolls-Royce engines are to be purchased from the UK and then the domestic engines developed by the Kale Group will be used (Milli Muharip Uçak'ın Motoru Türkiye'de, 2022).
6. Due to Türkiye's purchase of the S-400 air defense system from Russia, the USA has included Türkiye as of 6 April 2021 in the scope of the "Combating Adversaries of the United States through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)" to impose sanctions on China, Russia, Iran and North Korea (ABD'nin Türkiye'ye yönelik CAATSA yaptırımları yürürlüğe girdi, 2021).
7. The genocide of Turks and Jews in the Peloponnese from 1821 to 1822 is a lesser-known issue to the Turkish public because of a lack of academic interest (Öreñ, 2020).
8. The massacres suffering the Turks spread starting from Tripolis on 6 April 1821 and were not limited to the Peloponnese, but took place in Samos, Chios and Ipsara Islands, and even on the coasts of Anatolia (Büyüktuğrul, 1982; Tezel, 1973; Öz Saraç & Özyiğit, Osmanlı'nın Kalbi, Tersane-i Amire/Tersane, 2022).
9. During the Lausanne negotiations, the Ottoman Navy, which was weak, backward in technology, neglected and worn out due to war wounds, was interned in the docks and piers of the "Tersâne-i Âmire" in the Golden Horn under the control of the Allied Powers who had been occupying Istanbul since 1918. Two gunboats with very low firepower, named Preveza and Isareis, which escaped to support the logistical transportation of the War of Independence over the Black Sea and came under the command of the Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, could not cross the Turkish Straits controlled by the Allied Navy under the conditions of 1923. Even if they passed, it would be impossible for them to overcome the powerful Greek Navy (Öz Saraç & Özyiğit, Osmanlı'nın Kalbi, Tersane-i Amire/Tersane, 2022).
10. Following the Montreux Convention on the Straits, the Greek Parliament unilaterally increased the width of the territorial waters from 3 nautical miles to 6 nautical miles with Law No. 230 adopted on 17 September 1936. Along with the relatively friendly environment in bilateral relations, Türkiye did not object to this initiative of Greece due to the increasing threat of Italy in the Mediterranean. Although the Italian presence in the Islands Sea ended in 1947, Türkiye remained silent on this unilateral application of Greek territorial waters. After a while, it made a very serious mistake and increased the width of the territorial waters of Türkiye to 6 nautical miles with the law numbered 476 dated 15 May 1964. Moreover, with the Territorial Waters Law No. 2674 dated 20 May 1982, the width of the territorial waters of 6 nautical miles in the Islands Sea has been confirmed. Although Türkiye has made a double mistake, they are not incorrigible mistakes.
11. Greek scholars claim that the Turkish-Greek problems started in the 1970s (Grigoriadis, 2021).
12. In 2020, the world's first large-scale unmanned aerial vehicle battle between Bayraktar TB2, a SIHA (Armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) used by Turkish operators, and Chinese-made Wing Loong II drones used by United Arab Emirates citizen (UAE) operators, resulted in victory (Defense World, 2022).
13. In the language of literature used by the EU, it has become quite common to refer to Russia as the "enemy" and Türkiye as the "enemy's partner" (Tanchum, 2022).
14. Greece's ambition to snatch economic space through Crete and Rhodes has reached insanity with a map ordered for a fee from University of Seville professors Juan Luis Suarez de Vivero and Juan Carlos Mateos. On this map, Greece is trying to use the island of Meis, which is 330 nautical miles (580 kilometers) away from its mainland, but only 1.25 nautical miles (2 kilometers) from the shores of Kaş and on which only 500 Greeks live, as leverage. This attempt to steal a sea area of 40,000 square kilometers from the Blue Homeland was another issue that brought the tension to a peak.
15. It can also be called a "proxy", an increasingly commonly used term recently.
16. The \$6.9 billion MMSC shipbuilding project and the \$2.5 billion Hydra-class ship modernization project were presented to the US Congress as a package by the US Department of State on 10 December 2021 (Azman, 2021).

17. Although it was stated in the press that the entire Greek Navy would participate, one frigate, 2 LST (tank landing craft), one submarine, a small number of aircraft/helicopters from Greece and the FS Tonnerre helicopter amphibious ship from France participated in the ARGO-22 exercise on land for six days. It spent only one day at sea (News Beezer, 2022)

18. Among the academics who produce ideas within the EU, Türkiye has exhibited independent and problematic policies in the Mediterranean as it has stopped giving its attention to EU membership as before. Evaluations are made as it tries to get out of the deadlock it entered because it pushes its military limits excessively (Uzgel)

19. For example, it can be considered under a name such as the Asian Seas Collective Defense Organization (ASCCO)

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Chinese Presence in the Eastern Mediterranean: Evidence from Syria



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ABSTRACT

Sino-Syrian relations extend back to 1956, making it one of China's earliest and most established diplomatic ties with an Arab country. After the Soviet Union turned down Syria's request for medium-range missile technology in 1980, Beijing declared its willingness to offer Syria the technology. Beijing regards Syria's intellectual, ideological, cultural and social plurality as a model for the region. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made his first official trip to China in 2004; economic cooperation between China and Syria was the primary emphasis of this visit. There were contracts for oil and energy tankers and manufacturing facilities in Syria. This article deals with the development of Sino-Syrian relations and the main stages in the history of the bilateral relationship. An analytical-descriptive approach is used to explain the strategic relationship between the two countries. The article relies on relevant primary and secondary sources to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the topic. The study concludes that China aspires to expand and enhance its presence in the eastern Mediterranean due to its strategic geographical importance, the large economic market and the richness of natural resources that China needs. The article notes that Syria is a strategic area for China, which was evident during the Syrian crisis and China's use of its veto in the Security Council in favor of the Syrian regime. The article proposes that Sino-Syrian relations are expected to develop in the foreseeable future due to the strategic political understanding between the two regimes and Syria's active presence on the Belt and Road Initiative, which raises its geographical position in the eastern Mediterranean.

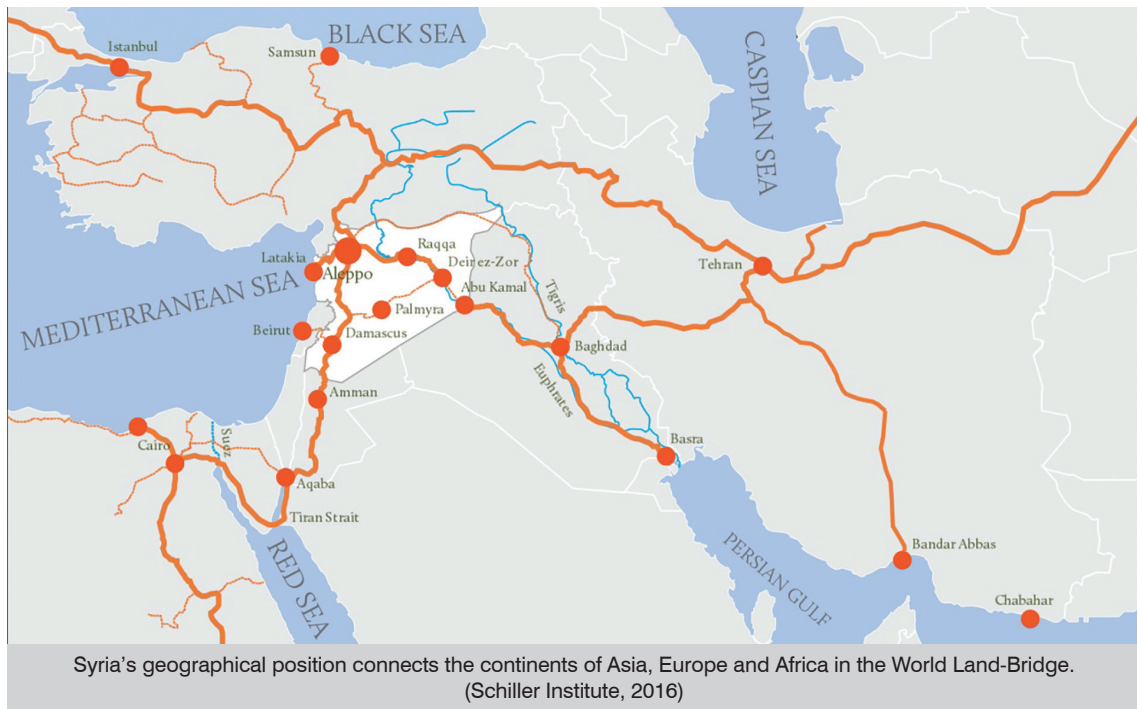
Keywords: China, Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, Syria, Syrian Crisis

Introduction

A SOCIALIST MARKET ECONOMY HAS helped China become the second-largest economy in the world in recent decades, thanks to reform and openness policies and the implementation of a market economy. China's economic and political renaissance has become an attractive topic for many scholars specializing in international issues. Accordingly, there is a growing number of China observers who notice that China is going global to the extent that its renaissance affects the entire world. China's relations with the Middle East are taking on a greater global significance in this environment. Worthy of special emphasis here is Syria's strategic position in the region, which is also part of China's larger Mideast strategy in the long term.

One should note that Chinese policymakers and scholars do not prefer to refer to the region as the "Middle East." Rather they prefer to call it "West Asia and North Africa" or WENA (Hachem, 2004:17). Major nations in the region are engaged in fierce international competition for many reasons. More than three-quarters of the world's population lives in Asia, Africa, and Europe, which turns the WENA region into the center of political, economic, and social interests at both the local and global levels (Amine, 2004:15-20).

The Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean are all located within or close to the region. In addition to the Nile, Tigris, Euphrates, and Jordan Rivers, it has other smaller rivers and waterways, most of which can be navigated.



For example, the Suez Canal, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits, the Bab al-Mandab, and the Strait of Hormuz are vital ports for regional and international trade, further increasing the importance of this region (Taher, 1998: 17-20).

When war breaks out, the area's breadth and depth make it ideal for the establishment of military bases that can withstand conventional and unconventional attacks alike. Natural, mineral, and energy resources also abound in this Mediterranean region. As a result, the Middle East's geopolitical qualities made it a point of strategic convergence and a battleground for major world powers. With its Mediterranean location, China sees Syria as a gateway for its European commodities, especially those manufactured in Syria and delivered through the ports of Latakia and Tartus, both located in the Eastern basin of the Mediterranean.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Syrian crisis

has created favorable conditions for divisions and rivalries that go well beyond regional borders on an international scale never before seen. On one side, the so-called Syrian political and military opposition, with assistance from regional and international powers, formed an axis. The other side includes the Syrian government, Iran, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, with Russia and China on the international level. Given the strategic importance of the WENA region and Syria's place in it, this paper discusses Sino-Syrian relations and explores the Chinese position on the Syrian crisis, the Belt and Road Initiative in the region, and Chinese progress in the WENA region.

The study draws on the inductive and comparative approach of the realist school of thought in international relations, looking at the world as it is rather than through the prism of the rules that govern it. This framework addresses

the following research questions: What is the geostrategic importance of Syria? What is Syria's strategic place in Chinese foreign policy? How have Chinese-Syrian relations developed in light of the current developments in the region?

The Geostrategic Importance of Syria

Foreign policy, according to Napoleon Bonaparte, is a matter of geography. In international relations, similarly, geostrategic factors are one of the most important factors in a country's foreign policy. International relations are preoccupied with the state's relationship to its environment and physical space, and it seeks to find solutions to all of the issues that arise from these relationships.

In 2011, a movement in Syria against the Assad regime descended into a bloody proxy war. Because of this protracted war, the world is facing the biggest refugee crisis since World War II.

Syria's relevance extends beyond its geographic location to include its role in the wider region. Syria is one of the most significant countries in the Middle East because of its strategic importance. In 2011, a movement in Syria against the Assad regime descended into a bloody proxy war. Because of this protracted war, the world is facing the biggest refugee crisis since World War II and one of the worst humanitarian situations in recent memory. About 11 million Syrians have been internally and internationally displaced due to the conflict's rapid escalation (Gürcan, 2019a). The crisis has been unable to

splinter or destroy the Syrian army, which is perhaps the greatest achievement (Zreik, 2022). Syria has been elevated from this crisis to the status of a geostrategic player endowed with an equally strategic position.

Syria's strategic importance can be summarized as follows: Syria is the hub of all regional balancing of power in the region. Syria stops regional powers from accessing the depths of the Arabian Peninsula from the eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, Syria serves as Lebanon's geographic buffer. According to Marshal Alexander de Seversky, geopolitical scientist and air force expert, this Arab region (the Levant) connects the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is critical to protecting Africa and Europe from airborne threats (Gürcan, 2019b: 1-10; Gürcan, 2020a: 65-80).

Syria's geostrategic position as Asia's entryway to Europe makes it a significant part of its natural surroundings. Syrian political and economic security has been bolstered by its favorable approach to China and Russia's grand strategies as part of the Five Seas and the Silk Road frameworks, as well as China's strategy to break the American blockade at the Strait of Malacca. Bashar al-Assad's opening up strategy (infatih) aims to revitalize Syria's economy and improve its foreign and regional alliances. President al-Assad announced his "Four Seas Approach" in 2004 to establish Syria at the heart of a regional energy and transportation network. Damascus gradually advocated his plan to make Syria a commerce hub in the Mediterranean, Black, Arabian, and Caspian seas. Later, the Red Sea was added. Before the foreign-orchestrated war on Syria, the Syrian President propagated this ideology across the area and boosted Syria's relations with numerous eastern countries: Iran,



A sign of the China-Egypt Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone, located some 120 km to the east of Cairo near the Suez Canal, Egypt. (Xinhua Net, 2019)

China, and Russia. President Assad articulated his broader goal in 2009: "Once the economic space between Syria, Türkiye, Iraq, and Iran is connected, we'll link the Mediterranean, the Caspian, the Black Sea, and the Gulf". The goal was to create a network of commercial trade, infrastructure, transportation networks, and pipeline projects (Abdullah & Arbache, 2020/2021, Gürcan, 2019/2020).

Confirmed gas discoveries in Syria and Lebanon and their surrounding waters sparked a global power battle over control of energy resources for the 21st century (Gürcan, 2020a: 65-80).

Nabucco Gas's future rests on Syria's role as a gas transit node, while the United States and other countries are fighting to free Europe from the control of Russia's Gazprom. The United States and the West did not succeed in

persuading Syria to give in to their demands. Iranian cooperation with the Lebanese, Iraqi, and Palestinian resistance was used to undermine and disrupt U.S., Atlantic and Israeli policies.

It is because of Syria's unique geographical and strategic location that the Sumerians, Akkadians, Canaanites, and Phoenicians passed through this region. Throughout its history, Syria's political and economic significance has been connected to its location at the crossroads of three continents and various cultures. Syria's strategic location made it an important transit point for trade between the Middle East's various countries and a pivotal player in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

With these geopolitical features, Syria became a key player in the region's economic and political interests, making it a polarizing

point for the aspirations of the regional and international powers. This made Syria a focal point for the sovereignty of regimes. The conflict in Syria has had a great effect on the regional and global balance of power (Zreik, 2020; Gürcan, 2020b: 331-50).

Background on China-Syria Relations

Relations between China and Syria date back many centuries. When the Silk Road was first established, Syria was a key link between China and the Arab world because of its central location on three continents. China's first line of defense in Central Asia and the Caucasus has been Syria since 1949, and the country has also served as a bridge for Russian oil to arrive in China while also serving as a transit country for most Iraqi oil from 1934 to 1982 and Saudi oil from 1973 to 1982. Later, President Bashar al-Assad has proposed a five-seas project that ties with the Chinese Belt and Road initiative (Abdullah & Arbache, 2020/2021).

Diplomatic relations between China and Syria extend back to 1956, when the two nations signed a Trade Promotion Agreement.

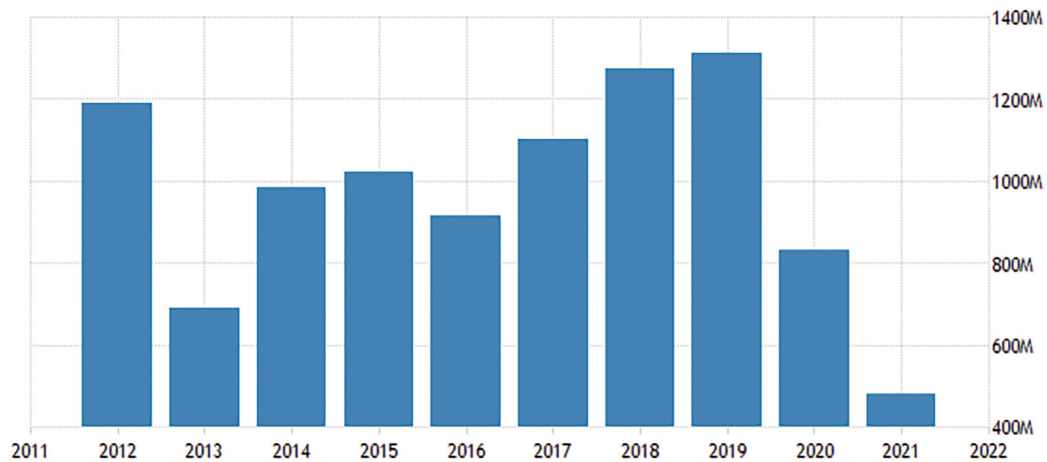
Diplomatic relations between China and Syria extend back to 1956, when the two nations signed a Trade Promotion Agreement. This paved the way for Arab diplomatic contact with modern China. However, relations between China and Syria were hampered by the conflict between Beijing and Moscow (Lawrence, 2013). Despite Syria's allegiance to the Soviet Union, China was eager to maintain political contact with the country and signed several agreements with it, including one in 1963 to increase

trade cooperation and another in 1965 to establish cultural cooperation, which was the first of its kind between the two countries (Zreik, 2021).

Relations between China and Syria improved after Egypt signed the Camp David Treaty in 1978, making Syria a point of balance in the Middle East not constrained by the decisions of the US. During the 1980s, Syrian-Chinese ties increased due to their shared perspective on the Iraqi-Iran war. China and Syria signed a long-term trade agreement in 1982, replacing the one signed in 1963. After the Soviet Union refused to provide Syria with medium-range missile technology, Beijing expressed its willingness to do so (Nabil, 2000). With the help of Beijing in 1985, the Syrian government was able to create missile factories in Aleppo and Hama and educate Syrian professionals in using the weapons.

In 1996, the two sides inked a slew of agreements, including one to promote and safeguard mutual investment and another to give a ten-year loan of 100 million yuan for financing oil projects and spinning mills in Hama. The Chinese government awarded a total of twenty million yuan in grants in 1999 as non-refundable gifts. Trade between the two countries grew rapidly, from 70 million dollars in 1989 to 150 million dollars in 2000 (Graf, 2018: 443-532).

Chinese officials opposed the idea of the United States and Western countries imposing sanctions on other countries under the pretext of non-democracy or human rights violations, such as North Korea and other countries in the Middle East, such as Iran, and recently the US sanctions policy on Syria, which China rejected. In response to the United States' embargo on Arab countries and Syria to purchase weapons in the mid-1990s, China supplied Syria with 150 surface anti-tank missiles, which helped to strengthen military ties between the two countries at the time.



A year over year graph on changing trade volume between China and Syria. (Trading Economics, 2022)

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made his first trip to China in 2004. Economic cooperation between China and Syria was the primary emphasis of this visit. There were contracts for oil and energy tankers, manufacturing facilities, and foreign personnel in China's interests in Syria. Cooperation agreements between China and Syria were formed during this period in oil and gas exploration, agricultural development, health, medical sciences, tourism, education, and culture. Syria received soft credit from China. Oil and cement have been popular investments for Chinese enterprises. Adra, a Syrian industrial city, was also built with Chinese help. The volume of trade exchange between the two countries grew to nine hundred million US dollars in 2005 (Zreik, 2022; Anderson, 2018).

China's Position on the Syrian Crisis

A series of international events contributed to creating the right conditions to change the structure and shape of the international system. All these reasons converged on the Syrian

crisis, which witnessed regional and global polarization that shattered traditional ideas, such as unipolarity, to create a new map of international relations based on the superiority of competing poles with different policies and goals (Gürcan, 2019c).

Since the start of the "Arab Spring", China has expressed its displeasure with the rise of Islamic movements in Arab countries, fearing for the safety of China's Muslim minorities, particularly those in Xinjiang province, where the United States incited and allocated a huge budget for propaganda against China under the pretext of violating human rights (Zreik, 2021).

The fact that China took a different stance on the Syrian situation than the United States is nothing new. Given China's pragmatic foreign policy regulated by the intersections of ideology and interests, China's political orientations have always clashed with their US equivalents in recent times. Nevertheless, China's position on the Syrian crisis is unique because it has crossed the usual boundaries

of situational difference with the policies of the United States in the Middle East and has reached the point of political confrontation. China is a new player, especially in light of the escalating crises in the region that reflect these balances of power (Al-Husseini, 2015:41).

In 2013, the Pentagon considered creating a "new country" that would span the Syrian-Iraqi border to shut off the Silk Road.

With the US expanding its influence in Asia-Pacific, China is working to respond in other places, such as Syria, as a direct response to the US' shifting strategy (Al-Sayyid, 2011:52). In addition to China accusing the United States of violating its essential interests, either by providing US weaponry to Taiwan or backing separatist organizations in Tibet, China accepted the war in the Syrian crisis as part of the response, even without any direct military intervention.

In 2013, the Pentagon considered creating a "new country" that would span the Syrian-Iraqi border to shut off the Silk Road. China changed its approach once ISIS took up this duty to avoid a run-in with the United States and stay out of the region's crises. An industrial zone 120 kilometers from Cairo has been established as part of Beijing's decision to change its route through Egypt (Meyssan, 2016).

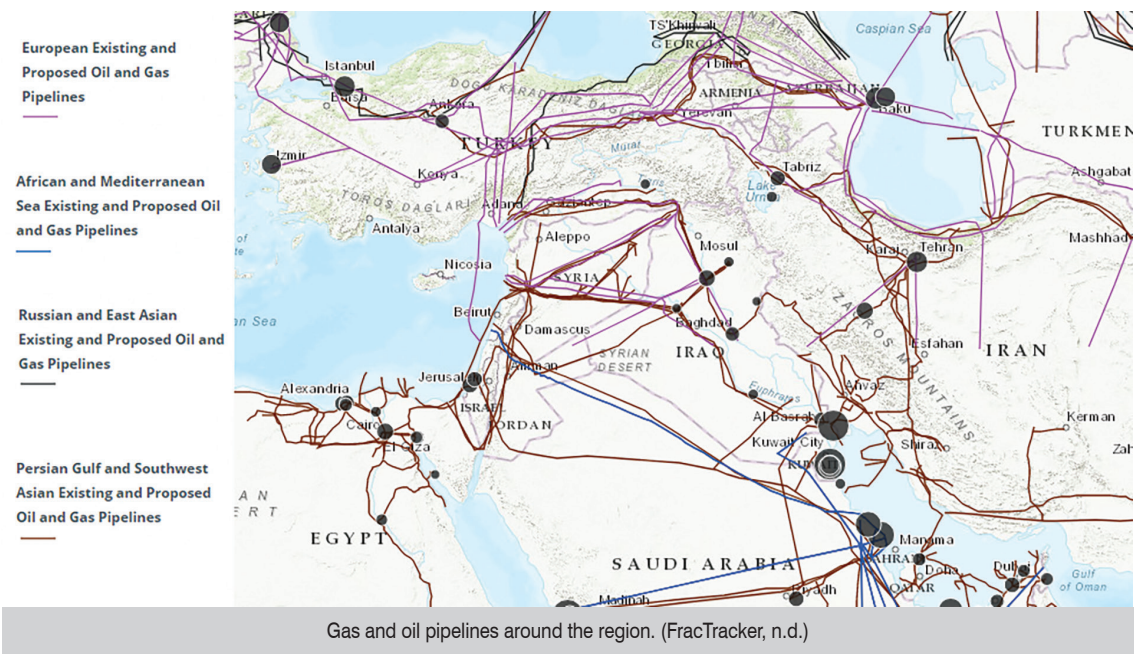
In the same way that Berlin witnessed the beginning of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, Damascus saw the beginning of a significant shift in Chinese foreign policy. From its vetoes

against resolutions on Syria, China's position on the conflict has been characterized by its opposition to external interventions in general and military interventions in particular and the rejection of any measure in the Security Council that would open the door to intervention. For the first time in veto history, the veto was used by China to block legislation against Syria. In addition, China has exercised its veto privilege six times in relation to Syria. Syria's strategic value comes not from its natural resources but rather from its geopolitical weight in terms of location and its influential role in Middle Eastern affairs. As a result of the joint Russian-Chinese veto, Beijing believes that the Syrian situation may be resolved (Zreik, 2019).

Chinese Initiatives to Resolve the Syrian Crisis

For the first time in its modern history, China has given up its policy of not engaging in crises outside of its immediate interests or geopolitical area. China's embassy in Damascus has remained operational despite Western pressure to close it. A ceasefire was assumed on April 10, 2012, as part of its initiative to resolve the Syrian crisis in February 2012. As Ahmad & Masaad (2012: 52) put it, the following points describe the initiative:

- The appointment of UN-Arab League special envoy Kofi Annan to monitor the implementation of the political decision is welcomed by China. However, Beijing believes that the United Nations or any other impartial organization should review the humanitarian situation in Syria under the conditions of respecting Syria's sovereignty.



- It is imperative that the international community recognize Syria's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity and that it "give the necessary aid and urge the various political forces in Syria to initiate discussion and respect the results of that dialogue". As a result, Beijing opposes armed intervention or pressure for regime change in Syria.

According to the United Nations Charter and international norms, all United Nations Security Council members must adhere to these rules.

Geneva Conference (1) was convened on June 30, 2012, and the Working Group for Syria (U.S.; China; Russia; France; UK; Türkiye; Arab League; and European Union) agreed on the fundamentals of a transitional phase in Syria. The plan calls for a "shared agreement" to build a "transitional government with full powers" but leaves President Assad's future in the air. A post-Assad period in Syria was viewed as a possibility following a conference between the United

States, Russia, and China in which they agreed that it is up to the Syrian people alone to decide the fate of their president (UNHCR, 2011).

The following are some of the most significant provisions made by the Geneva Conference (1):

- The establishment of a transitional administration consisting of representatives from both the Syrian government and the opposition.

- Holding a national discourse that includes all segments of the Syrian population and leads to establishing the Syrian regime's constitutional and legal framework and ensuring free and fair elections.

New recommendations were made in November 2012 to Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN and Arab League envoy, which included a phased ceasefire and the formation of a transitional government, which China had previously proposed. It was on September 30 of the same year that China proposed a plan to end the

conflict in Syria through diplomacy while at the same time cooperating to fight terrorism.

Even if the goal is to combat terrorist groups in Syria, China has vehemently opposed any military intervention. During the "Libyan revolution," when President Muammar Gaddafi was in power, the Chinese vetoed two similar resolutions against Libya. Beijing felt that the Western engagement in Syria was not to protect civilians, as claimed by the West and US policymakers.

Governments in countries overwhelmed by events have attempted to continue their trade ties with China.

With China's position on the Syrian issue and its use of its UN Security Council veto, the country's determination to play a global diplomatic and political role commensurate with its rising economic and military capabilities was made clear. As China's economic growth continues to outpace that of the rest of the world, Beijing's support for the Iran nuclear deal represents a fundamental qualitative shift in Beijing's vision of its diplomatic and political position in the global arena.

With the United States' efforts to destabilize Arab countries, some believe that the US strategy is preventing the flow of oil supplies to China. This is especially true because the United States' interest in the Middle East has decreased after it discovered vast quantities of oil in Canada and Brazil and is seeking to replace oil in the future with alternate and subterranean energy sources. Since the Chinese government views economic

cooperation as contingent on world peace, it has made diplomatic attempts to de-escalate tensions and resolve international conflicts through a policy centered on a "zero problems" approach to ties with the outside world (Sayegh, 2012).

Governments in countries overwhelmed by events have attempted to continue their trade ties with China. As a result, China believes that the fall of the Syrian regime will lead to the development of a new regime that is more Western-friendly. Any Western engagement in Syria would also affect Iraq, a major oil supply for China. While China is always seeking to cement three truths in its strategic vision for the Arab area and world: guaranteeing its share of energy, developing economic ties to ensure that it can fulfill its rising needs, and its constant emphasis on solving problems through collaboration and dialogue (Ayoub, 2012:27).

Analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative in the WENA Region

The economic, political, and cultural consequences of China's Belt and Road Initiative have sparked much attention. As a historic trade route that crossed three continents, the Silk Road reminds us of the long-standing ties that have bound governments and peoples worldwide. The activities and transactions that took place along the Silk Road are indicative of the emergence of a new wave of globalization. Through centuries, trade and cultural contacts took place between China, India, and many countries in the WENA region.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the development of nation-states and imperial wars for regional and global hegemony halted globalization.



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

Technology, popular culture, free trade, and population shifts in the late 20th century contributed to globalization's growth. With today's surge of huge energy resources, such as massive oil and gas deposits and renewable energy sources, the Middle East is one of the most important centers of world trade, commerce, politics and security. The Middle East has become one of the world's most globalized regions due to expanding trade volume, foreign investments, and the increasing number of people traveling worldwide.

If the Belt and Road Initiative succeeds in bringing countries and cultures together, globalization will be a success. There are fewer barriers to economic interdependence as areas and countries grow increasingly integrated and networked rather than isolated

and confrontational. Economic protectionism, barriers to free trade and foreign investment, and border closures for newcomers and immigration all contribute to a rise in anti-globalization sentiments in the West. Ironically, many who advocated and led globalization in the past, particularly in the West, are today celebrating populist isolationism.

The Belt and Road Initiative asks for a review of trends that could significantly impact the international trading system and the global security architecture, including the geopolitical and geo-economic landscape. However, there are still numerous difficulties to overcome, particularly in nations that have experienced years of political unrest and conflict. There is great potential in the Middle East; many world faiths have their roots in the Middle East, the

cradle of many civilizations and the birthplace of many world religions. A wide range of civilizations, ethnic groupings, and sectarian communities can be found in this region.

There is a growing interdependence between the globe's economies, politics, and security in a globalizing world.

The China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor ends in the WENA region, where countries like Iran and Türkiye lie along its route (Fasulo & Talbot, 2017). Economic growth in WENA is partly attributed to increased trade and investment. Economic exchanges, expectations, and dreams for the region and beyond are generated by a young, vibrant population, expanding wealth, and investment opportunities. WENA's vast oil and gas deposits, renewable energy sources, and rapid growth in trade and industry with regional and global actors have made it a key hub for world trade, economics, politics, and security.

There is a growing interdependence between the globe's economies, politics, and security in a globalizing world. This fact serves as a reminder that the Middle East and the rest of the globe are at risk if economic and political turmoil persists. Infrastructure investment will be limited if there is a lack of political stability and security; 60-65 % of the world's proven oil and gas reserves are located in WENA and its bordering regions (Abbasi, 2013:93-120). Industrial and economic progress hinges on a balance between energy use and security. These areas are bursting at the seams with people,

their economies booming, and new riches being created.

The importance of political stability, excellent governance, economic integration, and common security cannot be overstated. The effort presents a new opportunity for many countries to achieve their objectives but also has its share of challenges. By reviving the historic Silk Road through investments in rail and maritime links, the idea emphasizes the importance of a different form of globalization that includes countries in the North and South from East to West. In order to connect the world via a network of commerce routes, this path requires political and economic support. The Belt and Road Initiative aims to help partner countries thrive economically and financially.

With its investment and employment development, the Belt and Road Initiative hopes to help WENA's economy grow. Political stability and peace will become more important to all participating countries as the economy grows, the quality of life improves, and the chances for education, travel and employment improve. Under these circumstances, governments and citizens should prioritize political stability and the prevention of violent conflict and terrorist acts. These are reasonable aspirations tempered by a sense of optimism. There will be no investment in infrastructure unless there is political stability and security for all citizens. Investors, corporations, and governments are nevertheless hampered by political unrest and security concerns.

WENA has enormous potential and opportunity, but it also faces challenges in regional upheavals and geopolitical developments that could impede the implementation of Belt and Road projects.



Chinese Ambassador Li Baodong voted against the draft resolution calling for regime change in Syria. (China Daily, 2012)

Ineffective governance and economic progress, opposition to political reform and scorn for public ambitions are all obstacles that must be overcome. Problems such as these will impede cooperation and policy development in the WENA region (Bölme, 2015:7-37). The safety of the area and the world must come first. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 resulted in disorder and instability that persists today. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria were revolutionized by the Arab Spring in 2010. (Sadiki, 2015). While the political dialogue in Tunisia led to relative calm, Egypt's military coup, witnessed in silence by the world's superpowers and the West as the claimed

advocates of freedom, brought order following deadly social upheavals (Karakoç, 2015:172-199).

There has been an increase in the impact of non-state actors and terrorist organizations. In this case, no effective action was taken by the international community, global powers, regional institutions, or international organizations. Terrorist groups have enhanced their positions by recruiting militants, engaging in commercial enterprises, and committing ethnic cleansing because of governments' lack of interest in finding solutions to oncoming crises. Conflicts in the region have left a trail of destruction, and the danger extends beyond the nations involved.

As the crisis in Syria escalates, a proxy war is happening there, dispersing its people. ISIS has emerged in Syria due to the regime's use of all available tools to quash dissent, which resulted in war crimes against its people and the loss of control of the country (Gürcan, 2019a).

To lay a solid foundation, the Belt and Road Initiative and its partner countries must deal with political instability, forced migration, large numbers of refugees, security threats, terrorist networks, a lack of good governance and legitimacy.

About 15 million Syrians have been displaced since the conflict began six years ago. Syrian refugees in Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan profoundly impact the countries' economies, societies, and political and social landscapes (Ferris and Kirişçi, 2016). This is the most serious humanitarian issue of the twenty-first century. The global impact was created due to inaction by governments and international organizations. Türkiye, France, Belgium, the UK, Russia and Iran have all been targeted by ISIS militants. No country can be considered secure until a political settlement in Syria and a regional security policy are agreed upon. The unrest and ills afflicting the Middle East must be addressed.

The new Silk Road will traverse through the Suez Canal, including numerous regional actors, via the Middle Corridor and Sea Route. Preconditions for full implementation include regional stability, peace, common security, collaboration, and effective governance. Without it, a promising project may collapse and fall short

of its objectives. The initiative's greatest challenge is to meet and maintain these preconditions (stability, common security, and cooperation). The reopening of the historic Silk Road has aroused widespread interest and raised the prospect of a new geopolitical order in the Middle East. Development, security, conflict resolution, political stability and effective government all benefit from the new Silk Road.

To lay a solid foundation, the Belt and Road Initiative and its partner countries must deal with political instability, armed conflicts, forced migration, large numbers of refugees, security threats, terrorist organizations and networks, a lack of good governance and legitimacy, and radical ideologies. Many countries in the Middle East face serious threats to their national security. The ramifications of ISIS in Syria and Iraq are widespread. It is imperative that the Belt and Road Initiative's investors have a safe and stable environment in which to operate (Keskin, 2016). In this way, terrorist organizations and networks are given legitimacy, which they do not deserve. As a result of the crisis, the Middle East would have been destabilized politically, economically, and militarily. For this initiative to succeed, terrorist organizations must be eliminated and security established (Ataman, 2017).

Syria: A Strategic Partner for China

The great Chinese industrial and economic renaissance can serve as a role model for Syria and other developing countries. China's balanced position recognizes the interests of all parties and supports the state and people in Syria. Since President Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, Syria has shown interest in joining the initiative as a member state (Zreik, 2021).

China's ancient Silk Road passed through Syria, and in modern history, Syrian-Chinese diplomatic contacts have existed for more than 60 years, and the two economies have been intertwined ever since. Economically, Adra's free industrial city provided China with a huge potential to enter markets in WENA and Europe, which were previously out of reach (Nabil, 2000).

The time has come for the Chinese to enter Syria to invest in infrastructure, trade cooperation and reconstruction as most of the country's topography is stable and the situation is ready for investment.

The economic sanctions on Syria have devastated its economy and social infrastructure after the war on Syria destroyed its national economy and resulted in significant losses in GDP, human capital, and infrastructure. The war's minimum financial toll is expected to be around \$500 billion and might top \$1 trillion (Sun, 2012).

Since many Syrian regions have been liberated and ISIS has been defeated in many areas, the Syrian government has announced the beginning of the reconstruction phase, in which China and the friendly countries that stood by Syria are invited to play an important role, especially that the Syrian government adopts the policy of heading east.

As a result of Syria's dependence on China, which accounts for more than 7 % of the country's total exports, commerce between Syria and China has remained steady and now

exceeds \$1 billion (Burton, Lyall & Pauley, 2021: 55-75). The Syrian market's future seems bright, but it still needs more projects and investments in the post-crisis era.

The time has come for the Chinese to enter Syria to invest in infrastructure, trade cooperation and reconstruction rather than wait for full political stability, as most of the country's topography is stable and the situation is ready for investment. Sanctions severely hamper several sectors of the Syrian economy, and China's investment in these sectors, particularly in infrastructure and technology (notably communications and financial systems), is expected to be a game changer for the country (Zreik, 2019).

Even before the crisis, Syria tried to emulate China's development model while acknowledging ideological differences. Returning to this approach after the war feels like an important necessity. The Syrian administration believes that the issue of Syrian refugees is being used as a political tool by unfriendly countries. Measures must be taken to achieve the desired result, such as moving to national reconciliation internally, and ensuring the needs of survival, such as housing and infrastructure, are in place before the refugees return home.

There are many people fleeing terrorism, so it's important to work on updating the law to address their needs. These people come in various forms and may face security or political issues. Refugees' applications for asylum were exploited as a political tool by nations trying to influence the path of the Syrian civil war. Rebuilding trust and overcoming sensitivity and divisions can only be accomplished via open communication with refugees in countries of asylum, who are being reached out to

learn about their needs and the injustices and violations they are subjected to.

Syria hopes to learn from China's experience rebuilding human capital through the Chinese model using the Chinese experience, such as the decision-making cycle, the function of think tanks, universities and the means of communication. Future academic collaborations between institutions could benefit a more prosperous future. Many Syrian intellectuals have acquired a deeper knowledge of Chinese culture through the Confucius Institutes and Chinese media, which broadcasts in Arabic to reach the largest segment of the Arab people. This may be the way to compete with Western cultural expansion in Syria. The Syrian government admires China's experience in dealing with cultural diversity, its challenges, and how it decided to handle them (Al-Husseini, 2015).

For some situations, the Chinese model should be applied to solve some problems and avoid them from becoming long-term crises, such as the issues of international terrorism, ethnic cleansing and sectarian conflicts that Beijing has used modern technology to resolve. For this reason, the Chinese government has also set up an educational center for backward and impoverished citizens in rural areas to prevent terrorist attacks. (Ghiselli & Alsudairi, 2022). Additionally, the legislation must be disseminated, and the state's official language must be taught to these people so they can find work more easily.

A national strategy to tackle poverty could also draw on China's grand development strategy, which aims to bridge the eastern and western areas of the country (Meysan, 2016). China's experience in developing the eastern part of

the country can also be used. China has ended extreme poverty thanks to its decades-long reform and opening-up policies. The Chinese Communist Party has drawn up an ambitious plan to eliminate all of China's impoverished by 2021, the party's 100th anniversary.

Recommendations

"A Chinese cultural center in Damascus should be established as soon as possible, and some graduates of the Arabic language department from China should be sent to Syria (in the form of exchange fellowships) to complete their higher studies and secure a job in the cultural center by teaching the Chinese language there. Intensification of undergraduate and graduate scholarships for Syrian students to study in China, working with the Chinese government to support Syrian universities in their efforts to teach Chinese, and translating some Chinese literary works to promote cultural ties between the Arab and Chinese nations. Moreover, there is a strong need for developing a permanent mechanism of inter-university cooperation between China and Syria and sustained cooperation between research centers operating in relevant areas.

Conclusion

There is a misperception among Chinese citizens and intellectuals about the current security situation in Syria, as they continue to view it as a region riven with wars, turmoil, and tensions and as a long-term and complex conflict. As a result, Chinese business people and companies are wary of doing business in Syria. Western propaganda and US sanctions play an important role in keeping foreign investors away from Syria in the post-conflict era.

The Syrian government and the international community must work tirelessly to reconcile and end the bloody and ongoing conflict, and China wants to play a role because all Syrian parties accept it as a neutral and friendly state. China is accepted by all Syrian parties (the people - the government - the opposition), which is a factor for Chinese diplomacy.


Political and security stability is indeed necessary for economic cooperation and reconstruction, but this should not prohibit the search for answers to challenges that may limit economic collaboration or involvement in reconstruction. Promoting and encouraging collaborative engagement between Syrian and Chinese business people is an important step toward solving reconstruction-related issues like funding.

With this in mind, the two nations should work together to develop a meaningful economic alliance to link Iran's transportation and energy infrastructure with Chinese investment in Iraq and Syria. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad proposed the strategy of turning Syria into a gas transportation hub and a free trade zone linking the East and West by linking the five seas, which China saw as a revival of the Silk Road.

This is in accordance with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who proposed it in 2013. The banking system in Syria must be improved as well, and to do so, Syria looks to China's experience in the financial and investment fields and alternative payment methods to the US dollar. It is beneficial to strengthen ties between the two chambers of commerce, industry, and agriculture and to set up joint chambers at this level.

One could conclude that China's stance

on the conflict in Syria is based on two factors: the geostrategic position of Syria on the Silk Road and its location in the middle of the continents of the ancient world. From a Chinese point of view, the current world order formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the United States losing its position as a sole global power little by little. Therefore, China will have a prominent position in the world order that is forming. With its expanding economic and military power, Beijing wants to play a role in global diplomacy and politics.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China suffered from foreign interference, not to mention the sanctions imposed on it under the leadership of the United States during the Cold War. China's opposition to any interference in the internal affairs of countries was, and still is, a determinant of China's foreign policy. 

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The Belt & Road Initiative: New Driving Force for Regionalisation and Globalisation

CHEN, X. (2021).

The Belt and Road Initiative as Epochal Regionalisation.
London: Routledge

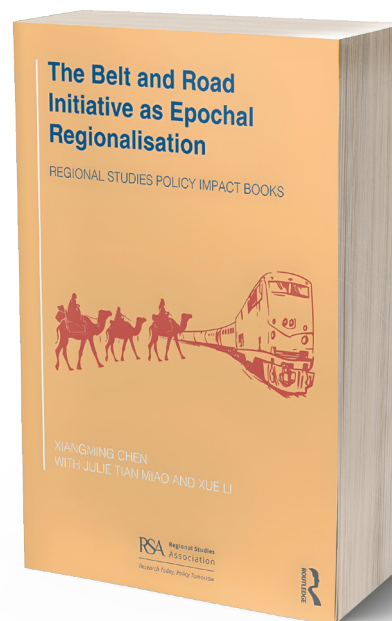


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THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI) is China's idea, but the opportunities it has created belong to the world. Over the past nine years, the BRI has evolved from a concept into tangible actions, from vision to reality, bringing enormous opportunities and benefits to countries worldwide. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine crisis, our world has entered a period of turbulence and transformation, but the BRI cooperation did not come to a halt. It continued to move forward, showing remarkable resilience and vitality.

Facing an increasingly complex international environment, will China continue to reform and open up or close the door to the outside world? Prof. Chen Xiangming, the Distinguished Professor of Global Urban Studies and Sociology at Trinity College and a guest professor at Fudan University, China, replied to this question in his recent monograph *The Belt and Road Initiative as Epochal Regionalisation*. In this book, he illustrated the contribution of the BRI to regional and global connectivity with a regional focus, pointing out that the BRI is evolving from a single initiative to a worldwide synergy.



In general, this book answered three main questions: How does the BRI move towards epochal regionalization? How will the new regionalization promoted by the BRI affect globalization? Can the BRI provide sustainable public goods?

How Does the BRI Move Towards Epochal Regionalization?

Prof. Chen takes a new perspective on the BRI, namely that it is a synergistic force centered on the regionalization of corridors.

First, the core of regionalization lies in corridor regionalization. In the early stage, the corridors were small in scale and did not have clear boundaries. They were mainly formed naturally through the market. Therefore, they were primarily centered in cities of developed countries, just like the “Blue Banana” in Europe (p. 20). However, the BRI, with its large span and its intention to connect the land and sea across Eurasia, has promoted the extension of the corridor into a wider space, which has also overcame the unbalanced global development.

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Second, the BRI is driven by the spatial dynamics of China's internal economic transformation. China has made two very different regional pivots in the past four decades. The first occurred in the 1980s when China's economic focus shifted to the eastern coast and East Asia. This export-oriented industrial policy led to the formation of regional manufacturing centers and the completion of supply chain integration. The result is China attracted a large amount of foreign investment, thus increasing the share of international trade dramatically. The second shift started since 21st century, when China's economy began to focus on the western area and the Eurasian continent. This is also an infrastructure-oriented policy, with "Go West" and "Go Global" as the climax of this transition (p. 26). In essence, this is a supplement to the first regional transition of "unbalanced development".

Third, the BRI transmits the new regionalisation to the whole world. Having consolidated its strong internal economic backbone and external cross-border links after two regional pivots, it is time for China to pass on its valuable experience to the broader world. China's expertise lies in placing the three processes of globalisation, urbanisation, and development as a whole. That is, based on large-scale infrastructure development, by accelerating China's urbanisation, industrialisation, and transportation development, new urban centers will be created to renew the global urban hierarchy and provide a new impetus for the sustainable development of globalisation from the ground up.

How Will the New Regionalization Promoted by the BRI Affect Globalization?

Prof. Chen pointed out that "The BRI's regionalising dynamics are reshaping globalisation, urbanisation and development simultaneously and relationally." (p. 80)

China was an earlier leader in globalisation, which can be traced back to the ancient Silk Road. Even the Westerners' great exploration in the 15th century was later than Zheng He's voyages. However, China

was lagging behind the rapid development of globalisation in the following centuries until recent 20 years. The process of China's globalisation can be best represented by Xi'an, the ancient capital of 13 dynasties. As one of the starting points of the Silk Road, Xi'an witnessed the glory and humiliation of China's history until the China Railway Express (CR Express) brought new life to this city and a new driving force for the regional integration of Eurasia. This will certainly restrain the process of reverse globalisation and enhance the sustainability of globalisation.

Furthermore, the BRI accelerates the process of global urbanisation through China's external infrastructure construction. The method of integrating transport networks and urban development was initiated in Britain as early as the 18th century, but the capitalist state inevitably excluded poor areas from the infrastructure system. (p. 46) Until now, many countries and regions in the world cannot participate effectively in the global market because of the lack of infrastructure construction.

Today, as the world's largest infrastructure builder, China is leading urbanisation on an unprecedented scale and at an unparalleled speed, contributing positively to the global society and economy. China's infrastructure construction practice in overseas cities is mainly reflected in the combination of special economic zones and transportation corridors. For example, in Laos, the Boten Special Economic Zone, which attracts a large amount of foreign investment, has been established. The China-Laos Railway, which links essential passageways, has also been opened. This approach of pulling urban development through infrastructure construction has created new opportunities for numerous cities in Laos to become crucial nodes in the cross-border corridors of mainland Southeast Asia.

Finally, the BRI provides feasible solutions for sustainable development for developing countries based on China's industrialisation experience. As the world seeks sustainable development, China is working hard to align the BRI with the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

China's development experience has had a massive impact on the world, most notably in its exploration of industrial sustainability. As early as 1979, China's bold innovation in Shekou Industrial Zone in Shenzhen achieved sustainable industrial development thanks to the "port-park-city" (PPC) model. Djibouti also benefited from being the first city to introduce the PPC model. The model enhances the functionality of Djibouti's ports, highlighting its unique role as a transportation and logistics center, making Djibouti a sustainable urban-industrial complex. This unique experience of industrialisation has optimized the spatial combination of supply chains and provided new opportunities for developing countries to participate in the development of globalisation and urbanisation.

Can the BRI Provide Sustainable Public Goods?

This is a problem facing reality and the future. In fact, over the past nine years, the BRI has evolved from a single initiative into a collective force that has provided public goods to many countries. At the same time, Prof. Chen warns that the BRI needs to consider sustainable supply capabilities both regionally and globally (p. 82). This means that the BRI faces the risk of insufficient supply on its way to becoming a global public good.

From a regional perspective, the actual connectivity effect of regional corridors created by the BRI is affected by various regions and may be limited to local areas, unable to "bring points to areas". From a global perspective, the BRI also faces long-term potential risks and hazards, such as the ecological and economic burden of large-scale infrastructure construction. Moreover, the global economy is weak due to the impact of the epidemic and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine nowadays. Consequently, China has adjusted its economic structure again and implemented the "Dual Circulation". But if it fails to ensure the long-term stability of the domestic economy and society, the BRI may cause an overdraft

on China's own national strength.

Apart from the BRI, the COVID-19 vaccines have been recognized as global public goods in the world. By December 2021, China had delivered nearly 2 billion doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to more than 100 countries and international organizations, becoming the most prominent foreign provider of vaccines. At the same time, China is conducting joint research, development, and production of vaccines with 16 countries and working with 30 countries to develop the Belt and Road Vaccine Partnership Initiative. At present, the COVID-19 situation is still tricky. As a major responsible country, China will continue to increase its public goods assistance to developing countries and strive to make the BRI a popular platform for global public goods and cooperation. As the year 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the BRI, we expect it to inject more stability and certainty into a turbulent world.

In general, this book brings a new perspective and framework to observe the BRI, elevating the early corridors to the level of regionalisation, driving the joint development of developing countries and remote areas along the BRI, and becoming the backbone of the "globalisation, urbanisation and development" framework. This book is very useful for domestic and foreign scholars to have a better understanding of the evolution and results of the inward reform and outward development of the BRI.

Of course, there are some imperfections about this book. First of all, the pattern of regional cooperation highlighted in this book is based on the "Five-Pronged Approach" (policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure and facilities, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and closer people-to-people ties). However, the relevant discussion in this book is lacking in people-to-people ties. If the people-to-people and cultural exchanges between countries along the routes can be supplemented, the policy suggestions of this book on the BRI will be more complete and rich. In addition, the discussion about the BRI and public goods in the last part of the book also needs to be further elaborated. 🌸

A. KADİR EKİNCİ



The Silent Light

A. Kadir Ekinci is a graduate of the Ankara Gazi Education Institute. Ekinci, took part in the management and advisory boards of the Ankara Photography Artists Association (AFSAD) since 1992. He took part in many projects organized by AFSAD, such as the GAP Faith and Beliefs Project in Southeastern Anatolia. His photographs were exhibited in many national and international exhibitions and competitions.

MUHARREM PIRE

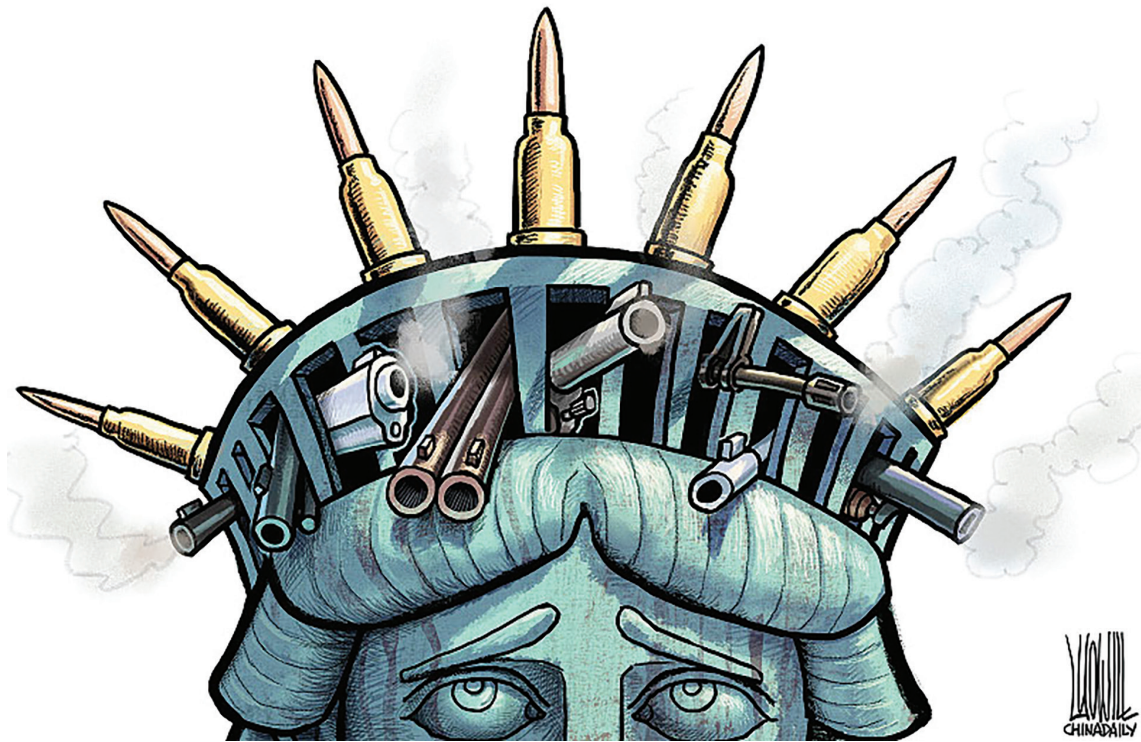


From the "Blue Homeland" Exhibition in Memory of Rear Admiral Soner Polat*

Muharrem Pire was born in Bulgaria in 1944. He was a student of Selahattin Hüsnü Taran at Kepirtepe Primary School and a student of İlhami Demirci at Istanbul Capa Teachers' School. He graduated from the Ankara Gazi Education Institute's Painting Department in 1966. The artist worked as an art teacher in teachers' schools for five years. After five years of work, he left this job and continued his work as a freelance artist. He has worked in different fields such as wall decoration, advertisement design, and theater decoration. He opened his first personal exhibition in Ankara in 1985. Since then, Muharrem Pire has opened a total of 26 solo exhibitions in Ankara and has also participated in many group exhibitions. Pire has received an award in the Meteksan Pattern Contest in 1983. He received an honorable mention at the 1987 Grand National Assembly of Türkiye's National Security and Peace Competition and a success award at the 48th State Painting and Sculpture Exhibition. In 1995, the artist's works were distributed to The Pollock-Krasner Foundation Inc. and included in the Pollock-Krasner 10th Anniversary Catalogue. Muharrem Pire continues his painting work in his workshop in Ankara.

* Muharrem Pire, Untitled, Oil on Canvas, 40x59, 2020

LUO JIE



The Culture of Guns

Luo Jie graduated from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in 1991. His public collections have been exhibited at the Shanghai Yuangong Art Museum and the Nanjing Qinghe Art Museum. Luo Jie is one of the most distinctive Chinese contemporary artists in China today. His works feature his iconic subject, "Rope Man," and express a kind of emotional nostalgia that is entangled with the life of a modern metropolis. The patterns and lines of his Works demonstrate the complex nature of feelings and experiences in life that often have neither a beginning nor an end.

