

# Geopolitical analysis of Eastern Mediterranean competitions using game theory

## *Análisis geopolítico de las competiciones del Mediterráneo Oriental utilizando la teoría de juegos*

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### RESUMEN

El Mediterráneo Oriental se encuentra en el centro de un periodo de transición. Por lo tanto, comprender los intereses de los actores locales y extrarregionales ayudaría a comprender el posible futuro de esta región. Debido a su importancia geopolítica, esta área se ha convertido en un campo de batalla para entidades regionales y globales que tienen intereses contrapuestos. Las autoridades de la zona se sintieron motivadas a realizar operaciones exploratorias y de cooperación multilateral en la región del Mediterráneo Oriental luego de que se encontraran nuevos recursos de gas en aguas frente a las costas de Egipto y Chipre. Este proceso condujo a un aumento de las actividades geopolíticas de Turquía, Israel y los estados vecinos en el Mediterráneo Oriental, tanto a escala regional como internacional. Estos requisitos geopolíticos están ligados a los requisitos estratégicos de estas naciones. El objetivo de este ensayo fue utilizar la teoría de juegos para evaluar geopolíticamente la competencia entre las naciones del Mediterráneo Oriental. La investigación fue descriptiva-analítica y la información se recopiló a través de recursos en línea y documentales, dependiendo del material histórico y la evidencia disponible.

**Palabras clave:** Mediterráneo oriental, crisis geopolítica, teoría de juegos, disputas marítimas, disputas por el gas.

### ABSTRACT

The Eastern Mediterranean is within the center of a transition period. Therefore, understanding the interests of local and extra-regional actors would help to understand the possible future of this region. Due to its geopolitical significance, this area has developed into a battleground for regional and global entities that have competing interests. The authorities in the area were

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motivated to conduct exploratory operations and multilateral cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean region after new gas resources were found in the waters off the coasts of Egypt and Cyprus. This process led to an increase in Turkey's, Israel's, and the neighboring states' geopolitical activities in the Eastern Mediterranean on both a regional and an international scale. These geopolitical requirements are tied to these nations' strategic requirements. The goal of this essay was to use game theory to evaluate geopolitically the competition between the Eastern Mediterranean nations and to offer answers to any issues that may have arisen. The research was descriptive-analytical, and the information was gathered through online and library resources, depending on historical material and available proof.

**Keywords:** Eastern Mediterranean, geopolitical crisis, game theory, maritime disputes, gas disputes

## INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Mediterranean region is one of the most important and influential areas in global geopolitical considerations. The most significant and profound political crises of the modern era occur in this region, and significant geopolitical issues are among the elements that influence, exacerbate, and sustain the crisis. The Mediterranean Basin is the name of a large area around the Mediterranean Sea. This basin includes the Mediterranean Sea and continental areas close to the coast of Southern Europe, North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. The foggiest part of the Mediterranean basin, which is also located in the fragile belt of the Middle East, is the "Eastern Mediterranean". This area is the focus of competition between regional and extra-regional actors (Zaki et al., 2018: 21). Therefore, in terms of its strategic importance, the Eastern Mediterranean region has been taken into consideration by all analysts of regional issues. The regional developments and the strategic crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean have left their effects on the small geographical countries that have a geopolitical position. Such a process shows that strategic competitions in global politics have provided the ground for the formation of geopolitical crisis in this region (Moslinejad, 2015: 31). The question that arises here is what solution should be provided to solve the geopolitical disputes among the Eastern Mediterranean powers? The findings of this research show that among the existing methods, game theory has a special place in the field of dispute resolution. It seems that the decision-makers of the foreign policy apparatus of regional and extra-regional influential actors in the Eastern Mediterranean should resolve these conflicts by adopting an appropriate regional solution, involving other influential actors in the region, curbing the interventionist power, and balancing the distribution of power. A detailed and comprehensive answer to the question raised and the test of the hypothesis along with the

presentation of the competition axes in this regard confirms the necessity of writing and presenting this article. Based on this, the upcoming article aims to comprehensively analyze “geopolitical rivalries in the Eastern Mediterranean” using game theory to provide solutions for geopolitical disputes among regional and extra-regional powers in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, the collection of information has been formed in a documentary-library way and using a descriptive-analytical method.

## **RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Few studies, particularly within the nation, have explored and investigated all elements of this subject due to the subject's breadth and the role of numerous actors in it; therefore, some of the most pertinent and significant sources are listed below. The Eastern Mediterranean region is significant in terms of geopolitics, according to Abbas Moslinejad (2015), who discussed this in his article titled “Strategic Planning and Development Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.” He believes that this region is the reason that international powers are so present and that their interests are being interfered with. In the article of Zaki (2018) under the title “Eastern Mediterranean and its effect on Iran's geopolitical territorialization in South-West Asia”, he identified the geopolitical factors affecting Iran's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this research, while examining the geopolitical importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region, he considers the major activities of global and regional powers such as Britain, France, America, Germany, etc. to be the main cause of the crisis. Ebrahimi and Rashidi (2014) in an article entitled “Security Consequences of Gas Discovery in the Eastern Mediterranean” discussed the change of regional power equations in the Eastern Mediterranean due to gas discovery. Considering the importance of energy in Israel's security, the discovery of gas in the Eastern Mediterranean has promoted the position of the Zionist regime in the region and has used gas as a tool to achieve its regional goals. Hosseini and Fatahi (2021) in an article entitled “Perspective on the role of Russia and Turkey in Libya; From Competition to Cooperation” while examining the proxy conflict between regional and extra-regional powers in the Eastern Mediterranean region, has examined the role of Russia and Turkey in Libya as a prominent example of the countries involved in this region.

## **CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

### **Crisis**

The significant occurrences in the world's political, economic, social, geographic, and human spheres over the past few decades demonstrate that human societies have experienced natural disasters or destructive human tendencies

that result in a variety of crises. Crises may go so far as to question the internal and external interests of societies or the credibility of a large organization. When a set of special conditions suddenly changes the normal and expected routine of work flow, activity, production, service delivery, life, communication, provision of public needs, health, environment, or public opinion, in this case, a critical situation has occurred.

### **Geopolitical crisis**

Geopolitical crisis is the conflict and struggle of countries and political-spatial groups and political actors over the control and occupation of one or more geographical values and commons. Crises have different sources and types, and in terms of function, they lead to the departure of the system from the state of equilibrium and the occurrence of disturbances in the normal situation and processes of the geographical space and human habitat. The geopolitical crisis has relative stability and continuity and cannot be easily resolved, because the issue of crisis and conflict are geographical values, which are considered among national and collective interests (Hafez-Niya, 2007: 126-130).

### **Theory of games**

Game theory is a field of applied mathematics that was developed in the context of economics and deals with the study of strategic behavior between “rational agents”. Strategic behavior occurs when each agent depends not only on the strategy chosen by him but also on the strategy chosen by other actors (Abdali, 2007: 19). The competition between two countries to obtain oil and gas energy or to obtain a strategic region, the governing mechanism of relations between two countries in resolving an international dispute, etc. are examples of these games whose results can be explained based on the algebraic sum of zero. Game theory discusses competitive situations in which two or more intelligent competitors compete with competing interests. In this competition, actors have several choices and each actor tries to optimize his reception. The theory of coalition building is influenced by the theory of games and believes that governments create alliances only for the sake of winning (gaining benefits and points). In this situation, the optimal form of distribution of benefits and privileges within the alliance is completely different (Askari and Moinabadi, 2021: 136); Therefore, since the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean region are prominent players and have conflicting interests and compete with each other; It seems that the theory of games can describe and explain how this game is played between these countries. Game theory has a special place in the field of dispute resolution. This method, which has been widely welcomed by researchers, managers and planners in various branches of science, in many cases is able to make the results of dispute resolution

very realistic even without the need for accurate quantitative data to predict. On the other hand, due to the way of presenting the results by this method, finding solutions to create a desire to change the results obtained from the behavior of decision makers is done more easily than other methods. Influential parties and local, regional and extra-regional powers in the developments of the Eastern Mediterranean each have their own goals, interests and interests, in order to reach a balance between these actors within the scope of the game and actually solve the crises in this region, they must use solutions politically agreed upon by different regional and international parties.

## **DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Geopolitical values, Eastern Mediterranean geoculture**

Eastern Mediterranean is one of the important geopolitical and geostrategic regions of the world. The Mediterranean Sea, which is located in the middle of the globe, is the largest inland sea in the world, which is located between Asia, Europe and Africa, and about sixteen Asian, European and African countries are located on the coast of this sea, which include the countries located in The east of this sea is like Syria, Lebanon and occupied Palestine (Israel and the Palestinian Authority). This sea served as the principal arena for conflict between international and regional powers during the two world wars, and dominating it might test adversaries. Due to the fact that the Mediterranean Sea is now the most militarized sea in the world and has increased in geostrategic significance, several regional and international nations demonstrate their strength there (Manif, 2014: 86). One of these geographical regions, which was the center of global developments in the years after the Second World War, is the "Levant" region, or the Eastern Mediterranean, and it goes back to the years after the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; Because with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the division between England and France, the Levant region (Syria and Lebanon) became France's share. The origin of the term Levant is French and means "the place of the rising sun". The people of Western Europe considered the Levant region to be synonymous with the lands adjacent to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, which includes the present-day countries of Turkey, Greece, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. This western name, which was applied to the eastern lands, implied a kind of dialogue between the East and the West, and of course, Islam and Christianity. As Edward Gibbon considered the Eastern Mediterranean as a coast that has been involved in cultural and global conflicts for a long time (Fazlinejad, 2013: 10). The position of this geographical region in the global geopolitical system is due to its location at the intersection of three continents (Asia, Europe and Africa), proximity to the Mediterranean and proximity to the important and international straits of

Suez and Gibraltar. These features have caused the global powers not to ignore it. World powers such as Britain, France, America, Germany, etc. are among the countries that have economic and political interests in this geopolitical region and monitor all its developments from small to large. The main focus of the activities of these world powers in the eastern Mediterranean are Syria, Lebanon and Israel (Zaki et al., 2018: 22). Apart from global powers, another issue is the geopolitical competition between regional powers in this part of Southwest Asia. Turkey and Iran are one of these regional powers that have a special view of the Eastern Mediterranean and consider their presence in this region and influencing its developments in line with their national interests. In relation to the geostrategic position of the Eastern Mediterranean and its influence on the strategy of regional and extra-regional actors, it can be said that the Mediterranean Sea is a manifestation of East-West competition, the Arab-Israeli dispute, and the confrontation between developing and industrial countries on both sides of the sea. One of the most important parts of the Mediterranean Sea is the Eastern Mediterranean. The discovery of gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially in the occupied territories, has changed the power equations in the region. On the one hand, the discovery of gas has added a new source to the sources of tension in Arab-Israeli relations, and on the other hand, it has provided the grounds for new regional alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean security system, especially between Israel, Cyprus and Greece. On the other hand, this development has intensified the tension between Turkey, Cyprus and Greece in the mentioned security system (Antreasyan, 2:2013); therefore, the orientations and policies of the governments in the Eastern Mediterranean are in the direction of their macro strategy and the developments that have affected from North Africa to the Middle East. The developments that have occurred in the Eastern Mediterranean in recent years have made the big picture of the ongoing geopolitical struggle in a region consisting of the Middle East and North Africa to be clearly visible. There is no doubt that this region, which can be explained and investigated as an extraordinary geopolitical campaign, will be one of the regions in the future that will witness a very intense and close competition of several actors at the same time. In recent years, with the discovery of a significant amount of oil and gas resources in this region, its political and economic importance has also increased. The power conflict in Mediterranean geopolitics is an old conflict that goes back to the past years and the competition between Greece and Turkey, especially after the 1970s and Turkey's attack on Cyprus and its division, this conflict deepened and with the announcement of the existence of resources and energy reserves and competitive effort Actors for exploration and extraction of these reserves have taken on new dimensions; Therefore, this issue has its roots in the disputes arising from the history and maritime borders of Turkey and Greece, which has resurfaced today due to the competition for the exploration of gas resources. The Eastern Mediterranean Sea Basin is a part

of the Mediterranean Sea that is of great geopolitical importance. This water area, which is also known as the “Levantine” sea area, is located in the vicinity of the sensitive and turbulent region of the Middle East on the one hand, and on the other hand, the sea area is between the two strategic waterways of the Suez Canal in the south and the Turkish straits (Dardanel and Bosphorus) in the north. And it connects the flow of goods from the Indian Ocean to the Aegean, Marmara and Black Seas in the north and the Atlantic Ocean in the west. The Mediterranean, especially its eastern part, has been important from a military point of view since the past, and this importance has increased after the Arab revolutions and subsequent political-security developments. The discovery of new gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean provoked the countries of the region. The dispute over the exploration, extraction, exploitation and transfer of oil and gas in the eastern Mediterranean has become one of the most important problems in the Mediterranean area due to the multitude of actors, conflict of interests and also the legal complications of dividing resources. Actors and beneficiaries of exploitation of energy resources of the eastern Mediterranean Sea are divided into regional and extra-regional categories. Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Libya are among the regional players. Among the extra-regional actors, we can mention America, Russia, France and England.

### **Axis of geopolitical conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean**

The recent rise in cooperation agreements between regional entities in the energy sector, which has led to the creation of new geopolitical conflict axes in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as the cooperation agreement between Turkey and the Government of National Accord in Libya, the approval of the energy transfer project agreement between Israel, Cyprus and Greece, as well as the new agreement between Greece and Egypt has started to form new dimensions of this confrontation and the entry of new actors into this crisis; Such as France, which while supporting Greece has strongly warned against Turkey’s behavior, and the United Arab Emirates, which holds a joint exercise with Greece, a situation that has complicated this old geopolitical conflict.

### **TURKEY’S APPROACH TO THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

It has become a crucial and strategic objective for Turkey to lessen its reliance on other countries for the supply of its energy needs; Therefore, “Energy Diplomacy” has become a basic goal for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, and Turkey has taken extensive measures for exploration and extraction in two very important geographical areas of the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. It is always dependent on energy imports due to the demand and supply of hydrocarbons. Accordingly, after the discovery of rich fields in the

Eastern Mediterranean, this country is looking at the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean in order to provide its energy resources and is trying to take its share from it. Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, in addition to having old legal disputes with Greece and Cyprus, in terms of the political and security importance of the region and the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean, there is a situation that this approach of Turkey has caused tension in the Eastern Mediterranean. The merging of conflicting legal claims with old conflicts and new tensions has complicated the conflict situation. Since the discovery of the “Noa” gas field in this area in 1999, many other reserves of the region have been discovered on the coasts of the occupied territories, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and Libya. In general, Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean region is trying to narrow the field for the gas alliance formed by a group of regional actors with access to oil and gas resources.

### **Turkey's confrontation with Greece and Cyprus**

The discovery of rich resources in the eastern Mediterranean caused a dispute over natural gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. This debate has increased the geopolitical and economic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Turkey, Greece and Cyprus are among at least eight countries that claim gas resources of the Eastern Mediterranean, and this discussion has caused disputes over the share of the gas resources of the Eastern Mediterranean. Exploitation of Eastern Mediterranean energy resources has complicated the relations between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. The Eastern Mediterranean Sea, which geologically has huge oil and gas reserves, has been disputed by regional actors throughout history. Turkey believes that both Greece and Cyprus should determine the boundaries of their maritime areas in coordination with this country. Accordingly, after Israel and Cyprus defined their exclusive economic zones in an agreement in 2010, Turkey strongly objected to this (Zenonas, 2012:8).

In order to dominate the Mediterranean, Turkey signed an agreement on November 27, 2019 with the National Alliance to delimit the maritime areas in the Mediterranean Sea. Erdogan and Libyan Prime Minister Fayed Siraj also signed a memorandum of understanding on security cooperation, which includes military and anti-terrorism training, cooperation to deal with illegal immigration, logistical support, military planning and transfer of training and expertise. It was (Hosseini and Fatahi, 2021: 176). The November 27 agreement between Turkey and Libya considered the territorial sea area of 18.6 nautical miles (35 kilometers) for Turkey, which, based on this, determined the continental shelf of the country's exclusive economic zone. Apart from the security issues, it should be said that such an agreement between Turkey and Libya is an attempt to deal with the Eastern Mediterranean countries' gas forum, which Turkey, Lebanon and Syria had ignored. This proxy war in Libya



should be evaluated in the geopolitical framework of the Eastern Mediterranean, which has doubled with the discovery of gas in this area. According to the United States Geological Survey data, this area has 122 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas resources. The dispute in the distribution of gas resources and also the control over the transfer of the transmission lines of these resources to the Egyptian European markets is one of the challenges of the countries involved in this sector (Tekir, 2020: 205). It seems that Turkey and Greece, in cooperation with Cyprus, as the three main players in the Eastern Mediterranean, should reach a stable understanding regarding the investment and exploitation of the energy resources of this region. Otherwise, the move towards tension and even war will be inevitable.

### *The confrontation between Turkey and Greece*

Greece is one of the most important stakeholders in the exploitation of energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean. Greece's membership in the European Union, NATO, relations with Cyprus, the Zionist regime, and having the support of the United States have somewhat made it easier for Athens; But on the other hand, the unresolved maritime legal problems with Turkey, and at the same time, Turkey's military superiority, have created challenges for Athens. Greece, which considers the Eastern Mediterranean as its exclusive economic area, puts its armed forces on alert if needed. Greece considers the expansion of territorial waters from 6 to 12 miles in the Ionian Sea as its "inalienable right". Egypt believes that Greece's right to expand its territorial waters in other maritime areas is reserved; but this approach of Athens has caused Ankara to protest. Turkey and Greece also have serious differences regarding some islands. For example, one of the disputed islands between Athens and Ankara is Kastelorizo Island. After Noble Energy Company discovered a gas field with a reserve of 280 billion cubic meters in block 12 located in the waters claimed by Cyprus, Turkey sent three warships to the sea area where the gas field is located and started shooting at the gas block. Pointed out following this move, Cyprus agreed to share its gas resources with Turkey-backed Northern Cyprus (Mier, 2013: 3).

Therefore, the main source of the dispute between Turkey and Greece is in this area, which is complicated by the dispute over the island of Cyprus. Greece has a significant EEZ based on its numerous islands, while Turkey maintains that its EEZ should be wider than the one depicted on the above map, commensurate with its long coastline. In this regard, and in order to neutralize the alliance between Greece, Cyprus and Egypt, Turkey signed an exclusive zone agreement with the government of the Libyan National Coalition led by Fayez al-Sarraj in 2019. The exclusive economic zone claimed by Turkey also includes parts of the exclusive zone of Greece and Cyprus and has caused serious political tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. This island

is located 2 km from the coast of Turkey and about 580 km from the coast of Greece in the southeast of the Mediterranean. Turkey plans to conduct exploratory drilling for oil and gas near the waters of this island, and Greece believes that Turkey has no right to this because that area is in Greek waters. Following the agreement between Turkey and Libya, Greece claimed that such an understanding ignored the maritime boundaries of the island of Crete. Also, Turkey's decisions were subject to the divisions of Cyprus (Selcan & Kuzov, 2019). Greece is trying to rely on the European Union and the Zionist regime in the Eastern Mediterranean and use this issue as a leverage against Turkey. Greece believes that if Turkey does not take practical measures to reduce tension in the region, the relations between the two countries will become more fragile. Greece also seeks to use the power of the United States, and for this purpose, in September 2020, the military forces of the United States and Greece held a joint military exercise. Turkey and Greece are both important members of NATO and play an important role in carrying out NATO missions. NATO has organized a de-escalation mechanism to prevent air and sea clashes between the two countries; but the problem is that the economic and legal dimensions of the Greek-Turkish disputes are more important than the defense and security aspects, and this is what has tied NATO's hands and feet to a significant extent.

### *The confrontation between Turkey and Cyprus*

Cyprus also has a special and strategic position in the case of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, and as a small European country with island geography, it is one of the beneficial actors in the Eastern Mediterranean, which can find a better economic position with the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus is facing an important legal problem and challenge in the name of insisting on the separation of the Turks and the recognition of the self-proclaimed Republic of Northern Cyprus by Turkey. It has a special position that can be described as the simultaneous effects of threat and opportunity. The secession of Cyprus was the result of Turkey's attack on this country claiming that Greece was trying to annex Cyprus in 1947. After this year, Cyprus has been divided into two southern parts (recognized by the international community) and northern (recognized by Turkey). After this domination, Turkey has carried out its explorations to discover the extraction of hydrocarbon resources in the waters of Cyprus (Hosseini and Fatahi, 2021: 176).

For Turkey, it is necessary to respect the maritime rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus; Therefore, the issuance of unilateral licenses for the extraction of resources and the delimitation of gas resource discovery areas around the island of Cyprus are objected to by Ankara. Turkey concluded an agreement in this regard with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in

2011. On the other hand, the Greek Cypriot government has concluded bilateral agreements with Egypt, Lebanon and the Zionist regime (Güzel, 2019: 6). These tripartite alliances held several meetings regarding the Eastern Mediterranean project, which planned to transfer gas to Europe through Egypt, Palestine, Cyprus and Greece in the coming years in order to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas exports (Cingoli, 2016: 4); But no result has been reached yet. In fact, according to some analysts, these measures are not just dependence on gas and oil resources; rather, it is a part of the great plan and doctrine of Turkey's foreign policy in the form of pursuing the doctrine of the Blue Homeland, which stems from the expansion of Turkish sovereignty and jurisdiction in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. Based on this, by putting this doctrine on the agenda, Turkey has tried to control a large part of the continental plateau of this region to its own benefit and to the detriment of its neighbors (Shama, 2019); therefore, the conflict over energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean will affect the Turkish Cypriot part of the country in the future. It is expected that solving the problems of this area will clarify the task of the Turkish Cypriot part and determine its fate.

### **Russia's positions towards Turkey's actions**

Russia negotiated long-term contracts for the production and development of oil and gas with Syria by taking a strong position in support of Bashar al-Assad; And several times by using the right of veto in the UN Security Council, he prevented the issuance of a resolution against Bashar al-Assad's government. Some analysts argue that if there was no foreign policy priority in Libya, Russia would have taken a softer approach on the implementation of sanctions against the government. Bashar Assad adopted (Stepanova, 2018: 93). On the one hand, Moscow is trying to become an influential player in the energy market in the Mediterranean region, and on the other hand, it is seeking to gain political benefits in Libya. Because Libya, having a very long coast and important ports in the Mediterranean Sea, is considered important for Russia's foreign policy and Russia is trying to strengthen its position in front of the West by increasing its activity in the Mediterranean through Libya (Ruhe, 2020). Meanwhile, Ankara's active participation in Libyan territorial waters can help advance Moscow's plans to strengthen its positions in the Mediterranean basin (Mammadov, 2020).

### **The position of the European Union towards Turkey's actions**

While Germany seeks to create a balance between Turkey and Greece, France is trying to create the ground for putting pressure on an important NATO member, Turkey, with extensive military cooperation with the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Greece. To give regarding the situation in Libya, French

President Macron accused Erdogan of intensifying the conflict in this country and blamed Turkey for endangering the security of Europe by sending a terrorist group to Libya. Also, Ankara's ambition in the Eastern Mediterranean was met with severe criticism from Paris; So that the President of France asked the members of the European Union to sanction Turkey by ignoring the maritime boundaries of Greece and Cyprus. Apart from this issue, the cooperation between Russia and Turkey has dealt a major blow to the European powers involved in Libya, such as Italy and France, who have not been able to resolve the crisis in this country.

On the other hand, France and the UAE have a geopolitical competition with Turkey in the Middle East and influence in Libya, and in fact, the behavior of these actors, who have taken the side of Egypt in the tension between Turkey and Greece, is to put pressure on Ankara in an area that is considered as a national interest for Turkey. With these pressures, they try to involve Turkey more in those areas first, so that more space is provided for them in other geopolitical areas with the absence or weakening of Turkey's influence, then they challenge Turkey's coalition building in the Eastern Mediterranean region and with The creation of the opposite axis will challenge Turkey's strategy for the future of energy in the Mediterranean Sea.

### **The positions of Saudi Arabia and the UAE regarding Turkey's actions**

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as natural allies of Egypt and Israel, have entered and engaged in these competitions in an area called Sham or Shamat on the eastern and southern coasts of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The main goal of this group is to control the power and limit Turkey's ability to maneuver in this very important geopolitical field. During this process, the mentioned countries have formed a new alliance with Greece and the Greek part of Cyprus. The recent exercise of the United Arab Emirates and Greece in the Mediterranean Sea is a clear example of this new trend. This political bloc is seriously trying to impose restrictions and encirclement against Turkey. They are trying to implement their policies by encircling Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and hoping that the implementation of these policies can limit Turkey's operational power in this breathtaking geopolitical campaign. This newly established political bloc also intends to reduce the power of the Turkish armed forces and limit the influence of the Ankara government in possible equations and developments in this region; therefore, the first pillar of this policy, the blockade is considered as the first element of the existing coalition aimed at curbing the power of Turkey (Yeshiltash, 2021).

## ISRAEL'S RELATIONS WITH EGYPT AND CYPRUS

In recent years, new gas resources were also discovered in the waters belonging to Cyprus and Egypt, and therefore the governments of the region were encouraged to carry out exploration operations and multilateral cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean region. As a result of this process, Israel and the neighboring states also underwent a leap in their regional activities in the Eastern Mediterranean both at the regional geopolitical level and at the international level (Goren, 2018). Since 2011, 73 meetings between Israeli ministers and their counterparts have been held in the region, including several visits by Israeli officials to Eastern Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Cyprus and Italy. It should be noted that Israel's relations with Greece and Cyprus have greatly increased since then. In 2011, the then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Cyprus was the first visit of a head of state of the Zionist regime to this country. The same process was then repeated in Greece. In 2013 the three governments signed a memorandum of understanding on energy and in the following years developed their trilateral partnership with regular meetings on tourism, economy, network security and maritime cooperation. They have also held several joint exercises so far. Their tripartite meetings are mainly focused on the east mode pipeline. Although some industry experts doubt the feasibility of the East Mode pipeline project, it is possible that Israel, Greece and Cyprus will succeed in passing their electric grid under the sea and connect their electric grid to Europe (Rubin and Eiran, 2019: 979). Israel-Egypt relations have also improved under the influence of this issue. Since Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power in 2013, security cooperation between Tel Aviv and Cairo has reached unprecedented levels; but today, energy is also one of the main pillars of the relations between the two sides. When the two sides reach an agreement on their existing energy-based dispute, the doors will be opened for the export of natural gas to Edco and Damiyat gas terminals in Egypt. Today, the partnership between Egypt and Israel is considered the basis for the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Association - the first international organization in the region that is committed to energy development and multilateral cooperation (Mitchell, 2020). The association, which is located in Cairo, includes, apart from Egypt, the governments of Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and finally the Zionist regime; it represents a network of political and economic relations that is the elixir of life for Israel. It can take the path of convergence in a regional structure after decades. The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Association started informally in January 2019, but its founding members signed the membership documents in September 2020, and finally in March 2021, all members united to implement its goals (Mitchell, 2021).

As we said before, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Association is considered the first regional organization in the Eastern Mediterranean region, but

it is not the only collective cooperation mechanism in this region. Israel was already cooperating with the “Barcelona Process” or the Union of Mediterranean Sea Countries (which is part of the European Union’s Neighborhood Policy) as well as the NATO “Mediterranean Dialogue” process. Although the Mediterranean Union is not focused on the foreign and security issues of the Eastern Mediterranean, it is considered a vehicle for economic development and will serve as an umbrella for environmental cooperation in the future.

## 7. ISRAELI DISPUTES WITH LEBANON

The discovery of hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean intensified the dispute over maritime borders between neighboring countries. Now the Zionist regime has border disputes with Lebanon in this area. On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority has protested against the Jewish government that the blockade of the Gaza Strip has prevented the development of the Gaza gas field. Lebanon and Israel have been involved in a maritime dispute for years over the exact location of their water borders. Since this disputed area may have natural gas reserves, it is of special importance for both sides. Israel and Lebanon’s disputes are mainly over an area of 860 square kilometers (330 sq mi). In 2011, the two sides had agreed to proceed with their negotiations on a UN-approved map, but the differences that arose between them in the following years prevented a final solution to the problem.

The Leviathan gas field, which is located near this area, is one of the largest gas fields in the Zionist regime. Parts of this gas field are located in the disputed area and both sides claim it. The gas reserves located in the Leviathan field are very large and can make Israel one of the main energy exporters. Negotiations on determining the maritime border continued between Tel Aviv and Beirut in 2020, but due to the increase in the demands of the Lebanese side, these negotiations have not experienced the necessary progress. Following the significant reduction of the American military presence in the Middle East, Israel needs to compensate for its “strategic depth” from another side, which is why the water borders in the Eastern Mediterranean have become more important for this regime than in the past.

In 2020, a new round of negotiations began between Lebanon and the Zionist regime to draw the blue borders with the mediation of the United States, and 5 rounds of negotiations were held between the two sides until first the army and then the Lebanese government made new requests. According to these claims, the area claimed by this country increased by 1430 square kilometers (552 nautical miles). Thus, when this claim was raised, the prospect of resolving the crisis became very dark.

“Michel Aoun”, the President of Lebanon in 2020, while bringing up the discussion of the Lausanne Agreement of 1923, put forward the argument that according to this agreement, the last border point of Lebanon is “Na-

gourah” and therefore the water border demarcation should also be based on the same principle. On the other hand, Lebanon recently and since 2018 has entered exploration activities in the Mediterranean bed and with a consortium of three companies Total, A. NI and Novatech has signed a contract to carry out exploration operations; therefore, one of Beirut’s arguments is that this country has not completed the discovery process in this region. Also, Lebanon’s external debt is over 170% of the country’s GDP and has turned into a big crisis, therefore Beirut is hoping for possible gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean waters to adjust its external debt. Also, in August 2021, Lebanon’s Minister of Public Affairs, Michel Najjar, issued an official decree to increase Lebanon’s water borders in the disputed area with Israel, although the president of this country has not yet signed the said decree.

### **ANALYSIS**

The solution of disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean area using game theory One of the most important issues in international relations is dispute resolution. Predicting the general behavior of the decision makers involved in these disputes can provide a way out of these disputes. In general, the disputes over water resources are multi-criteria and multi-decision-makers, which complicate their prediction. On the other hand, in many of the methods presented to resolve the dispute, the cooperation of the parties to the conflict is assumed, in order to achieve the greatest possible profit for the whole group. This is despite the fact that in reality, not only every decision-maker is trying to maximize personal profit, but in many cases other than economic issues, social and political issues also play a role in the behavior of decision-makers, which is as complicated as the Mediterranean disputes. Eastern adds. Among the dispute resolution methods, game theory has gained increasing acceptance in various sciences due to the accuracy of predictions, consideration of various aspects of the dispute, and lack of dependence on quantitative data. It seems that with detailed and comprehensive analysis, it is possible to get out of the bottleneck at the lowest cost for the parties to the disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### **Prisoners’ puzzle method**

The energy issue is one of the most important reasons for the tensions between Ankara and Greece, so that the tension between Ankara and Athens has reached its peak over Turkey’s exploratory actions in the Mediterranean and maritime alliances between Turkey, Libya and Egypt, Greece. Turkey has to take serious steps to resolve its differences with this country because other players such as America, Europe and NATO have supported Greece. Nowadays, one of the fields in which the issue of dispute resolution is discussed a lot is the use of the game theory method. Today, this method has been widely

accepted by researchers, managers and planners in various branches of science. In many cases, it is able to predict the results of dispute resolution very realistically even without the need for precise quantitative data. Based on the techniques proposed for game theory, only by knowing the priority order of each decision maker or player, the outcome of a dispute can be predicted. Regarding the geopolitical competition among the actors of the Eastern Mediterranean, the first solution is negotiation and agreement. The prison puzzle is one of the examples of game theory analysis to show why two rational actors (the country) do not necessarily cooperate to achieve the same goal, while the appearances of the matter indicate that they benefit from cooperation; For example, the border disputes between Lebanon and Israel regarding maritime borders and the energy issue, if both actors start negotiations, the process of this geopolitical dispute will move towards the normalization of relations and agreement. The next case is the dispute between Turkey and France, which is related to the interests of the two countries in Libya. Whether it is the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, the crisis in Libya and Syria, or the dispute over Turkish gas discoveries in the Mediterranean Sea, the two countries are facing each other in the most important regional disputes. Therefore, all the evidence indicates that the main factor of this conflict lies in the clash of strategic interests of the two countries.

### **Nash equilibrium method**

The next solution is balancing power distribution equations among regional and international actors. This approach in game theory is called “Nash equilibrium”; That is, the actors should make the common points the center of gravity of their diplomacy activities. Now France, England, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and every regional and extra-regional country are playing according to their goals and interests. Therefore, one should look for commonalities in the game with any actor in the international scene in order to interact with them so that the competition does not become tense if the ceiling of the game collides. Because staying in the game of disputes in any way (whether they succeed or not), the game is in the field of opposites and ultimately benefits the other side. Therefore, any actor who is looking to enter the international arena must pay attention to all aspects of the game in game theory; it means forming cooperation and interaction while there are conflict and conflict platforms. Therefore, no country can interact with big players by relying only on one dimension of its capabilities, such as the military and missile dimension. On the other hand, one of the most important points of using the game method to predict the results of the behavior of international actors and decision makers in geopolitical disputes is the correct formulation of the dispute in the appropriate game. Therefore, in the present study, by evaluating the game of competition between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, and



on the other hand, Turkey's competition with Cyprus and Greece, the best way to reduce geopolitical conflicts between these actors is always to curb the intervening power and balance the distribution of power.

Regarding the main possible scenarios in the Eastern Mediterranean, it should be said that considering the multiplicity of actors and the geopolitical characteristics of the Mediterranean, which is directly related to the economic security of Europe, the idea of a large-scale war in the Mediterranean seems unlikely. Of course, due to the maritime-security agreement between Turkey and Libya on the one hand and Greece and Egypt on the other hand, there is a potential capacity for tension and conflict of interests. In such a situation, the closest option and possible scenario is a brief and limited conflict between Turkey and Greece. The Zionist regime, the United States and the European Union are against a wide-ranging war in the eastern Mediterranean, but if there is a brief tension with Turkey from the countries of Greece and Cyprus with the naval support of France, they will support Egypt. Such an option will have a negative impact on Turkey's interests in Cyprus and the European Union in the medium term. As a result, the likely scenario is that Turkey chooses the option of threats and media and propaganda war. According to the decision of December 10, 2020 EU leaders in Brussels to sanction Turkey, Turkey's initial steps and efforts are to use the favorable opinion of some European countries in order to prevent the formation and continuation of the consensus of European opinion.

In general, it can be said that the rising tension and differences between Turkey and Egypt, Greece and Cyprus on the other hand, the removal of Turkey from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, the desire of the European Union, the Zionist regime and the United States to participate in the energy equations of the Eastern Mediterranean, all indicate that Turkey has a difficult road ahead to become an energy hub in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, until it reconsiders its relations with Egypt, Cyprus and Greece, it will be very difficult and far from reach to achieve a favorable result in this area. Also, it is difficult to mediate and play a positive role for the United Nations and the European Union to bring the conflicting countries to a stable consensus and agreement, and it seems that the existing differences cause the task of extracting And the amount of actors' share of Eastern Mediterranean energy resources, in the medium term, cannot be determined.

## CONCLUSION

The Eastern Mediterranean region has influenced both the surrounding nations and the superpowers of the world because of its unique and delicate geostrategic and geopolitical condition. This situation is often caused by three factors: the presence of significant energy reserves; its geographical location; and the fact that it constitutes a sensitive point of the world system. For this

reason, it has led to new trends, including the formation of alliances and changes in the type of political differences between countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The discovery of new gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean provoked the countries of the region. The dispute over the exploration, extraction, exploitation and transfer of oil and gas in the eastern Mediterranean has become one of the most important problems in the Mediterranean area due to the multitude of actors, conflict of interests and also the legal complications of dividing resources. The actors and beneficiaries of the exploitation of the energy resources of the eastern Mediterranean Sea are divided into regional (Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Libya) and extra-regional (Russia, European Union and Saudi Arabia) categories. According to the data mentioned in the research, it seems that the disagreement about the way to determine the maritime border lines and the competition over hydrocarbon resources so that each of the countries around the Eastern Mediterranean have the most maritime competence has caused the formation of regional and extra-regional geopolitical competitions in the Eastern Mediterranean. If this trend continues, the possibility of conflicts in the region will increase, which has already happened. The important thing is that the existing competitions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the presence of trans-regional actors show that the presence of these actors is not only due to the energy conflict in that area, but there are other reasons, including their competitions in the Middle East.

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