

Implications of Gas Reservoirs on the Conflicts and Cooperative Relationships in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to examine the implications of the energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The concerned discoveries represent a strong impetus to expand and even complicate the cycle of rivalry and conflict.

Methods: The study is based on the theoretical framework of national interest, as to interpret the foreign policy of Eastern Mediterranean states. Moreover, the study employs the case study approach, by which data and information collection is conducted comprehensively for an individual case, or a limited number of cases. This is done for the purpose of reaching a deeper understanding of the political phenomenon in the international context.

Results: This study concludes that gas reservoirs have fueled the conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Conclusions: gas reservoirs alliances aggravate the regional instability; Also new network of alliances undermines the opportunities for cooperation.

Keywords: Energy conflict, energy security alliances, cooperation routes, gas reservoirs.

تداعيات احتياطيات الغاز على النزاعات والعلاقات التعاونية في منطقة شرق المتوسط

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ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت الدراسة الوصول إلى معرفة تداعيات مصادر الطاقة في شرق المتوسط، مثلت الاكتشافات الجديدة دافعا قويا لتوسيع وتعقيد دائرة التنافس والصراع.

المنهجية: اعتمدت الدراسة على نظرية المصلحة القومية، لتفسير السياسة الخارجية لدول شرق المتوسط، كما اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج دراسة الحالة، الذي يقوم على جمع بيانات ومعلومات شاملة عن حالة فردية واحدة، أو عدد محدود من الحالات، بهدف الوصول إلى فهم أعمق للظاهرة السياسية في النسق الدولي.

النتائج: ولدت احتياطيات الغاز تحالفات وتكتلات من شأنها زعزعة الاستقرار الإقليمي، كما أن شبكة التحالفات والتكتلات الجديدة تقوض من فرص التعاون..

الخلاصة: ساهمت احتياطيات الغاز في تأجيج الصراع في شرق المتوسط.

الكلمات الدالة: صراع الطاقة، تحالفات أمن الطاقة، مسارات التعاون، احتياطيات الغاز.



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1. Introduction

The energy security has become a manifestation of security concepts that began to form and have a scientific significance among many variables during the post-Cold War era, with the emergence of a new international system. Energy security is one of the central issues, related to the field of international relations. Its particular significance to this study comes from its being one of the drivers of foreign policy, particularly those of the Great Powers. This is due to its associations with the broad sectors of industry, trade, transportation, technology, and so on. These Great Powers sought to stabilize energy security while ensuring the provision of supplies in a manner that meets the growing demands of the domestic market and does not depend entirely on the policies of the energy-producing countries. The US and EU strategy, both are the two major consumers of fossil fuel in the world, draws on the diversification of energy sources from multiple suppliers. This intersects with the statement of Winston Churchill in the beginnings of the past century, regarding “the oil security that lies in variety; variety only”. The European decision to reduce reliance on Russian gas, considering the promising energy sources in the Eastern Mediterranean region, comes as an alternative to replenish the market demands. Moreover, the peoples’ uprisings in some Arab countries were preceded by a series of gas and oil discoveries in the Levantine Basin in 2010, rendering security, public order, and the stability of the ruling regimes in such countries as top priorities. Meanwhile, Israel does not cease exploring, producing, and developing gas fields. Therefore, the process is accelerated to reach the domestic markets, and this explains why the production is prompted. Israel, for the first time, changed from being an energy importer to an exporter, which instigates a revolution in the various product segments. Despite the emergence of Turkey and Israel in the energy market, the conflict of interests and the absence of constructive cooperation drive the Eastern Mediterranean region into a network of alliances that mark the early indications for the outbreak of conflict, and instability of the regional security. The US and primarily the EU have attempted to defuse the tension and construct strong interrelations, based on the cooperation between the regional countries to maintain stability in the region, along with the gas and oil prices, while securing the energy supplies for the European market at relatively reduced costs. And despite the controversial alliances and partnerships that tie Turkey and Israel with the United States at varying levels, the outcome is that the present conflictual situation reflects the international balance of power, whereas the emerging Middle Powers cast back the imbalanced structure of the international system.

Objectives of Study:

This study aims to examine the following:

- Trends of conflict over the reservoirs of energy resources.
- Regional interactions in the Eastern Mediterranean region.
- Divergent national interests of the Eastern Mediterranean countries threaten the opportunities for regional cooperation.

Problem of Study:

The problem of this study is centered upon the implications the energy resources, discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean region, have on the trends of conflict/cooperation, generated by the multiplicity of foreign policy objectives of the Eastern Mediterranean countries that seek to accomplish their national interests. These take place in an unstable political environment, where the variable of the emerging energy resources represents a challenge before the regional countries, imposing new facts that can upset the balance of power and regional stability. Energy security has contributed to the ability of these countries to draw an active foreign policy for the regional and international systems, while enabling them to enhance and diversify the available energy alternatives, by dealing with energy issues in terms of the others to gain the knowledge of both the allies and opponents. This in turn provides preliminary inputs on the areas of cooperation and conflict, within the framework of the national interest of the parties involved. Considering the complexity that defines the central conflicts in the region, there are persistent concerns of contention, particularly concerning the natural sources of the discovered energy resources. The variables of this study can be interpreted and connected to represent the implications of energy reservoirs on the patterns of regional dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean countries.

Hence, the main research question herein study is: To what extent do the implications of energy reservoirs impact the

areas of cooperation and conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean countries?

Secondary Research Questions:

- What are the main routes of conflict for energy resources?
- What are the patterns of interaction in the Eastern Mediterranean region?
- Do the routes of cooperation contribute to strengthening energy security?

Theoretical framework: Theory of National Interest:

The foreign policy of a country is formulated based on its national interests. Historical shreds of evidence support this tendency, which can be traced through the steps taken by politicians and decision-makers. The concept of national interest imposes intellectual discipline and a rationale that elucidates the theoretical foundations for any political behavior (Morgntaw, 1964, p. 26). Also, it clarifies the continuity of the foreign policy, despite the changes in the political leadership or in the dominant ideology and the prevailing models of political and social values. In other words, the national interest is always the general index by which, the factors determining the foreign behavior of any member state of the international community are inferred, irrespective of the differences in the political, strategic, ideological, or natural factors that influence the privileged position of any given country, which drive it to conflict or cooperate with other countries (Maklad, 1991, p. 26). Countries seek to advance their self-interests to the highest possible degree while maintaining their competitiveness according to their capabilities. The totality of these goals stands for the national interest. Morgenthau contends that the concept of the national interest, as defined by power, is unstable. However, he stresses that as long as the world remains divided into sovereign countries, the minimum standard of foreign policy should be the survival one, since every country is compelled to safeguard its material, political, and cultural existence against any attack by other countries. A national interest corresponds to the strong survival, as well as the formation of a single identity. It can be concluded that international relations are power relations that are not subject to any law, save for that of national interest (Frag, 2007, pp. 231-232).

According to the realist theory, every country has a set of national interests, which can be summed up into three major zones: the survival, i.e. the primary interest of any country; the maximization of military power, which is the main instrument of defense against enemies; and the increase of political power that considers the foreign policy, including the economic and commercial dimensions of the inter-state relations, being the material base for the expansion in the military power (Dasher, 2016, p. 402). The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, highlighted the value of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean region linking it to the survival interest. During the discussion of the Antitrust Law of Natural Gas, before the Economic Affairs Committee of the Knesset, Netanyahu stated that the development of the Israeli gas fields is vital for its national security, survival, and future (Netanyahu, 2015). Therefore, the issue pertains to the main task of Israel, which is the interest in survival, attached to which is harnessing all the national capabilities to defend the Israeli interests, for the gas projects in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including exploration, extraction, and production. According to Johnson, the energy resources discovery and trading may lead to the exacerbation of long-term tensions and rivalry between the neighboring countries, without necessarily resolving the dispute over the alluring trade of oil and gas, with its financial returns (Johnson, 2015) Realists believe that countries are dominated by the ideas and calculations of power and authority, and fight for them. Such rivalry sometimes requires waging wars, which can be an acceptable instrument of statecraft and the continuity of policy by other means (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 34).

Methodology:

A case study approach is “in-depth research into the multiple and complex factors that contribute to the formation of a given social unit, by drawing on the necessary research tools for data collection” (Ibrach, 2009, p. 161). This approach is built on the collection of a considerable amount of comprehensive data and information on a case, or a limited number of cases to reach a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the subject matter of this study, as well as its comparable phenomena (Alyan & Ghoniem, 2000, p. 46). Data collection covers the current situation of the case under study, as well as its past and relations, to reach a deeper and better understanding. This is intended to determine scientific generalizations concerning the case under study, and other similar cases, whether this case be an individual, an administrative organization, a political system, a country, an empire, or a civilization. This is done for the aim of recognizing the case, its enigmas, and

the factors influencing this unit, in addition to highlighting the correlations, and the causal and functional relationships between the parts of the phenomenon. This approach focuses on the whole situation and views the particles considering their relations with the whole since the particle is a side or aspect of the whole truth (Shalaby, 1997, p. 87). This is what the study addresses concerning the political environment of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Moreover, it investigates whether the discovered energy sources are, on the one hand, areas of cooperation between Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt, and how the latter seeks to play a pivotal role as the regional center of gas trade, by boosting its rivaling capacity in the global market, to become a strategic hub for global gas trade. On the other hand, the discovered energy sources can be viewed as areas of the regional conflict between Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey, concerning the delimitation of the maritime boundaries, particularly the issues of jurisdiction, and the right to benefit in the exclusive economic zone near Gaza, according to the protocols annexed to the Declaration of Principles of the Oslo Accords, adding to that the reemergence of the dispute between Turkey and Greece over the Island of Cyprus, specifically after the discovery of new energy sources. This study will collect data by tracking and analyzing the most prominent official statements of political leaders and competent professional bodies that express the objectives of foreign policy. This also includes studying and explaining the political behavior and the pragmatic facts imposed on the ground, about the new variables, represented by the energy security, and attempting to link them with the two variables of this study.

The major routes of energy conflict:

The Eastern Mediterranean region rose to prominence after a series of discoveries and explorations, and gas extraction, leading countries of the Eastern Mediterranean towards strengthening their energy security. The United States Geological Survey estimated the tentative average of oil and gas reserve in the Levantine Basin to be 122 trillion cubic feet of recoverable gas, and 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil, distributed among Palestine, Israel, Cyprus, Lebanon, and Syria (Schenk, et al., 2010, p. 1). These discoveries occurred inside a region suffering from chronic conflicts, of which the most significant has been the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as Shia-Sunni sectarian strife, and terrorism in the region, in addition to the power struggle in Syria, which turned into an international conflict between pivotal parties of the international system, represented by the United States and Russia, towards defending their spheres of influence. This led to the complication of the political scene in the Eastern Mediterranean region, considering the polarization and tension among the countries of the region. The emerging energy sources played a role in the regional and international network of alliances, which in turn bred and fueled new hotspots of conflict and rivalry over energy sources, between Israel and Lebanon, between Israel and Palestine, between Israel and Turkey, and between Turkey and Cyprus, adding to that the one with Greek Cyprus, Greece, and Israel on one side, and Turkey on the other.

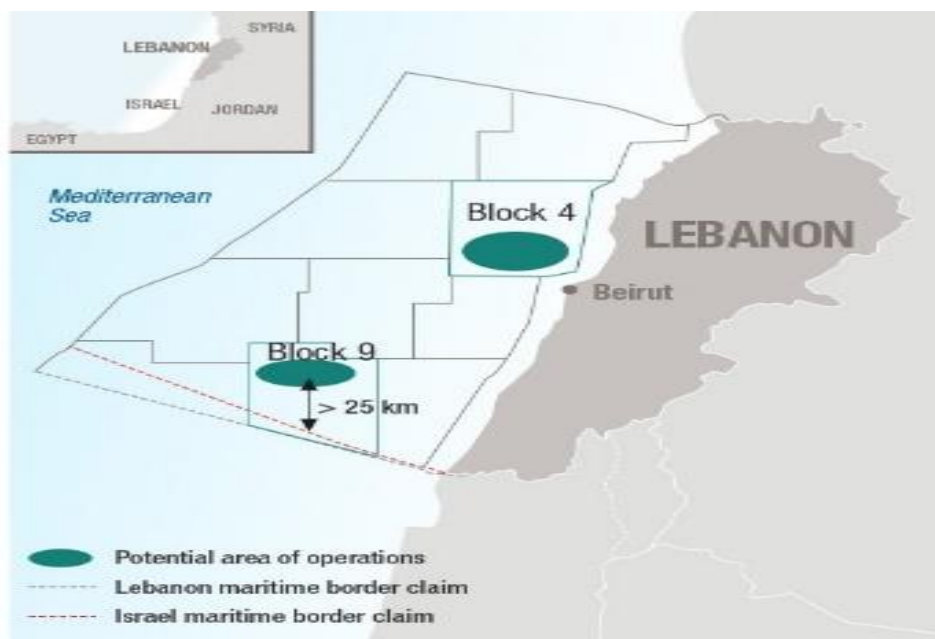
The Israeli Lebanese Route:

The hostile relationship between the two countries has been irreconcilable. Israel has consistently violated the Lebanese sovereignty for groundless reasons. Israel invaded Lebanese territories, most notably in 1978, 1982, and 2006, under the pretext of establishing a buffer zone along the borders, to protect the Israeli northern borders from guerilla attacks by *fedayeen*, to eliminate the Palestinian resistance forces, and to deter the Lebanese forces of Hezbollah that became a threat to the northern territories in Israel. These wars left behind thousands of civilian casualties and destroyed Lebanon's infrastructure, which constrained the efforts of the Lebanese country towards development. The religious and sectarian diversity characteristic of the Lebanese reality could be a strong component to the society, as well as an important element in the safeguarding of the political system. This could be achieved if the political powers agreed to the national interest and asserted the rule of law by imposing country authority throughout Lebanon's national territory and eliminating the armed militias operating according to foreign agendas, specifically in the case of Hezbollah and Iran.

As for the Israeli Lebanese conflict, tension rose following a series of gas discoveries offshore Israel, adjacent to the Lebanese borders, which Lebanon considered as part of its territorial waters. What made this situation more complicated was the absence of any agreement on the demarcation of land and maritime borders. The points of disagreement regarding this issue have been endless, from Shebaa farmlands to the gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the different views and tensions in Lebanon's domestic politics, Lebanon laid claims to benefit from its maritime borders. The President, Speaker of

Parliament, and the Minister of Energy asserted Lebanon's property rights to the fields in its territorial waters. The case acquired another dimension when Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasr Allah avowed that the resistance was not going to allow Israel to exploit the gas fields (Al-Na'amy, 2011, p. 9). The Blue Line was not drawn until after Israel withdrew from the Lebanese territories in 2000. The UN Security Council approved Resolution No. (1701) on the delimitation of the maritime boundaries of both countries, after Israel's aggression in Lebanon in 2006 (Council, Security, 2006).

According to the present seismic maps, the offshore gas reservoirs in Lebanon are estimated to be nearly 12-25 trillion cubic feet, while the average estimate for oil reserve is nearly 557.5 million barrels. Thus, the value of cash income for gas reservoirs is estimated to be approximately 163.91 billion dollars, and 90 billion dollars for oil reservoirs, between the years 2020 and 2039 (Shehab, 2017, pp. 8-9). The Lebanese territorial waters have an area of nearly 22,700 square kilometers, of which the disputed area represents 4%; that is 860 square kilometers. Block 9 is one of these territories. In January 2017, the Lebanese government announced opening the maritime areas, namely Blocks 1, 4, 9, and 10, for global oil companies to submit their proposals (Lebanese Ministry of Energy, 2018). In December 2017, authorizations were granted for oil exploration and production in Blocks 4 and 9, by 40% to Total of France, 40% to Eni of Italy, and 20% to Novatek of Russia. The priority of the Consortium, the coalition of the companies, was set to drill the first well in Block 4 in 2019. As for Block 9, Total and its partners affirmed their full awareness of the Lebanese Israeli border dispute, in the northern side of the Block, determining that a limited area of less than 8% of the Block is located 25 kilometers off the disputed area. The Consortium asserted that drilling of the well in Block 9 would not intersect with other fields (Total, 2018).



Map showing the location of Blocks 4 and 9 off the Lebanese coastline.

Source: (Total, 2018).

The conflict escalated, despite the clarifications announced by the coalition of international companies, following Israel's warning to the Consortium to stay away from the disputed territories, specifically Block 9. In the meanwhile, the Lebanese President stated that Lebanon expected the United States to play an active role in resolving this crisis with Israel. This led the U.S. Envoy David Satterfield to propose a compromise to appease both parties, which was a half solution that was not accepted by the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Barry (Aoudé, 2019). The exploration fired Israel's antagonism, sending warnings to the Lebanese government, whereas the latter responded by highlighting the unlawfulness of the bilateral agreement between Israel and Cyprus on border demarcation, and noting the damages to Lebanon and its economy, and the violation of its sovereignty. Under the UN auspices, negotiations between the Lebanese and the Israel

armies were underway to contain the situation and agree on the delimitation of the maritime boundaries. Nevertheless, Israel's decision to build a wall along the land boundary derailed the negotiations, which gave Hezbollah a reason to remain weaponized (Qoblan, 2018, p. 85).

During the annual convention of Israel's Institute of National Security, in January 2018, the former Minister of Defense Avigdor Liberman began his speech, on border issues with Lebanon, with a declaration stating that the Lebanese government issued tenders for the exploration of natural gas in the Mediterranean Sea, whereas Block 9, for which several global oil companies bade, was by all measures Israel's exclusive economic zone. Liberman described the steps taken by the Lebanese government in that direction as acts of provocation, and a big mistake. His statement triggered a response from Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasr Allah, who stressed Lebanon's ownership of the fields located inside its exclusive economic waters (Eran, 2018, p. 1). Israel's apprehension stemmed from Nasr Allah's threats to attack Israel's gas and oil rigs in the Mediterranean Sea, which he could reach. During the 2006 War, an Israeli warship was struck 10 nautical miles off the Lebanese coastline, killing the four sailors on board, and causing extensive damage. The disparity in military capacities between the two parties, in favor of Israel, due to the technology, smart missiles, the early-warning sensors and alarm systems, and other war machines- did not stop Hezbollah from reaching the warship. This called Israel to reevaluate its military strategy by enhancing the navy's capacities, to avoid security incidents and naval attacks, in particular (Guardian, The, 2006). Targeting the Israeli warship was proof of Hezbollah's ability to reach and disrupt Israel's oil rigs, which would lead to the destabilization of the security environment in the Mediterranean, and consequently the withdrawal of the international companies working in the fields, or the disruption of their workflow. The outcome would be the breach of Israel's energy security. To face this challenge, Israel protects its spheres of influence in the Mediterranean Sea, against the infiltrating guerilla groups of fedayeen, and the smuggling of arms, by monitoring the capabilities of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria and imposing a naval blockade on Gaza Strip.

The Israeli navy was increasingly being summoned to test its readiness, after being modernized and enhanced, increasing its numbers and weaponization, in addition to the expansion of its spheres of influence, to safeguard the infrastructure of the gas projects in the Mediterranean and to firmly deter forces that can potentially pose a threat (Vogler & Thompson, 2015, pp. 3-4). Israel is deeply concerned about Iran's influence in Syria, and the transfer of arms from Iran to Syria and Hezbollah, as well as Iran's influence on Israel's northern borders with Lebanon, and the southern borders with the Gaza Strip, which is under the control of Hamas, whose leaders, in more than one occasion, announced their relations and alliances with Iran, loud and clear. To the international community, this provided further justification for the continuation of Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, and the suppression of Palestinian demonstrators along the border fence. Israel seeks to stabilize the security environment for companies working in the exploration and production inside its exclusive economic zones. The major challenge lies in the decay of the deterrence strategy implemented by the Israeli military when dealing with adversaries. It has precluded the Israeli policies in effect for the past years, limiting Israel's political options in the field.

The Palestinian-Israeli Route:

In 2000, the British Gas Company discovered the first gas field in the territorial waters of the Gaza Strip. This Gaza Marine field is estimated to hold 1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, making it economically viable (Palestinian Investment Fund, 2018). When developed, the project will cover the demands of the domestic market and empower energy generation programs in Palestine. According to the annexes to the Declaration of Principles of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority in the Mediterranean Sea extends 22 miles, within which the Gaza Marine field was discovered. A smaller field was discovered to the north, in a territory assumed or shared by Israel. The perspective of the Palestinian Authority changed, in legal terms, after the UN recognition of the State of Palestine as an observer. This allowed Palestine the opportunity to join organizations, and accede to international conventions, among which was the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea that represented the legal basis for the demarcation of country boundaries, and the delimitation of territorial waters at 12 miles long, water contiguous at 24 miles, and the exclusive economic zone at 200 miles, starting from the end of the contiguous zone. This was among the first agreements signed by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in 2012 (Sadqa, 2020). In April 2018, the Palestine Investment Fund announced the agreement with Shell on its exit from the authorization to develop

the natural gas field, Gaza Marine. The Palestine Investment Fund identifies itself as the Palestinian Authority sovereign fund that focuses its work on impact through investments and partnerships in strategic projects and vital sectors that contribute to the process of growth and development. The agreement followed Palestine's official approval and declaration to replace Shell with a new alliance that consists of the Palestine Investment Fund and the Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC) by 27.5% each, and 45% to global companies. These arrangements accelerate the development process of one of the biggest strategic and vital projects in Palestine (Palestinian Investment Fund, 2018).

The President of the Palestinian Energy Authority Dhafer Melham stated that they did not, until that moment, initiated the executive procedures towards gas extraction, adding that Palestinians had multiple options to overcome any obstacle and that they would defend their rights to their natural resources against Israel's piracy. He, also, assured investors that, in case Israel attempted to prevent access to the external market, there are main consumers in the Palestinian domestic market, which are the power stations in Gaza, and in the northern West Bank (Douglas, 2018). The Israeli occupation opposes the development of the project because it believes that the forces of Hamas in Gaza will benefit from the gas returns. It should be noted that both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank currently depend on Israel to supply their electricity consumption, except for the city of Jericho which depends on Jordan, in addition to one diesel power generator in Gaza. The discoveries offshore Gaza will remain unutilized due to the domestic situation in Palestine (Hamdy, 2013, p. 119). Regarding the issue of importing gas from Israel, the Head of the Palestinian Delegation in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, held in Cairo last year, on the 15th of January, Mohamed Mostafa refuted news claiming that the Palestinian Authority imported gas from Israel. This news spread after the Israeli Minister of Energy Yuval Steinitz had stated that discussions concerning importing gas from Israel were underway. Mostafa explained that these talks were part of the continuous effort by the Palestinian Authority to resolve the electricity crisis in Gaza, adding that the goal would be running the power station with Palestinian gas, referring to the gas in the Gaza Marine field (Wafa, 2020). He called for the utilization of his country's resources, stating that it would be the ideal means to reach economic dissociation from the occupation and to accomplish self-reliance in the field of energy. He added that Israel denied Palestine's multiple demands regarding the development of the Gaza Marine field and the utilization of gas in the Gaza power station. He considered the participation of the delegation as an affirmation of the Palestinians' rights to their natural resources, including their extraction, development, and safeguarding within the regional context (Toameh, 2018).

The Palestinian government has a clear strategy, which includes economic dissociation and severing colonial ties with Israel, and aspiring to build a free national economy, in cooperation with neighboring Arab countries, particularly after political negotiations came to an end, and the subsequent penalties Israel imposed on the Palestinian Authority, including the freeze and deduction of the Palestinian clearing house funds. On its part, Israel seeks to maintain Palestine's economic dependence and to continue tying the Palestinian economy directly to the Israeli economy. If Israel was indeed concerned that forces of Hamas in Gaza would benefit from the returns of the Palestinian gas project, and exploit it to tighten its grip, why would Israel hinder the development of the project for 7 years, that is before Hamas' total takeover and exclusive dominance over Gaza, and its coup against the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority in 2007? Second, Israel allowed Qatar to transfer millions of dollars in the suitcases of Ambassador Mohamed Al Emadi, to support Hamas' governance in the Gaza Strip, and through the political and security level in Israel (Toameh, 2018). The same occurred when Qatar donated the fuel to operate the Gaza power station, while the power company, under the control of Hamas, collected millions of shekels from Palestinian citizens in Gaza for many months (Aljazeera, 2017). This is how Israel contributed to sustaining and strengthening Hamas' governing of Gaza.

The Cypriot-Turkish Route:

On the 7th of November 2017, Cyprus announced its first deal to utilize natural gas. The 9.3-billion-dollar deal was with a Consortium a coalition between Shell, Noble Energy, and the Israeli Delek. The duration of the license is 25 years, covering the Aphrodite gas field, which was discovered by Noble Energy in 2011, and was estimated to contain over 4 trillion cubic feet of gas, which is over 113 billion cubic meters. It will generate an average annual income of 520 million dollars, over 18 years, for the Cypriot Ministry of Finance (EMC, 2020). In January 2018, the exploratory drilling operations in Block 6

revealed promising geological structures like those found in the huge gas field discovered in Egypt's exclusive economic zone. Yet, no official data were released on the size of the Calypso field, which was a joint discovery for Eni and Total in Blocks 6 and 11 located inside Cyprus's exclusive zone (CAN, 2018). In February 2019, Exxon Mobil and Qatar Petroleum discovered a big natural gas reserve offshore Cyprus, holding around 5-8 trillion cubic feet, which ranges from 142 to 227 billion cubic meters. Based on the preliminary estimates of data of the field located in Block 10, the discovery can be considered a new resource of natural gas (ExxonMobil, 2019). The Italian company Eni, and the French company Total still participate in the gas and oil exploration offshore Cyprus, which is a member of the European Union. Although the 2017 talks on ending the divisions in the Mediterranean island collapsed, the Republic of Cyprus proceeded in its exploration for maritime energy resources, which outraged Turkey that had control over Northern Cyprus since 1974 (France24, 2017).

It should be noted that last year, Cyprus's exclusive economic zone witnessed Turkish attempts to control and expand its spheres of influence. These attempts included Turkey sending its drillship Al-Fateh specifically for the exploration and excavation of energy sources in the western region of Cyprus, 55 miles off Cyprus's exclusive economic zone. It was followed by a seismic vessel, named after the Ottoman Admiral Hayreddin Barbarossa Pasha, sent by Turkey to a region in southern Cyprus, for which the government in Nicosia had granted the Italian company Eni authorization. Finally, the drillship Yavuz joined the exploration and excavation off Karpas Peninsula, located inside the Republic of Cyprus, supported by Turkey. It is worth mentioning that the vessels carried names associated with the Ottoman conquests in past centuries (Henderson, 2019, p. 1). Turkey's drilling operations in the Eastern Mediterranean were condemned and considered illegal by Europe. The European Council called for restraint and respect for Cyprus's sovereignty, urging Turkey to abstain from any operations that would violate Cyprus's rights, in addition to imposing a set of penalties on Turkey for the illegal excavation activities it conducted (European Council, 2019).

In December 2019, a Turkish navy ship forced the Israeli research vessel Bat Galim to leave Cyprus's territorial waters, since the ship, which belonged to the Oceanographic and Limnological Research institution of the Israeli Ministry of Energy, was sailing by the Cypriot coastline. Turkey had, also, intercepted an Italian drillship off the Cypriot coastline, an act described by the European Union as provocative, and would ignite tension in the region. Turkey reiterates its opposition to Cyprus's aspirations regarding investment and utilization of gas returns. Developments on the ground through action-reaction policy came to prevail over diplomatic efforts, as all parties began to rely on what came to be known as 'gunboat diplomacy.' Nevertheless, Egypt has the biggest gas reserve in the region, which became another target for Turkey after signing the gas development agreement with Cyprus (Salem, 2020).

The Israeli-Turkish Route:

The recent gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly offshore Israel, and Cyprus, pose a huge challenge for Turkey, regarding its regional relationships, and its relations with pivotal countries in the international system. It should be noted that these discoveries occurred under complex and tangled circumstances. First, the relations with Israel deteriorated following the May 2010 attack on the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara, off the coastline of the Gaza Strip, which was under Israeli blockade, killing 9 Turkish citizens (Turkish national commission of inquiry, 2010). Second, the endeavors of the United Nations failed to reach a consensus formula for both parties to the crisis of Cyprus. Third, Turkey's sustained efforts towards the accession to the European Union failed. Finally, Turkey joined the context of the Syrian crisis, which put its theory of minimization to zero at stake. Although Turkey had aspired to consolidate its position in foreign policy as a mediator and influencer in regional disputes, Turkey's position shifted into becoming a party to the dispute. Consequently, this position undermined its soft power, by which Turkey had sought to present the best image of the Turkish model to the Arab population, exploiting the historic and religious ties at various points in history (Oghlo, 2011, p. 117).

Over the past time, and as the Justice and Development party assumed power, Turkey sought to utilize its relations with Israel, to serve two goals. The first was to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which stemmed from Turkey's relations and ties to the countries of the Arab region, to present a consensus view of the conflict. The second was enhancing its energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, the failure to advance in this arena required Turkey to reevaluate its strategy in the region, to find the balance in its relations, and offset the alliances against it, by expanding its relations

with Arab countries, through broadening the prospects for political, commercial, and economic cooperation (Aoudé, 2019, pp. 98-99) Turkey objected to the bilateral agreement between Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt concerning the delimitation of the maritime boundaries, on the ground that the current situation in the Island was not conducive to any agreements. Turkey highlighted that it would not accept the exploitation of oil wealth exclusively by the Greek Cypriots, as the Turkish Cypriots were denied the returns of the recovered gas and oil. Turkey asserted that it was crucial to reach a comprehensive political settlement for the Island, before embarking on the utilization of gas wealth (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

Turkey aspires that the gas pipeline of the Levantine Basin passes through its territories, reaching its domestic markets, and from there to the European markets. Yet, this depends on Turkey restoring diplomatic relations with Israel and resolving the dispute in Cyprus. While the former can be achieved, the latter extends for 45 years, making it difficult for Turkey to achieve a quick breakthrough in this issue, despite the advantages of the oil returns (Charles, John, Harry, & David, 2016, p. 19) This is due to the political and religious barriers, and the cultural residues that impede coexistence, gap reduction, and bridging of communal living in one country. Also, the historical dispute between Turkey and Greece has recently witnessed some tension due to the exploration and drilling operations for energy sources in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Energy and the New Network of Alliances:

It is significant to note that Turkey is an ally to the U.S. President, and an active member of NATO, while Israel is also an ally to the U.S. President, and tied by various partnerships at the highest levels. Both parties, Turkey, and Israel, relate to cooperation agreements and partnerships in multiple fields. However, the emergence of energy sources in the region contributed to the transformation in the network of alliances, according to the national interest of each country, notwithstanding the differences in visions, and foreign policy goals. As the rivalry intensified, it became uncertain if U.S. policy in the Eastern Mediterranean can successfully defuse tension with Turkey and Israel. On the 14th of May 2015, military exercises were conducted among the navy forces of Israel, Greece, and the Us, for naval capacity building, and consolidating bonds of friendship, understanding, and cooperation. The former Israeli Minister of Energy Uzi Landau announced an axis that includes Greece, Cyprus, and Israel. On its part, Turkey viewed these exercises and alliances as directed against it, responding on the same level, by conducting military exercises that involved its navy and air forces, near the disputed gas projects (Samaan , 2016, pp. 1-3) Israel declared that understandings were reached regarding what came to be known as the Eastern Mediterranean Project, in conjunction with Greece and Italy. The project aims to initiate the extension of gas pipelines from Israel to Italy, and from there to the European markets. Nevertheless, Israel is apprehensive that the Libyan-Turkish agreement may directly threaten the Israeli interests, and hinder the project, hence causing damage to the Israeli economy, since extending gas pipelines to the countries of the European Union comes at a high cost.

It should be noted that the Libyan-Turkish agreement allows Turkey control over wide areas of the Mediterranean Sea (TRT, 2019 b) On the 9th of December 2019, the Turkish President spoke to TRT Network, stating that his country would never tolerate the construction of the gas pipeline in territories under Turkey's control, in case Southern Cyprus, Greece, and Israel attempted to initiate the project. He explained that Turkey's endeavors in this regard had been in complete accordance with the International Maritime Law. He added that signing the Memorandum of Understanding with Libya was the strongest response to the attempts by Greece and Cyprus to enclose and isolate Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean (TRT, 2019 a) Turkish diplomacy is directed towards concluding agreements and military alliances with Arab countries' producers of energy sources, in addition to expanding utilization and adjustments according to the regional variables emerging in the Arab reality. Turkey took part in the Gulf crisis and aligned with Qatar to open the forced isolation imposed by Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Turkey offered military protection by establishing a Turkish army base in Qatar and deploying thousands of Turkish soldiers to the Qatari territories. This came after the Turkish Parliament promptly endorsed the military cooperation agreement between the two countries. The Turkish intervention complicated the situation and hardened the position of parties involved, but at the same time, pushed back the prospect of military involvement by the Gulf countries in Qatar (Elhamd, 2018).

In fulfillment of the Libyan-Turkish agreement on the delimitation of the maritime boundaries, in January 2020, the Turkish Parliament approved the President's request to send military forces to Libya, to support the internationally recognized

government of National Accord in Tripoli, which is under attack by the forces loyal to General Khalifa Haftar. Turkey attempts to build a network of alliances to meet and support its demands for gas excavation in the Eastern Mediterranean rich with energy resources, and to counteract the coalition of Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Israel (DW, 2020). It is noteworthy to add that Turkey is a transit country for Russian gas. Turkey aims to become a multi-source transit country for numerous suppliers in the Caspian and Middle Eastern regions, which will strengthen its position in its regional and international domain and expand its political options. Besides, Turkey's interest in energy security, especially in Europe, will generate funds for the country, and enable access to the energy market, and the European market at relatively reduced costs.

Routes of Cooperation in Energy Security:

Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean seek to provide a stable security environment, based on dialogue and cooperation, which realizes governmental plans for development and prosperity. This is achieved through an institutional framework that brings together parties concerned, defuses tension, and tackles the risks impeding optimal utilization of natural resources. Yet, the challenge before the routes of cooperation is manifested in the rivalry and the search for a role that can be employed to achieve political gains, status, and influence in the regional system.

East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF)

The third meeting of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) was convened in Cairo, early this year, under the presidency of the Egyptian Minister of Petroleum, Tarek El Mulla. The meeting was attended by the Cypriot, Greek, Israeli and Palestinian Ministers in charge of the energy portfolio, in addition to the Italian Under-Secretary for Economic Development, and a representative of the Jordanian Minister of Energy, as the heads of delegations of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum founding members. Moreover, the meeting was attended by representatives of the European Union, and the World Bank, in addition to representatives from the United States and France as guests. During the meeting, the full recognition of the members' rights to their natural resources was asserted, following the international law, which will serve as a platform for structured dialogue on issues of gas, embracing strategies and regional gas policies, based on a common vision, and supported by governmental cooperation, towards the prosperity of the region (Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum, 2020).

The Egyptian initiative aims to establish an internationally sponsored institutional framework that brings together the main regional parties, organize efforts related to energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and tackle the Turkish aspirations to stifle the development of gas infrastructure. Excluding Lebanon and Syria from the institutional framework of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum was primarily due to the absence of diplomatic relations between both countries and Israel, and secondarily because of Syria's preoccupation with its power struggle. What connected all parties involved in the Forum were, first and foremost, their exclusive economic interests. Egypt seeks to overcome its economic crisis and strengthen its position in regional and international arenas. Greece, also, seeks a central role in the region, as a member of the European Union and NATO. Both Greece and Cyprus aspire to overcome their economic crisis. Moreover, the European Union and the United States are considered the guarantors for enhancing American and European gas companies in the Eastern Mediterranean. This stands in accord with the European decision to reduce the European dependence on Russian gas, as the European Union aims to diversify its energy sources. Israel seeks to overcome its regional isolation, strengthen its energy security, and increase its utilization of gas supplies through long-term contracts with the neighboring Arab markets (Winter & Strauss, 2019) Israel lacks the infrastructure for gas processing, and consequently, for gas exports, needs Egypt, which has 2 gas liquefaction stations. The United States strongly encouraged such projects, hoping that gas may represent a big push towards regional stability and peace in the region, and economic integration in Israel (Mills, 2018, p. 9). For Palestinians, it is an assertion of their right to manage their natural resources, particularly the development of the Gaza Marine field. Jordan seeks to meet the growing needs for energy demands and secure the stability of the domestic energy market for years to come while avoiding similar disruptions in supplies as recently witnessed.

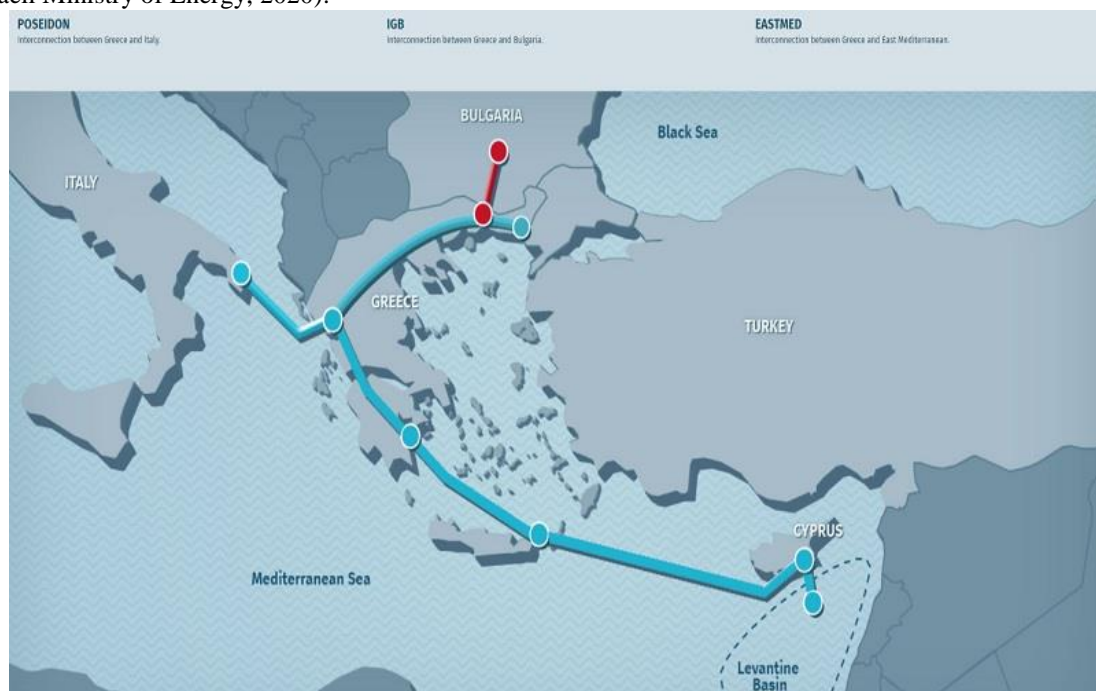
It should be clear that the main barriers to energy in the Middle East are not technical, economic, financial, or even commercial, in the form of reduced or elevated energy prices. The main barriers are political, and related to the cultural construct, obstructing the normalized view of Israel as an accepted entity in the Arab region. Also, there are some irreconcilable regional conflicts, and substantial obstacles standing against a real breakthrough in this area. There is no possibility for peace

between Lebanon/Syria and Israeli, in the absence of a huge regional political transformation (Mills, 2018, p. 11).

The Arab Summit, held in the Lebanese capital Beirut, in March 2002 called for a historic solution that would end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which in its essence advocated the withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories of the 1967 borders, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and Israel's withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights, and the Lebanese territories under occupation, as well as the return of Palestinian refugees, per United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

The Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (East Med):

The Cypriot, Greek, and Italian governments confirmed the construction of the East Med pipeline, as Project of Common Interest, adopted by the EU Commission among Southern Gas Corridor projects. The project corresponds to the objective of the European Network Transportation System Operators of Gas; to create one European market for gas, and a reliable safe transportation network capable of meeting Europe's current and future needs (IGI Poseidon, 2015). On the 5th of December 2017, the Cypriot, Greek, and Israeli Ministers of Energy, and the Italian Ambassador in Nicosia, Cyprus, signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in constructing East Med Pipeline, in the presence of a representative of the EU Commission. All parties agreed to cooperate in empowering and boosting development. East Med Pipeline was a feasible strategic option that secures a long-term direct exporting route from Israel and Cyprus to Greece, Italy, and others, which ultimately strengthens the security of supplies to the European Union while motivating rivalry between gas suppliers (Cyprus Ministry of Energy, 2017). In the year 2015, the European Commission granted the project 2 million euros in funds, under the Connecting European Facility program. In 2017, the status of the project as a priority for joint action was confirmed (European Commission, 2015). On the 2nd of January 2020, the Greek, Cypriot, and Israeli Prime Ministers, and the Italian Minister of Energy attended, as all parties involved signed off the final stage of the international agreement to start East Med Pipeline. This came after the project's engineering studies were concluded, and the Final Investment Decision was endorsed, according to the scheduled timeline, revealing that the project would be ready to start production in 2025 (Pipeline agreement, 2020, p. 2). This Pipeline is 2000 kilometers long, which will enable Israel to export the recovered natural gas to European markets, for the first time. Israel aspires to link the entire Eastern Mediterranean Basin with a single exporting system through a network of pipelines, from Israel's natural gas fields to Cyprus's territorial waters, passing through the Greek Crete Island, to the Greek mainland, and reaching the European gas pipeline network through Italy (Israeli Ministry of Energy, 2020).



The route of the East Med Pipeline that connects Israel and Cyprus with Greece.

Source: (IGI Poseidon, 2019).

Concerning its economic feasibility, current estimates of the project's capital expenditures reveal that the total cost of the project leads to lower results, compared to import projects of similar capacity to the European Union, and sustainable considering the scenarios of gas prices in the European Union. Besides, it is complementary to other export options, since the region's current discoveries will provide exports of approximately 30 billion cubic meters per year, to the global markets, without accounting for future discoveries, in a widely unexplored region. Therefore, it will support multiple export plans, including global markets through the liquified natural gas, and to Europe via the East Med pipeline (IGI Poseidon, 2015). The European Union recognizes the main infrastructure projects across borders as those that integrate markets of at least 2 EU countries, in a manner by which a project has a great impact on energy markets. This will boost rivalry in the energy markets, and support energy security in the European Union through the diversification of sources. Besides, it will contribute to the European Union's climate and energy plans, by integrating renewable energy sources, to reach affordable, secure, and sustainable energy for all the citizens, and achieving long-term decarbonization of the economy (European Commission, 2015).

The EU policy is based on conflict resolution, particularly the Turkish-Cypriot conflict since its persistence compromises the success of the East Med project. Instead of encouraging cooperation and defusing tension between the two parties, energy hardened the attitudes of both sides and created an environment of distrust between them. The situation requires an international effort, by the European Union in particular, to create joint dialogue, and encourage cooperation (Baconi , 2017). Irrespective of the currently ongoing debate on its economic feasibility, the strategic value of the project lies in the linkage of three continents of the world, Asia, Africa, and Europe. In case it was accomplished, Israel would become a regional hub for energy, which would strengthen its energy security. If Israel managed to achieve a real breakthrough regarding the ongoing conflict, leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State under the Arab initiative, its significance would grow further, considering the gas fields in the Arab Gulf.

The Israeli - Emirati normalization accord was signed last August, allowing for establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. The energy-related clause therein provides for bilateral cooperation in the field of energy security, natural gas, and regional networks through promoting and developing cooperation mechanisms in the energy projects. (US Department of State, 2020, p. 3) This opened the door before the revival of Europe-Asia Pipeline Co. (EAPC) (Bialer , 2007). that connects Eilat Port in southern Israel on the Red Sea with Ashkelon Port on the Mediterranean coast with the European and North American markets via tankers or the East Med pipeline. In this regard, the CEO of the Israeli pipeline company, Izik Levi, declared that this accord opens many doors and provides numerous opportunities. (Ferziger , 2020).

Israeli proposals imply that the United Arab Emirates should urge the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to pass the oil and gas from the Arab Gulf countries to the EAPC pipeline through Saudi territory. According to the Israeli vision, the commercial advantages of EAPC will provide a financial return to the Israeli treasury. And for Europe, it will reduce the time and cost of shipping, while it will reduce dependence on the traditional, yet also risky, maritime routes, particularly the Hormuz Strait, for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries (Barkat , 2020).

The project, for Israel, will strengthen and stabilize its energy security. It is worth mentioning that if the project is completed, and the approval of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is obtained, this would change the geopolitical map of the region and reduce dependence on the international shipping route of the Suez Canal, as well as the Hormuz Strait.

Osama Rabie, the Head of the Suez Canal Authority, adds that "in the long-term, the project will affect the Suez Canal. Nevertheless, Egypt is working on enhancing its shipping route by partnering with China, regarding maritime transport on the Silk Road, provided that the ships passing through the Silk Road must pass the Suez Canal." (Taha , 2021).

Conclusion:

Decades ago, Israel suffered from energy security problems, exemplified by the security threats, interruptions in energy supplies, market fluctuations, and political problems related to its legitimacy in the Arab region. The discoveries come to contribute to strengthening its energy security and helping it avoid the risk of being relatively isolated regionally. This

impact enabled it to diversify the movement alternatives and widen the margin of maneuvering, based on hegemony and expansion of the influence areas, especially as it is a major party in the problems of conflict. Turkey, as a hub country and a regional player with Israel, is participating in the attempts to dominate the gas and oil reservoirs in the region. This has brought the two regional powers into a state of rivalry and conflict over energy resources, resulting in the emergence of new alliances that have essentially taken part in redrawing the geopolitical map of the region that maintained relative stability and balance for decades ago. This takes the region back to the international agendas and attention. The main conflict routes in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and Israel, the Lebanese State, Turkey, and Cyprus, resulted in expanding the Turkish-Israeli vital sphere to include Libya, Qatar, Egypt, Greece, and Italy. As for the areas of cooperation and the institutional framework of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), by its stated goals of pursuing regional gas strategy and policies, based on a common vision, the EMGF failed to find close cooperation means, based on a cooperative vision or formula that represents the institutional framework strategy. This explains why Israel worked individually on establishing the East Med gas pipeline that connects the Israeli gas fields to Cypriot waters and from there to Greece to the European gas pipeline network in Italy. Israel also revived the EAPC pipeline that connects Eilat Port with the coast of Ashkelon. Israel aspires to be a transit country for the Gulf oil and gas to the European markets. And if the two projects are completed, this will fundamentally cement Israel's position in the regional and international markets, while negatively affecting the Suez Canal revenues and the strategic value of the Hormuz Strait, which will, in turn, reduce the margin of maneuvering of the Iranian leadership with the major powers in the international system. As a result, the geopolitical map of the region will be redrawn, supported by the United States, in a way that ensures Israeli supremacy as an important regional player. What increases the fragility of the institutional framework is that while the Palestinian Authority is a member and partner in EMGF, it does not benefit from its rights and natural resources, controlled by Israel, which is a member of the same forum. This keeps the scene of conflict and tension as the most prominent feature of the foreign policy activity of the region's countries, something that contradicts with the international efforts that aim at reducing the current tension and creating constructive cooperation to achieve regional stability.

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