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PAN-TURKISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CYPRUS

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The relationship between NATO member Turkey and the US and EU have become mainly transactional, embodied by Turkish continued occupation of the northern part of Cyprus by establishing a puppet statelet after the 1974 invasion, condemned by United Nations Security Council Resolutions¹, and the non-recognition of Cyprus as a sovereign and independent State. Consequently, Turkey's disregard for Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) solutions became an established policy theorised by the "Blue Homeland" doctrine. As an ad hoc EEZ demarcation deal, as part of Turkey's accession to the EU, should be considered along with increased US and EU involvement. In the case of protracted obstructionism and disregard for International Law, sanctions and a frozen Turkish EU membership process should be pursued. The Greco-Cypriot strategy of building ties with regional actors with an increasing Western holistic engagement should go hand in hand with the objective to making Turkey change its policy on Cyprus.

The Geopolitics of the East Mediterranean

Turkey's conflictual Eurasian identity as a resurgent transcontinental superpower trading and cooperating with the very enemy of the West, Russia² and China³, proves that Turkish foreign policy has less in common with NATO union in anti-Russian and, potentially, anti-Chinese strategy or EU's strategic security and more with unilateralism. The non-recognition of Cyprus' sovereignty and independence fits ideologically with Russia's infringement of Ukraine's and sets the blueprint for

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¹ See UN Security Council Resolutions 353, 357, 358, 359, 360, and 365, 367, and all from 1974 <https://www.un.org/site-search/?query=cyprus> Accessed 27 September 2023

² "Putin and Erdogan unveil Russia's built nuclear plant in Turkey", Moscow Times, April 27 2023 <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/04/27/putin-erdogan-unveil-russia-built-nuclear-plant-in-turkey-a80967> Accessed 27 September 2023

³ <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/shanghai-cooperation-organization.en.mfa> Accessed 27 September 2023

rogue states in the world. The lack of holistic and strategic EU-NATO engagement in Cyprus is, indirectly, Moscow's and Beijing's profiting from Turkish influence as an energy and infrastructure chance and transit route and for vessels, given how Turkey aims to boost Russo-Chinese investments and cooperates with Russia in Syria.

Turko-Russian rivalry in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea should not overshadow Ankara's anti-US and anti-EU posture in the Eastern Mediterranean, a vital way from Southeast Asia to Europe and a regional foothold in the policy of containment and diversification towards Moscow's East Mediterranean ambitions and Beijing's Maritime Silkroad. Cyprus's renewed role as a broad Western strategic counter to the pan-Turkic "Middle Corridor" strategy in the region benefiting Moscow and Beijing, implied in the "Blue Homeland" and Multilateral Transportation Policy⁴, the internationally unrecognised Turkish Exclusive Economic Zone claims over Greek-Cypriot areas, going against the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) should prompt the EU and the US to drop past inaction, augment presence and adopt a holistic approach consisting of upholding Cyprus sovereignty, containment of Russia-China friendly Turkey and protection of EU-US energetic and regional interests in the East Mediterranean.

The Turkish unilateral approach is shown by its opposition⁵ to the US decision to lift the arms embargo on Cyprus after the latter pledged to close its ports to Russian vessels and abide by money laundering regulations that NATO member Turkey disregards amid the increased naval deployment by Moscow from its Tartous and Hmeimin bases.

The Turkish decision to purchase the Russian S-400 System, which resulted in being denied the acquisition of the F-35, is proof of Turkish unilateralism towards NATO amid the increased naval deployment by Moscow from its Tartous base, Chinese presence by its Piraeus and Kumpot port assets and infrastructure investments in Athens⁶, Turkey⁷ along with increased links to Cyprus.⁸ Turkish infringement prompted the US and EU to sanction companies and persons that help Moscow evade Western sanctions and increase broad engagement.

⁴ https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa

Accessed 27 September 2023

⁵ https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-194_-abd-nin-gkry-ye-yonelik-silah-ambargosunu-kaldirma-karari-hk.en.mfa Accessed 27 September 2023

⁶ <http://www.hunterbmartin.com/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-in-greece8203.html> Accessed 27 September 2023

⁷ "China's 2023 Trade and Investment with Turkey: development trade", Silk Road Briefing, 28 January 2023,

<https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/01/25/chinas-2023-trade-and-investment-with-turkiye-trends/> Accessed 27 September 2023

⁸ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/202111/t20211130_10459117.shtml

Accessed 27 September 2023

The illegal stationing of Turkish forces on the island that has recently clashed with the UN peacekeepers signals how Turkey is unafraid of challenging the international forces and proceeding with illegal constructions by force, emboldened by the allies' passivity. It should prompt the expansion of military support and supply for the Cypriot forces with external help to ensure deterrence towards an increasingly belligerent and unpredictable NATO partner.

Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and US-UE Commitment in the Face of Turkish Unilateralism

The illegal drilling⁹ in Cyprus EEZ helps hinder disenfranchisement from imported gas that is of vital concern to counter Russian influence in the sector for the EU and the US.

The EEZ, bordering Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt, allows Cyprus to exercise its rights of exploitation and exploration according to International Law and by striking relative agreements with Greece, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt. The recognition is disputed by Ankara, based on the status of the breakaway "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" "(TRNC)" in the spirit of the Taksim policy, the two-state solution to the Cyprus problem to protect the rights of the separatists, not recognised by the United Nations and any other NATO and EU member. Consequently, the Turkey and the breakaway entity established an exclusive economic zone that violates the rights of Cyprus.¹⁰

This goes hand in hand with Turkey's defiance of extant international legal dispositions that define Cyprus's EEZ¹¹, a strategic European natural resources hub¹², given the strategy of diversification and decoupling from imported gas from Moscow. The NATO and EU request to desist resulted in Turkey carrying on with its new provocative plans for drilling in the area¹³ have de facto put into question

⁹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/11/11/turkey-s-illegal-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-framework-for-sanctions/> Accessed 27 September 2023

¹⁰ https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-216_-21-september-2011_-press-statement-on-the-continental-shelf-delimitation-agreement-signed-between-turkey-and-the-trnc.en.mfa Accessed 27 September 2023

¹¹ <https://www.marineregions.org/gazetteer.php?p=details&id=8376> Accessed 27 September 2023

¹² "ENI, TOTAL announce sizeable new gas discovery off Greek Cyprus", Daily Sabah, 21 December 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/eni-total-announce-sizeable-new-gas-discovery-off-greek-cyprus> Accessed 27 September 2023

¹³ "Turkey prepares to drill for gas off Cyprus early next month", Euractiv, 27 July, 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/turkey-prepares-to-drill-for-gas-off-cyprus-early-next-month/> Accessed 27 September 2023

the Western capacity to encourage allies to abide by International Law and EU-NATO security and objectives.¹⁴

While Rabinowitz voiced the outdatedness of oil and gas resources fields in favour of renewable energies¹⁵, the dispute over the EEZ shows Turkey's unpreparedness to restart the EU integration process and NATO to drop unilateralism and cynicism, which are the lifeboat of Moscow's declining status as arbiter in the East Mediterranean. The containment strategy towards Turkey, a NATO member functioning as an ally to Moscow, imposes the pursuit of isolation until Ankara decides to detach from it and stops threatening Western companies militarily. The companies involved in the drilling voiced their concerns¹⁶, thus complicating the bilateral relations between NATO allies. The issue points to Ankara's weaponization¹⁷ of the "TRNC" to carry out illegal activities against European energy companies.¹⁸

Turkish unilateralism could hinder European companies' search rather than, as boasted, ensure their security and rights from Greek Cypriots' actions. Thus, the whole narrative of internationally condemned Taksim policy, once more, how the breakaway entity¹⁹ serves as a puppet to Turkey's²⁰ encompassing strategy to access resources out of its reach by assisting in the setting up of a mock institutional system to the breakaway entity much as Moscow with the occupied Ukrainian territories by gunboat diplomacy. It is a clear violation of International Law, a threat not just to the strategic security of the Nicosia Government but also to the US and EU themselves in the East Mediterranean.

¹⁴ Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation, 10 January 2023

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/01/10/eu-nato-joint-declaration-10-january-2023/> Accessed 27 September 2023

¹⁵ Rabinowitz Dan, "Oil and gas are now a thing of the past", Ekathimerini, 20 March 2021, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/interviews/1157476/oil-and-gas-are-now-a-thing-of-the-past/> Accessed 27 September 2023

¹⁶ Zoppo Angela, "Descalzi (ENI): il gasdotto EastMed si può fare ma serve l'accordo con la Turchia", MilanoFinanza, 17 May 2015, <https://www.milanofinanza.it/news/descalzi-eni-il-gasdotto-eastmed-si-puo-fare-ma-serve-l-accordo-con-la-turchia-202305171500537038> Accessed 27 September 2023

¹⁷ "Exxon Mobil, Qatar Petroleum 'won't enter' Turkiye's continental shelf", TRT World, 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/exxon-mobil-qatar-petroleum-won-t-enter-turkiye-s-continental-shelf-52607> Accessed 27 September 2023

¹⁸ "Cyprus: Turkey may have stolen data for latest gas drillings", AabNews, 22 January 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1616761/amp> Accessed 27 September 2023

¹⁹ "Turkish Cyprus condemns Greek Cypriot Admin's unilateral drillings", Daily Sabah, 25 May 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/turkish-cyprus-condemns-greek-cypriot-admins-unilateral-drilling> Accessed 27 September 2023

²⁰ See the functioning and ties of the separatist entity: <https://mfa.gov.ct.tr/> Accessed 27 September 2023

Thus, the US and the EU should push for a comprehensive and sustainable deal, ideally similar²¹ to that between Israel and Lebanon, that is different from the one that envisions a shared use of the drilling in the area by allowing Turkey's access to the East Mediterranean Gas Forum²² that contains exploitation and exploration rights for companies from its signatory members, thus aiming at disenfranchising Moscow according to the EU and US objectives. The dispositions that ensure the said right should be included not just in the possible deal on the unification of the island but equally in the one of accession of Turkey into the EU. Further sanctions in case of protracted obstructionism should have effect from the outset. Moreover, expanding the scope for remunerative alliances with such regional partners as Egypt²³, the UAE²⁴, and Israel²⁵ via the hypothetical East Med Pipeline with the role of renewable energies would be a limiting factor to Turkey's anti-western strategy.²⁶

The 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act and the Acquisition and Cross Services Agreement²⁷ have opened a new chapter of US-Cypriot relations, given the Turko-Russian encroachment in the pivotal East Mediterranean basin that would fit Chinese interests by the Belt and Silk Road Initiative.

²¹ US-brokered deal to solve maritime dispute by establishing the divide line between the two EEZ. See Nackle Carol, "Lebanon and Israel's Historic Maritime Border Deal", GIS, 9 February 2023, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/israel-lebanon-maritime/> Accessed 27 September 2023

²² Surkes Sue, "Mistake to leave out of new EastMed gas club", The Times of Israel, 27 September 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mistake-to-leave-turkey-out-of-new-east-med-gas-club-international-expert/> Accessed 27 September 2023

²³ Farouk A. Menna, "Egypt conducts joint drills with Greece, Cyprus amid Turkey tensions", Al-Monitor, 15 November 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/11/egypt-cyprus-greece-naval-drills-tension-turkey.html> Accessed 27 September 2023

²⁴ Cyprus, "UAE sign first military cooperation agreement", Ekathimerini, 13 January 2021, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/261164/cyprus-uae-sign-first-military-cooperation-agreement/> Accessed September 2023

²⁵ Hasjicosti Menelaos, "Cyprus, Israel work on natural gas deal", Arkansas Democratic Gazette, 16 March 2023, <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2023/may/16/cyprus-israel-work-on-natural-gas-deal/> Accessed September 2023

²⁶ Elgendim Karim, "Egypt as an Eastern Mediterranean power in the energy transition", Middle East Institute, 18 July 2022, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/egypt-eastern-mediterranean-power-age-energy-transition> Accessed 27 September 2023

²⁷ "Mendez, Rubio introduce Eastern Mediterranean Security and Partnership Act of 2019", Foreign Relations Committee, April 09 2019 <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/dem/release/menendez-rubio-introduce-eastern-mediterranean-security-and-energy-partnership-act-of-2019> Accessed 27 September 2023

"Cyprus to provide logistical support and services to US naval vessels", September 20 2022 <https://knews.kathimerini.com.cy/en/news/cyprus-to-provide-logistical-support-and-services-to-us-naval-vessels-video> Accessed 27 September 2023

To pressure Turkey to desist from infringing, the EU and US should support the Greco-Cypriot strategy²⁸ of expanding ties²⁹ as a deterrent and coercive move to isolate Turkey, foster cooperation and opportunities among regional allies, and highlight Turkish malign influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. To isolate Turkey, the US should also think of resuming the East Med pipeline project, given Turkey's poor record as a NATO ally and the Russo-Turkish pet Turk-Stream project that runs against the disenfranchisement policy.

To ensure compliance, ad hoc missions along the allies' presence³⁰ in place should be permanently based in the area based on past similar actions to deter. Rearmament of Southern Cyprus, because of the new reality and Turkish obstructionism and defiance, should be increased exponentially to counter Turkish militarism.

Conclusions

Turkish unilateralism, coupled with expansionism in the Caspian Sea through its alliance with Azerbaijan, would create an all-Turkish sphere of influence that would complicate Western free ventures Cypriot choice in terms of foreign policy in the East Mediterranean and give Moscow and Beijing a chance to use to expand their scope.

The EU and US should each envision new harsher sanctions on the Turkish Taksim policy that is getting recognition internationally through OTS and TURKPA, the pan-Turkic media featuring a role for Moscow and Beijing but have so far hesitated due to geopolitical considerations such as the increasing close ties between Ankara and Moscow. The lesson from Ukraine teaches that appeasement against rogues never pays off in the long term. A formal meeting about Turkey's future within the Euro-Atlantic alliance should be urgently convened in the framework of the much-needed counter-strategy to frustrate the Russo-Chinese encirclement in the Mediterranean and Europe.

²⁸ "Saudi Arabia, UAE siding with Greece against Turkey in Cyprus", Middle East Monitor, 29 January 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200129-saudi-arabia-uae-siding-with-greece-against-turkey-in-cyprus/> Accessed 27 September 2023

²⁹ "Cyprus meeting of UAE, Israel, Greece showcases new narrative", The Arab Weekly, 17 April 2021, <https://theArabweekly.com/cyprus-meeting-uae-israel-greece-showcases-new-narrative> Accessed 27 September 2023

³⁰ "Cyprus holds military drill with France, Italy, Greece to bolster security in Eastern Mediterranean", Associated Press, 14 September 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/cyprus-france-italy-greece-military-drills-9344a4b789dfd3a87b3571120bea8017> Accessed 27 September 2023

Kennard Matt, "Revealed: America's secret military deployment on British Cyprus", Declassified UK, 1 February 2023, <https://www.declassifieduk.org/revealed-americas-secret-military-deployment-on-british-cyprus/> Accessed 27 September 2023

<https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no-94-abd-nin-uss-san-juan-saldiri-denizaltisinin-bir-gkry-limanina-demirlemesi-ve-gkry-nin-silahlanma-faaliyetleri-hk.en.mfa> Accessed 27 September 2023