Intractable Dilemmas in the Energy-Rich Eastern Mediterranean

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Edited by

Aris Petasis

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To democracy and the rule of international law

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Over lunch in Nicosia with the late Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, Italy's former minister of finance and to most people a founding father of the European single currency, our discussion turned to Altiero Spinelli, the Italian political theorist generally considered one of the fathers of the European Union. Tommaso had a comprehensive understanding of Spinelli's ideas and his burning desire to see the countries of Europe work together peacefully. He was a strong force in getting me to start thinking about the Eastern Mediterranean along the lines that Spinelli saw Europe (in his time) and, most importantly, to start questioning the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean, which holds back all the countries in the region and does not allow them to achieve their potential. From this discussion it become clear to me that democracy and the rule of law would have to be the two pillars on which to build the new Eastern Mediterranean nations. Clearly, therefore, I owe a strong debt of gratitude to Tommaso for planting in my head the first ideas around the subject of this book. The same holds for Miguel Moratinos, former Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the contributors here, who some time back proposed the idea of a High Energy Authority for the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, which ultimately became a central theme of this book.

There is no need for me to search further than the chapters to follow to find seven thinkers to acknowledge for their contribution and to thank for all the great work they have done. A strong expression of gratitude therefore goes to my seven colleagues in this work, in chapter order: Stephanos Constantinides, William Mallinson, Solon Kassinis, George Georgeou, Hilal Khashan, Miguel Moratinos, and Theodoros Kyprianou. I find it difficult to use the right words of praise for these colleagues, whose seamless cooperation led to this work being completed on time and without a single hitch. I do not think that many editors can claim such good fortune.

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page layout issues and to put the book together in the right format, ensuring that publisher requirements were met. I was always worried about this side of the project, but was fortunate enough to have heard that Thomas is in this business. Having spent a few months in the quiet and inspiring environment of the Stadtbibliothek Winterthur, Switzerland working on this book, I feel I also owe a word of thanks to this welcoming library for keeping its doors open not only to me, but to any scholar who wishes to use its facilities. My wife Sophie took the brunt of my ceaseless reference to what my colleagues and I were doing; she listened patiently and acted as a valuable sounding board. As a person greatly interested in spirituality and the after-life, I suspect that she must have found some parts of our discussion boring – certainly the discussion on the economics of the region!

With no hesitation I take full responsibility for any mistakes or omissions in the editorial work of this book.

PREFACE

The history of the Eastern Mediterranean in the last 100 or so years reminds one of British and French colonialism and the continued attempts by outside powers to exploit the resources of a region by exploiting its internal squabbles. The many conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean have marked its history and continue to influence perceptions and attitudes to this day. In the last century the region has faced disturbing and unsettling events including conflict between Arabs and Israelis; continued Turkish occupation of 37 percent of Cyprus's territory; bullying of weak countries by their stronger neighbors; religious fundamentalism and violence; big-power games and proxy wars; brutality, coups, and counter-coups; and failed and ungovernable states. On the shinier side, and going a long way back in history, the Eastern Mediterranean reminds one that three of the world's major religions were founded in the Middle East; that the region has made immense contributions to civilization, the arts, the sciences, philosophy, and theology; that a hugely disproportionate percentage of the world's antiquities are to be found in this part of the world, led by Egypt and Greece; and that as well as its magnificent ancient history, the region is blessed with easy-going people, sandy beaches, warm weather, and a leisurely way of life. It is a region of contradictions.

The Eastern Mediterranean is gradually beginning to make a name for itself as a possibly significant oil and gas player. The potential energy finds in the region offer optimism, but that potential hangs to a large extent on the willingness of these countries to work together cooperatively. If all goes well, the region will at last free itself from big-power games and exploitation at economic, political, and military levels. Yet, its countries need first to assess the situation realistically and resolve to work together democratically to solve within the rule of law two burning issues: the Palestinian problem and the occupation of Cyprus.

Conflict and cooperation

The management of this new-found energy wealth is fraught with problems: inter-country rivalries, outsiders looking for opportunities to lay their hands on the region's wealth, and big-power rivalries being just a few. The bullying of the weak by the strong has already started,

threatening the peaceful exploration and commercial utilization of the energy finds. Proxies are now being summoned to play their usual role of promoting the interests of outsiders. Predictably, the region is now seeing the presence of foreign warships – US, Russian, and British – there as a show of force but ready to arm twist as necessary. Time will tell where such developments will lead the region. Tensions are already manifesting themselves, with a powerful Turkey bullying a weak Cyprus in an attempt to muscle its way in to Cyprus's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in violation of the Law of the Sea. The deafening silence of Cyprus's former colonial power, Britain, and its successor, the United States, lends encouragement to the aggressor and casts doubts over the prospects for true cooperation on a democratic platform.

Encouragingly, however, some of the countries in the region are beginning to work together for their common benefit. It is heartening to see Greece and Cyprus working amiably with Egypt and Israel on joint energy projects. Lebanon is expected soon to join the league of cooperating countries in the energy field, as might Jordan.

Cooperation and energy benefits

This book brings together the work of eight contributors who are deeply concerned about the future of the Eastern Mediterranean. They believe that the region finds itself at a fork in the road and needs to decide whether to cooperate in exploiting its energy resources for mutual benefit, or work alone or in small groups, raising the possibility of conflict and making the region dependent on bigger powers that will exploit that conflict for their own advantage. The difference in benefits between the two options could be massive.

Under the first option, the economics of the region stand to be catapulted to new heights, people's living standards immensely enhanced, and defense budgets slashed. Under the second option, most if not all countries in the region will end up in some form of disagreement with their neighbors, while their economies will suffer or continue to work greatly below potential, with defense budgets much above what is reasonable. The contributors to this book strongly recommend the adoption of the first option, while appreciating the great difficulties of getting all countries in the region to work together and to fully respect international law. Foremost is the creation of a High Energy Authority (HEA), just as Germany and France did in 1951, which in the end proved to be a great blessing for both (and others that joined the successor institution, the European Union).

The option of cooperation is a rational approach considering the many problems of the region, economic and otherwise, which hopefully can be remedied through collaboration. Some of these problems are as follows:

- All the countries are under varying threats of destabilization, particularly Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon, and Jordan. Israel is continuously in an emergency situation and worried about its future and Turkey is threatened internally. Egypt is experiencing internal problems, particularly in the Sinai, many of which are instigated from abroad. Syria is an inferno and Lebanon has problems caused by its divisive and undemocratic constitution.
- Nearly all countries in the region have open conflicts of some sort and scale. Cyprus is in open conflict with Turkey, which is occupying 37 percent of its territory. Greece is in conflict with Turkey over Cyprus and the Aegean. Israel and the Arab countries are in a festering conflict over the Palestinian issue.
- Some of the countries are suffering economically and are in financial crisis: Cyprus is experiencing serious economic problems, as are Greece and Egypt. Turkey will probably follow the same route soon according to some predictions. Investor confidence is at an all-time low in some countries, business trust is generally low, and bad management is in evidence in many places. particularly in the public sector.
- Although all countries in the region view its energy reserves as crucial to their economic growth, they have failed to take the great leap toward cooperation. In fact, some are in open disputes with their neighbors over resources.
- Everyone in the region lives under conditions of uncertainty. Turkey does not know what will happen with the Kurds, who are now approaching 20 million by some estimates and will soon become the largest ethnic group given their high birth rate. Cypriots do not know what Turkey will do next to undermine the Republic of Cyprus and its government. In Lebanon no one is sure what the next day will bring, and Syria is a shambles. With continued uncertainty, people inevitably continue to pay a daily psychological tax.
- To varying extents, all the countries in the region are dictated to by the big powers, particularly the United States. The colonial demands of the past and those of today's colonial successor prevent them from formulating independent foreign policies.

- All countries in the region need security, which all depend on outsiders to provide. Turkey gets its security from the United States as a NATO member and America's policeman in the region. Israel also gets its security from America on account of the special relationship between the two countries. In exchange, both Turkey and Israel benefit hugely from economic and military assistance. The other countries in the region are continuously on the lookout for protection, but often with frustrating results.

All the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean feel insecure, which explains why they are so keen on alliances. Instead of looking to outsiders to protect them from their neighbors, they now have the option of closing ranks to free themselves from outside control. Improved security means reduced defense budgets, making money available for other, more beneficial causes. Strong economies are more likely than weak ones to bring about political stability. Thus all the countries in the region realize that energy monetization is critical to their economic future.

Inter-relatedness

This book is divided into nine chapters, each of which deals with one or more of the inter-related issues facing the Eastern Mediterranean:

- In Chapter 1, Stephanos Constantinides provides an in-depth analysis of the political dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East regions and examines the key political issues that affect each country. He also discusses the role in the region of the European Union, the United States, Russia, Iran, and China.
- In Chapter 2, William Mallinson examines the case of Greece and Cyprus and talks about their qualified independence, which does not allow them to chart their own sovereign foreign policy. Their situation forms a good paradigm for the region, given that hardly any country in the area is allowed a free hand in foreign policy. All are therefore keen to gain more independence via the region's potential energy wealth.
- In Chapter 3, Solon Kassinis covers energy and energy reserves in Cyprus and the region as a whole, and provides an in-depth but non-technical analysis of hydrocarbons and their exploration. This chapter shows vividly the immense benefits that the region could reap if its countries started working together within the rule of law.

- In Chapter 4, George Georgiou considers energy and the interdependence of countries using the paradigm of a partnership between Cyprus and Israel. He shows lucidly what happens when nations fail to cooperate and refuse to join forces. Failure to find peace in the region through cooperation unquestionably leads to countries trying to conclude mini-alliances to defend themselves against the dangers from neighboring countries.
- In Chapter 5, Aris Petasis traces the economic performance of each country as measured by various indices. He concludes that the countries in the region are not competitive (with the exception perhaps of Israel) and that much work needs to be done to bring their economies up to par. The best way forward would be to use income from energy to help in their reorganization and competitive improvement.
- In Chapter 6, Hilal Khashan puts energy into the historical context of the region and the enmities that past conflicts have created. He asks whether these countries are now ready to cooperate for the common good, and concludes that much work needs to be done to prepare them and put them on the path to cooperation. A period of lasting peace would have to start before the countries can begin to trust each other.
- In Chapter 7, Miguel Moratinos originates the idea of an HEA for the region that would get all countries working together for the common good. He introduces a note of optimism, in that he believes an HEA would liberate these nations from external dominance and avoid them squandering their wealth and impoverishing their citizens through conflict.
- In Chapter 8, Aris Petasis and Theodoros Kyprianou explain the concepts of holism and inter-relatedness and how they can be transferred from a theoretical level to a practical one to help the Eastern Mediterranean regain its luster. This chapter makes good use of one author's background in medicine and the other's in organizational development and strategy. The two put forward the position that a whole (the proposed HEA) made up of parts (countries in the region) can work efficiently if the same principles that govern the workings of the human body and/or manmade social systems (e.g., economies and business enterprises) are applied, maximizing efficiency through synergy and profiting from change by obeying the rule of dynamic homeostasis. The chapter offers an interesting and perhaps unique approach to cooperation between countries using holism and its underlying principles.

- In Chapter 9, Aris Petasis integrates the essence of all the chapters in the book and consolidates discussion of the issues that the countries in the region need to contend with in their attempt to work cooperatively through an HEA. He concludes that they stand to reap great benefits if they work together and in harmony, rather than operating alone in pursuit of their national interest. The chapter stresses that true cooperation rests on trust, which requires honesty and integrity at the highest level from cooperating countries.

The "if 'A' then 'B'" dictum that is inherent in holism explains why no action can be divorced from its consequences. Every single action (or decision) by one country will inevitably lead to consequences for its neighbors. It therefore behooves countries in the region to take decisions on energy jointly and in consultation, to avoid negative impacts as much as possible and to enhance positive outcomes for all. The HEA forms an ideal platform for joint decision making.

Challenges

This book brings to the fore the multiple challenges that the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean face and sheds light on the many problems that stand in the way of their full cooperation. Nevertheless, a serious attempt at inter-country cooperation needs to be made. The benefits to the region in terms of enhanced peace and the advancement of people's living standards should outweigh any concerns over national interests.

CHAPTER ONE

GEOPOLITICAL POKER IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

STEPHANOS CONSTANTINIDES

The geopolitical balance in the Eastern Mediterranean (EM) is precarious, not least because of the new conflicts that the recent energy finds have brought to the region. Equally, the problems in Cyprus and Palestine continue to be major obstacles on the path to peace and cooperation between countries in the area. Not surprisingly, we now see Cyprus, Israel, Greece, Egypt, and Turkey engaging in uneasy diplomacy and posturing for position. In the meantime, the geopolitical developments in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, particularly the Ukrainian crisis, continue to affect the balance of power in the EM. Clearly, a new geopolitical and geoeconomic environment is beginning to form in the southeastern Mediterranean region.

The failure of the Arab Spring, the worsening situation in Palestine, instability in Iraq and Syria, and the appearance of the so-called ISIL, the jihadist group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, constitute the background to unfolding developments. In the meantime, Turkey, which has illegally occupied the northern part of Cyprus since 1974, now threatens the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and its hydrocarbon resources. In the complex EM strategic area, Turkey continues with new-found vigor its neo-Ottoman, aggressive, and expansionist foreign policy, adding to an already complex and combustive situation in the EM (Constantinides 1996, 2002). On the positive side, the area is now seeing a thaw in relations between the West and Iran.

A complex game of geopolitical poker is now in progress in the EM with the United States (US) and Russia as the main actors and Turkey as a menacing proxy player. While Ankara's foreign policy is putting Turkey on a path of diplomatic isolation, Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan continues to look for reasons to assert Turkish power, with Cyprus falling as the country's first victim and Greece its second. Syria is no less a

victim, as is Iraq though to a lesser degree maybe. Erdoğan is attempting to monetize Turkey`s half-hearted (and often dubious) participation in the war against the jihadists by pressing for concessions on Cyprus in the belief that Washington will side with Turkey here, as it has done for the last 60 years. Luckily for Cyprus, several promising diplomatic possibilities at local and global levels are beginning to unfold, and these may prove fortuitous for the future of the island.

The regional geopolitical game

The year 2014 and the first half of 2015 have seen more than their fair share of extraordinary events. The often turbulent Middle East continues to receive increased attention, largely on account of the advent of ISIL, which replaced with astonishing speed the top jihadist organization al-Qaeda. Local tensions very quickly turned into international and in this way added to the already tense Syrian theater, which continues to attract much attention from foreign powers, most of which have failed to date to map out an effective strategy on the country.

Current conflicts are questioning the Sykes–Picot agreement of May 16, 1916, which in effect divided the Arab provinces (outside the Arabian Peninsula) that were under Ottoman Empire rule and put them under the effective control of the British and the French; in practice creating the borders we know today. Unfolding developments and conflicts make the breakdown of current boundaries in the region inevitable. Indeed, the Syrian conflict (and the displaced millions that it created), the Kurdish involvement in the war against ISIL, and the shifting alliances that are orchestrated largely by the powers of the Gulf, Iran, and Turkey make the fragmentation of current borders a strong probability. Iraq, Syria, and Libya could be the first to break up. The Kurds of Iraq, who have enjoyed a degree of autonomy for many years, ISIL and its supporters, as well as other factions that are close to Iran seem not to want a repeat of what was for some years an Iraqi secular autocracy under Saddam Hussein. The conflict that the Western powers with the help of local supporters started with the aim of countering and containing ISIL contrasts sharply with the inaction of the international community over the Syrian crisis, which has now morphed into a vicious civil war, proxies and all. Syria is fighting to keep its current borders intact, but it seems that the sectarian divide will ultimately determine the final outcome.

Turkey became embroiled in a complex game in Syria by first supporting ISIL, then later half-heartedly joining the coalition against it, while simultaneously fighting against the emergence of a Kurdish state on

its doorstep. Although Turkey is preventing the flow of men and materiel into the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani, it turns a blind eye to the transit of jihadists and oil to ISIL. Some accuse Turkey of outright support for the jihadists. Turkey is clearly playing a very dangerous game that has strong religious undertones and goes against Kemal Atatürk's secularism.

Cyprus risks becoming a sacrificial lamb on the altar of Western military and economic interests in the region, which Turkey supports. The US and Britain continue to favor a solution to the Cyprus problem that would be in the mold of the already rejected Annan Plan of 2004, which would have turned Cyprus into a Turkish protectorate. The Anglo-Americans and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) favor Cyprus becoming a Turkish dependency because, in their minds, that would safeguard Western interests in the region. This, of course, would in the end prove to be a calamitous miscalculation by the Anglo-Americans, adding one more bad decision to a long list of disastrous misjudgments.

A future Palestinian state might be created in the not too distant future, although this is by no means certain. Debates on the possibility of a two-state solution have been going on for many years, but no concrete steps have been taken to address the many unresolved issues, some of which date back to World War II. Some commentators argue that the creation of confessional states in the Middle East and beyond would facilitate the resolution of the many conflicts. Others argue that such a resolution could come about through more mundane change agents such as the energy resources that seem to abound in the region.

Populous Egypt is now governed by the military after a short experiment with free elections, for the first time in the country's modern history, which brought to power the Muslim Brotherhood. While Egypt and Tunisia took the same route to political change that put an end to the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes, the two countries now follow different approaches to government, with both experiencing sporadic violence from the (politically) disaffected. Tunisia opted for a consensual constitution (which for now at least brought some semblance of peace despite the eruption of violence), while Egypt went for military government and firmness.

For fear of a dominant Iran, the Gulf monarchies opted for protection from the US and Western powers. The Gulf states chose to protect themselves against a very powerful and often meddling neighbor, but got stuck in a local cold war that one day might make them pay a heavy price considering the steady struggle between Sunni and Shiite powers in the EM and beyond. The regional power game in the Gulf is played with a prominent American presence, and with Russia making a gradual return to

the area after an absence of a few years on account of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia is now actively fighting the extremists in Syria.

In this chapter an attempt is made to identify the major geopolitical issues in the region, assessing in parallel the economic impact that energy finds might have. Clearly, in the EM a new balance of power is emerging, in which two developments stand out: the European Union's (EU) policy of diversification of energy supplies to reduce reliance on Russian gas; and the threat posed by expanding Islamic extremism in the Mediterranean.

Turkey is at the center of matters because its geostrategic position is vital to the security of the EM and the Middle East. However, Turkey is at risk of isolation as the country is gradually seen as an unstable, cunning, and undependable Western ally. Inevitably other actors are also having a decisive influence on the evolution of a region in turmoil. The Middle East occupies a central position in the current international system because of its many conflicts, the global energy resource situation, and its unique geopolitical and geostrategic position, taking into account that the region straddles the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Meanwhile, the Sunni–Shia clash is becoming an overarching narrative for the area. The current highly militarized rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is likely to continue to escalate in the absence of any effort to reach a regional security arrangement. The US–Iran rapprochement that is now in progress is likely to create a new dynamic and will most likely add to the complexity of an already tense region.

Although the US remains the dominant external player in the region, it now finds itself caught between Iran (and Iran's possible new strategic ally, Iraq) and its traditional allies, particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel. However, the Sunni–Shia clash cannot explain all that is happening now. In Egypt, for example, the regime of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood was toppled by other Sunni forces, the Egyptian military, with Saudi Arabian financial support. In Gaza, the Sunnis of Hamas clashed with the Sunnis of ISIL. Equally, al-Qaeda is at odds with ISIL.

It seems that the region is now facing a tripartite divide that will almost certainly emerge as Iranians, Turks, and Arabs all seek to revive their past (glorious) identities. Iranians will increasingly turn to Persianism, Turks to Ottomanism, and Arabs to intemperate Islamism. This divide will far surpass the existing Sunni–Shia split or the gap that currently divides extremist and moderate Muslims. A resolute Jewish state in the midst of these three forces and continued imperial rivalry among foreign powers will add to the unpredictability of what might finally happen in the region.

International players

Taking into account the importance of the region, the trained observer can now see a mix of players vying for position openly and/or surreptitiously. As might be expected, local players are trying to determine which way the tide might turn and are acting accordingly. Importantly (and ominously perhaps), the region is seeing major world powers making their presence felt with the intention of furthering their own interests and in the process adding to the risk of a fallout from big power antagonisms.

Turkey

From the day Islamists assumed power in Turkey in 2002 through the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Ankara started gradually to adopt a neo-Ottoman foreign policy. This moved Turkey steadily away from Kemalism and toward Islamism, while being reminiscent of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey's internal political landscape has also undergone radical change during this period. Islamists now hold all the levers of the state and are transforming the structures of society in the direction of Islamism. Even the army, which once controlled the political process, has been sidelined through a series of purges and trials of hundreds of military officers (retired and active), including dozens of generals. Thus, the world is now witnessing the end of an era that lasted for a nearly a century and the ushering in of a new Islamist–Ottoman age. Obviously, the revised political landscape is having a strong influence on Ankara's foreign policy.

Although there are elements of continuity in Turkish foreign policy, for the first time Turkey openly acclaims its Ottoman imperial past and aspires to become the world's Muslim leader. Not long ago, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu inaugurated Turkey's policy of "zero problems" with neighbors, but ended up having issues with practically everyone in the neighborhood. Davutoğlu also proposed the doctrine of "strategic depth" in an (imaginary) Ottoman space. As quoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey on its website, the Davutoğlu doctrine ostensibly promotes peace with its neighbors:

> Aware that development and progress in real terms can only be achieved in a lasting peace and stable environment, Turkey places this objective at the very center of her foreign policy vision. This approach is a natural reflection of the "Peace at Home, Peace in the World" policy laid down by Great Leader Atatürk, founder of the Republic of Turkey. Besides, it is a natural consequence of a contemporary responsibility and a humanistic

> foreign policy vision. (http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa)

The policy of "zero problems" is not novel; Mustafa Kemal had in the past adopted the motto "peace in the country, peace in the world." The difference between current and old versions of the same policy is that the newer version stresses neo-Ottomanism, which captures the Islamist vision of Turkey, whereas the old Kemal version deemphasized the influence of the Ottoman Empire. Kemal wanted to move Turkey toward Europe, while the Islamists want to bring back the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire of old.

As part of this neo-Ottoman policy, Ankara resumed ties with the Middle East, after half a century of isolation. Economic and trade exchanges with Arab states as well as with Iran increased, visa restrictions with its neighbors were lifted, and at one time Turkey even assumed the role of mediator in some of the most difficult conflicts in the region. Ankara negotiated the resumption of indirect talks between Syria and Israel, and between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and even encouraged dialogue between Palestinian political parties Fatah and Hamas. Moreover, Turkey offered its good offices to mediate between the West and Iran over the Iranian nuclear issue. This aimed at allowing Turkey to be at the heart of the negotiation process and to enable it to improve its position in the power equation with Tehran, considering that distrust between the two countries continues to create suspicion and enmity. Ankara is opposed to Iran's nuclear ambitions on the grounds that they would give Tehran military superiority in the region.

Turkey's neo-Ottoman policy failed miserably, partly because the status quo in the area was upset by the changes that the Arab Spring brought with it. Worse still, in his effort to approach the Arab Muslim world, Erdoğan broke Turkey's friendly relations with Israel. The deterioration in relations began in Davos in 2009. Here Erdoğan, Turkey's Prime Minister at the time, unleashed a vitriolic attack against Shimon Peres, then Israeli president, criticizing Israeli policies in the Gaza Strip. The bonds between the two countries came to breaking point on May 31, 2010 when Israel attacked MV *Mavi Marmara*, the ship that was trying to break the Gaza blockade, killing nine Turkish activists (Black, MacAskill, and Booth 2010).

The Arab Spring shook up Turkish foreign policy, forcing Ankara to interfere in the affairs of the Arab world, provoking reactions from Arab countries that had not yet forgotten the heavy Ottoman yoke of the past. Ankara struggled hard to adapt to the new reality and to accept that the region was not willing to tolerate the imposition of neo-Ottoman policy. In

Libya, before the fall of Gaddafi, Ankara had argued that it was not the West's responsibility to intervene in the country. In Syria, it broke its strategic alliance with Assad and pressed for his overthrow by supporting the most extremist of Islamic forces. Erdoğan also ignored friendly warnings about the alarming change that was taking shape in the Syrian opposition, which saw a moderate Muslim Brotherhood being replaced by al-Qaeda and in turn by ISIL.

As regards Egypt, Turkey tried in the beginning to develop a privileged alliance with Islamist president Mohamed Morsi by putting him under Turkish protection and in the process angering both Israel and Saudi Arabia. After the overthrow of Morsi, Ankara cut its ties with Egypt and engaged in a war of words against the Gulf monarchies for their refusal to support Morsi. Turkey even accused Israel of having collaborated in the coup that removed him (Cagaptay 2013). By then, neo-Ottoman diplomacy had reached its limits and as such began to have little influence.

Meanwhile, relations with the US also deteriorated on account of Ankara's reluctance to engage vigorously in the war against the jihadists of ISIL, who formed their own state in parts of Iraq and Syria. Turkey attempted to play the Islamic card by trying to win over Sunni Islamic forces, offering them the role of a protector. Erdoğan walked away from the West feeling that he had a sufficiently strong part to play and that it would have allowed him to impose his conditions on Western countries. After all, it was with the support of the EU that Erdoğan managed to win the contest against the Turkish Kemalist military establishment. Having pocketed the victory over the military and the Kemalist bureaucracy, he then tried to cash in on Turkey's geostrategic position by negotiating its participation in the alliance against the jihadists. He also tried to take advantage of US consent over Turkish actions concerning Cyprus by laying claim to Cyprus's energy resources. Erdoğan read well America's position that Turkey could be very useful in the US fight against ISIL in Syria and Iraq. At least, this is the analysis that is presented in Nicosia, concerning Cypriots' fears of being forced by the Americans into concessions to Ankara.

Recent remarks by US secretary of state John Kerry to the effect that America needed to talk to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad as expected prompted a strong reaction from Ankara. Speaking in an interview in March 2015, Kerry carefully avoided repeating the long-held US line that Assad had lost all legitimacy and must go (Hurriyet Daily News 2015c). Kerry also angered the Turkish when he praised the reforms of Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who in 2013 overthrew the elected president Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. Erdoğan and

Davutoğlu denounced Sisi on every possible occasion, regardless of the fact that they are alone in doing that. Kerry's remarks coincided with a number of US-origin editorials and reports accusing Turkey of drifting away from the Western NATO military alliance as regards the latter's position on fighting ISIL and other fanatics. Turkey is also accused for its middle-of-the-road stance on the conflict in Ukraine and the NATO–Russia standoff.

There is something wrong with Turkish policy in the Middle East and the EM, a Turkish commentator noted (Yetkin 2015). Up until five or six years ago, Turkey was mediating between Israel and Syria and entering a strategic partnership with Egypt. Today, it does not have an ambassador in any of these three countries. The failure, therefore, is strategic and not tactical in nature, because the ruling AKP's foreign policy for the region – as shaped by Erdoğan and Davutoğlu – supported the formation of a Sunni triangle that would rely on three power centers – Ankara, Damascus, and Cairo – and this has failed. At the time Cairo was not under democratic rule, considering that Hosni Mubarak was in power, and Damascus was not even under Sunni rule. Assad was the symbol of a Nusayri/Alevi autocracy over a Sunni majority, even when Erdoğan was calling him "my brother" while holding joint cabinet meetings and taking family holidays together (Yetkin 2015).

Responding to Kerry, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu warned the country's powerful ally the US about the rise of a Shiite wave in Iraq, which he said "contributed to the rise of ISIL because of the pressure on Sunnis." About this warning Yetkin (2015) noted, "There might be some truth in this warning, but it also signals that the AKP Party government has no intention of revising its foreign policy, which has been alienating Turkey in the area since the start of the Arab Spring."

At the same time, the sacred union between Erdoğan's party, the AKP, and the powerful religious movement of Fethullah Gülen was shattered. Since 2002 the AKP had enjoyed the strong support of the religious community of Fethullah Gülen, an influential religious leader who was exiled to the US and persecuted by Kemalists. Gülen shared the same goals as AKP, with both sides wanting an end to Kemalist rule and the establishment of an Islamic government. Once the army and the state bureaucracy, which were both loyal to Kemalist power, were subdued, the two partners found themselves face to face over control of the government machinery. Erdoğan suspected Gülen's supporters of infiltrating the police and the judiciary. Even as the establishment succeeded in convicting many generals in the Ergenekon trial of members of an alleged criminal network, in the process muzzling the army, Gülenists were weary of Erdoğan and