



The Editor in-Chief's Note

As the Editor in Chief, it is a great pleasure to present the first issue of the magazine The Strategist.

The Strategist is committed to promote a better understanding of the regional affairs by providing relevant background information and analysis, as far as the Turkey's neighborhood in general, and Turkey's foreign, security and economic policies in particular are concerned.

In its first issue the major emphasis is put on the regional security questions in Turkey's neighborhood, Turkey's Olive Branch operation out of its borders; Turkey's bilateral relations with the US and Russia; and current developments in the Middle East and in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Since January 20, 2018, Turkey's policy on fighting against terrorism has recaptured the consciousness of the international community, most vividly through the Operation Olive Branch against the terrorist organizations DAESH and YPG/PKK, which are considered as a threat to Turkey's national security. Dr. Elnur Ismayil, expert on Foreign and Security Policies at the BILGESAM think tank, analyses the Operation Olive Branch and the strategy behind Turkey's military operation.

Renowned experts from Turkey, United States, and Germany have kindly contributed to the current issue. I would like to thank all contributors for their interesting and analysis.

Prof. Mustafa Kibaroglu in his analysis on relations between Turkey and the United States, attempts to answer the question whether the parties are staunch allies or rivals.

Retired Ambassador Unal Ceviköz analyses Turkey's bilateral relations with Russia, which sometimes is called as one of the partners of Ankara, especially in the Syrian conflict. Mr. Ceviköz scrutinizes those relations from political, economic, and military point of view.

While providing an all-encompassing reviews and research on Turkey's foreign and security policies in this issue, a wide range of regional issues, such as the United States Middle East policy, and current security developments in the Eastern Mediterranean are addressed.

Expert on security issues Matthew Cohen observes Donald Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem and its implications to the relations between Washington and Ankara.

Another important geography, which turns to be conflicting zone between neighbor countries, because of its energy resources, is the Eastern Mediterranean. Prof. Nursin Atesoglu Güney tries to answer the question whether there is any possibility for future cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean following the natural gas discoveries.

Retired Ambassador Mehmet Ogutcu and Researcher Can Ogutcu examine the expectations and new dynamics in the oil markets in 2018.

Expert on political issues and Director of Heinrich Böll Foundation in Istanbul, Kristian Brakel, in his piece on the US Middle East policy explains Trump's controversial decisions and its implications to regional security.

Retired Ambassador Faruk Logoglu in his analyses describes how religion affects the foreign policy of any country.

The first issue of the Strategist is a result of voluntary and hard work of the affiliated persons. Therefore, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the members of the Editorial Board and to the staff for their consistent and profound engagement.

Dr. Elnur İSMAYIL



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The Vancouver Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Security and Stability on Korean Peninsula was held in Vancouver.

(Canada, 16th January)



The White House released its Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).

(USA, 2nd February)

Bulgaria took over the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union.

(Bulgaria 1st January 2018)

Parliamentary elections were held in Northern Cyprus.

(Northern Cyprus, 7th January 2018)

Munich Security Conference 2018 has taken place in Munich.

(Germany, 16-18th February)

Greek Cypriot conservative leader Nicos Anastasiades was reelected for second five-year term.

(South Cyprus, 5th January 2018)

The Syrian National Dialogue Congress, Russian organized peace conference, took place in Russian city Sochi.

(Russia, 29-30th January)

North Korea staged a large military parade to commemorate the 70th anniversary of founding of the country's armed forces.

(North Korea, 8th February)

Turkish military launched "Olive Branch Operation" against PYD/YPG threat in Afrin, northwestern part of Syria.

(Turkey, 20th January)



Operation Olive Branch and the Strategy Behind Turkey's Operation

Elnur İSMAYIL

Dr., BİLGESAM General Coordinator





Launched on January 20, Turkey's Operation Olive Branch aims at clearing Syria's northwestern Afrin region from terrorist organizations DAESH and YPG/PKK, which are considered as threats to Turkey's national security. Turkey claims that YPG is Syrian arm of PKK and the military wing of PYD terrorist group backed by United States. Days after the United States informed establishment of Border Security Force composed of YPG-dominated SDF group near Turkey's border in northern Syria, Turkey commenced the military operation towards Afrin.

Afrin region is located in the northwest Syria bordering Turkey. Until the start of operations, the region was known as one of major centers for YPG militants. Syria's Assad regime, without any fight, had left Afrin city to terrorist groups in July 2012. Since March 12, Afrin city center is has been surrounded by the Turkish Military Forces. It should be noted that roughly 65 % of Turkish-Syrian border was controlled by YPG.

Undoubtedly, the operation is conducted on the basis of international law principles and UN Security Council resolutions 1624 (2005), 2170 and 2178 (2014) which are in tune with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter that gives right to Turkey to self-defense; and under the framework of Turkey's rights based on international law. As it is officially informed, operation Olive Branch will continue until the security threat against Turkish national interests in the region is eliminated.

One of the main goals of the operation is to eliminate any corridor controlled by the terrorist groups on Turkey's southern border. To create a security buffer zone 30 km deep inside Syria and along its borders is one of the ultimate aims of the Turkish Armed Forces. By achieving this, Turkey aims to restore peace within the region, and protect Syrian civil population from oppression of terrorists.

Being a member state of the NATO, Turkey plays an important role in maintaining the stability of the southern borders of the NATO through Olive Branch Operation. The operation does not target any ethnic or religious group. Instead, the operation will bring stabilization to the region by preventing new refugee outflows from Syria. Taking into consideration that after the successful conclusion of Operation Euphrates Shield, around 100 thousand of Syrian refugees returned to Jarablus, Olive Branch's successful end will allow return of a half million refugees to their homes in Syria.

On the other hand, on 24th of February, the UN Security Council voted unanimously in favor of a 30-day ceasefire in Syria, which all parties involved in crisis have to cease hostilities without delay across the country. Some Western countries, including the USA criticize Turkey's Olive Branch operation in Afrin as violation of the UN SC ceasefire resolution.

Engagement of regional and global players in Syria makes the situation more complex. As a result of successful achievements of the Turkish military forces in the first days of the Operation Olive Branch, Turkey forced YPG to make a statement asking the Assad regime for “carrying out its sovereign obligations in protection its borders with Turkey.

On the other side, Russia and Iran, which are considered as Turkey’s strategic partners in the Syria crisis, are working to empower current Syrian regime by helping Assad to consolidate his power, which is against Ankara’s interests. Moreover, Iran both at the presidential and Foreign Ministry levels criticized Turkey’s Olive Branch operation in its first days, by defining it as an aggression and invasion. That approach explains how Iran is worried about Turkey’s military presence in Syria, which could make its rival more influenced in the

region. In addition to this concern, USA’s support to the YPG is another issue that makes trouble in Tehran government.

Since the start of the Operation Olive Branch, Turkish Armed Forces neutralized more than 3400 YPG/PKK terrorists. Additionally, strategic heights and more than 100 villages in Afrin region have been taken under control, critically important areas have been seized. Battle for Jinderes was a mark of a shift from rural to urban warfare in the Turkish military operation. One of the main strategies is to lay siege to Afrin and to prevent any connection to Nubl and Zahra.

What would the Western countries, which criticize Turkey, do if they were in Ankara’s position? There is no doubt that Turkey’s struggle is legitimate and aims at preventing any threat to its territorial integrity. ■

Although Turkey gives the impression that its relations are beginning to become more intensive with Russia, first in the energy sector and now in defence, as far as S-400 procurements are concerned, this should not be interpreted as a change of axis in Turkey’s commitments to its western allied relations, specifically to NATO.





TURKEY AND THE UNITED STATES: STAUNCH ALLIES OR RIVALS?

Mustafa KIBAROĞLU

Prof. MEF University



Reports about the decision of the United States to set up a border force with the so-called “Syrian Democratic Forces” (SDF) that would operate along the Turkish and Iraqi borders and also inside Syria along the Euphrates river, exacerbated the tension in the already strenuous relations between Ankara and Washington. Turkey regards the SDF that is dominated by the Kurdish YPG as indistinguishable from the PKK terrorist organization. Accordingly, this move of Washington is seen from Ankara’s perspective as adding insult to injury and as a clear sign that the United States will not keep its promise to dump the YPG once the war against ISIS is won.

Turkey’s concomitant military mobilization along the Syrian border and the statements made by President Recep T. Erdoğan hinting at a large-scale military operation towards the sectors in northern Syria where the YPG aims to expand its authority may well result in unwanted and, certainly, an undesired confrontation between Turkey and the United States. So, how did Turkey and the United States, which have long treated each other as a “staunch ally” during the Cold War period, come to the point of wrangling and why do they seem to be drifting further apart from each other day by day?

The answer lies in the developments that have taken place since the end of the East-West confrontation that heralded the beginning of a new era in Turkish-American relations due to the changing priorities of the long-time allies, which manifested themselves in their policies toward Iraq following the 1991 Gulf War. The divergence of approaches toward the future of the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks aggravated the tension in the bilateral relations. Had it not been for the sake of having a history together, “rivalry” would be the term to define the nature of the state of affairs in Turkish-American relations since then.

The above paragraph is borrowed from the abstract of an article, entitled “Turkey and the United States in the 21st Century: Friends or Foes?” that was published in the Winter 2008 issue of the Korean Journal of Defense Analysis, which I had co-authored with my colleague Dr. Tarık Oğuzlu. In that article, Dr. Oğuzlu and I had discussed the sources of policies that were bringing Turkey and the United States to the brink of wrangling in a number of issue areas in the fields of foreign and security policies, and argued that a lack of common security culture was primarily responsible for most of the trouble encountered in the bilateral relations.

Ten years later, even a brief look at the current state of affairs in Turkish-American relations suggests that bilateral relations have been deteriorating since then, let alone marking any notable achievement. Therefore, a meaningful assessment of the current situation in Turkish-American relations requires a sound analysis of how and why, at times of dramatic changes in world politics, both countries have not been able to adjust their foreign and security policies.

The “Kurdish Issue” as a Dividing Factor in Turkish-American Relations

The fractures that are being experienced lately in Turkish-American relations, such as the short-lived suspension of visa applications to the US diplomatic missions in Turkey, or the so-called “Zarab court case” are not necessarily the results of the recent developments taking place in Syria, where Ankara and Washington find themselves very much at odds with each other in their respective policies.

At the roots of the major controversy between the two capitals, lies the very issue of how to treat the sub-state armed groups in the region (e.g. YPG and PYD that are the mere extensions of the PKK), which has been steadily poisoning the bilateral relations over the last quarter of the century. Thus, it makes sense to return to our ten-year-old article, in the remaining part of this section, in which Dr. Oğuzlu and I tried to analyze the causes and the consequences of the divergence of approaches between Turkey and the United States regarding the treatment of sub-state armed groups in the region.

Had Turkey and the United States not been staunch allies throughout the Cold War years, they would have easily declared each other as “adversary” due to their respective foreign policy objectives since the end of the Cold War. More specifically, since 9/11, Turkey and the United States have found themselves in the middle of an undeclared rivalry. Even though the grand strategic objectives of Turkey and the United States seemed to converge regarding the substance, there always existed deep divergences between the two nations concerning the means and the methods of achieving these objectives.

Hence, the two allies have started to come to the point of wrangling more frequently than ever in the pursuit of their objectives. It would not be wrong to say that the foreign policies of the American administrations were more warmly received in Turkey when the United States was 5,000 miles away. Yet, when the United States became a

de facto neighbor of Turkey in the aftermath of its invasion of Iraq in 2003, it has been seen in the Turkish public domain as the “number one enemy” and the greatest threat to Turkey’s security, stability as well as territorial and political integrity.

Despite a number of initiatives taken by high caliber individuals such as former diplomats and statesmen who played active and significant roles, on both sides, in the evolution of Turkish-American strategic relations, the outlook of the bilateral relations did not seem to be promising for the years and decades ahead. It should be noted that this process included the institutional interventions by the leading think tanks and non-governmental organizations, such as trade chambers and business unions.

We thought, this was an anomaly, considering the fact that the two nations were among those that would benefit the most by pursuing congruent policies with one another regarding the same problem areas, such as terrorism and weapons proliferation, which are defined by both of them as posing the greatest threats to their national security. The crisis of confidence in Turkish-American relations, however, could not be solely attributed to the leadership in both countries, when George W. Bush was the US president. Thus, we believed, the expectation that the relations would soon improve with the change of government in either or both countries could not be accepted at face value.

The crisis back in the mid-2000s owed its existence too much deeper factors, of which the growing rift between the strategic cultures of both countries would come first. Therefore, we anticipated in 2008 that unless the strategic gap is narrowed down, the years ahead might be fraught with new crises and dwindling cooperation. Hence, we argued that the core attributes of the Turkish and American strategic cultures in dealing with the challenges and threats to their national security, where the essence of the problem seems to lie, must be carefully studied.

This was important, for the dynamics of the Cold War era politics did long conceal the strategic differences between Ankara and Washington. Turkish and American decision-makers have long believed that their common threat perceptions would continue to guarantee their security cooperation within the context of NATO and elsewhere in the world even after the abolishing of the threat posed by the Soviet Union. Decades of close and intense cooperation in the military-strategic domain made the observers believe that both countries were subscribed to a common strategic mentality.

However, the developments that took place in the aftermath of the collapse of the bipolar international system, and then the dynamics of the post 9/11 era, have made it quite clear that Turkey and the United States did not see eye to eye on a number of strategic issues. That the United States being the most important actor across the globe having a hegemonic agenda, and Turkey a middle-sized power in its environment trying to protect itself against the uncertainties of the new era, has gradually shaped the strenuous nature of bilateral relations back then as well.

In the decades that followed the end of the Cold War, both countries have gradually drifted apart in terms of the ways and means of achieving their strategic objectives despite their high degree of congruence in substance.

Had Turkey and the United States not been staunch allies throughout the Cold War years, they would have easily declared each other as “adversary” due to their respective foreign policy objectives since the end of the Cold War.

To cite a few, both Turkey and the United States had to deal with terrorism more frequently and intensively in the post-Cold War era than ever before. Terrorism has become an inescapable problem for both nations due to changing international security environment. Notwithstanding the similarity of the problem that Turkey and the United States faced, it was difficult to argue that the degree of cooperation between them in dealing with the threat of terrorism was at the level that would be expected from "staunch allies".

On the contrary, falling short of meeting the expectations of each other has become a serious source of friction and even a bone of contention between the two countries. In the same vein, both Turkey and the United States were concerned with the rise of political Islam in the world. Turkey, being a secular state by Constitution, has been sensitive about the separation of the state and the religion in the administration of the country. Hence, both Turkey and the United States agreed that politicization of Islam must be tackled somehow. Nevertheless, both countries had deep disagreements on how to achieve this goal.

The growing strategic divergence between Turkey and the United States became evident when one focused his or her attention on the way as to how these countries define terrorism and the means to deal with it.

Despite all its horror, the September 11 attacks did not lead to a wholesale Turkish acceptance of the American conceptualization of terrorism. To Washington, the new-age terrorism was fundamentally different from the old conceptualizations in the sense that it was more driven by religious ideologies than ever and that the main goal of these terrorists was to annihilate their opponents. In the eyes of the US decision makers, the new-age terrorism, as represented by Al Qaeda, posed a grave threat to American way of life. What were at stake were the core American values. Americans conducted their struggle against new age terrorism as if they were at war, suggesting that there were only two possible

The aftermath of the US-led war in Iraq has made it quite clear that Turkey and the United States think differently as to how to define as well as to deal with the PKK terrorism.

outcomes; either total victory or total submission.

In contrast to the United States, Turkey viewed terrorism as more of a security problem caused by the employment of military instruments by a group of terrorists driven by what they believed to be achievable political goals. To Ankara, terrorism still operates in its classical understanding and the most important challenge in this context came from the PKK, which is a classical terrorist organization employing brutal and violent means in order to help bring into existence an independent Kurdish state in Turkey's southeastern region.

The aftermath of the US-led war in Iraq has made it quite clear that Turkey and the United States think differently as to how to define as well as to deal with the PKK terrorism. Turkey considers the PKK as an important threat posed to its national security and unity and thinks that it is entitled to resort to every possible legal means available to eradicate this threat. In this sense, Turkey has grown unhappy with the fact the regime change in Iraq has provided the PKK with the possibility of using northern Iraq as a logistical safe haven.

In the eyes of the Washington administrations, securing the strategic cooperation with the Iraqi Kurds during the post-war reconstruction and state-building period in Iraq has long appeared to be more important than aiding one of the staunchest allies in NATO, namely Turkey in its fight against the PKK.

While Washington mainly sees the PKK terrorism as Turkey's domestic problem and asks Ankara to find a solution to it within the framework of improving human rights and liberal democracy, Ankara argues that the resilience of the PKK terrorism is very much related to the political dynamics in northern Iraq. Moreover, Ankara views the politicization of the PKK terrorism through skeptical eyes and accuses the United States of turning a blind eye to Turkey's sensitivities.



While Washington approaches the PKK issue from an instrumental and tactical point of view, the PKK terrorism touches the very core of Turkey's security interests. Furthermore, while Turkey defines the Al Qaeda as a terrorist organization and helps the United States win its war in Afghanistan, Ankara does at the same time shy away from defining terrorism in reference to religion. To Ankara, the attempts at defining terrorism in religious terms, by making reference to Islam in particular, does not only breach the teachings of Islam but also carries the risk of endangering Turkey's secular identity.

What Now? Déjà Vu All Over Again

The above section demonstrates quite clearly that not much has changed in the positive direction, if not gotten even worse, due to a series of structural reasons that do not allow one to be optimistic about whether the once-staunch allies can overcome their much-troubled relations any time soon.

What is happening now, ten years later, is simply the "new wine in old bottles" or "déjà vu all over again" situation. To better understand what is meant by these phrases, it suffices to replace in the above section, PKK with YPG, and Al-Qaeda with ISIS, wherever they appear in the text, then read again the same paragraphs with the "new" actors, to acknowledge their role today in the "old" strategy of the United States toward the Kurds in northern Iraq and northern Syria.

Furthermore, while Turkey defines the Al Qaeda as a terrorist organization and helps the United States win its war in Afghanistan, Ankara does at the same time shy away from defining terrorism in reference to religion.



An Iraqi soldier holds US and Iraq flags as around



One might easily see that the causes and the consequences of deep divergences in the approaches of Turkey and the United States as to how to treat the sub-state armed groups in the region that we have discussed in our 2008 article remain almost exactly the same as the present situation.

This, unfortunately, tells us that whether it was George W. Bush or Barack H. Obama in the past, or Donald J. Trump today, or someone else in the White House in the near future, Turkish policymakers will continue to experience serious difficulties in having their NATO ally on their side in their fight against terrorism and this will be the greatest hurdle in the Turkish-American relations to overcome. ■

Eastern Mediterranean Gas Discoveries: Is there any Future for Cooperation?

Nurşin ATEŞOĞLU GÜNEY

Prof. MEF University





The Eastern Mediterranean 'peace pipeline dream' that has become popular ever since the founding of Tamar, Leviathan and Afrodit gas reserves in the Mediterranean has so far unfortunately failed to contribute positively to any of the various conflicting issues of the region.

The Eastern Mediterranean has become an area of international attraction especially after 820 bcm of natural gas was recently discovered, between 2009-2012, off the coast of Israel - in places like Tamar, Leviathan, Dalit and Tannin-Karish.-This was followed by further discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean that now total approximately 2.56 trillion cubic meters (tcm) . Some specialists have since then exaggerated the potential of Eastern Mediterranean gas reserves and quickly come to the conclusion that this region has the capacity to become not only a gas producer but also a real potential exporter to Europe. Hence, it was hoped that the EU's longtime energy dependency on Russia could thereby be overcome. Therefore, starting from the mid-2000s the gas discoveries in this region have led many experts to expect tectonic shifts in the strategic future and fortunes of the Levant . Specialists of this view seem to have forgotten the warning of Brenda Shafer that 'pipelines won't make or assure peace' . One can describe several examples, in this regard, of how the gas discoveries in the Mediterranean have so far failed to trigger the resolution of many conflicts. For instance, the various attempts to finalize peaceful negotiations between the two communities in Cyprus despite the gas discoveries around the island, especially in the late 2000s, have failed to bring an agreement. What is more striking, although the Tel-Aviv government, after founding off-shore gas fields in Tamar in 2009 and Leviathan in 2010, technically became an energy exporter rather than an importer, its dream of exporting its gas to Europe-nearly 40 percent of its production has not yet been materialized. Israel, since then has only succeeded in supplying small amounts of gas exports in its vicinity, for instance, Egypt. Hence, Tel-Aviv's Eastern Mediterranean pipeline dream, that hoped to export Israeli gas to Europe, has not been realized. In fact, according to some specialists, there is a high probability that this East Med pipeline project could become a pipedream, like the previous Nabucco project, unless new discoveries are made in the Mediterranean. In fact, as Theodoros Tsakiris asserted, the conventional thinking that was made public after the first discoveries of gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, with exaggerated predictions for this region's future role in gas traffic in Europe, soon proved to be wrong. At the time specialists like Matthew Byzra and others asserted that the East Mediterranean gas discoveries could make a positive impact and effect on easing or at least facilitating several problematic and conflicting issues of the region that are politically stalled . According to this assessment, it was first hoped that with the achievement of transferring Mediterranean gas, which

amounts to 20-50 bcm/year to Europe, the EU's basic aim of gas diversification strategy could be strengthened and hence Europe's dependency on Russian gas exports could be withered. Secondly, with the achievement of Mediterranean gas deliveries to Europe- via the various available sources and countries in the Mediterranean- it was expected that several stalled conflicts of this region, which mainly involve the gas producing countries, can be solved. However, due to several well-known constraints-like, the limited amount of discovered gas reserves, the technological barriers, etc- that are associated with these gas discoveries, by 2018 the likely main gas export routes were expected to be limited to the markets exclusively in the eastern Mediterranean region. It is estimated that Russia will remain as Europe's main gas supplier well into the 2020's. Tsakiris in his article called 'The Energy Geopolitics of Eastern Mediterranean and the Cyprus Problem' claims that the perceptions about the new gas discoveries in the Mediterranean have been over exaggerated, especially about its capacity to lead to future re-structuring of regional geopolitics of the eastern Mediterranean - by limiting the EU's gas imports from Russia . Hence, this paper will focus on examining the best possible options available for Israel, as one of the leading gas producing countries in the eastern Mediterranean in 2018, to export its gas beyond the region and if possible, to Europe-as it has desired for so long.

Can Eastern Mediterranean Gas Discoveries Bring Cooperation to the Region?

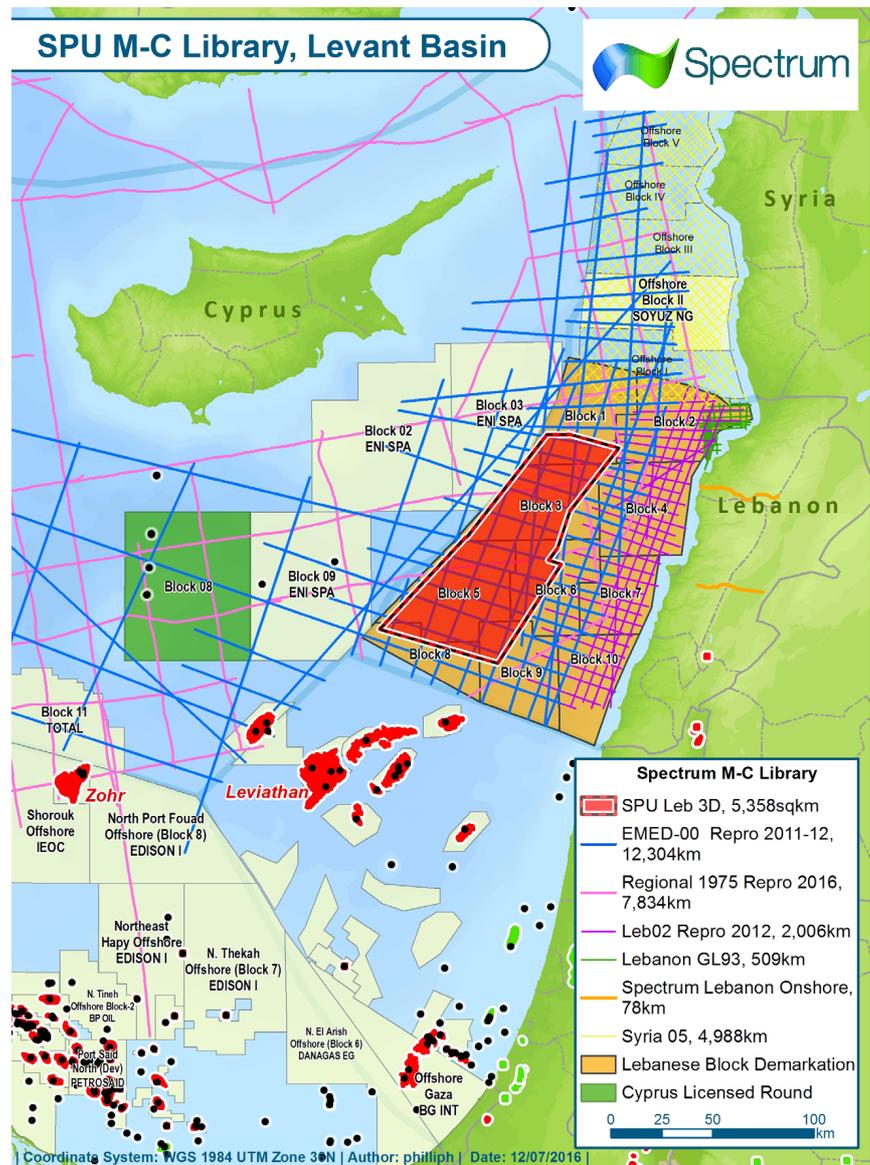
The Eastern Mediterranean 'peace pipeline dream' that has become popular ever since the founding of Tamar, Leviathan, and Afrodit gas reserves in the Mediterranean has so far, unfortunately, failed to contribute positively to any of the various conflicting issues of the region. One can easily recall the well-known linkage that was constructed between the Cyprus issue/question and the newly discovered Cypriot gas reserves monetization. However, it later became clear that this was an incorrect assumption. In 2009, people had thought that the newly found gas reserves could act as a new peace initiative for triggering cooperation between Turkish-Northern Cyprus and Southern Cyprus and hence this would lead to the resolving of the Cyprus issue. With the accomplishment of this peace pipeline initiative, it was first thought that exporting Cypriot gas to Turkey would limit Ankara's overwhelming gas dependency on Russia. Similarly, by transferring this gas to Europe via Turkey -through the extension of the East Med pipeline - EU's longtime gas dependency on Russia would also be ended. Therefore, these new gas discoveries in the East Mediterranean are hoped



to act as an incentive for both sides in Cyprus - since they are expected to share the gas wealth - to come to an overall political settlement of the Cyprus issue.

There are of course other examples of where Mediterranean gas discoveries have failed to bring new openings to the region's entrenched conflicts. For instance, the discovery of the Gaza Marine Gas field in 1999, in the Palestinian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), has also failed to motivate either Israel or the Palestinians to overcome the problems of the peace process. Currently, the situation has become worse especially after the U.S. President Trump unilaterally declared Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel. The hopes of bringing progress to the peace process that stems from Israeli-Palestine conflict seem to be buried, due to Israel's uncompromising attitudes in the aftermath of Trump's Jerusalem action. Another example can be given from the discovery of gas in the Leviathan region of the Mediterranean where Lebanon and Israel have been engaged in a dispute over an 854 km portion of their respective EEZs. This EEZ dispute which erupted after the gas reserve discoveries, unfortunately, has not yet been resolved; however, this situation did not stop Lebanon from deciding to start its own exploration in the region from 2017 onwards.

The complex nature of the region today still challenges the realization of the possibilities that Mediterranean gas deliveries can be carried from the available source countries, not only into the Mediterranean region but also beyond. Firstly, the uncertainty about the total size of the natural gas reserves that are found, namely whether the current amount of gas discovered is economically feasible or not, plays an important role in the determination of which route East Med gas should be transferred through-both within and beyond the Mediterranean region. Secondly, the boycott of the Israeli firms by most of the Arab countries in the region stands as another important challenge for the realization of the conditions of regional cooperation in East Med gas projects. Hence, due to the ongoing political impasse in the Middle East especially between Israel and most of the Arab



The hopes of bringing progress to the peace process that stems from Israeli-Palestine conflict seem to be buried, due to Israel's uncompromising attitudes in the aftermath of Trump's Jerusalem action.

states, delivering gas via the Israeli gas factories is still considered to be a wider Middle Eastern taboo. Countries like Jordan and Egypt stand as the few exceptions that have peace treaties with Israel and so are eligible to openly engage in commercial trade with Tel-Aviv. But, this does not change the reality that the majority of Arab countries continue to stick to their perpetual boycott of Israeli companies. Hence, this situation in the Mediterranean basin does not facilitate Tel-Aviv's dreams of accomplishing the best means of transferring its gas beyond its EEZ. On the other hand, despite the optimists' expectations, the gas discoveries in the seabed between Israel and Southern Cyprus - that are expected to make significant shifts in the Mediterranean geopolitics - has revived certain questions. Such as the question of delineating the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of all littoral states in the Eastern Mediterranean and this has added a new problem to the menu of the region's unresolved issues. Hence, the controversial and unresolved issue of EEZs among the Eastern Mediterranean countries has made Israel's dream of carrying its gas through the Mediterranean Sea more of a complex job. It is true that in different parts of the globe there exist several cases where the revenues that are earned from the sale of oil and gas have brought wealth and prosperity to the society. But in the Eastern Mediterranean, on the contrary, these gas discoveries, rather than bringing wealth to their source countries, are likely to further upset the existing fragile regional balances of power present in the area. It is widely known that the MENA region and Eastern Mediterranean as part of this region has been embedded in several conflicts over territory for decades. Unfortunately, the new gas discoveries in the region, starting from 2009, have not changed this reality. In fact, from the inception of these discoveries, the tense competition over ownership of gas has increased the stakes and as expected further destabilized the already strained relations especially between Israel and Lebanon as well as between Turkey/Northern Cyprus and Southern Cyprus.

But in the Eastern Mediterranean on the contrary these gas discoveries, rather than bringing wealth to their source countries, are likely to further upset the existing fragile regional balances of power present in the area. It is well-known that, the MENA region and Eastern Mediterranean as part of this region has been embedded in several conflicts over territory for decades.

Hence, the neglect by Southern Cyprus of legitimate warnings from Turkey and Northern Cyprus about the delineation of EEZ, as well as Ankara's frozen relations - especially after the Mavi Marmara incident- with Israel, that lasted until the 2016 normalization, have together helped deter the possibility of regional gas cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. But the role of the EU and U.S. also stand as other factors that have become effective in influencing the fate of the cooperation to exploit natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Certainly currently, and in the future, the role of the EU -because of Southern Cyprus which wants to carry Cypriot and Israeli gas together through Greece to Europe as an alternative route to Russia - as well as the Americans capacity and political determination will be determining factors which could hinder or facilitate cooperation in the Mediterranean.

Has the Role of the U.S. as Promoter of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Project changed with the Trump Administration?

With the Trump administration coming to power in the U.S., Washington's energy policy seems to be radically changed and this radical alteration is expected to have a negative effect on the future of the Eastern Mediterranean gas pipeline. Hence, countries like Greece, Southern Cyprus and most important of all Israel need to revise their plans for the realization of East Med pipeline routes. It is because Washington, with the current administration, is encouraging more domestic conventional and non-conventional shale-oil and gas production. This new administration, due to its new energy policy, has already started looking for export markets for its oil and gas around the world and what's more important Europe is high on the list. The U.S. in this regard has ambitiously shipped its first LNG cargo to Poland . Furthermore, when one examines the newly released American National Security Document from the viewpoint of Washington's new energy security paradigm; in the document where the U.S. mentions that it plans to beco-





Biden optimistic about Cyprus reunification

me an energy dominant country this announcement perfectly fits with the Trump administration's new energy policy inclination. The former president Obama, in contrast to Trump, dedicated a large effort and employed a high level of personnel to negotiate peace pipelines for the East Mediterranean region. This included several Mediterranean gas export deals and accomplished the Israel-Turkey détente that he believed would help in promoting the EU's energy security and finally find a resolution to the Cyprus conflict . Unlike the previous administration, the current White House's America First energy platform, which focuses on domestic politics, is aiming to promote shale oil and gas development in the U.S. thereby hoping to guarantee independence from foreign oil imports. Obama was inclined to give importance to reviving the East Med pipeline projects for several reasons other than the American aim to end Russia's overwhelming gas import dominance of the EU. Back in 2011 onwards, U.S. President Obama thought that it would be much easier to solve the issues of the Cyprus conflict together with the Israeli-Turkey bitterness- by bringing the gas discoveries into the picture as incentives for the establishment of political cooperation among the actors- rather than attempting to solve the complex issues of Arab Spring-like Egypt or the Syrian conflict . To this end, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden took a personal interest in the Cyprus problem and consequently the highest-level visit of an American official to Cyprus since Lyndon Johnson's visit in 1962 was realized. In fact, Joe Biden, during his visit to the island, stated that 'Cyprus is poised to become a key player [and expected to be transforming the eastern Mediterranean into a new global hub for natural gas]'. He also took care to mention a U.S. pledge for initiating peace negotiations between the two communities on the island. But, now that U.S. energy policy direction and its emphasis under the Trump administration is diverted to domestic production and shale development and few U.S. oil and gas companies are eager to enter the eastern Mediterranean, the Trump administration does not feel

East Med pipeline projects for several reasons other than the American aim to end Russia's overwhelming gas import dominance of the EU. Back in 2011 onwards, U.S. President Obama thought that it would be much easier to solve the issues of the Cyprus conflict together with the Israeli-Turkey bitterness- by bringing the gas discoveries into the picture as incentives for the establishment of political cooperation among the actors- rather than attempting to solve the complex issues of Arab Spring like Egypt or the Syrian conflict .

the obligation to advocate on behalf of American industry . Furthermore, energy companies, without having the guarantee of an Eastern Mediterranean region where legal agreements are associated with EEZ rights, will not be able to secure the necessary funding which is required for development and implementation of proposed gas projects . However, the U.S. under the Trump administration seems to have already lost interest in the East Med gas discoveries and hence the president does not feel obliged to act as a broker in hosting multilateral regional talks - to encourage mutual understanding between countries in the region - which would hopefully bring relative stability to the area.

What is the likelihood of the EU Playing a Role in the Mediterranean Gas issue?

The newly discovered Mediterranean energy resources, especially since 2009, have certainly attracted the attention of the EU as the Union is very much energy dependent on Russia-which lived through the crisis of 2006-2009 and the latest Ukrainian uprising in 2014 -to supply its overwhelming gas needs. The Union to strengthen its energy security wants to diversify both the source countries and the routes that pipelines can pass through. With this in mind, the EU has given serious thought to the East Med gas resources that were found in 2009 in the region. The Union first and foremost be aware of the East Med gas reserves geographical proximity to Europe came to the conclusion that the source countries' in the Mediterranean with their small populations- and their limited needs of gas for domestic purposes- could easily export their excess gas to Europe. EU countries in this regard have also assessed Greece and Southern Cyprus's membership in the Union as a crucial advantage on the side of the EU. Since 2009, the East Med gas pipeline has been evaluated as one of the outstanding alternative sources of gas for the EU triggering Union members to make progress in

Especially after the launch of Trump's gas doctrine - relying on the White House's America First energy platform which promotes domestic shale oil and gas development in the U.S. and supports Washington's independence from foreign oil imports - Israel is naturally expected to face a host of policy changes emanating from the U.S., but these changes will be felt most acutely in energy.

this matter. For this reason countries in the EU have thought and believed that the East Med gas pipeline could serve as a third gas corridor for the European continent, alongside Russian and Azeri gas- that will soon be supplied with the completion of TAAP/TAP. As is known the East Med pipeline project, which envisages a 1300 km offshore and a 600km onshore pipeline, is planned directly to connect East Mediterranean resources to Greece via Cyprus and Crete. This project with the support given by the Southern Cypriot, Greek, and the Italian governments have been confirmed in the EU as a Project of Common Interest (PCI) and hence been included by the EU Commission in the second PCI list among Southern Gas Corridor projects . This does not mean that the EU would support the project without a sound economic and political rationale. In fact, even though the East Med pipeline project was initially regarded as technically feasible and hopes were high, this optimism has been replaced with a range of serious concerns that seem to hinder its realization . Firstly, many experts have found the pipeline quite commercially expensive when considering the limited amount of gas that has so far been discovered. To counteract this, the Southern Cypriots are attempting to combine their gas reserves with the Israeli ones to achieve a volume that could be feasibly exported beyond the Eastern Mediterranean region. Most experts agree that the East Med pipeline project - that aims to go from Leviathan through Cyprus and then to Greece and Italy - is a very long route that would inevitably increase the price of the gas. In that case, the East Med gas prices are expected to fail to compete for not only with the much lower Russian gas prices available to EU countries but also with major LNG suppliers like the U.S. and others .

Especially after the launch of Trump's gas doctrine - relying on the White House's America First energy platform which promotes domestic shale oil and gas development in the U.S.

and supports Washington's independence from foreign oil imports - Israel is naturally expected to face a host of policy changes emanating from the U.S., but these changes will be felt most acutely in energy. Since the gas discoveries in Leviathan, Israel has been trying to find ways of realizing its aspirations for gas sales to Europe and hence has been working to find international support for the realization of its Leviathan gas sales. Likewise, Southern Cyprus with its limited gas capacity has tried to initiate gas sales together with Israel to Europe with the consideration that the Obama government's support given in this regard would continue. Unfortunately, this expectation of Southern Cyprus has not come to fruition. Now that few American oil and gas companies are eager to enter the eastern Mediterranean, for Trump there is no need to advocate for American industry. In addition, the Trump administration seems now to be more interested in concentrating on exporting its LNG gas to Europe in its competition with the Russians'. Under the present conditions, there seems almost no chance for the realization of the East Med pipeline project. Hence, Israel now needs to take the U.S. factor out of the equation for its European pipeline dreams.

Can we Expect Gas Cooperation in Mediterranean Basin?

All in all, under the present circumstances, the only feasible gas export option that is left for the East Med gas project is the one which will go through the undersea pipeline from Israel's Leviathan field to Turkey-either across Cyprus or skirting the island to the east. However, the lack of a peace settlement in the divided island makes the route that is planned to go through Cyprus almost impossible because of the unsolved and highly debatable EEZ problem between the two communities.

To summarize, a result of the thaw between Turkey and Israel after 2016 is that Israeli Leviathan gas is expected to go to Turkey only by by-passing Cyprus' EEZ . However, following Ankara and Tel-Aviv's recent clash over Trump's Jerusalem decision, there is a high probability that the two sides might temporarily defer the signing of the twenty-year gas supply deal that requires crucial investment in a pipeline. None-the-less the best option currently available to Israel is to export its Leviathan gas to Europe using the pipeline that goes through Turkey. ■



TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF 2018

A. Ünal ÇEVİKÖZ

Ret. Ambassador



Turkey has started the new year with an important new military operation directed towards the Afrin region in Syria. Turkish government deems it necessary to sanitize its border area from being prone to all kinds of terrorist activities.

In Syria, the international community identifies ISIL and other derivatives of radical extremist organizations exploiting Muslim religion as “terrorists” and fails to comprehend Turkey’s subjective security concerns. Turkey’s “olive branch” operation, therefore, may not receive the understanding it deserves.

A military operation to Afrin region in Syria has been on Turkey’s agenda since the summer of 2017. Obviously, the strategic decision to launch it required serious strategic coordination. The reason why it has been delayed for such a long period has much to do with Turkey’s relations with Russia. It is important, therefore, to review the dynamics of Turkish-Russian relations within the last three years.

Interestingly, bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia have been both negatively and posi-

tively affected due to the emergence of the Syrian problem and the developments related to it. Russia’s intervention in Syria at the end of September 2015 manifested that two countries were not in full harmony in terms of their vision about the resolution of the Syrian quagmire.

Russia argued that the fight against terrorism on the Syrian theater had to be conducted in coordination with the Syrian government. Turkey, on the other hand, was entirely against President Assad and his government in Damascus. These differences of opinions marked the main parameters of the disaccord between Turkey and Russia in Syria. In a nutshell, Russia was supporting the Syrian government and Turkey was helping the opposition. At times, the two governments were even accused of having an indirect proxy war in the Syrian theatre.

Incursions of Russian military aircraft into the Turkish airspace raised the tension between the two countries. On the 24th of November 2015, Turkish-Russian bilateral relations were affected by a shocking development. Turkey shot down a Russian military aircraft, an event which left two



Olive Branch Operation



Russian officers dead. This tragic development marked a serious deterioration in the bilateral relations.

Turkish-Russian bilateral relations have developed at a slow pace in the aftermath of the historic disintegration of the Soviet Union. Russia has perceived Turkey as a serious competitor in its hinterland, namely in Central Asia and in the South Caucasus. To a certain extent, this could be considered as a legitimate concern because Turkey's cultural and linguistic familiarity with the post-Soviet independent republics in Central Asia, and with Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus helped Turkey to establish advanced economic and political relations with them very easily. Meanwhile, Russia's Chechnya problem in the North Caucasus caused Moscow to suspect that Turkey was trying to reach out to the peoples of the Caucasus through religious affiliations, too.

Turkey and Russia started to overcome their mutual mistrust and suspicion only after the resolution of the Chechnya problem and with the grip of Pre-

In 2009, the two countries have managed to promote these relations to an upper level with intensified bilateral cooperation and joint projects on oil, natural gas and nuclear energy. Turkey heavily relies on imports of oil and gas from Russia to supply its energy need. Construction of the nuclear plant in Akkuyu, Mersin, will also increase Turkey's dependence on Russia in terms of its energy generation.

sident Putin on domestic politics in the country. Consequently, Putin's visit to Turkey in 2004 marked the beginning of the ascent in Turkish-Russian bilateral relations in trade and commerce as well as in economic cooperation focusing mainly on the energy sector.

In 2009, two countries have managed to promote these relations to an upper level with intensified bilateral cooperation and joint projects on oil, natural gas, and nuclear energy. Turkey heavily relies on imports of oil and gas from Russia to supply its energy need. Construction of the nuclear plant in Akkuyu, Mersin, will also increase Turkey's dependence on Russia in terms of its energy generation. Moreover, Turkey also hosts some 3 to 4 million Russian tourists every year.

These relations, obviously, were negatively affected due to the shooting of the Russian military aircraft by Turkey on the 24th of November in 2015. Yet, mutual interdependence of the two countries obliged them to find a quick solution to prevent further deterioration of bilateral relations. At the end of June

2016, President Erdogan's letter to Putin, interpreted as an apology by the latter, started the normalization of bilateral relations.

The two Presidents have met eight times in 2017. The first meeting took place in Moscow on 10th of March on the occasion of the bilateral High-Level Cooperation Council. This was followed by a meeting in Sochi to discuss the developments in Syria. Following two meetings were brief encounters on the margins of multilateral conferences, namely during the "One Belt One Road Summit" in Beijing on 15 May and during the G-20 Summit in Hamburg on 8 July. Then, Putin visited Ankara on the 28th of September. Turkey and Russia, having launched "Astana Process" to bring an end to the Syrian conflict had several coordination meetings in 2017. Two of those took place on 13 and 22 of November. Then, President Putin made a stopover in Ankara on the 12th of December on his return trip to Moscow from Egypt and Syria.

Turkey, in the last couple of years, particularly after the implosion of Syria, has been unable to establish efficient and fruitful cooperation and coordination with its allies. Turkey's dissenting views on the causes of Syrian civil strife has widened the gap with the United States and has resulted in the questioning of Turkey's commitments to NATO and to its western vocation. Such concerns have exacerbated because of Turkey's close coordination with Russia on the resolution of the Syrian conflict. Turkey's western allies questioned Turkey's purchasing of S-400 missile defense system from Russia, too.

All these developments jeopardize the perception of Turkey as a reliable and predictable ally. Certainly, this perception has to be corrected because Turkey's national defense strategy still relies fundamentally on its membership in NATO and its ultimate goal is still to become a full member of the European Union. What then, could be the

justification for increasing the intensity of Turkey's relations with Russia?

The rapid evolution of post-Cold War international system into multipolarity has also affected international organizations and their internal homogeneity. The European Union (EU), for example, is struggling to limit the effects of Brexit to maintain its solidarity. The relations between the United States and its European allies are being challenged by Donald Trump's new vision on Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) as well as on NATO. Turkey's relations with the European Union are also being affected by the perception about Turkey.

Today, multipolarity has started to challenge the unity and solidarity in terms of allied solidarity, too. As a result of those loosening commitments, international relations are transforming into transactional relations. This is how the US is looking at its relations with Europe. EU, on its behalf, is also re-defining its relationship with Turkey by means of suspending the accession negotiations and focusing more on issues such as refugees, and, if approved by Germany, on the revision of Customs Union.

Turkey-Russia relations will also develop on a similar basis. Although Turkey gives the impression that its relations are beginning to become more intensive with Russia, first in the energy sector and now in defence, as far as S-400 procurements are concerned, this should not be interpreted as a change of axis in Turkey's commitments to its western allied relations, specifically to NATO.

Turkey and Russia, during the course of 2018, will continue to define their relationship as a factor of two important files: the development of Turkish Stream project for the Russian natural gas exports through a pipeline under the Black Sea; and

Although Turkey gives the impression that its relations are beginning to become more intensive with Russia, first in the energy sector and now in defence, as far as S-400 procurements are concerned, this should not be interpreted as a change of axis in Turkey's commitments to its western allied relations, specifically to NATO.

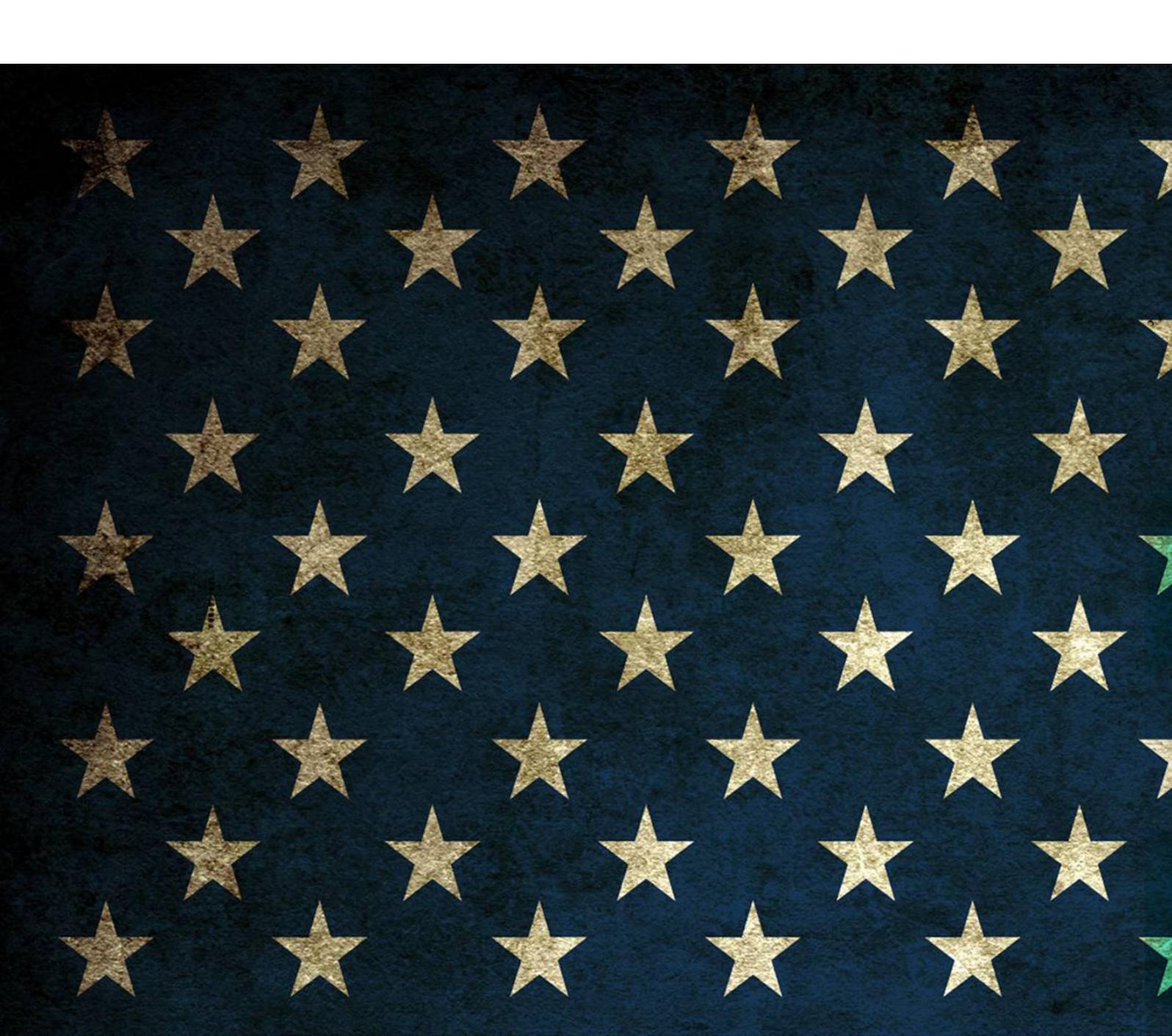
the establishment of security and stability along with the transition to a durable settlement of Syrian problem. The latter, particularly at a time when Turkey has launched a unilateral operation towards Afrin, will be tested both at military and at political levels.

On the military level, Turkey's operation is a new variable in the Syrian equation. To what extent it will be tolerated by the international coalition and how effective Russia will be in controlling the Assad regime to prevent an unfavorable escalation between Turkey and Syria will be the major determining factors. On the political level, Turkey's Afrin operation and Turkey's vision for the future of Sochi meetings designed to prepare a good and solid background for the Geneva peace talks have to become more compatible. If Turkey's strategy to ensure the security of its borders is to be approved, then Turkey will have to support its policy with enhanced diplomatic efforts, too. All of the above makes dialogue between Ankara and Damascus an inevitable requirement. Turkish-Russian relations will also continue to be tested along these parameters. ■

If Turkey's strategy to ensure the security of its borders is to be approved, then Turkey will have to support its policy with enhanced diplomatic efforts, too. All of the above makes dialogue between Ankara and Damascus an inevitable requirement.



Russia s-400 Firings



The end of Old Certainties

Breaking With US Middle East Policy

Kristian BRAKEL

Dr. Ret. Ambassador



The EU's role in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) has often been the most decisive when the Europeans dared to take the initiative. In 1980 the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community (EEC) issued the Venice Declaration, which called for recognition of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the right to Palestinian self-determination. The EEC's move came in reaction to the standstill that American peace efforts had produced.

Today in the hallways of the European Commission the Venice Declaration is often cited as a proud moment in the EU's history and as an example what the EU should eventually do to regain its relevance in the stalled Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. That the time for such an initiative might be ripe was recently demonstrated by President Trump's decision to break with a staple of the Two State formula – the agreement that the status of

Jerusalem would only be decided in final status talks between the conflict's parties.

The change in American foreign policy poses a dilemma for the EU and president Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem has brought this problem to the fore. "The EU and its Member States will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, UNSCR 478, including on the location of their diplomatic representations until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved.", such as the statement by the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy Federica Mogherini after US President Trump' unilateral declaration. The statement reflects the longstanding agreement that all quartet members (EU, US, UN, Russia) held until recently and that the American president has now shattered.



The problem goes well beyond the repeated failure of negotiations.



UN Security Council to Vote on Monday on Draft Rejecting Trump Jerusalem Move

The EU, which's member states behind closed doors are often at odds with American positions on the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), for most of its history accepted the primacy of American policy over the issue. The United States, due to its strong ties to Israel and due to its heavy military footprint in the region was seen as the only possible arbiter in the conflict. The EU would follow the American lead, tender good offices, foot the largest part of the bill of the Palestinian Authority and try to dovetail most of its initiatives with Washington.

Central member states that used to pursue a rather conservative position such as Germany were happy to tail behind the American lead. Knowing that Washington would rarely push the Israeli leadership into a corner in which it did not want to be, meant no bilateral problems would arise for Berlin or Paris either. Other member states such as the UK were often happy that they could maintain a harsh rhetoric, but then blame eventual inaction on the Americans.

Firstly there is the American shift away from the international consensus of a Two State Solution. Secondly there is the growing intransigence of an ever more right-wing Israeli government. And thirdly there are new regional dynamics emerging since the Arab Spring, in which Israel has begun to build new alliances with countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in a move to counter Iranian influence.

The glue that helped bind this policy together was the belief in the Two State Solution. Ever since the Oslo Accords, this approach was heralded as the only game in town. Even when negotiations occasionally broke down the idea that even while the situation on the ground was deteriorating, one day the parties would eventually return to the basic idea of the Oslo Peace Process ("Land for Peace" as formulated earlier in UN Security Council Resolution 242). They would agree to a solution that looked more or less the way every peace plan has outlined it since the 1990ies (adjusted 1967 borders with some land-swaps to incorporate the major settlement blocks such as Maale Adumim and Ariel, shared control of resources such as water, a limited return of Palestinian refugees and Jerusalem as a shared capital). Every foreign minister from Lisbon to Sofia would reiterate his or her hope that the two sides would return to the negotiation table to strike a peace deal. In reality, the Two State Solution had long been suffocated by the realities successive Israel governments built on the ground.

While many decision-makers in European capitals might not be fully aware, that the preferred model of EU peace-making – the Two State Solution – is becoming less and less of an option, EU bureaucrats knew fully well. Jerusalem has for long been an excellent barometer to gauge how the conflict will develop. Fully aware of that, the EU's delegation in East Jerusalem has together with member states for many years authored the now infamous annual "Head of Mission Reports on Jerusalem". The report which was famous for being leaked to the press and civil society even sometimes before some capitals had time to demand that especially critical passages be redacted, described in full detail how the Israeli state and radical settlers with the backing of state authorities worked towards precluding any Two State Solution that would see the establishment of Jerusalem as a shared capital. While the EU maintained its two state rhetoric, Israel was creating a one-state reality on the ground.

However, the times are changing and three trends are currently emerging that could force the EU to alter its course. Firstly there is the American shift away from the international consensus of a Two State Solution. Secondly, there is the growing intransigence of an ever more right-wing Israeli government. And thirdly there are new regional dynamics emerging since the Arab Spring, in which Israel has begun to build new alliances with countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in a move to counter Iranian influence.

All of these run counter to the declared European goal of a solution to the conflict. And they make it harder for EU member states to maintain the old course, while at the same time trying not to damage their bilateral ties with Israel, which most countries have tried to preserve. However the EU historically often had a hard time engineering consensus among its members. States such as Germany were often not willing to pursue a course that did not have US approval or that was designed to upset the Israeli government too much. And in recent years Israel has

Such leverage would be designed to transform the EU from a predominantly donor position to one that enforces the red lines that it helped draw up in UN Security Council resolution 2334. Such a move would have to be implemented both in its multilateral dealings with Israel, as well as in the bilateral relationship that member states maintain.

managed to sway several member states from Central Europe to break with the EU's consensus. Countries like Hungary, which blocked an EU statement in response to Trump or the Czech Republic – which followed Trump's lead and declared that it recognizes West Jerusalem as Israel's capital – are among those breaking the line, as is the United Kingdom, which in the light of Brexit is moving closer to the US. The fact that the EU's Foreign Affairs Council has not taken any conclusions on the MEPP since mid-2016 is not only owed to the fact that other regional conflicts such as in Syria have taken priority, but also to the fact that it is getting harder and harder to agree on a common position.

However, these developments have also lead to a situation where some rather conservative member states such as Germany are now willing to levy at least a bit more pressure than before. And with this, some of the core member states might eventually come to a point where they decide that it is time for the Europeans to become a more independent actor in their own right. This would not necessarily include abandoning the Two-State Solution – as no feasible alternative solutions are on the horizon but at least developing a policy that uses EU leverage to its full potential. Such leverage would be designed to transform the EU from a predominantly donor position to one that enforces the red lines that it helped draw up in UN Security Council resolution 2334. Such a move would have to be implemented both in its multilateral dealings with Israel, as well as in the bilateral relationship that member states maintain. Otherwise, the EU will continue to find itself trapped in a peacemaking model, that was designed for a different reality and which has failed to deliver the peace the EU is hoping for. ■



UN Security Council



Trump and Jerusalem **An Opportunity for Turkey**

Matthew COHEN

Dr. Ret. Ambassador



İİT İSLAM ZİRVESİ KONFERANSI
OLAĞANÜSTÜ TOPLANTISI
"Kudüs'le Dayanışma İçin Birlikte Hareket"
İstanbul, 13 Aralık 2017

EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE
OIC ISLAMIC SUMMIT CONFERENCE
"Unified Action in Solidarity with Al-Quds"
Istanbul, 13 December 2017



الإسلامي
مع القدس
2017

SESSION
ISLAMIC
"Action
Istanbul



Extraordinary Session of the Oic Islamic Summit Conference, Istanbul, 13 December 2017

Donald Trump's recent recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has led to a swift backlash not just among Palestinians or in Arab or Muslim majority states, but around the world. This is evidenced by the recent UN General Assembly vote condemning the move, which passed overwhelmingly. As was predicted by many analysts and world leaders, widespread protests around the world and violence targeting Israeli citizens followed. The action has strained trust between the Palestinian leadership and the United States (US), possibly past the breaking point. Palestinian leaders now doubt the idea that the US can continue to serve as an "honest broker" in the peace process. Palestinian leaders stated that they would not meet with US Vice President Mike Pence on his now-postponed trip to the Middle East. This makes a US-led peace process already on life support even harder to revive.

At the same time, there is no reason a peace process cannot resume if both sides are actually serious about achieving peace. The US embassy will certainly be placed in West Jerusalem, which is not really part of negotiations. Even if West Jerusalem were to be discussed in any talks going forward, the presence of a US embassy does not preclude any agreements the two sides might make. Thus, talks can, and should, still take place. Admittedly, it seems highly doubtful that the current leaders of either the Israelis or Palestinians are committed to a peace agreement, but the US action regarding Jerusalem might provide an

unexpected chance to restart the process. Assuming both sides will at least talk to each other, a new "honest broker" appears to be needed, meaning new opportunities arise for other nations to step forward. There are not many nations that could fill this role, but one state, Turkey, can.

Why would Turkey have the potential to be accepted as an "honest broker" by both the Israelis and Palestinians? From the Palestinian side, Turkey appears to be a good fit. Over the last decade, Turkey's government, and in particular Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has been an outspoken supporter of the Palestinian cause. Turkey has sent supplies and aid to the Palestinians, including helping to pressure Israel into allowing shipments from Turkey into Gaza as part of a broader agreement between Turkey and Israel. Turkey has fostered closer relations with the Palestinian leadership, making it easier for Turkey to exert helpful pressure on them, as is always needed in negotiations.

The appeal Turkey holds as a mediator to the Palestinians is clear. While less obvious, Turkey has the potential to play this role for Israel as well, despite some previous Israeli resistance to Turkey's efforts to become involved. Throughout 1990s, Israel and Turkey had cooperative, if not warm, bilateral relations. This included ties in the military, diplomatic, and intelligence arenas that were beneficial to both sides. The collapse in relations between the two nations is a recent development.

الدورة الإستثنائية لمؤتمر القمة الإسلامية لمنظمة التعاون الإسلامي
 "العمل الموحد في التضامن مع القدس"
 اسطنبول، 13 ديسمبر 2017

SESSION EXTRAORDINAIRE DE LA CONFERENCE
 AMIQUUE AU SOMMET DE L'OIC

"Solidarité commune de solidarité avec Jérusalem"
 Istanbul, 13 Décembre 2017



Turkey has fostered closer relations with the Palestinian leadership, making it easier for Turkey to exert helpful pressure on them, as is always needed in negotiations.

Israel has long looked to improve relations with its neighbors in the Middle East as a way to enhance its security. The ties to Turkey, in particular, have been important to Israel, as Turkey was for a long time the only neighbor willing to even talk with Israel. Since the breakdown in relations, Israel has looked to boost relations again. If Turkey were willing to improve relations with Israel as part of efforts to make peace between Israelis and Palestinians, Israel might be willing to accept Turkey as a mediator.

Turkey can fill this role in part due to its history and strengths. The historic ties that Turkey has to the region as an inheritor of the legacy of the Ottoman Empire gives Turkey a tie into the entire region. While this past has also fostered resentment in the region, Turkey has the contacts, relationships, and knowledge of the region needed to strike a deal. Turkey has economic and diplomatic soft power, and hard power (including the second largest standing army in NATO), to be able to serve as a regional leader. Turkey, like Israel, is not Arab and thus is viewed as somewhat of an outsider in the Middle East. However, Turkey is a Muslim state, and its rare combination

Taking on the role of "honest broker" is a new and potentially highly rewarding way Turkey can enhance its regional status and power.

of traits, some shared with Israel and some with Arab countries, may position it well as a mediator.

The benefits to Turkey of taking on such a role could be substantial. Under the AKP, Turkey has looked for ways to improve relations with Middle Eastern states. Taking on the role of "honest broker" is a new and potentially highly rewarding way Turkey can enhance its regional status and power. Notably, Turkey and Iran (another non-Arab outsider) often battle for influence across the Middle East. Iran has used the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though Iran's support of the terror groups Hamas and Hezbollah, to show its support for the Arab world and gain influence. If Turkey steps in as a central actor and "honest broker" in peace talks, Iran's relevance in the region would be reduced. Even in a scenario in which Turkey cannot get the two parties to agree to a deal, Turkey can emerge stronger. If both parties are willing to accept Turkey as an intermediary and broker, it will instantly raise Turkey's influence in the Middle East and its importance on the world stage. If Turkey and the US are both able to stay involved in the peace process, it could additionally improve the chances of an agreement



being reached or a series of steps that work towards an agreement being agreed upon. It might also help improve Turkish-US relations if the two sides can work together on this process.

Turkey's decision whether to take on this role will, in the end, largely depend on either by taking sides to fan further hostilities and tensions, or instead by helping to solve the underlying issues and working to bring the sides closer together. For much of the past decade, Erdoğan has taken an overtly hostile position towards Israel. This is illustrated by his recent speech at the UN General Assembly condemning the US embassy move. There is little doubt, however, that part of Erdoğan's aggressive stance stems from genuine upset over Israeli actions regarding the Palestinians. In the end, whatever the reasons for the downgrade in relations, Erdoğan can make the choice to re-engage with Israel. Some Arab states appear to be engaging with Israel in private. If Erdoğan chooses to re-engage, Turkey will benefit diplomatically and economically through improved regional relationships.

In recent days, Turkey has been suggesting it will open an embassy in East Jerusalem as their contact with the Palestinian Authority. Instead, Turkey could propose something more radical. Turkey could propose opening

Some Arab states appear to be engaging with Israel in private, and Erdoğan risks leaving Turkey behind in the region if he does not do the same. If Erdoğan chooses to re-engage, Turkey will benefit diplomatically and economically through improved regional relationships.

two embassies in Jerusalem. One to serve as an embassy for a future Palestinian state in East Jerusalem. The second in West Jerusalem to serve as its embassy to Israel. This move could quickly change the conversation regarding the location of embassies, restart the peace process, and would show both sides that Turkey takes their claims to self-determination seriously.

The US decision to move the US embassy to West Jerusalem has provided Turkey with an opportunity. In this regard, Turkey can attempt to step into the role of "honest broker" and boost its regional and global profile and power. In so doing, Turkey could end up not only helping itself but could help many others, including the Palestinians, Israelis, the greater Middle East, and the world. ■





Oil markets' new dynamics and unknowns:
What to expect and how to prepare in 2018?

Mehmet ÖĞÜTÇÜ

Dr. Ret. Ambassador

Can ÖĞÜTÇÜ

Dr. Ret. Ambassador



Oil prices rallied in the first week of 2018, supported by increased geopolitical risk and severely cold weather in certain parts of the world, but the 'perfect storm' that pushed oil prices higher also raises the risk of a correction and of heightened herd mentality in trade. Protests in Iran, possible new US sanctions against Tehran, Saudi domestic dynamics, North Korea's missiles and Venezuela's economic collapse could be the main geopolitical risks that could drive oil prices up this year.

In this age of disruption, there are too many unknowns to predict what will happen next week, let alone 52 of them into the future. So instead of predicting where the oil markets will be by the end of 2018, it would be more plausible to outline some of the key developments and some unknowns in the energy markets for the year 2018:

Overall world oil production: World oil production is going up. The oil industry has changed in fundamental ways. First, OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) reduced output to put a floor under prices. On November 30 2016, OPEC members agreed to cut production by 1.2 mbd by January 2017. Prices began rising right after the OPEC announcement. OPEC's cuts lowered production to 32.5 mbd. The EIA (Energy Information Administration) estimates that OPEC would produce 32.8 mbd in 2018. Yet both figures are still higher than its 2015 average of 32.32 mbd. Throughout its history, OPEC

STATE OF KUWAIT

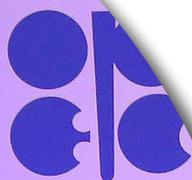


controlled production to maintain a \$70 price target. In 2014, it abandoned this policy. Saudi Arabia, OPEC's biggest contributor, lowered its price to its largest customers in October 2014. It did not want to lose market share to its arch-rival, Iran. Outside OPEC, Russia has the greatest productive power. Their cloaked restraint, or lack thereof, in a \$60 world will determine whether oil goes to \$75 or \$45, with Putin keeping us guessing.

World oil consumption will be breaching 100 mbd in 2018, at a time when the Middle East's cold war is ratcheting up. The uncertainty of whether an outage will occur is only exceeded by the uncertainty of what will happen in the event of a supply disruption. Inventories have dramatically decli-

ned, and are sitting roughly 100 mbd above the five-year average. The disruption in Libya, as long as the size of the volume knocked offline stays at the 100,000 bpd levels, probably will not have a major effect on the oil market. Indeed, prices fell back after it became clear that the disruption was as small as it is. However, the market jitters are magnified by the fact that the oil market is a lot tighter than it used to be. An outage in Libya could help accelerate the rebalancing process, depending on how long it takes the pipeline to see repairs. It also comes on the heels of a roughly 400,000-450,000 bpd outage in the North Sea because of the crack in the Forties pipeline.

PEC
 MONITORING COMMITTEE
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 2017



What about the US production? The US is actually benefiting from the OPEC deal by pumping more oil to the market. The US emergence as a dominant force in oil and gas production is changing the dynamics of its role in the global energy market. US oil production this year is expected to break through the 1970 record of 9.637 mbd (this was below 5 mbd just before the shale oil boom) in the near future, securing the US industry's role at the top of the energy world. The US is likely to continue to pressure global prices with more output, as Russia and Saudi Arabia work to prop up prices. Oil producers say that they expect the cost of drilling and producing oil will also rise this year. A growing number of companies also think that the efficiency gains are at least 25 to 50 percent structural, rather than cyclical. Finally, they expect to spend their cash flow this year.

Price volatility is inevitable: In December 2017, oil price hit a 30-month high. Some pundits are suggesting that oil is now overvalued, and a pullback is inevitable. But a few lonely voices have been forecasting \$80 oil by year-end. Indeed, if the crisis in Iran threatens the region's oil production, \$100 is not out of the question this year. There are many headwinds for oil at this point. In particular, many oil producers are hedging at current prices, and there is a large backlog of drilled but uncompleted wells. The latter can bring new oil production online quickly as oil prices rise.

OPEC and 11 other producers including Russia agreed in December to reduce their combined output by almost 1.8 million barrels per day in the first half of this year.

Concerns that electric vehicles are going to start taking market share from oil are excessively premature. Oil prices will trade in a relatively narrow range this year, but ultimately the price of West Texas Intermediate could reach \$70 from the current price is \$61.59/bbl. Rising oil prices would benefit shale companies that have relatively less hedging, exposing them to a more positive market.

It is often risky to speculate for long-term price levels yet it might be argued that by 2025 the average price of a barrel of Brent crude oil could rise to \$86 and \$95 by 2030. By 2040, prices could be \$109 and \$117 by 2050 (again in 2016 dollars). By then, the cheap sources of oil will have been exhausted, making it more expensive to extract oil. These forecasts all depend on 1) what happens with the US shale oil production, 2) how OPEC responds, and 3) how fast the global economy grows.

If enough shale oil producers go out of business, and Iran does not produce what it says it could, prices could return to their historical levels of \$70 - \$100 a barrel. OPEC is counting on it. High oil prices can result

in “demand destruction”. If high prices last long enough, people change their buying habits. Demand destruction occurred after the 1979 oil shock. Oil prices steadily deteriorated for about six years. They finally collapsed when demand declined and supply caught up. Oil speculators could spike the price higher if they panic about future supply shortages.

Would there be enough capital?: Capital is not the issue – the rise so much money flows into the market. It is to find the right projects with long-term stability and good rates of return with minimum risk. Bringing on energy projects needs a lot of investment. At the same time the shakeup of capital markets is inflicting opaque, collateral disruption to the energy business too. Financial technologies are altering fund flows, market liquidity, and access to the capital. We thought self-driving cars were the only things that could affect the oil business. How about robot-trading in debt and equity markets? Energy executives now need to be ‘fintech’ experts too. Crypto-currencies like Bitcoin have seemingly little to do with energy, but the underlying block chain technology will be transformative to financing, supplying and consuming primary energy resources. Yet-to-be-understood changes to the energy business are coming faster than most people think.

What will OPEC do?: In many decades OPEC has for the first time displayed strong production discipline, and this has helped to maintain prices in the mid-\$50s range. Last winter, OPEC and non-OPEC oil giant Russia have agreed to extend oil output cuts until the end of 2018. The move was heavily signaled ahead of the decision but the oil producers had earlier indicated that they could exit the deal if they feel the market was overheating. The deal to cut oil output by 1.8 million barrels a day was adopted last winter by the 14-member OPEC cartel, Russia and nine other global producers. The initial agreement was due to end in March 2018, having already been extended once. Rather than extend the deal by nine months, the group agreed to implement a new deal that will last from

Bringing on energy projects needs a lot of investment. The shakeup of capital markets is inflicting opaque, collateral disruption to the energy business too. Financial technologies are altering fund flows, market liquidity and access to capital.

January to December of 2018. The agreement does not include U.S. shale oil producers, and there are concerns that rising oil prices, largely thanks to the oil output cut, has allowed U.S. producers to come back online.

Oil Majors and Exploration CAPEX for 2018: Leading oil majors are expected to increase their exploration capital expenditure by 20 to 30 percent in 2018 and resume drilling deep water in a bid to build hydrocarbon-based assets. There would be asset swaps among the majors, with a good level of acquisitions of reserves from medium to smallholders in the industry. Currently companies are more efficient having slashed capital expenditures and operational expenditures. Opportunities are there as daily rig rates are at \$50,000 to \$60,000, down from the \$120,000 peak seen several years ago. Deepwater hydrocarbon production and ultra-deep water exploration will remain on the ground for longer while. It is only viable at a sustained barrel price of \$60 to \$65 and he sees 2018 oil prices range between \$52 to \$58. A price of \$60 would certainly bring back the U.S. shale oil on the international market, something OPEC would not want to see.

Geopolitics is back in the equation: Geopolitical concerns will replace the OPEC/non-OPEC production cuts as the main driver of oil prices this year. Just as the OPEC cuts started to have a tangible effect on global oil inventories, the geopolitical risk premium returned to the oil market last year; first with the fallout from Iraq’s Kurdistan’s referendum and Baghdad’s response to it, which pushed oil prices up on concerns over supply outages from the region. Then the Saudi government’s purge spooked the markets, as well as the heightened tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The risk is that an open conflict, which Iran and Saudi have traditionally avoided despite all their differences, would spread and hit oil production and trade. The Gulf accounts for a quarter of global production and over 4 percent of all the oil traded globally. The threat to stability is all the greater given that





Iran is likely to win any such clash and to treat the result as a license to reassert its influence in the region. We also expect Saudi Aramco's initial public offering to go ahead in 2018 as planned but there are those who are skeptical about the Saudi oil giant managing to pull off what is expected to be the world's biggest IPO before the end of the year.

North Korea's belligerence and Venezuela's economic collapse and near-default are some of the geopolitical risks to watch for in 2018. So far, the bearish news of resumed oil flows in the North Sea and Libya has been outweighed by the protests in Iran. Oil prices remained at more than two-year highs as protests swept across multiple cities in Iran. Crowds of protestors, mainly young people, criticized the government for poor economic conditions. The demonstrations pushed crude prices up a bit, and both WTI and Brent opened above \$60 per barrel for the first time in years. Growing unrest in Iran set the table for a bullish start to 2018.

China is of course, an unavoidable ingredient: The country's economy is changing and moving away from heavy industry fuelled largely by coal to a more service-based one, with a more varied fuel mix. Nevertheless, the pace of that shift is uncertain and some recent data suggests that as economic growth has picked up, so has consumption of oil and coal. Beijing has high ambitions for a much cleaner energy economy, driven not least by the levels of air pollution in many of the major cities; 2018 will show how much progress they are making.

For the last three years, China has managed to deliver economic growth with only minimal increases in energy consumption. Growth was probably lower than the claimed numbers, but despite all these, the achievement is considerable. If the trend continues, the result will limit global demand growth for oil, gas, and coal. China, which accounts for a quarter of the world's daily energy

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use, is the swing consumer. If energy efficiency gains continue, CO2 emissions will remain flat or even fall.

China, the world's biggest oil buyer, is on the verge of opening a domestic market to trade future contracts. The Shanghai International Energy Exchange will allow Chinese buyers to lock in oil prices and pay in local currency. There are implications for the US dollar's well-established role as the global currency of the oil market. The pace of the Chinese state oil reserve stockpiling is likely to ease.

The second Sino-Russian oil pipeline will enable Russia to stake a stronger claim to the growing Chinese crude oil market. This bigger market share for Russia will erode that of Saudi Arabia, whose export volumes 'will remain under pressure over the coming months in line with the now-extended OPEC, non-OPEC supply cut. The new pipeline, expected to double China's oil import capacity from Russia to 30 million tons from 15 million tons per annum, will link oil from Russia's East Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline to the Chinese city of Daqing.

There is also electric vehicle's impact: Clearly electric vehicles, robotaxis, and autonomous vehicles sales are at record highs and growing rapidly. Tesla's Model 3 will gain traction this year, and other automakers will introduce more EV (Electric vehicles) models. China is on the way to become

the global leader in EV. Vehicle fuel consumption should see a major decline globally as a result, but it will not happen for a couple of decades. While there are more electric cars, hybrids, and fuel-efficient gasoline-powered cars compared to a decade ago, sales of pickup trucks, SUVs and crossovers due to low prices have taken away fuel economy gains.

We also heard from countries like China, India, France, Great Britain, and Norway—all pledging to ban the sale of fossil fuels to power vehicles on their roads. Electric vehicles could possibly make up 90 percent of all vehicle sales globally by 2050. That would be made up of about one billion battery electric vehicles out on roads worldwide.

Sales penetration into the passenger market will accelerate, creating more uncertainty about future oil demand. Yet, perception will not meet the reality any time soon; oil demand is rising above the 10-year average. In addition, oil use goes far beyond turning wheels. Bottom line: Petroleum consumption should drop significantly over the next two decades. However, for the next few years, global vehicle fuel consumption will likely continue to increase.

Other unknowns: Compliance with Paris Agreement and renewables: By 2018 the climate change accord will be three years in the work in force. The realization will begin to set in that the targets have a high probability of being unachievable –

within most countries, and globally as a whole. The biggest unknown to energy markets is what the world governing bodies will do after waking up to this realization.

Renewables, including hydro, accounted for just 5 % of global daily energy supply. That is increasing — solar photovoltaic capacity grew by 5 percent in 2016 — but to make a real difference the industry needs a period of expansion comparable in scale to the growth of personal computing and mobile phones in the 1990s and 2000s.

The problem is that the industry remains fragmented. Most renewable companies are small and local, and in many case undercapitalized (though there is a significant shift of capital from fossils fuels to renewables); some are built to collect subsidies. Fast technological transformation brings disruption. A radical change will be necessary to make the industry global and capable of competing on the scale necessary to displace coal and natural gas. Falling costs, Chinese dominance, and competition in battery technology are some of the main developments to monitor in 2018. The coming year will show us whether it is ready for that challenge.

What to do: There is no simple advice on how to deal with the challenges and to capture the opportunities. However, it is clear that companies of the future have to adjust to a pragmatic mindset of competing in a fray of increasing unknowns, instead of seeking solace in over-confident predictions that confirm pre-disposed biases. In short, be skeptical of forecasts; keep an open mind; become more flexible and adaptable. ■

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RELIGION and FOREIGN POLICY

Faruk LOĐOĐLU

Dr., Retired Ambassador



Today the role of religion in society and the relationship between religion and foreign policy comprise the issues of widespread interest and intense discussion. Governments, think tanks, universities, and religious bodies are all engaged in debating and analyzing this complex question from a variety of perspectives. In this regard, this analysis delineates relevant properties of religion and politics then identifies the basic modes of their interaction. In the end, some suggestions as to what to do and what to avoid are offered.

Religions are closed doctrinaire systems, total in scope, exclusionary in outlook and autocratic in nature. Politics, on the other hand, is open to change, inclusionary, pragmatic, and opportunistic. When these interact, either religion ingests politics for the attainment of its ethereal ends or politics exploits religion for its worldly interests. It all depends on the relative strengths of the state versus the religious estate at a particular moment in time and on the priorities of those exercising the powers of the state.



Medieval miniature painting of the Siege of Antioch - First Crusade

Throughout the history, religion has played a prominent political role in human affairs, engaged, among other things, in nearly all the recorded major wars. While religions cannot be viewed as the progenitor of all violence, historically there is nothing else that even comes close as a competitor. On a historical scale, therefore, the religious estate has been the clear winner in this tug-of-war. We have first the expansion of Islam and the conquest of Spain. Then there are the Crusades in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries. These could be considered the first "jihad" and "counter-jihad" wars in history. The wars in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries were similarly fought in the name of religion.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, religious wars eventually gave way to wars of national supremacy and of national and ethnic liberation. Today, however, religion has made a crushing comeback because terrorism as the new form of warfare is waged in the name of religion. It is mostly "radical Islam" that gets the most blame. However, this simplistic paradigm that slams Islam as the only culprit ignores the fact Christianity, Judaism and even Buddhism are also responsible for the perpetration of faith-based violence on others.

Be that as it may, religion is no longer confined to the place of worship, having explosively moved into the domain of national and international politics. This surge has a number of distinct reasons and consequences in our lives:

- a) today for many, one's faith competes with race, nationality, and ethnicity as a source of identity,
- b) in the absence of other avenues for the underprivileged, religion serves as a vehicle for social mobility,
- c) it is a powerful tool in the hands of the politicians to touch the souls of the masses and ready material for populists everywhere; it is a vote winner,
- d) Islam is a top agenda item of international politics and the subject of widespread interest in academic studies as a result of the growth and attacks of terror organizations operating in the name of Islam.

Religion directly shapes political developments in at least five different ways:

1. Beliefs directly influence the choices of state and non-state actors.

2. State actors employ religion to sway the public to get votes or to legitimize policies.

3. Conversely, faith-related issues and expectations of the public influence the attitudes and discourse of politicians.

4. Literacy or lack thereof about religion and related matters affects the quality of the decisions of state actors.

5. State and civil society actors employ religion to organize social life, including education and provide means of livelihood to adherents.

6. And most importantly, terrorism-related questions are a permanent fixture of national and international agendas.

All of these are pertinent to the mentality and decisions of policy makers but it is religion-related terrorism and sectarian strife dimensions that pose the most immediate challenges. Undoubtedly, religion is not the only cause, driver or leitmotif of violence today. It has tough competition from such cohorts as racism, ethnic nationalism, xenophobia, Islam-phobia and other-culture specific variables that generate violence. Confronting violence based on elements of faith requires a multi-layered approach, addressing not only its horrific manifestations but also its root causes.

Sound policies require knowledge by politicians and diplomats of major belief systems. Religious literacy means knowledge about the mindsets, beliefs and practices of various faith traditions and their impact on the choices, decisions, and behavior of individuals and groups. Hence religious literacy would help, but would not be sufficient alone. Foreign policymakers need to be also versed in secularism.

Secularism, the ultimate equalizer, is the leveling ground for all faiths and beliefs. It rests on the premise that there is not and cannot be a hierarchy of different religions/faiths/beliefs. In this sense, it embraces an egalitarian stance towards different belief systems. Moreover, the secular approach, by its

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nature, avoids the application of religious norms in organizing social life and state structure and practices.

Whatever the approach to the problem, the end goal is direct and unmistakable: keep religion out of politics! Former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright put it well: "Many practitioners of foreign policy – including me – have sought to separate religion from world politics, to liberate logic from beliefs that transcend logic." Diplomacy and foreign policy must be free of religious themes; they must be secular in nature.

To this end, policy-makers should avoid certain common fallacies that lead to bad policies. The fallacy of "fighting radical Islam with moderate Islam" perhaps tops this list. There are no "hard" and "soft" versions of religion. That means one cannot fight Islam with Islam. One needs a much broader and secular approach to deal with radicalism.

An equally serious mistake is building policies upon the Sunni/Shia division in the MENA and the Gulf region. That is a recipe for protracted violence. History is witness to the fact that there can be no winner in the war of the sects.

Another misconception is that religion-based political parties become "democratic" as they join the mainstream of politics. There are no actual examples of this. All religion-based parties remain religious in a core and in instinct; democracy is just a temporal station for them. Religion in the service of politics is bad for democracy; politics in the service of religion is the end of democracy.

Another contentious misconception is that Islam is incompatible with democracy. To the extent that any religion is compatible with democracy, so is Islam. Democracy takes its sustenance from a political culture in which authority patterns of institutions and behavior of groups and individuals are all predominantly democratic. And religion is just one ingredient of that culture. Turkey's democracy is a case in point, one that functions in a predominant-

ly Muslim social setting. There are no theocratic regimes that are democratic. That includes the Vatican.

There are also those who mistakenly believe in the virtue of dialogue among religions. Such a dialogue by definition is impossible. Monotheistic religions are insular, exclusionary systems. Theirs is not a dialogue; it is monologues in alternation. This is why the Alliance of Civilizations under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, based on this false premise is, in my view, an exercise in futility. Then there is the assertion that religions are peaceful. History amply disapproves that. Today scores of terrorist organizations and others perpetrate violence across religious lines.

And pluralism –increasingly mistaken for and abused as majoritarianism – is a sine qua non of democracy. This leads us to the point that for democracy to thrive, it has to be secular by nature and by definition. It rests on the equal participati-

on of all citizens in the political process, whatever their faith may be.

In conclusion, politicians and diplomats must stop trying to win points by employing, abusing and exploiting religious themes. They may win a few votes but in the end, it is the society as a whole that loses. “Leave religion alone” is the prime advice politicians and diplomats must heed at all times. Matters of faith are matters of the private domain. Public domain should remain secular.

Mahatma Gandhi defined the issue in unequivocal terms: “If I were a dictator, religion and state would be separate. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it. The state would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody’s personal concern!” ■



Boko Haram using civilians as human shields, Photo AP