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**The Italian foreign policy in the domain of energy resources in  
the Eastern Mediterranean in the XXI century: a Neoclassical  
realist approach.**

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## *Introduction*

Over the past two decades, the Eastern Mediterranean has emerged as a strategic region for global energy security, particularly in the domain of natural gas. Italy, as a major energy importer and Mediterranean power, has a vested interest in the region's evolving dynamics and the implications for its foreign policy. The discovery of significant gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, coupled with the unresolved disputes over maritime boundaries and ownership rights, has created a complex web of strategic interactions among regional and global actors. Italy's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean is shaped not only by its energy needs, but also by its historical ties, geopolitical interests, and alignment with key partners such as the United States and its membership status ties to the European Union.

The first major discoveries of natural gas fields in the early 2010s have led to numerous tensions in a region that already didn't enjoy established stability. The Cyprus question and the *de facto* split status of the island became even more entangled after the discovery of natural gas fields in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Cyprus since Turkey has manifested its interest on exploiting them through the maritime border claims of the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

The instability of the MENA region after the 2011 Arab springs has played also a role in destabilizing the Eastern Mediterranean. On this instance, the status of Libya is of particular importance since the *de facto* split status of the country has led to other countries of the region, also EU countries, to either back the internationally recognized Government of National Unity, based in

Tripoli, or the Libyan National Army led by General Haftar backed government in Tobruk. Also in this contest, the role of Turkey has been important since the 2019 maritime border agreement with the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord that led and still leads in heightened tensions with Greece. This new assertive Turkish foreign policy has been framed within its *Mavi Vatan* (Blue homeland) doctrine. Turkish relations have worsened also with regards to other actors of the region such as Egypt and Israel that led to the exclusion of Turkey from regional cooperation attempts such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum.

To understand Italy's strategic behaviour in this context, this research adopts a Neoclassical realist approach in the domain of international relations theories, which seeks to integrate domestic and international factors in explaining State behaviour.

The Neoclassical realist approach, which combines systemic and domestic factors, provides a useful framework for understanding Italy's foreign policy behaviour in the Eastern Mediterranean. By examining the interplay between Italy's domestic factors, such as its economic interests, political institutions, and societal preferences, and the systemic factors, such as the regional and global power dynamics, this research aims to shed light on Italy's foreign policy decisions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Through an analysis of Italy's bilateral and multilateral relations with key actors in the region, including Libya, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of Italy's role in the Eastern Mediterranean and the factors that have shaped its foreign policy behaviour.

The first chapter is dedicated to the understanding the basics of the evolution of realist thought since Ancient Greece until the birth of Neoclassical realism in the 1990s. Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars* laid the foundations of some realist variables in international relations theory such as the centrality of the State as well as the importance of power as a factor that determines the international relations dynamics. Machiavelli's *The Prince* from the era of Renaissance Italy has added the importance of rejecting moral and ethical standards in favour of a practical and pragmatic use of power, the latter being framed in its most material aspects, such as military power. Hobbes' modern era addition of the self-interested nature and self-preserving behaviour in humankind, also applied in the international system formed by States has been seminal in the realist paradigm. Nevertheless, it is E. H. Carr's *The Twenty years' Crisis 1919-1939*, published in 1939, that has been widely considered the foundational text in the study of International Relations as an academic subject, and especially for the realist theory. The centrality of the State, anarchic nature of international politics, the importance of historical context in understanding international politics, the role of the threat of force and the conflictive nature of international politics have been masterfully introduced by Carr in academia and in the realist paradigm. Morgenthau's seminal book, *Politics among nations*, has been widely regarded as a cornerstone of the realist school of thought in international relations. The introduction of the centrality of national interest and its pursuit by States in the international arena as well as the importance of the struggle of power among them in order to guarantee their security and the overall balance of power among nations are all principles that have clearly impacted to this day international relations and the realist theory. The major shift of paradigm within the realist school of

thought was introduced by Kenneth Waltz in the 1970s thanks to his neorealist theory introduced by his famous book *Theory of International Politics*. According to the latter it is the international system's structure that dictates the posture each State can adopt within the system itself. The shift from giving more importance to the single foreign policies of States to giving more importance to the structure of the international system and hence to the constrictions and available options for foreign policy choices has been a major one. Waltz's neorealist theory is also known as defensive neorealism since the scope of States is to maintain a balance of power equilibrium in order to secure their survival. John Mearsheimer, although agreeing on major neorealist principles introduced by Waltz, argued that the States seek hegemony in order to secure their survival thus introducing the offensive neorealist theory.

The chapter goes on focusing on the main innovations of Neoclassical realism within the realist school as well as its general theoretical framework. The Neoclassical realist theory was introduced by Gideon Rose in 1998 mainly as a foreign policy theory but since then it has been developed by many realist scholars such as Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro into becoming a genuine theory of international relations within the realist school of thought. Neoclassical realism accepts some main neorealist principles, such as the centrality of the State and the predominance of the international system's constraints over the States' choices of foreign policy. Nevertheless, Neoclassical realism introduces numerous intervening variables between the international system and the State that play a crucial role in the perception of the system by the States. Neoclassical realism also introduces some very

important classical realist variables regarding the nature of the State and its core national interests as determinant variables in the equation that will result in a foreign policy choice. Variables such as leader image, and State-society relations are also close to Alexander Wendt's constructivist theory of international relations.

Finally, the chapter closes analysing the main criticism on Neoclassical realism by both realist and non-realist scholars of international relations, the main one being that it is too holistic, and thus eclectic, by non-realist scholars and betraying neorealist core principles by realist, mostly neorealist, scholars.

The second chapter is focused on a geopolitical analysis of the main State actors in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the main complications and disputes of the area. The Eastern Mediterranean is mainly divided geologically in two basins: the Ionian basin, comprising Italy, Albania, and Greece, and the Levant basin, comprising Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Cyprus, and Libya. The focus will be mainly set on the Levant basin. The analysis is pursued through the observation of the main demographic, economic, and political data available, with a special focus on natural resources capabilities and assets. Each country shall be thus scrutinized.

The second paragraph is dedicated in shedding some light on the most relevant geopolitical issues, such as the Cyprus question and Turkish assertiveness in the area, shall be briefly introduced in order to obtain a general overview of the regional interState system and its fracture points, our independent variable.

Also, non-regional actors' interests in the area will be considered, such as China, Russia, the United States, and the EU.

Finally, the last paragraph of the chapter focuses on the Eastmed gas pipeline and the birth of the East Mediterranean gas forum (EMGF) in 2019. Such diplomatic enterprise is the result of Turkish assertiveness in the area and the counterbalancing action, on a diplomatic field, by countries such as Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, and Israel. The EMGF could be the ideal platform, a light diplomatic tool, in order for cooperation among States to arise in the management of natural gas and other resources in the area. The intergovernmental platform, nonetheless, suffers from the absence of a major regional player, Turkey, without which frictions could only escalate in the area. Thus, an important task of the regional actors, as well as of other international actors, would be to define a path through which renewed cooperation with Turkey could be achieved.

The third, and final, chapter offers a historical analysis of Italy's role and its energy diplomacy in the Mediterranean since the birth of the Republic. Since the birth of ENI under the leadership of Enrico Mattei, Italy had a major interest in guaranteeing the necessary annual energy supply as a means to allow the growth of its industry, and the energetic needs of post-war Italy. In the Cold war international chessboard Italy had to navigate turbulent waters since the international setting was very rigid and its allegiance to the Western world being undisputed since the 1948 parliamentary election that set Italy solidly and structurally in the Western bloc. This notwithstanding, Mattei strived to penetrate with ENI the oil cartel formed by the notorious Seven



sisters, the seven most important western oil companies and strike deals with MENA region countries so as to allow new kind of oil deals, that would be more careful towards the oil exporting country's needs for development growth and a fairer share of the profits. The Mattei formula became famous and thus it rallied the wrath of the Seven sisters. Nevertheless, since then Italy's foreign policy became inextricably bound to energy diplomacy and the importance of the Mediterranean region, once more, became evident for the supply of energy and for energy security.

The second paragraph is dedicated in observing nowadays Italy's posture vis-à-vis the EastMed pipeline project, and the EMGF. Italy's position regarding the EastMed pipeline has crossed many ups and downs since the conception of the project in the 2010s. The pipeline has been alternatively seen as a strategic or an economic project, these two visions having different posits and different consequences. As of today, the technical viability of the project is confirmed while the economic viability of it is still debated. On the strategic plan, the importance and the opportunities offered by a pipeline that would bind the Eastern Mediterranean to Italy, and thus Europe, are numerous. On the one hand, the fear of Italian decision makers is that such project would lead to escalation in the relations with Turkey, since the latter is not part of the project, while other decision makers believe that such project would both counterbalance Turkey's actions and it would provide a sound possibility of collaboration once tensions have been dissipated to all parties on equal terms and in respect of international law and institutions. Italy has also participated in the creation of the EMGF and is a founder member of it. Much possibility lies for Italian diplomatic action through the Forum if it becomes a target of Italian foreign policy interest and thus worthy of a further investment in terms

of resources, both human and economic.

Finally, the last paragraph introduces the analysis of the main Italian domestic factors, the domestic variables suggested by Neoclassical realist theory, that shape Italian posture in the area, and tests the adaptability of the theory to the foreign policy outcome taking into account first and foremost the independent, and intervening variables as suggested by Neoclassical realist theory. As the reader shall note, the main results prove that Italian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean can be explained successfully by Neoclassical realism in its foreign policy theory form, especially thanks to the discrepancy between what would the independent variable, stemming from the international and regional systems' constrictions suggest as foreign policy outcome, and the actual foreign policy outcome. Such discrepancy can be explained thanks to the intervening variables of Neoclassical realism.

By examining Italy's foreign policy towards the Eastern Mediterranean in the XXI century, this study aims to contribute to the broader debate on the role of middle powers in the evolving global order and the implications for international security and cooperation.

## ***Chapter 1. From the precursors of realism to Neoclassical realism.***

### *1.1: The realist tradition.*

International relations as a scientific branch of studies hails in its own right from a relatively young tradition. Although many international relations theories can be dated back to the classical age, its normative and positive schemes have been developed only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this first paragraph our objective is to illustrate the theories of realist tradition in international relations from its beginnings, pointing out the most important theoretical aspects of the main authors of said theory in order to allow a better understanding of the reasons for which Neoclassical realism was born as a theory as well as to have a better understanding of its “neo” and “classical” roots.

To trace back the roots of the realist tradition in international relations it is important to highlight that although many thinkers of the classical age may have scrutinized the philosophical and/or ethical facets of war and peace, such as Plato, Aristotle, and others, there are few that have delved in the intricacies of diplomatic relations and customs as well as with interstate power relations. One exception to this State of being is the work of Greek historian Thucydides. In his book on the Peloponnesian Wars, Thucydides lays the foundations of some variables of *classical* realist thought that have crossed

the ages, influencing realist authors such as the Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli in the Renaissance period, and have reached, been embraced, and confirmed by seminal authors of classic realist thought such as Hans Morgenthau in the 1950s. The link between realism and Thucydides has been studied and confirmed by numerous authors. For Doyle<sup>1</sup>, the importance of Thucydides' work can be of interest also to other schools of thought of international relations, such as for liberalism, or constructivism. Nevertheless, Doyle notes that Thucydides *belongs* to the realists, just as they belong to him<sup>2</sup>. The importance of his *Peloponnesian War*<sup>3</sup> is that of having laid out a series of core elements of realist thought: the centrality of the State as the main unit of analysis in international relations, and the role of power in the relations between States in order to reach a State of balance between them.<sup>4</sup> Thucydides' work on the Peloponnesian War has been highly influential in shaping the realist school of thought in international relations. Realism is a dominant theory in international relations that emphasizes the importance of State power and the pursuit of national interests in shaping international relations. Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War provides a historical example of States pursuing their interests through power politics, and the consequences that follow. Through his account, realist thought acquired assumptions such as that States operate in an anarchic

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<sup>1</sup> Doyle, M. W., *Thucydidean Realism*, *Review of International Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1990, pp. 223–237.

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, 1990, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Thucydides, Finley M. (Introducer), Warner R. (Translator), *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Penguin Classics, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Knutsen L., *Realism – a distinctively European academic tradition*, in Toje A., Kunz B., *Neoclassical realism in European Politics: Bringing power back in*, Manchester University Press, 2012, p. 17.

international system, where there is no central authority to regulate behaviour. This means that States must rely on their own power and capabilities to survive and thrive in the international arena. Realists argue that the international system is characterized by competition and conflict, since States seek to maximize their power and influence. In this context, and especially through the meaning that is given to power, military capabilities, and the balance of power, those are all elements perceived as critical factors in shaping international relations.

Thucydides' work has been particularly influential in shaping realist thought on the importance of power and military capabilities in international relations. For example, the famous classical realist scholar Hans Morgenthau argued that Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War provided "the most profound analysis of international politics ever written"<sup>5</sup>. Morgenthau saw Thucydides as providing insights into the nature of power, the role of fear and self-interest in shaping State behaviour, and the importance of alliances and diplomacy in international politics.

Other realist scholars have also drawn on Thucydides' work to develop their own theories of international relations. For example, Kenneth Waltz, another influential realist scholar, argued that Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War provides evidence for the importance of the balance of power in international relations<sup>6</sup>. According to Waltz, States are driven by a desire for security, which leads them to seek a balance of power with other States. This balance of power can help to prevent conflict and maintain

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<sup>5</sup> Morgenthau H., *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace*, Knopf, New York, 1954, p.12.

<sup>6</sup> Waltz K., *Theory of international politics*, McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 94.

stability in the international system. Major differences on what the State is seeking in the international arena, anarchic in its nature, will be developed later on.

Furthermore, the ancient Greek historian will play a major role in the development of the roots and further development of Neoclassical realism, as we shall further elaborate on in the next paragraph, since through his work he pays a lot of attention to the internal nature of the State, as well as to the role of perception that Statesmen have of other international actors, hence other States. In particular, as is highlighted in Doyle's article on Thucydides' thought on international relations, according to the ancient Greek author the structure of the international system does not suffice in order to determine and explain the scopes or the means of a State. Thus, Sparta's anguish vis-à-vis Athenian relative power was not a sufficient condition to lead the former to wage war on the latter. There were domestic factors of the Spartan State that also led to the posture Sparta acquired later. The same can be said on Athenian attitude towards the dramatic, for Athens, end of the conflict. The decline of the relative power of the Athenian city-State was certainly an important factor to take in consideration but there were also internal factors that led Athens to make choices that led to the fatal finale of the war.

Renaissance Italy reminded many scholars of that period of the situation in Greece during the golden age of the city-States. The presence of multiple State actors in the Italian peninsula, sharing similar dialects, history, and cultures, reminded a lot of the Greek situation in the classical period. Thus, in the frame of a broader rediscovery of ancient texts and a rekindling of interest towards them, Italian scholars delved deep in classical texts in order to better understand inter-State dynamics. Niccolò Machiavelli, a Florentine

State official that covered multiple institutional roles in the Florentine Republic acquired a deep interest in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars*. Machiavelli drew on Thucydides' insights into power politics and leadership in his own work on political theory and viewed Thucydides as a model for how to approach the study of politics and international relations. After being banished from the new regime established in Florence, being accused of supporting the previous regime, he started his most prolific period of writing, and among his works the most notable one is *The Prince*. Machiavelli drew on Thucydides' insights into power politics in his own work on political theory, including *The Prince*.<sup>7</sup> Machiavelli emphasized the importance of strength and cunning in politics and argued that leaders must be willing to use force and deception to achieve their goals. Machiavelli viewed politics as a struggle for power and believed that successful leaders must be able to navigate this struggle in order to achieve their objectives. In addition to his influence on Machiavelli's views on power politics, Thucydides also influenced Machiavelli's approach to the study of politics and international relations. Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is notable for its detailed and objective account of the conflict between Athens and Sparta, and for its emphasis on the importance of understanding the underlying causes of this conflict. Machiavelli viewed Thucydides as a model for how to approach the study of politics and international relations and believed that scholars must be willing to study history in order to understand the complexities of political behaviour.

Except Machiavelli's inspiration to Thucydides' works, he has provided many

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<sup>7</sup> Machiavelli N., *The Prince*, Penguin Classics, 2003.

influential insights in his own right both to political science, as well as to realist theories of international relations. Machiavelli's work has been particularly influential in shaping realist thought on the role of power, leadership, and the State in international relations. Machiavelli's most famous work, *The Prince*, is often seen as a manual for political leaders seeking to gain and maintain power. The book emphasizes the importance of strength and cunning in politics and argues that leaders must be willing to use force and deception to achieve their goals. *The Prince* is notable for its rejection of traditional moral and ethical standards in politics, and its emphasis on the practical and pragmatic use of power. It can't be highlighted enough the disruptive nature of the rejection of moral and ethical standards in his age. This is the reason for which for a long time and in many States in Europe *The Prince* was banned from circulation. Also, his focus on the importance of material aspects of power has directly impacted many scholars that followed his theoretical framework. For example, Hans Morgenthau argued that Machiavelli's insights into the importance of power and the limits of morality in politics helped to establish the realist view that international relations are characterized by competition and conflict<sup>8</sup> Machiavelli's work has also been influential in shaping realist thought on the importance of military power and the use of force in international relations. Kenneth Waltz, one of the most influential realist scholars of the 20th century, argued that Machiavelli's work helped to establish the idea that "the State is the dominant actor in international relations"<sup>9</sup>. Machiavelli's emphasis on the importance of power

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<sup>8</sup> Morgenthau, H., 1948, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Waltz K., 1979, p. 86.



and leadership in politics helped to shape the realist view that States are driven by a desire to maximize their power and influence in the international system. Finally, we may add that the importance that Machiavelli attributes to leadership and to leaders has been somewhat incorporated in the framework of Neoclassical realism through the importance attributed to State élites.

Further on in history, in the context of the Thirty Years War in Europe between 1618 and 1648, another seminal philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, translated Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars* in English in 1620<sup>10</sup>. In his research on human nature, he famously theorized the State of nature setting with a mostly negative picture of man in said State. Hobbes' political philosophy is grounded in his understanding of human nature as self-interested and competitive, which is reflected in his famous axiom, "the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."<sup>11</sup> This view of human nature is also evident in his understanding of international relations, where he emphasizes the importance of power and security in the anarchic State of nature.<sup>12</sup> Hobbes' approach to international relations can be traced back to his interpretation of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War, which he regarded as a masterful analysis of power politics in international relations.<sup>13</sup> Hobbes drew on Thucydides' insights to develop his own theory of the State and international relations, which emphasized the importance of self-help and

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<sup>10</sup> Toje A., Kunz B., p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Hobbes T., *Leviathan*, Edited by Macpherson C. B., Penguin Harmondsworth, 1968, p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, pp. 186-190.

<sup>13</sup> Hobbes T., *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, p. 113.

the need for a strong sovereign to maintain order in the face of anarchy.<sup>14</sup> Hobbes' understanding of Thucydides' work is also evident in his own writing, where he frequently references Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. For example, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes draws on Thucydides' description of the Melian dialogue to argue that States will act according to their own interests in the absence of a higher authority.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in *Behemoth*, Hobbes draws on Thucydides' account of the Athenian empire to illustrate the dangers of imperial expansion and the importance of balance of power politics.<sup>16</sup> Except from Thucydides' influence of Hobbes work, the latter further developed and added other insights of his own that would enrich realist thought. Hobbes' primary contribution to this tradition was his belief that individuals are inherently self-interested and that their behaviour is driven by a desire for self-preservation.<sup>17</sup> This idea was at the core of Hobbes' famous work, *Leviathan*, in which he argues that individuals would be in a constant State of war if left to their own devices, and that the only way to prevent this was through the creation of a strong, centralized State that could enforce order and security.<sup>18</sup> Hobbes' emphasis on the need for a strong State in international affairs has been highly influential in the realist school of thought. Realists argue that States are the primary actors in the international system and that they must be strong and secure in order to survive in a world where other States are constantly competing for power and resources.<sup>19</sup> In this

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<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p.118.

<sup>15</sup> Hobbes T., 1968, p. 186.

<sup>16</sup> Hobbes T., 1990, p. 118.

<sup>17</sup> Hobbes T., 1968, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, pp. 113-114.

<sup>19</sup> Waltz, 1979, p. 88.

view, international relations are characterized by anarchy, with no overarching authority to regulate State behaviour. Thus, States must rely on their own power and capabilities to ensure their security and promote their interests in the international arena.<sup>20</sup> Defensive neorealists believe that security is the most important goal of States in the international system and that States must be willing to use military force to defend themselves when necessary.<sup>21</sup> This view is consistent with Hobbes' belief in the importance of self-preservation and his argument that individuals and States must be willing to use force to protect themselves from harm.<sup>22</sup> Finally, another key aspect of Hobbes' thought that has influenced realist thinking is his belief in the importance of reputation in international affairs. According to Hobbes, individuals and States alike are driven by a desire for glory and honour, which is closely tied to their reputation in the eyes of others.<sup>23</sup> This idea has been incorporated into realist thinking through the concept of deterrence, which holds that States can prevent other States from attacking them by creating a reputation for being strong and willing to use force if necessary.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, also Neoclassical realists will somewhat include the importance of reputation in the frame of the perception that States have of themselves and

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<sup>20</sup> Morgenthau, 1954, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Buzan B., *People, States and Fear: the national Security Problem in International Relations, An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Wheatsheaf, 1983, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Hobbes, 1968, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> Art R. J., *To What Ends Military Power?*, *International Security*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1980, pp. 5-17.

of each other, and in particular of the reputation attributed by the perception of individuals and élites of each State.

Hobbes' thought greatly influenced Baruch de Spinoza, another European great philosopher and political philosopher. Although he embraced Hobbes' stance on the State of nature in the realm of international relations, he criticized the fact that Hobbes placed sovereign monarchs as the main actors of international relations and thus the protagonists of the State of nature among nations. In Spinoza's framework of international relations, he placed instead sovereign States as the protagonists of the State of nature in international relations. This point is of critical importance in the way a State was perceived. Furthermore, whereas Hobbes would claim the equality of individuals in the State of nature, Spinoza claimed that there is an unequal distribution of a factor that renders States unequal in the State of nature, and such factor is *reason*. According to Spinoza reason, as an ability to rule a State and its behaviour according to the rules of reasoned thought in the international arena, was unequally distributed among States, since some among the latter were ruled by more or less *reasonable* rulers, more or less prone to rule forward-looking and sensibly.<sup>25</sup>

Although Spinoza identified States as the main actors in international relations, another focal point in all subsequent realist thought, he did not appropriately address two other such focal points: balance of power and the inherent anarchy of the international system.

One of the first thinkers to address these issues was David Hume. David

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<sup>25</sup> Toje, Kunz, 2012, p. 18.

Hume was an influential philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment and a key figure in the development of the realist school of thought in international relations. Hume's scepticism towards the ability of human reason to determine objective truths led him to reject the idea of a universal moral code governing human behaviour in international relations, arguing instead that self-interest was the primary motivator of State behaviour.<sup>26</sup> He believed that human nature was inherently flawed, and that the pursuit of power and self-interest was the natural State of affairs for individuals and States alike.<sup>27</sup> Hume's view of international relations was largely based on his understanding of human nature, which he believed to be driven by self-interest and a desire for power. He argued that the pursuit of power and self-interest was the primary motivation behind State behaviour, and that States would only act in accordance with their own interests.<sup>28</sup> Hume believed that this pursuit of power and self-interest would inevitably lead to conflict between States, and that the international system was inherently anarchic and lacking in any higher authority to mediate disputes.<sup>29</sup> David Hume's balance of power theory posits that in order to maintain international stability, no State should be allowed to become too powerful.<sup>30</sup> Hume's belief that States will always act

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<sup>26</sup> Hume D., *Of the First Principles of Government*, in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1985, pp. 54-55.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>28</sup> Hume D., *Of the Balance of Power*, in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 1985, pp. 137-141.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 138.

<sup>30</sup> Vasquez, J., *The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition*, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, Issue 4, pp. 899-912.

in their own self-interest<sup>31</sup> informs his understanding that the balance of power ensures that no single State can dominate all others.<sup>32</sup> Hume also notes that in order for the balance of power to be effective, there must be a certain degree of flexibility in the system, as well as a willingness of States to cooperate with one another when necessary.<sup>33</sup>

Hume's balance of power theory has been influential in shaping the realist school of thought in international relations, as it emphasizes the importance of self-help and the pursuit of power by States.<sup>34</sup> However, critics of the theory argue that it oversimplifies the complexities of international relations, and that cooperation and collective security can be just as effective as the balance of power in maintaining international stability.<sup>35</sup> Hume's contributions to the realist school of thought in international relations emphasized the importance of self-interest and power in shaping State behaviour, and the inherent conflict and anarchy in the international system. His views have continued to influence the realist school of thought in international relations to this day.<sup>36</sup>

Another view regarding balance of power was provided by French enlightenment's philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, according to whom the

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<sup>31</sup> Hume, 1985, pp. 197-198.

<sup>32</sup> Grieco, J. M. "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism." *International Organization*, Vol. 42, no. 3, 1988, pp. 485–507.

<sup>33</sup> Hume, 1985, pp. 212-215.

<sup>34</sup> Waltz, 1979, pp. 126-127.

<sup>35</sup> Mearsheimer J., *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2001, pp. 48-49.

<sup>36</sup> Jackson R., Sørensen G., *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 50-51.

Thirty Years War and the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire historically put in the centre the principle of balance of power. Jean Jacques Rousseau, a social contract theorist, also made contributions to the balance of power theory within the realist school of thought. Rousseau's perspective on the balance of power reflects his belief in the importance of State sovereignty and the need to limit the power of dominant States in the international system. He argued that States should cooperate to maintain a balance of power, rather than seeking domination over one another. Rousseau believed that the balance of power would be maintained through a combination of alliances and military force, with weaker States aligning themselves with stronger States to counterbalance the power of dominant States<sup>37</sup> or through alliances between weaker States would unite to counterbalance the power of a stronger State. He argued that "it is necessary for weak States to unite against strong ones in order to guarantee their own security and preserve the balance of power."<sup>38</sup> This idea of balancing power through alliances is similar to the realist concept of balancing, in which States align themselves with others to prevent any single State from becoming too powerful. Furthermore, Rousseau believed that international law should be based on the principles of justice and morality, rather than simply reflecting the interests of powerful States.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, he saw the balance of power as a means to achieve a more just and peaceful international order, rather than simply a strategy for maintaining stability. Rousseau's emphasis on State sovereignty and the importance of

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<sup>37</sup> Rousseau J. J., *The Social Contract*, Penguin Classics, 2003, pp. 215-220.

<sup>38</sup> Rousseau, J. J., *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, Edited and Translated by Gourevitch V., Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 128.

<sup>39</sup> Rousseau, 2003, pp. 206-214.

limiting the power of dominant States influenced later realist thinkers such as Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz, who also emphasized the importance of balance of power in international relations.<sup>4041</sup>

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century an expansion on international relations theory, and in particular in the realist school of thought of international relations arrived from an unlikely field of study. British geographer Halford Mackinder contributed significantly to the development of geopolitics as a field of study in the early 20th century. He is considered one of the founding fathers of geopolitics, along with Friedrich Ratzel and Rudolf Kjellén.<sup>42</sup> Mackinder's most famous contribution to the field of geopolitics is his concept of the "geographical pivot of history" or the "heartland theory". According to this theory, the Eurasian landmass, which includes Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia, is the most strategically important region in the world due to its vast resources and strategic location. Control of this region would give its possessor the ability to dominate the "world island", which encompasses Europe, Asia, and Africa.<sup>43</sup> Mackinder's ideas were highly influential in shaping the foreign policy of Great Britain during the early 20th century. His theory of the heartland played a significant role in British strategy during World War I and World War II. Mackinder argued that in order to maintain its global power and prevent any other State from dominating the Eurasian landmass, Great Britain needed to form alliances and

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<sup>40</sup> Waltz, 1979, pp. 87-89.

<sup>41</sup> Morgenthau, 1954, pp. 133-135.

<sup>42</sup> Dodds K., *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 28-29.

<sup>43</sup> Mackinder H. J., *The Geographical Pivot of History*, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 23, no. 4, April 1904, pp. 421-37.



balance against potential threats in the region.<sup>44</sup>

Mackinder's geopolitical theory had a significant impact on the realist school of thought in international relations, particularly on the understanding of the balance of power and the role of geography in international politics. Realist scholars such as Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz drew on Mackinder's ideas, highlighting the importance of geography and resource distribution in shaping international power dynamics. Morgenthau, for instance, argued that a State's power is not solely dependent on its military or economic capabilities, but also on its geographical location, natural resources, and population size.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Waltz emphasized the role of geography in shaping the international system, arguing that States' strategic behaviour is heavily influenced by their position in the international order.<sup>46</sup> Mackinder's impact on the realist school of thought can also be seen in his influence on international policy, particularly during the Cold War. His theory influenced US and British foreign policies towards the Soviet Union, with policymakers seeing the Soviet Union as a potential threat to the balance of power and the security of the "World Island." Mackinder's work also had a lasting impact on the field of geography, inspiring scholars to explore the relationship between geography and politics. It is very interesting to note how the thought of a systemic approach was born in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a very objective method. Distribution of natural resources, geographical location and geographic frontiers allowed a more systematic method of analysis which

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<sup>44</sup> Knutsen, T. L., *Halford J. Mackinder, Geopolitics, and the Heartland Thesis*, *The International History Review*, Vol. 36, No. 5, pp. 835–857.

<sup>45</sup> Morgenthau, 1954.

<sup>46</sup> Waltz, 1979.

became pivotal in Waltz's structuralist realism. It is also important to note that Neoclassical realism upholds as valid the primary importance of systemic features of the international arena. Further ahead we shall delve into the complications of power distribution and even more importantly the nature and meaning of *power* for Neoclassical realists.

The academic discipline of International Relations as we know it today began to emerge in the aftermath of World War I. Classic realism, as one of the oldest and most dominant theoretical approaches within International Relations, was among the first schools of thought to take shape. Realism, in general, emphasizes the role of power and self-interest in shaping the behaviour of States, and assumes that States exist within an anarchical international system, where there is no higher authority that can enforce order or resolve conflicts.<sup>47</sup>

The interwar period witnessed the development of Realist ideas by several influential scholars, including E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Reinhold Niebuhr, among others.<sup>48</sup> Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, published in 1939, is often considered a foundational text in the study of International Relations, and it remains an influential work within Realist thought to this day.<sup>49</sup> Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*, first published in 1948, also had a significant impact on the development of Realism, and it is

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<sup>47</sup> Mearsheimer, J. J., *The False Promise of International Institutions*. *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1994, pp. 5–49.

<sup>48</sup> Hoffmann S., *An American Social Science: International Relations*, Daedalus, Vol. 106, No. 3, Discoveries and Interpretations: Studies in Contemporary Scholarship, Volume I, Summer 1977, pp. 41-60.

<sup>49</sup> Carr E. H., *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, Harper & Row, New York, 1964.

often regarded as the most important Realist work of the 20th century.<sup>50</sup>

Later on, during the period of the Cold War, from the end of World War II until the early 1990s, it was a particularly fruitful time for the development of Realist theory. During this time, scholars such as Kenneth Waltz, Robert Jervis, and John Mearsheimer made significant contributions to Realist thought, particularly in the area of international security.<sup>51</sup> The end of the Cold War and the subsequent shift in the international system towards greater globalization and interdependence challenged some of the core assumptions of Realism, but the approach remains a significant and influential perspective within International Relations to this day.<sup>52</sup>

In order to better understand classic realism, which would be a very significant influence in *Neoclassical* realism we shall first try to illustrate Carr's thought with a first glimpse on his crucial role in Neoclassical realist thought. In a second place we shall develop the thoughts of Morgenthau, as a seminal author of classic realism, and thus we shall move onto the neorealist thought of Kenneth Waltz, and his defensive structural realism, and Mearsheimer with his offensive neorealist thought.

E.H. Carr was one of the most important authors of the classical realist tradition in international relations theory. His main contributions to the field include the rejection of utopianism and the notion of progress in international affairs, the emphasis on power as the central concept in international relations, and the importance of understanding the context and historical development

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<sup>50</sup> Morgenthau, 1954.

<sup>51</sup> Jervis, R., *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton University Press, 1976.

<sup>52</sup> Nye, J., *The Future of Power*, Public Affairs, New York, 2011, pp.2-10.

of international politics. Carr's book, "The Twenty Years' Crisis", is considered a classic work in the classical realist school of thought. Carr argued that international politics are fundamentally anarchic, with no overarching authority or world government to maintain order or enforce rules.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, States are forced to rely on their own power and interests to survive in the international system. Carr also criticized the liberal notion of progress and the idea that international cooperation and institutions could lead to a peaceful and harmonious world order.<sup>54</sup> Instead, he believed that power politics and conflict were an inherent part of the international system. Furthermore, Carr emphasized the importance of understanding the historical context of international relations, rather than relying on abstract theories or universal principles.<sup>55</sup> He believed that the behaviour of States was shaped by their historical experiences, culture, and ideology, rather than purely rational calculations of national interest. This led Carr to be critical of the idealist school of thought, which he saw as too focused on universal moral principles rather than the realities of power politics.<sup>56</sup>

In his seminal work, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, Carr suggests that international politics be studied as an academic science *per se* as well as become part of the interest of political parties and of representation organs in order to keep the professionals accountable and to analyse and scrutinize their actions. Carr depicts realism as the impact of thought on desire, defining the latter as the fruit of utopianism. Pioneers of utopian thought were US

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<sup>53</sup> Carr, 1964, 9-11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, pp. 23-25.

<sup>55</sup> Carr, 1964, pp. 1-3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, pp. 23-24.

President Woodrow Wilson as well as the famous author Norman Angell. Carr himself admits the influence of Marxist thought in his book<sup>57</sup> and although he makes no use of the capital vs. labour paradigm, his case is that international politics are subject to the clash between satisfied and unsatisfied States. The satisfied States wish to preserve the status quo, while the unsatisfied act in order to change their present situation through threat of force or, at times, through force itself if their claims are not approved by other actors. In his view of international relations, Carr suggests that once all unsatisfied actors have been satisfied through peaceful negotiation and their confidence has been conquered then a true peaceful change can be instituted, in which all actors accept to solve peacefully their disputes through conciliation, without relinquishing the eventual use of threat of force.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, before reaching that point of stability in international relations, two very important elements are of essential importance: power and legitimacy.

Carr's vision of power was deeply rooted in his historical materialist framework, which emphasized the role of social and economic factors in shaping the behaviour of States and other actors in the international system. Carr argued that power is a relative concept that cannot be measured objectively, but rather is determined by the perception of actors in the international system.<sup>59</sup> In other words, the amount of power a State or actor possesses is not determined solely by its military or economic capabilities, but also by the perception of other actors in the system. For example, a small

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<sup>57</sup> Andreatta, F., *Le grandi opere delle relazioni internazionali*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2011, p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Carr, 1964, p. 285.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, pp. 77-78.

State with a strong military and a weak economy may be perceived as more powerful than a large State with a weak military and a strong economy, if it is able to project its military power effectively and intimidate other States. Carr also emphasized the importance of understanding the historical context in which power operates in international relations. He argued that power is not a static or fixed concept, but rather is constantly changing and evolving in response to shifts in the balance of power between States, changes in economic and social structures, and other historical factors.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in order to understand the nature of power in international relations, it is necessary to take a long-term view of history and to analyse the social, economic, and political factors that have shaped the behaviour of States over time. Carr argued that power is always used for specific purposes, and that the goals and interests of States are the key determinants of how power is used in international relations.<sup>61</sup> Thus, while military power may be an important factor in determining the relative power of States, it is ultimately the goals and interests of States that determine how that power is used and for what purposes.

Nevertheless, the other fundamental aspect towards reaching stability in international relations is legitimacy. In his work, Carr believes that although power, the threat of it, is very important in reaching peaceful outcomes in international relations it cannot be separated from a sense of morality. By morality, Carr defines the environment around which a negotiation takes place. Such environment should be subject to a clear perception of the power

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<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, pp. 57-60.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, pp. 113-114.

and weakness of the parts, it should be also subject to a general and shared understanding of what is legitimate and rational in the relations between the parts, in order to have a basis of justice that will dictate the final outcome.<sup>62</sup>

It is in this frame of understanding that Carr prescribes the ingredients for a successful foreign policy. The latter should be, according to him, swinging between the two opposite poles of the use of force and of appeasement. As it may be imagined, this prescription has been proven wrong by the fashion of the outbreak of the Second World War and by the denouncing of the appeasement approach in the months and years before September 1939.

Still, a very important part of Carr's seminal book was its *pars destruens* over previous scholars that championed liberal, utopian as referred to by Carr, ideals of peaceful coexistence and as a valid drive to keep stability in international relations. That criticism became a core element of future realist thought. Carr's book, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, includes a scathing critique of utopian and liberal approaches to international relations. Carr argued that these approaches were overly idealistic and failed to account for the realities of power politics in the international system. Carr argued that utopian approaches to international relations, which emphasized the importance of moral principles and international law, were unrealistic and ineffective in promoting peace and stability in the international system. He claimed that utopian approaches failed to consider the realities of power politics, and that the pursuit of moral principles often resulted in the exacerbation of international tensions and conflicts.<sup>63</sup> Carr also criticized

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<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, pp. 292.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, pp. 50-56.

liberal approaches to international relations, which emphasized the importance of individual rights, democracy, and economic cooperation. He argued that these approaches were based on the assumption that all States shared common values and interests, and that conflicts could be resolved through negotiation and compromise. However, Carr claimed that this assumption was not supported by the historical record, and that conflicts between States were often driven by irreconcilable differences in values and interests.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Carr criticized liberal approaches to international relations for failing to recognize the role of power in shaping the behaviour of States. He argued that the pursuit of individual rights and economic cooperation was only possible when States were relatively equal in power, and that attempts to impose these values on weaker States were often met with resistance and resentment. Furthermore, he claimed that liberal approaches to international relations often masked the pursuit of power under the guise of cooperation and diplomacy.<sup>65</sup> As Stated above, Carr's critique of utopian and liberal approaches to international relations was grounded in his belief that these approaches were based on a flawed understanding of human nature and the role of power in shaping human behaviour. According to Carr, utopian and liberal approaches assumed that individuals and States were driven by moral principles and shared values, and that conflicts could be resolved through rational discussion and negotiation. Carr rejected this view of human nature, arguing that individuals and States were motivated primarily by the pursuit of power and self-interest. He claimed that the pursuit of power was a

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<sup>64</sup> Ibidem, pp. 63-68.

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, pp.82-86.



fundamental aspect of human nature, and that it was the driving force behind State behaviour in the international system. Therefore, any attempt to eliminate power from international relations was bound to fail. Furthermore, Carr argued that the pursuit of power was not inherently negative, but rather a necessary and inevitable aspect of international relations. He claimed that the balance of power between States was constantly shifting, and that it was important for States to maintain a balance of power in order to prevent any one State from becoming too dominant and threatening the stability of the system. In this sense, the pursuit of power was seen as a means of maintaining stability and preventing the outbreak of war. It is of great interest to the present analysis to highlight that Carr's critique of utopian and liberal approaches to international relations also emphasized the importance of historical context in shaping the behaviour of States. He argued that historical factors such as geography, culture, and ideology played an important role in determining the values and interests of States, and that attempts to impose universal values and principles on all States were likely to be met with resistance and hostility. E.H. Carr's critique of utopian and liberal approaches to international relations emphasized the importance of a realist approach that acknowledged the role of power in shaping State behaviour. His emphasis on the importance of historical context, the pursuit of power as a means of maintaining stability, and the rejection of idealistic approaches to international relations continues to inform contemporary debates over the nature of power in the international system.

On a conclusive note, Carr tries to find a synthesis between integral utopia, that disregards the surrounding reality, and integral realism, that descends into a mere analysis of the causality of events. His *coherent realism* recognizes the

need to discover a new utopia, grounded on realist postulates, but also that appears ephemeral since in the moment in which it would grasp a political manifestation it would itself subject to particularistic interests and to hypocrisy, and thus it would be matched through realist means.<sup>66</sup>

The Marxist bias, as well as the importance attributed to history, ideology and context provided by Carr's framework has been since criticized by later realist scholars, pushing Carr's realist credentials to the fringes of the realist school. Traditional realists have criticized Carr for downplaying the importance of power politics in international relations. Kenneth Waltz, one of the leading neorealist scholars, argues that Carr's view that States are not solely driven by the pursuit of power is misguided and fails to capture the essence of international politics.<sup>67</sup> Some scholars have also criticized Carr's alleged sympathy towards the Soviet Union and his failure to recognize the dangers posed by Soviet expansionism. For example, Robert Jervis, a prominent scholar of international security, has argued that Carr's emphasis on the importance of historical context and culture led him to overlook the aggressive tendencies of the Soviet regime and to underestimate the importance of balancing behaviour by other States.<sup>68</sup> Neorealist scholars have also criticized Carr's ideas, arguing that his emphasis on the role of ideology and culture in shaping State behaviour is misguided. For example, John Mearsheimer, a leading neorealist scholar, argues that Carr's view that States are not solely driven by the pursuit of power is "naive" and fails to capture

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<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, p.130.

<sup>67</sup> Waltz, 1979.

<sup>68</sup> Jervis, 1976.

the reality of international politics.<sup>69</sup>

A recent article of Keith Smith aimed at rehabilitating Carr's realist thought through the analysis of two minor works of the prominent scholar, *Britain of 1939* and *German-Soviet Relations* of 1951. One of the main criticisms of Carr comes from traditional realists who argue that he failed to recognize the central importance of power in shaping State behavior. Smith notes that Carr's focus on the role of culture, ideology, and historical context led him to downplay the importance of power politics and to suggest that States were not solely driven by the pursuit of power. This view was criticized by traditional realists, who argued that power was the primary driving force behind State behaviour in international relations. Smith also notes that Carr has been criticized by some scholars for his alleged sympathy towards the Soviet Union and his failure to recognize the dangers posed by Soviet expansionism. Some scholars have argued that Carr's ideological biases led him to overlook the aggressive and expansionist tendencies of the Soviet regime and to downplay the importance of Soviet threats to European security. In addition, Smith discusses the criticisms of Carr's ideas by neorealist scholars, who have argued that his emphasis on the role of ideology and culture in shaping State behaviour is misguided. Neorealists argue that States are primarily driven by the pursuit of power and that culture and ideology play a subordinate role in shaping State behaviour.<sup>70</sup> Smith paves the way to a re-examination of Carr's realism and his leading role among

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<sup>69</sup> Mearsheimer, 1994, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Smith, K., *A reassessment of E.H. Carr and the realist tradition: Britain, German-Soviet Relations and neoclassical realism*, *International Politics*, Vol. 54, 2017, pp. 89–103.

Neoclassical realists since in both his books, *Britain*<sup>71</sup> and *German-Soviet Relations Between the Two World Wars*<sup>72</sup> provide valuable insights on both domestic factors that played a valuable role in shaping those countries' foreign policy and thus influenced international politics, but also the role of international politics, observed as a system, and how it constrained those countries' foreign policy. Of course, it must be noted that the latter element, systemic constraints over national foreign policy choices, had not yet acquired the predominant role that it would later acquire in the neorealist paradigm.

Although Carr can confidently be considered a realist figurehead, the scholar that is widely recognized as father of classical realism is Hans J. Morgenthau and his seminal book *Politics among nations*.<sup>73</sup> Carr's influence on Morgenthau can be seen in the latter's adoption of Carr's critique of utopianism in international relations.

Morgenthau argues that a realistic approach is necessary to understand and address power politics, as Carr had suggested in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, Morgenthau adopted Carr's emphasis on the role of power in international relations, although he modified it by incorporating a normative element that emphasized the importance of morality in foreign policy decision-making.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, Morgenthau's conception of the balance of

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<sup>71</sup> Carr E.H., *Britain: A Study of Foreign Policy from the Versailles Treaty to the Outbreak of War*, Longmans, Green & Co., London, New York, 1939.

<sup>72</sup> Carr E.H., *German-Soviet Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919–1939*, Geoffrey Cumberlege, London, 1952.

<sup>73</sup> Morgenthau, 1954.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, pp. 5-8.

<sup>75</sup> Ivi.

power as a necessary element for stability in the international system is also reminiscent of Carr's emphasis on the importance of balance of power in his book, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.<sup>76</sup> Thus, it can be said that Morgenthau was influenced by Carr's realism in international relations theory, which he developed into his own form of realism that came to be known as classical realism.

Morgenthau was a prominent figure in the development of classical realism, which is a school of thought in international relations that emphasizes the centrality of the State, of power, and the pursuit of national interest in the conduct of foreign policy.<sup>77</sup> Morgenthau's thinking was heavily influenced by his experiences as a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany and his deep scepticism of political ideology and utopian thinking. One of the key principles of Morgenthau's classical realism is the belief that international politics is a struggle for power among nation-States. According to Morgenthau, nation-States are motivated primarily by a desire to maximize their power and security in relation to other States, and this pursuit of power is the driving force behind much of international politics. In other words, power is the currency of international relations, and States compete for power in order to ensure their own survival and protect their interests. Another key principle of Morgenthau's classical realism is the idea that States are rational actors that pursue their interests in a self-interested and strategic manner. Morgenthau believed that States make decisions based on a careful assessment of their national interests, and that their actions are driven by a

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 211-213.

<sup>77</sup> Dunne T., Kurki M., and Smith S., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013.

desire to achieve those interests in the most efficient and effective way possible. In this view, international relations are not driven by moral considerations or idealistic goals, but rather by the cold calculus of national interest and the pursuit of power. A third important principle of Morgenthau's classical realism is the idea that international politics are characterized by a perpetual State of conflict and competition among nation-States. Morgenthau believed that conflict is an inherent feature of the international system, and that it is driven by the pursuit of power and the clash of interests between different States. In this view, war and conflict are not aberrations or deviations from the norm, but rather a constant feature of the international system.<sup>78</sup> In order to illustrate even better the fundamentals of Morgenthau's realist belief it is important to discuss his six principles of classical realism. The first principle is that politics is governed by objective laws based on human nature: Morgenthau argued that politics are subject to certain objective laws that are based on human nature, rather than being arbitrary or based on ideology or moral principles. He saw human nature as inherently self-interested, aggressive, and competitive, and argued that these qualities shape the behaviour of States in international relations.<sup>79</sup> The second principle is that the international system is characterized by anarchy: Morgenthau viewed the international system as being characterized by anarchy, in the sense that there is no overarching authority or world government to regulate the behaviour of States. Each State is sovereign and must act in its own self-interest to survive in a competitive and uncertain environment.<sup>80</sup> The third principle is that the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, pp.4-14.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem, pp. 4-5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem, p. 6.

pursuit of power is the primary goal of States: according to Morgenthau, the pursuit of power is the primary goal of States, and this drive for power is based on their survival instincts. He argued that States must seek to maximize their power and security to protect themselves against potential threats.<sup>81</sup> The fourth principle is that States are rational actors: Morgenthau saw States as rational actors who make decisions based on their interests and the costs and benefits associated with various policy options. He argued that States do not act out of altruism or moral principles, but rather in pursuit of their own self-interest.<sup>82</sup> The fifth principle is that ethics is separate from politics: Morgenthau believed that ethics is a separate sphere from politics and that States should not be guided by moral principles or ideology. He argued that the use of moral principles in international relations can lead to unrealistic expectations and actions, which can in turn lead to conflict and war. This principle is a clear reminder of Machiavellian thought. Finally, the sixth principle is that the balance of power is a key element of international stability: Morgenthau saw the balance of power as a key element of international stability and argued that States must seek to maintain a balance of power in order to prevent any single State from dominating the system. He believed that the balance of power helps to deter aggression and prevent war, and that its breakdown can lead to conflict and instability.<sup>83</sup>

When it comes to the analysis of power, Morgenthau believes that politics can be defined as a struggle for power, both internally and internationally. The main compass so as to understand international relations is the underlining

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<sup>81</sup> Ibidem, pp. 9-10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem, pp. 10-11.

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem, pp. 14-15.

understanding of interest defined in terms of power. The moral dignity of the pursuit of national interest in the international arena yields such dignity from the idea that there is an absence of an international legitimate authority and thus each State must persevere in the achievement of its own goals since an altruistic approach may not be reciprocated. Now the objectives of this struggle for power have three forms according to Morgenthau.<sup>84</sup> The first form is status quo politics, the second is imperialist politics, and the final is prestige politics. States' status quo policies aim at the stability of the present distribution of power. Imperialist politics aim at overthrowing the present status quo, hence the present distribution of power. On this aspect it would be interesting to delve in a suggestion made by Morgenthau on the importance of perception of the other States' policies that will be very important later on in the Neoclassical realist paradigm. Morgenthau warns foreign policies, and thus its policy makers, from two fatal errors: avoid compromise with an imperialist State, a State with an imperialist foreign policy, and avoid the fear generated by an imperialist policy when it does not actually exist. Thus, the role of perception of the other States' foreign policies appears crucial in the setting and the posture of one's own State. Finally, prestige politics has the final objective of impressing and intimidating other States by the power, or by the presumed power, disposed. The means by which such impression is delivered is through diplomatic protocol or the display of force, such as mobilization or military manoeuvres. The objective of this process is to either sustain status quo politics or to sustain an imperialist policy.

Although a realist, and thus not particularly keen on the efficiency of

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<sup>84</sup> Ibidem, p. 78.



international law as a stabilizing factor, Morgenthau embraces its relevance but submits it to the balance of power. A distribution of power that allows balance of power is the basis for the flourishing of international law.

Other than the balance of power, Morgenthau attributes to diplomacy another stabilizing element in international relations. According to Morgenthau, diplomacy played a crucial role in international relations and the pursuit of national interest. In his view, diplomacy is the means through which States can manage their conflicts and pursue their interests in a peaceful manner, without resorting to war.<sup>85</sup> Diplomacy involves the use of communication and negotiation to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes, as opposed to the use of force or coercion.<sup>86</sup> For Morgenthau, diplomacy is not just about achieving short-term goals, but about building and maintaining stable relationships between States. He believed that successful diplomacy requires an understanding of the interests, motivations, and values of other States, as well as a willingness to compromise and cooperate when necessary.<sup>87</sup> Diplomacy can also help to establish and maintain international norms and rules of behaviour, which can help to reduce conflict and promote stability.<sup>88</sup> Diplomacy is a key aspect of Morgenthau's realist approach to international relations, as it provides a means for States to pursue their interests in a peaceful and stable manner. By using diplomacy, States can manage their conflicts and build relationships based on mutual understanding and cooperation, rather than on the use of force or coercion. The national interest,

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 223.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 224.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 228.

which should be pursued by States as a major objective of their foreign policies, is considered by Morgenthau as a crucial concept in his theory of realism. He believed that the ultimate goal of any State was to preserve its national interest, which he defined as "the sum of the interests of the many individuals and groups that make up the State".<sup>89</sup> For Morgenthau, the national interest was not a fixed or static concept, but rather a dynamic one that was shaped by the changing circumstances of the international system. Morgenthau's emphasis on national interest was rooted in his belief that international politics was fundamentally a struggle for power between States. He believed that the anarchic nature of the international system meant that States had to compete for power and security, and that the pursuit of national interest was the best way to ensure a State's survival in this competitive environment.

Hans Morgenthau's work had a significant impact on Reinhold Niebuhr's thought, particularly his understanding of power politics and the role of morality in international relations. Niebuhr, a theologian and political thinker, was Morgenthau's colleague at the University of Chicago and a fellow proponent of realism. Niebuhr's thought, similar to Morgenthau's, emphasized the importance of power and the role of self-interest in international relations. He recognized that nations are driven by their self-interest, and that the pursuit of power and security is a natural consequence of the anarchic nature of the international system. However, Niebuhr also emphasized the role of morality in guiding foreign policy decisions, and argued that nations have a responsibility to act in a just and ethical manner. Morgenthau's influence on

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<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, p. 3.

Niebuhr can be seen in his concept of the "tragic" view of international relations, which acknowledges the inevitability of conflict and tragedy in the pursuit of power. Niebuhr adopted this view in his own work, emphasizing that the pursuit of power must be tempered by ethical considerations, and that nations have a responsibility to pursue justice and promote the common good, even if it means making sacrifices in the short-term. Niebuhr also borrowed Morgenthau's concept of "power as a means" rather than an end in itself. He argued that power is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve political goals and ensure national security. However, he also recognized that the pursuit of power can lead to corruption and injustice, and that ethical considerations must be taken into account in the use of power.<sup>90</sup>

Niebuhr's balance of power understanding was heavily influenced by Morgenthau. For Niebuhr, the balance of power is an essential tool for preventing the domination of one power over another in international relations. He argues that the balance of power can be maintained through alliances between nations with common interests, as well as the cultivation of a healthy sense of self-interest among nations. In his view, the balance of power should not be seen as a static equilibrium, but rather as a dynamic process that requires constant adjustment in response to changing circumstances.<sup>91</sup> Niebuhr also acknowledges that the balance of power can lead to conflict, but he argues that conflict is an inevitable part of human nature and that the balance of power is the best means of managing it. He contends that nations must be prepared to use force if necessary to defend

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<sup>90</sup> Niebuhr R., *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2013.

<sup>91</sup> Niebuhr R., *The Irony of American History*, University of Chicago Press, 1952, pp.71-72.

their interests, but that this use of force should be tempered by a sense of moral responsibility and a commitment to the common good.<sup>92</sup>

Something interesting to note the difference between Morgenthau and Niebuhr when it comes to the concept of morality as a principle in international relations. Morgenthau and Niebuhr had different conceptions of morality, which is reflected in their respective approaches to international relations. While Morgenthau believed that the interests of the State should be pursued without regard to moral considerations, Niebuhr argued that moral values should not be abandoned in the pursuit of power. For Niebuhr, the pursuit of power should be tempered by a sense of moral responsibility, which he believed was necessary to ensure that power was used in a just manner. In his view, morality was not an impediment to the pursuit of power, but rather an essential component of it. Niebuhr's conception of morality is one of the key aspects of his thought. He believed that morality was a fundamental aspect of politics, but at the same time, he recognized that the moral aspirations of individuals and nations could often be in conflict with the realities of power politics.<sup>93</sup> He argued that the pursuit of power and the pursuit of moral values were often incompatible, and that Statesmen had to make difficult choices between these competing interests. According to Niebuhr, Statesmen had to be aware of the limitations of their power and the unintended consequences of their actions, and they had to be willing to compromise and accept partial solutions to problems.<sup>94</sup> In other words, Niebuhr believed that morality was an important consideration in politics, but

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>93</sup> Niebuhr R., 2013, pp.1-2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 33

that it had to be tempered by a sense of realism and an understanding of the complexities of power politics. Niebuhr's emphasis on the need for realism in politics was influenced by his understanding of human nature, which he believed was inherently flawed and prone to sin.<sup>95</sup> He argued that individuals and nations were motivated by self-interest and that this self-interest could lead to conflict and violence. In order to prevent this, Niebuhr believed that power had to be balanced among nations, and that no single nation could be allowed to dominate others.<sup>96</sup> This idea of balance of power was central to his conception of international relations and influenced his support for collective security and the creation of the United Nations.<sup>97</sup>

A major figurehead among international relations scholars and by some means a predecessor of Neoclassical realist thought was French thinker Raymond Aron. Like Morgenthau, Aron argued that power was the central concept in international relations, and that the pursuit of national interest was the primary goal of States, and by that he also placed States as the main actors in international relations. Aron, however, diverged from Morgenthau in his conception of morality in international relations. While Morgenthau argued that moral considerations were irrelevant in international politics, Aron believed that morality was an essential component of international relations and that it was possible to reconcile morality and power politics.<sup>98</sup> Aron also criticized Morgenthau's conception of power as a fixed quantity, arguing

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<sup>95</sup> Fox R. W., *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1985, pp. 18-19.

<sup>96</sup> Niebuhr, 2013, p. 122.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 178.

<sup>98</sup> Aron R., *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, Routledge, New York, 2003.

instead that power was constantly shifting and that the balance of power was a crucial determinant of international stability.<sup>99</sup> In his later works, Aron moved closer to Niebuhr's conception of morality in international relations, arguing that the tension between power and morality was a central feature of international politics.<sup>100</sup> Like Niebuhr, Aron believed that States should pursue their national interests but also recognized that there were limits to the use of power and that morality could serve as a restraint on State action.<sup>101</sup> Aron's theory of international relations is grounded in classical realism and emphasizes the importance of power in international politics. Aron argues that power is not only the means by which States achieve their goals, but it is also a fundamental aspect of the international system itself.<sup>102</sup> According to Aron, the international system is anarchic, meaning that there is no overarching authority that can enforce rules and norms between States. As a result, States are left to pursue their own interests through the use of power, whether that be military, economic, or diplomatic.<sup>103</sup> Another key element in Aron's theory is the idea of the balance of power. Aron argues that the balance of power is necessary to maintain stability in the international system. When one State becomes too powerful, it threatens the interests of other States, which may lead to conflict. Therefore, the balance of power acts as a check on the ambitions of individual States, and it is up to the weaker States to form alliances or coalitions to prevent any single State from becoming too

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<sup>99</sup> Aron R., *Les Guerres en Chaine*, Gallimard, Paris, 1951.

<sup>100</sup> Aron R., *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, translated by Terence Kilmartin, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1957.

<sup>101</sup> Niebuhr, 2008.

<sup>102</sup> Aron R., 2003, p. 7.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 71.

powerful.<sup>104</sup> Raymond Aron's conception of balance of power is one of the key elements in his theory of international relations. Aron believes that balance of power is a fundamental principle of international relations and that it is the most effective way to ensure stability and prevent war in the international system. For Aron, balance of power is a dynamic process that involves the distribution of power among States and the interactions between them. Within his conception of balance of power is based on a realistic understanding of the international system, which he views as inherently anarchic and characterized by the absence of a world government or central authority. As such, the distribution of power among States is a crucial factor in determining the behaviour of States and the stability of the international system. Aron argues that States will naturally seek to maximize their power and influence, and that this pursuit of power can lead to conflicts and wars if left unchecked. Therefore, the goal of balance of power is to maintain a distribution of power among States that prevents any single State from becoming too powerful and dominating the system. Aron views balance of power as a process that is shaped by both internal and external factors. Internally, States must maintain a balance between their domestic and foreign policies, avoiding the concentration of power in any one area. Externally, balance of power is maintained through a series of alliances and power-balancing mechanisms that enable States to counterbalance each other's power and influence. Aron argues that the formation of alliances is a natural response to the pursuit of power by States, and that these alliances are a necessary element in maintaining balance of power and preventing

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91.

domination by any other State. This last approach will be very useful for those who would later on become Neoclassical realists.

In addition to alliances, Aron emphasizes the importance of diplomacy in the maintenance of balance of power. Diplomacy, for Aron, is a key tool for States to negotiate and manage their relationship with each other, and to prevent conflicts and wars. Diplomacy allows States to communicate their interests and concerns to each other, and to find mutually acceptable solutions to conflicts and disputes. Aron also emphasizes the role of international organizations, such as the United Nations, in promoting balance of power and facilitating diplomatic efforts between States.

Aron also emphasizes the role of ideology in international politics. He argues that ideology can be a powerful motivator for States, and it can influence their behaviour in significant ways. However, he cautions that ideology should not be seen as the only or even the most important factor in international politics. Rather, it is just one of many factors that must be considered when analysing State behaviour. Finally, Aron stresses the importance of understanding the historical context in which international events occur. He argues that history shapes the interests, identities, and power capabilities of States, and it is therefore essential to understand historical factors when analysing State behaviour. Additionally, he believes that historical analogies can be a useful tool for understanding contemporary international issues.<sup>105</sup>

On the level of foreign policy, Aron argued that foreign policy is not only influenced by the distribution of power but also by the goals and preferences of nation-States, which are shaped by their unique historical, cultural, and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibidem, pp. 50-53.



geopolitical contexts. Aron criticized the notion that States pursue their interests objectively and rationally, and instead argued that foreign policy is a result of the interplay of various factors, including but not limited to security concerns, ideology, domestic politics, and leaders' personalities.<sup>106</sup> He believed that national foreign policies reflect a mix of realism and idealism, with States seeking to maintain their security and promote their values in the international system. Aron's conception of foreign policy emphasizes the importance of national autonomy and sovereignty, as he saw foreign policy as the expression of a State's identity and interests. He believed that nation-States must have the capacity to act independently in the international system, as the absence of this capacity would lead to a loss of agency and the inability to pursue their interests. Aron also saw the role of diplomacy as crucial in foreign policy, as it allows States to negotiate and manage conflicts peacefully.<sup>107</sup>

An almost Copernican turn took place in the late Seventies in the realist school of thought in international relations. Kenneth Waltz, in his seminal *Theory of international politics* of 1979 gave new breadth to the realist school, differentiating himself from classical realist authors introducing a new conception of realism. First, Waltz shifted the focus of realism from the State level to the international system level. While classical realists like Morgenthau and Carr focused on the behaviour of individual States, Waltz argued that the structure of the international system, particularly the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibidem, pp. 53-56.

<sup>107</sup> Ibidem, pp.133-135

distribution of power, is the primary determinant of State behaviour.<sup>108</sup> Second, Waltz emphasized the importance of the balance of power in maintaining international stability. However, unlike classical realists who saw balance of power as a means to prevent aggression and maintain stability, Waltz argued that the balance of power is an inherent feature of the international system that emerges naturally as a result of States pursuing their self-interest.<sup>109</sup> Third, Waltz introduced the concept of neorealism, also known as structural realism, which emphasized the distribution of power and the constraints it places on State behaviour. Neorealism rejected the idea that States always act in a rational manner to maximize their power, instead arguing that States are limited by the structure of the international system.<sup>110</sup> Finally, Waltz's neorealism downplayed the importance of ideology and domestic politics in shaping State behaviour, which classical realists viewed as significant factors. Instead, Waltz argued that the structure of the international system constrains State behaviour, regardless of their domestic politics or ideology.

As it may be observed the major shifts were putting on the forefront of political analysis the international system, thus the general distribution of power and rendering such distribution a major constraint in the action of State actors. Whatever the national interest and the consequent foreign policy adopted could not be enacted if the international system wouldn't allow such path. Furthermore, in Waltz's neorealist paradigm internal politics and

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<sup>108</sup> Waltz, K. N., *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, Columbia University Press, 2001.

<sup>109</sup> Waltz, 1979.

<sup>110</sup> Mearsheimer, 2001.

dynamics played no role, or a minor role at best, in the international arena. The *innenpolitik* tendency of classical realists was thus marginalized in favour of the impact that the international system would have on single States. His analysis focused on major powers of the international system, deeming them as the only actors worth being analysed.

According to Kenneth Waltz's neorealist theory, the central element that pushed States into action is the distribution of power within the international system. In his view, the structure of the international system shapes the behaviour of States, and the distribution of power is a key determinant of the level of conflict or cooperation that is likely to emerge among States.<sup>111</sup> Waltz argues that States are primarily concerned with maintaining their relative power in the system. They do this by pursuing policies that maximize their security and increasing their capabilities in relation to other States. This creates a balancing mechanism in which other States must also increase their power or form alliances to counterbalance the rising State, leading to a stable balance of power. Waltz's theory emphasizes that the international system operates independently from domestic policies or ideology of individual States. Thus, the actions of States are less determined by their internal characteristics and more by the distribution of power in the system. In this sense, Waltz's neorealist theory is often referred to as a systemic theory, as it emphasizes the importance of the international system in shaping State behaviour.<sup>112</sup>

It is further important to state that the international system was observed as a

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<sup>111</sup> Waltz, 1979.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 88.

system with power polarities deriving from power distribution. The categorised polarities were mainly three: multipolar, bipolar, and unipolar. Multipolarity refers to a system in which multiple States or groups of States have relatively equal power and compete with one another for influence and resources.<sup>113</sup> This type of system is often associated with a higher likelihood of conflict, as there is no dominant power to regulate the behaviour of other States.<sup>114</sup> Good historic examples of multipolar systems are ancient Greek City-States, Italian Renaissance City-States, and the Nineteenth century European concert. The multipolarity system seemed to be the most stable according to Hans Morgenthau thanks to the creation of shifting alliances in order to counterbalance those States that opted for a revisionist approach to the international system.

Bipolarity, on the other hand, refers to a system in which two States or groups of States dominate the international system and have relatively equal power.<sup>115</sup> The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union is an example of a bipolar system.<sup>116</sup> In a bipolar system, conflict can be mitigated through a balance of power between the two dominant States.<sup>117</sup> A major proponent of the bipolar system as the most stable one, as in the Cold war, was indeed Kenneth Waltz himself.

Unipolarity refers to a system in which one State or group of States dominates

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<sup>113</sup> Keohane, R. O, *Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond*, in Ada W. Finifter A. W., *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, American Political Science Association, Washington D.C., 1983, pp. 503–540.

<sup>114</sup> Mearsheimer, 2001.

<sup>115</sup> Waltz, 1979.

<sup>116</sup> Jervis R., *Cooperation under the Security Dilemma*, *World Politics* Vol. 30, No. 2, 1978, pp. 167-214.

<sup>117</sup> Waltz, 1979.

the international system and has significantly more power than any other State or group of States.<sup>118</sup> The post-Cold War era has been characterized as a unipolar system, with the United States as the dominant power.<sup>119</sup> In a unipolar system, the dominant power has the ability to regulate the behaviour of other States, but this can also lead to resentment and conflict as other States seek to challenge the dominant power.<sup>120</sup>

According to Waltz's neorealist theory, the international system's stability depends on the system's structure and distribution of power between States.<sup>121</sup> In a bipolar system, the balance of power is relatively stable because two superpowers check each other's power, and this reduces the likelihood of direct conflict. On the other hand, in a multipolar system, the absence of a clear hegemon creates a higher probability of instability and conflict due to the fluidity of alliances and potential power vacuums.<sup>122</sup> Waltz argues that a unipolar system is also stable because the sole superpower can exert significant influence and control over the international system, which provides a form of order. However, this stability can also lead to hegemonic war, as the dominant power attempts to maintain its position by force or coercion. Furthermore, Waltz suggests that the balance of power can be maintained through a "balance of threat," which means that States will balance against potential threats, not just against actual threats. This means

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<sup>118</sup> Ivi.

<sup>119</sup> Ikenberry, G. J., *The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?*, Foreign Affairs, Vo. 87, No. 1, 2008, pp. 23-37.

<sup>120</sup> Kupchan C. A., *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007.

<sup>121</sup> Waltz, 1979, p. 88.

<sup>122</sup> Ibidem, pp. 125-129.

that States will increase their power and form alliances to counteract the potential power of others, even if no direct threat has been made.<sup>123</sup> Foreign policies do play a role, although a minor one, in the neorealist theory, as they can affect a State's relative power and capabilities in the international system. States are constantly striving to increase their power and security, and foreign policies are a means by which they do so. However, foreign policies are ultimately constrained by the structural pressures of the international system, which limit the range of options available to States.<sup>124</sup> In a multipolar system, for example, a State may seek to form alliances to balance against other States, but it is limited by the fact that it must also consider the power and capabilities of potential allies. In a unipolar system, a State may seek to increase its power and influence, but it is constrained by the fact that the dominant power may seek to prevent it from doing so.<sup>125</sup>

Furthermore, it is also indicative that Waltz's neorealist paradigm is defined as *defensive* in contrast to the next theory that will be approached which is *offensive* neorealism, championed by Mearsheimer. Waltz's theory is often referred to as defensive realism because it focuses on the structural constraints that limit State behaviour in the international system, rather than on the eventual aggressive nature of individual States or leaders. In other words, the theory assumes that States are primarily concerned with their own survival, and that they will act defensively in response to any perceived threat to their security. This contrasts with offensive realism, which suggests that States are inherently aggressive and seek to maximize their power and influence in the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibidem, pp. 160-161.

<sup>124</sup> Ibidem, pp.101-103.

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem, p. 133.

international system. Waltz argues that the anarchic structure of the international system, in which there is no central authority to enforce rules or resolve conflicts, creates a self-help system in which States must rely on their own resources to ensure their survival. This creates a security dilemma, in which one State's efforts to enhance its security may be perceived as a threat by other States, leading them to respond with their own security measures. This can lead to arms races, alliances, and other forms of competition that may ultimately undermine rather than enhance security. Defensive realism, therefore, emphasizes the importance of balance of power and deterrence as a means of maintaining stability in the international system. Waltz argues that States seek to balance against perceived threats, rather than seeking to dominate others, and that the possession of nuclear weapons has indeed helped to deter major wars between great powers since the end of World War II.

Kenneth Waltz's neorealism significantly influenced the development of the theory of John Mearsheimer. Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism builds on the structural assumptions of Waltz's neorealism but differs in its assumptions about the behaviour of States in an anarchic international system. Mearsheimer agrees with Waltz that States operate in a self-help system and are motivated by survival, but he argues that they pursue power maximization rather than simply maintaining a balance of power. According to Mearsheimer, States seek to achieve hegemony in order to secure their survival in a hostile international environment. He also believes that States are inherently aggressive and will attempt to dominate their neighbours if they have the capability to do so. Mearsheimer's theory also differs from Waltz's

in its emphasis on the importance of geography and technology in shaping the balance of power among States. He argues that States with superior geographic and technological advantages are more likely to dominate other States, regardless of their intentions.<sup>126</sup>

More broadly, John Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism suggests that States are primarily driven by the desire to maximize their relative power in an anarchic international system. According to Mearsheimer, the international system is characterized by a self-help system, where States must rely on themselves to ensure their own security. In this context, States are driven by the pursuit of power and security, which leads them to engage in aggressive behaviour in order to increase their relative power and ensure their survival.<sup>127</sup>

Mearsheimer argues that States seek to achieve hegemony or dominance in the international system, which they see as necessary to ensure their own security and survival. States are therefore driven to pursue offensive military capabilities and engage in strategies aimed at increasing their relative power in order to achieve this goal. According to Mearsheimer, this pursuit of power and dominance is driven by the fear of other States gaining power and threatening their security.<sup>128</sup> Regarding the stability of the international system, Mearsheimer argues that the anarchic structure of the system and the relentless pursuit of power by States make it inherently unstable. This is because no State can ever be sure of the intentions of other States, and the pursuit of power is an endless and self-reinforcing process that can lead to arms races and even war. Therefore, Mearsheimer argues that there is no

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<sup>126</sup> Mearsheimer, 2001.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 30-35.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 36-39.



possibility of a lasting peace in the international system, and that the best strategy for States is to focus on maximizing their relative power and security to deter potential aggressors. That is the exact reason for which, according to Mearsheimer, national foreign policies can do nothing more than to maximize that relative power in order to answer to the international relations' system stimuli.

Alexander Wendt's social constructivist theory was heavily influenced by the works of both Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer in the neorealist paradigm of international relations. He took Waltz's idea of the structure of the international system as an anarchic entity with no overarching authority, and Mearsheimer's focus on the importance of power and self-help in State behaviour, and applied a constructivist approach to understanding how States construct their identities and interests within this system.<sup>129</sup> Wendt argues that the nature of the international system is not solely defined by anarchy, but also by the social interactions and shared understandings of the actors within it. According to Wendt, States are not simply driven by self-help and power maximization, but by their identities and perceptions of other States and the international order. He contends that States have the ability to change their interests and behaviour through socialization and the construction of new identities and norms within the international system. Wendt's approach to international relations represents a departure from the traditional realist perspective that views the international system as static and unchanging. Instead, his theory recognizes the dynamic and evolving nature of the

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<sup>129</sup> Wendt A., *Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics*, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1992, pp. 391-425.

international system, and the potential for States to alter their behaviour through social and normative processes.<sup>130</sup> Especially for the part of perceptions and historic identities, Neoclassical realism draws some inspiration from Wendtian constructivism.

Having addressed all the main theoretic background on which Neoclassical realism lies the next paragraph shall analyse the theories that form the corpus of Neoclassical realism, along with the differences between the American and European schools.

#### *1.2.1: Neoclassical realism as a foreign policy theory.*

Neoclassical realism is a theory of international relations that emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the limitations of both classical realism and structural realism. Unlike classical realism, Neoclassical realism acknowledges the importance of domestic politics in shaping a State's foreign policy, but also recognizes that external factors, such as the international system and the behaviour of other States, play a crucial role in shaping a State's behaviour. Neoclassical realism, therefore, seeks to integrate the insights of both domestic and international factors into a comprehensive theory of international relations. It is a nuanced and complex approach to the study of international relations that has been influential in shaping contemporary debates on topics such as foreign policy decision-making, great power politics, and international security. Neoclassical realism is a theory of international relations that emerged in the late 20th century as a response to

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<sup>130</sup> Ibidem, pp. 401-409.

the limitations of both classical realism and structural realism. Unlike classical realism, Neoclassical realism acknowledges the importance of domestic politics in shaping a State's foreign policy, but also recognizes that external factors, such as the international system and the behaviour of other States, play a crucial role in shaping a State's behaviour. Neoclassical realism, therefore, seeks to integrate the insights of both domestic and international factors into a comprehensive theory of international relations. It is a nuanced and complex approach to the study of international relations that has been influential in shaping contemporary debates on topics such as foreign policy decision-making, great power politics, and international security. One of the key figures in the development of Neoclassical realism is Gideon Rose, with his seminal article of 1998 that gave the name itself to Neoclassical realism arising from a mix of already present theories. He argued that while the distribution of power in the international system is important, the way that States respond to this distribution is shaped by domestic politics. Other notable scholars include Steven Lobell, Randall Schweller, and David Lake, who have expanded on the Neoclassical realist framework to address a range of international issues such as alliance formation, arms races, and the role of institutions. Rose asserted that the Neoclassical realism approach provides a more nuanced understanding of foreign policy decision-making, by acknowledging the influence of both systemic and domestic factors on State behaviour. This approach also recognizes that the perception and interpretation of external threats by State leaders can vary depending on their country's specific history, culture, and institutional arrangements. Furthermore, Rose argues that Neoclassical realism provides a useful middle ground between traditional realism and other more constructivist or ideational

approaches to foreign policy analysis.<sup>131</sup> Rose identifies two key concepts that are central to Neoclassical realism: the "internal characteristics of States" and "external systemic pressures". According to Rose, Neoclassical realism seeks to explain the foreign policy behaviour of States by taking into account both these factors. Specifically, Neoclassical realism argues that while the international system constrains the behaviour of States, it is the internal characteristics of States, such as their domestic politics, national identity, and bureaucratic structure, that ultimately determine how States respond to external systemic pressures.<sup>132</sup>

It is also interesting that in Rose's article Neoclassical realism is presented as a set of theories that help explain foreign policy decisions of single States. The dependent variable, thus, is not State interactions and the dynamics of such interactions, it is rather the behaviour of individual States. Neoclassical realists are located in a middle ground between structural realists and constructivists by Rose, since the former believe that systemic constraints form the behaviour and thus foreign policy of States while the latter believe that international reality is socially constructed and, as famously put by Wendt "anarchy is what States make of it". For Neoclassical realists the systemic constraints and an objective distribution of power do indeed exist and must be accounted for the definition of a foreign policy. The issue is however that such constraints are not always so clearly readable and there are a set of setbacks that do not allow decision makers and foreign policy experts to clearly assess objective realities. The objective reality of the international

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<sup>131</sup> Rose G., *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*, World Politics, Vol. 51, No. 1, 1998, p. 145.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibidem*, 149.

system and the power distribution within it are defined as *independent variables* by Neoclassical realists, while the glass of setbacks through which decision makers observe such reality is a set of *intervening variables*, and finally the foreign policy outcome is the *dependent variable*. The intervening variables can be seen as the transmission belt through which the independent variables reach the decision makers and allow them to form their response to international stimuli. According to Gideon Rose, perception and misperception are important intervening variables in Neoclassical realism that shape a State's foreign policy behaviour. States perceive and interpret the international system and other actors' behaviour based on their own assumptions, beliefs, and interests, which are often subjective and biased.<sup>133</sup> Misperceptions can lead to erroneous judgments and actions that may have unintended consequences. For example, a State may perceive another State's actions as hostile or threatening when they were not intended to be so, leading to a miscalculation of the situation and a possible conflict. Rose argues that understanding the role of perception and misperception in shaping foreign policy behaviour is crucial for Neoclassical realism because it highlights the importance of leaders' subjective beliefs and cognitive biases in decision-making. In addition, the ability to manage and shape perceptions can be a source of power in international relations.<sup>134</sup>

Another intervening variable introduced as such by Rose is the role of the State apparatus. He argues that the internal organization of the State and its ability to implement foreign policy decisions also affect State behaviour. The

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<sup>133</sup> Ibidem, p. 157-158.

<sup>134</sup> Taliaferro, J. W. *Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited*, International Security, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2000, pp. 128-161.

State apparatus includes the military, intelligence agencies, bureaucracy, and other government institutions that are responsible for executing foreign policy decisions. The State apparatus can either facilitate or impede the implementation of foreign policy decisions. For example, a weak or dysfunctional military can limit a State's ability to project power, while a highly effective intelligence agency can provide critical information that helps to shape foreign policy decisions. Rose contends that States with highly developed State apparatuses are better equipped to pursue ambitious foreign policies, while weaker States may be limited in their ability to do so. Therefore, the State apparatus is an important intervening variable in Neoclassical realism, as it helps to explain variations in State behaviour and foreign policy outcomes.<sup>135</sup>

Finally, Rose paved the way for future Neoclassical realist research arguing that designing social inquiry requires the researcher to specify their theoretical and empirical framework, to choose the level of analysis and to choose a set of variables that are considered important. According to Rose, Neoclassical realism can provide a useful framework for designing social inquiry in foreign policy analysis by taking into account the intervening variables that shape State behaviour. By incorporating these variables, Neoclassical realism can provide a more nuanced understanding of foreign policy decision-making and avoid the oversimplification of other theories that ignore important variables. Furthermore, Rose emphasizes that researchers should focus on testing their theories based on empirical evidence in order to

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<sup>135</sup> Rose, G., *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*, World Politics, vol. 51, no. 1, 1998, pp. 161-162.

validate their claims and develop a more accurate understanding of foreign policy behaviour.<sup>136</sup>

From Rose's article onwards different theories of foreign policy acquired a common home under the Neoclassical realist school of thought. The theoretic corpus was further enriched in the next decade, especially in the United States, until it reached an important milestone in 2009 with a seminal book written by Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro by the title of *Neoclassical realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*.<sup>137</sup> That book represented a first, almost shy, attempt of a more organic approach towards a as unitary theory as possible. We can already anticipate that such attempt was crowned by success only in 2016 in a manifesto monography written by the same authors.

*Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* argues that the Neoclassical realist approach is distinct from other realist theories because it incorporates a more nuanced understanding of the role of domestic factors such as the State apparatus, bureaucratic politics, and public opinion in shaping foreign policy decisions. At the same time, it acknowledges the importance of systemic factors such as the distribution of power in the international system but argues that these factors interact with domestic variables in complex ways that are not fully captured by traditional realist theories. The authors use case studies to illustrate the application of Neoclassical realism to different foreign policy problems and situations, such as US foreign policy during the Cold War, the impact of democratic

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<sup>136</sup> Ibidem, 165-166.

<sup>137</sup> Lobell, S. E., Ripsman, N. M., & Taliaferro, J. W. *Neoclassical realism, the State, and foreign policy* Cambridge, University Press., 2009.

transitions on foreign policy behaviour, and the role of domestic politics in shaping nuclear proliferation policies. They also discuss the implications of Neoclassical realism for policymaking, arguing that it can provide policymakers with a more realistic understanding of the constraints and opportunities that shape foreign policy decisions.

Regarding intervening variables, the book delves deeply into the perception of threat by discussing the importance of distinguishing between objective and subjective threats. Objective threats refer to the tangible capabilities of other States or actors, such as their military or economic power, while subjective threats are based on perceptions or beliefs about the intentions of other States or actors. The authors argue that subjective threats are often more important than objective threats in shaping foreign policy decisions.<sup>138</sup> The authors then introduce the concept of threat perception, which refers to how a State views the threats it faces. They argue that threat perception is influenced by a variety of factors, including a State's national identity, political culture, and historical experience. Additionally, the authors emphasize the role of domestic politics in shaping threat perception, as different interest groups and institutions within a State may have different perceptions of threats.

The importance of threat assessment is also discussed, which refers to a State's evaluation of the capabilities and intentions of other States or actors. The authors argue that threat assessment is not a straightforward process, as it involves complex calculations about the intentions and capabilities of other

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 41-43.



actors, as well as uncertainty about the future.<sup>139</sup> On threat assessment, the authors offer as an example the threat assessment of the German State in the interwar period between the two world wars by French, British and Soviet foreign policies. France's assessment of the German threat was influenced by its traumatic experience of World War I and its belief in the primacy of military power. France saw Germany as a direct military threat and sought to contain it through alliances with other European powers. Soviet Russia, on the other hand, saw Germany as a potential ally against capitalist powers, such as Great Britain and France, and sought to build a partnership with Germany to advance its own revolutionary agenda. Great Britain's assessment of the German threat was shaped by its naval tradition and its belief in the balance of power. Great Britain viewed Germany as a potential naval rival and sought to limit Germany's naval capabilities through arms control agreements. However, Britain's strategic culture also emphasized the importance of avoiding continental entanglements and maintaining its global interests. The Soviet Union perceived the German threat as a result of its ideological differences with Germany and its history of conflict. The Soviet Union saw Germany as a capitalist power that posed a direct threat to its communist ideology, and as a revisionist State that aimed to regain its pre-World War I position as a great power. Soviet Union's perception of the German threat was also shaped by its own weaknesses, such as its backward economy, its lack of allies, and its vulnerability to attack. As a result, the Soviet Union pursued a policy of collective security, seeking to form alliances with other States to counter the German threat. However, the Soviet Union's perception of the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibidem, pp.66-67.

German threat was not always accurate. For example, the Soviet Union failed to recognize the strength of the German military during the interwar period and overestimated the capabilities of its own military. This misperception contributed to the Soviet Union's unpreparedness for the German invasion of 1941. The authors argue that these different assessments of the German threat ultimately shaped the foreign policies of each State and contributed to the outbreak of World War II.

On the issue of the role of identity within States as an intervening variable the authors offer a more in-depth analysis. They argue that States' identities, which are shaped by their historical experiences, can significantly influence their foreign policy decisions, and in that it is quite easy to find some similarities with classical realists such as Carr. The authors assert that States' identities can be viewed as a crucial intervening variable that connects the systemic pressures and the domestic variables. For instance, a State that perceives itself as a powerful nation would be more likely to pursue aggressive foreign policies than a State that sees itself as a weaker nation. Similarly, a State that perceives itself as a victim of past aggression might adopt a defensive posture in shaping its foreign policy. The authors also explore the notion of identity in the context of Neoclassical realism by examining the concept of national role conception. They argue that national role conceptions reflect States' identities and provide a framework for understanding their foreign policy preferences. The authors argue that a State's national role conception can be defined as the set of beliefs about the State's place in the international system, its interests, and its responsibilities.

<sup>140</sup> As a case study in order to illustrate their perspective is offered from the role of Taiwan and its relationship to other regional and international powers. In the case of Taiwan, the authors suggest that Taiwan's identity as a separate and sovereign State from China shapes its foreign policy decisions. Despite pressure from China to accept a "one-China" policy, Taiwan's leaders have maintained their separate identity and pursued policies to preserve their autonomy. The authors argue that this identity has shaped Taiwan's foreign policy decisions, including its efforts to seek international recognition and maintain military readiness. Furthermore, the authors contend that the identity of other States in the region, particularly China and the United States, also influences their interactions with Taiwan. For example, China's identity as a rising power seeking to assert itself in the region has led to increased pressure on Taiwan to accept reunification. Meanwhile, the United States' identity as a champion of democracy and human rights has led it to support Taiwan's autonomy and oppose China's efforts to reunify with the island.<sup>141</sup>

Another intervening variable to be presented is national interest. The nuance of national interest offered by Neoclassical realism is not the same as the classic realist one. The latter is based on objective and observable factors, while the former although it embraces the objective and observable factors, it further includes a set of less evident and tangible factors. National interest refers to the objectives, goals, and preferences of a State, which are shaped by its domestic politics, economic conditions, and strategic environment. The authors suggest that Neoclassical realism provides a nuanced understanding

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<sup>140</sup> Ibidem, pp. 104-105.

<sup>141</sup> Ibidem, pp. 103-106.

of national interest, as it recognizes that the formulation of national interest is not a straightforward process. Rather, it is a dynamic and iterative process, influenced by various factors such as historical experiences, cultural values, and social norms. In the case on national interest, as expressed by Neoclassical realists, the authors use the 2003 Iraq War as an example of how national interest can be an intervening variable in foreign policy decision-making. The authors argue that national interest can shape how States perceive threats and determine their response to those threats. In the case of Iraq, the United States perceived Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as a threat to its national security interests. This perception of the threat was based on the belief that Iraq's possession of WMD could lead to the transfer of such weapons to terrorist groups, which could then use them against the United States. The authors argue that the United States' decision to invade Iraq was driven by its perception of the threat posed by Iraq's possession of WMD, which was seen as a direct threat to its national interest. This perception of the threat was also influenced by the broader context of the post-9/11 world, in which the United States were perceived to be under attack from non-State actors such as Al-Qaeda. Furthermore, the authors argue that the United States' decision to invade Iraq was also influenced by its belief that it had a moral obligation to remove Saddam Hussein from power and promote democracy in the Middle East. This belief in the moral superiority of the United States and its commitment to spreading democracy can be seen as a reflection of its national identity, which also played a role in its decision-making process.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibidem, pp. 157-163.

The next intervening variable to be analysed is the role of domestic interest groups in shaping foreign policy. Such variable can be easily associated to a long list of lobby theories in political science. The authors argue that interest groups, such as business associations, labour unions, and ethnic lobbies, can shape foreign policy outcomes by influencing the preferences of policymakers and the constraints they face. The authors provide several examples of how interest groups have impacted foreign policy decisions, such as the role of the Israel lobby in shaping US policy towards the Middle East and the influence of Cuban exiles in shaping US policy towards Cuba. The authors argue that interest groups can be particularly influential in situations where there is low public salience and high issue-specific expertise.<sup>143</sup>

The next intervening variable presented is the capability of a State to extract resources by its population and the society as a whole in order to reach its foreign policy objectives. The authors argue that social resource extraction, such as taxation and conscription, is a crucial factor in understanding a State's foreign policy behaviour. The authors argue that the capacity of a State to extract resources from its population, and the political and social implications of this extraction, shapes the State's foreign policy behaviour. The chapter explores several cases, including the United States during the Vietnam War and the Soviet Union during the Afghan War, to demonstrate how social resource extraction influenced foreign policy decisions. The authors also address the limitations of traditional economic measures, such as GDP, in capturing a State's resource extraction capacity. Instead, they argue that factors such as political legitimacy, social mobilization, and bureaucratic

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<sup>143</sup> Ibidem, pp. 175-180.

efficiency must also be considered.<sup>144</sup>

While resource extraction regards the efficiency of a State to extract resources from its population and society, the mobilization and actual use of such resources in the pursuit of a foreign policy represents a completely different intervening variable: State mobilization. State mobilization, of both material and non-material resources, is a crucial factor in determining a State's foreign policy, as it determines the State's ability to project power and achieve its objectives in the international system. A State that is effectively mobilized can marshal its resources and act with unity and purpose, while a poorly mobilized State is likely to be fragmented and unable to pursue a coherent foreign policy. The authors present two examples of States that successfully mobilized their societies for foreign policy purposes: Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and Meiji Japan in the late 19th century. In the case of Russia, the authors argue that the Tsarist regime was able to mobilize support for its expansionist foreign policy by appealing to a sense of Russian nationalism and portraying Russia as a defender of the Orthodox Christian faith. The government also promoted industrialization and modernization to strengthen the country's economy and military, which further bolstered support for expansionist policies. In the case of Meiji Japan, the authors argue that the new government that came to power in the late 19th century was able to mobilize support for its modernization and expansionist policies by appealing to a sense of national identity and pride. The government implemented policies aimed at modernizing the economy, military, and society, which were successful in garnering support from various groups

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<sup>144</sup> Ibidem, p. 195.

within Japanese society.<sup>145</sup>

Finally, the authors face the main limitations and criticism that were presented to the theory up until 2009. The authors argue that while Neoclassical realism provides a useful framework for understanding the role of the State in foreign policy decision-making, but does not offer a broader international relations theory. It may be already anticipated that this issue is addressed and partially dealt with in the manifesto of 2016. The authors argue that Neoclassical realism tends to focus on the actions of great powers and neglects the actions of smaller States. This limitation makes it difficult to apply the theory to the foreign policies of small and medium-sized States. Also this issue has been addressed by a not very large number of scholars that tried to apply Neoclassical realism on case studies regarding medium sized powers in regional theatres, and that is indeed what the present work tries to address. Neoclassical realism has also been criticized for neglecting the role of ideology in foreign policy decision-making. While the authors acknowledge that ideology is often subsumed under identity, they argue that this is not always the case, and that ideology can play an important role in shaping foreign policy decisions. Finally, the authors argue that Neoclassical realism does not provide a clear framework for understanding the role of non-State actors, such as transnational corporations and civil society organizations, in shaping foreign policy decisions. Nevertheless, the authors clearly State that the theory was still, and partly still is, very young and thus requires testing in actual case studies and a broadening of the spectrum of analysis.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibidem, pp. 228-232.

<sup>146</sup> Ibidem, pp.252-255.

After this seminal book for the progress of Neoclassical realism, many scholars engaged in case study analysis to test the efficiency of Neoclassical realist postulates. Everyone would agree on the importance of the independent variable, it being the international system as explained by neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz, while many would either test or add other intervening variables to the theory. The dependent variable remained the foreign policy outcome. The school was mainly developed either in the United States, the vast majority of it, or in the United Kingdom, a consistent minority.

In 2012 there was a bold attempt to introduce Neoclassical realism in the European continent through the publication of *Neoclassical realism in European politics, bringing power back in*, by Asle Toje and Barbara Kunz. European Neoclassical realism builds upon the theoretical foundations of United States' Neoclassical realism, but it focuses on the particularities of the European context. According to Toje and Kunz, European Neoclassical realism is a response to the limitations of neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism in explaining European politics. European Neoclassical realism emphasizes the role of the State, both in terms of its internal dynamics and its external relations, as the key actor in the international system. One of the key features of European Neoclassical realism is its focus on the regional level of analysis. The authors argue that the European region is a distinct and important level of analysis, with its own unique set of characteristics and dynamics. European Neoclassical realism emphasizes the importance of regional integration and cooperation, as well as the role of regional powers in shaping European politics. In their book, Toje and Kunz criticize neorealism for its narrow focus on the international system and its disregard for the role



of the State and domestic factors in shaping foreign policy. They argue that neorealism's emphasis on the distribution of power and the anarchic nature of the international system oversimplifies the complexity of international relations and overlooks important factors that influence State behaviour, such as domestic politics and economic interests.

Reichwein, in particular, criticizes neorealism on several grounds. First, he argues that neorealism's focus on the distribution of power among States is too narrow and does not account for the role of domestic factors in shaping foreign policy. Reichwein also criticizes neorealism for assuming that States always act rationally to maximize their security and power, which does not account for cases where States may act irrationally or be constrained by domestic political factors. He also criticizes the theories of neorealists Waltz and Mearsheimer, and constructivist Walt for assuming that States have an unlimited capacity extract and to mobilise the domestic resources that are needed to provide the ground for a balance of power stability setting in the international system. Furthermore, Reichwein argues that neorealism's emphasis on the structural constraints of the international system overlooks the importance of agency in international politics. He notes that States are not passive actors that simply respond to external pressures, but rather they have the ability to shape their environment and pursue their interests. Reichwein also takes issue with neorealism's assumption of unitary actors, arguing that States are composed of a variety of actors with different interests and preferences, and that these internal divisions can significantly affect foreign

policy decisions.<sup>147</sup> Reichwein also discusses another very important factor for Neoclassical realists, the deconstruction of *the State* seen as a black box by neorealists. The State is not a monolithic entity. Rather, the State is made up of various individuals, groups, and organizations that may have different goals, preferences, and interests.

Recalling the State-society relation of classical realists such as Morgenthau, Neoclassical realists seek to open up the “black box”. Neoclassical realists present a top-down approach in connection with foreign policy. The *foreign policy executive* (FPE) mainly shapes and drives the external behaviour of the State. Those executives mainly comprise the head of government, the ministers, officials in political, economic, and military positions, as well as high-ranking bureaucracy. Within the FPE, the Statesman is seen as the most important actor.<sup>148</sup> In this instance it is unavoidable to observe some constructivist-drawn inspiration.

Regarding the notion of power, whose distribution in the system is essential in both neorealist and Neoclassical realist approaches, there are mainly two approaches that are taken into account by Neoclassical realists.

The first, is the "*elements of power approach*" analysis of power by Baldwin<sup>149</sup> refers to the notion that power can be broken down into various distinct elements, including military, economic, political, and social components. Baldwin argues that these elements are interrelated, but they are also capable of functioning independently, and they may hold different levels

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<sup>147</sup> Toje A., Kunz, B., *Neoclassical realism in European politics: Bringing power back in*, Manchester University Press, 2012, pp. 33-37.

<sup>148</sup> Ibidem, p. 43.

<sup>149</sup> Baldwin, D. A., *Power Analysis and World Politics*, World Politics, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1979, pp. 161-194

of importance depending on the particular context in which power is being exercised. This approach rejects the idea that power is simply a matter of material capabilities, such as military strength or economic wealth, and instead emphasizes the ways in which power is constructed and exercised through a variety of social and political factors. This approach has been embraced by many realist scholars in international relations.

The second approach is Robert Dahl's *relational power* approach that emphasizes that power is not something that one actor possesses, but rather a dynamic relationship between actors. He argues that power is the ability of one actor to get another actor to do something that they would not otherwise have done, and it is present in all social relationships.<sup>150</sup> According to Dahl, power is not just exercised through overt coercion or the use of force, but also through more subtle means such as manipulation, persuasion, and control over information. He also highlights the importance of non-decision-making, or the ability of those in power to prevent certain issues from being addressed, as a crucial aspect of power.<sup>151</sup> Dahl's relational power approach is seen as a departure from traditional understandings of power in international relations, which have tended to focus on the distribution of material capabilities among States.<sup>152</sup>

In the European Neoclassical realist approach, Schmidt and JunEAU explore the concept of power in Neoclassical realism. The authors argue that Neoclassical realism builds on the classical realist concept of power as the

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<sup>150</sup> Dahl R. A., *The Concept of Power*, Behavioral Science Vol. 2, No. 3, 1957, pp. 201-215.

<sup>151</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>152</sup> Krasner S. D., *Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics*, Comparative Politics, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1984, p. 238.

ability to control the behaviour of others but adds two new dimensions: power is situational and contextual, and power is dynamic and relational. They suggest that the distribution of power is influenced by changes in the international system and the actions of other States. Schmidt and Juneau also criticize structural realists, arguing that they oversimplify the role of power in international relations by focusing solely on material capabilities and ignoring the importance of perception and interpretation. They suggest that Neoclassical realism offers a more nuanced understanding of power by considering how States interpret and respond to changes in the distribution of power while adding that most Neoclassical realists endorse the elements of national power approach.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, unlike structural realism's tenet, for Neoclassical realists the State is not a monolithic unit, it rather comprises a set of internal and external processes that shape its posture.

Neoclassical realists present a first distinction between State power and national power, the first being the actual power that can be both extracted and mobilized, while the latter is the *potential* power of nation. They also embrace Randall Schweller's attempt to specify a State's relative capabilities. Randall Schweller's analysis of a State's relative capabilities builds on the Correlates of War (COW) dataset, which is a widely used quantitative database of international relations. Schweller used the COW data to measure a State's relative power, which he defines as "the ratio of a State's capabilities to those of the other States in the international system".<sup>154</sup> Schweller's analysis involves calculating the relative power of a State at different points in time

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<sup>153</sup> Toje A., Kunz B., 2012, pp. 62 – 67.

<sup>154</sup> Schweller, R. L., *Bandwagoning for profit: Bringing the revisionist State back in*, International Security, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1994, p. 331.

and examining how changes in relative power affect foreign policy behaviour. He argues that States with high levels of relative power are more likely to adopt assertive foreign policies, while States with low levels of relative power are more likely to adopt defensive foreign policies. Schweller's analysis thus emphasizes the importance of relative power dynamics in shaping State behaviour. Neoclassical realists, observing relative power capabilities, set as the ultimate objective of a State, through its power capabilities, influence maximization. Power, in terms of specific assets and capabilities is not an end by itself, as in defensive and offensive neorealism paradigms with the aim to reach balance of threat or balance of power, whereas it is a means to reach influence maximization.<sup>155</sup>

An interesting overview of the Neoclassical realist approach in understanding foreign policy has been conducted by Romanova and Pavlova in 2012 regarding Russian foreign policy. They argue that Russia's foreign policy is driven by a combination of structural, domestic, and individual factors, and that these factors interact with each other in complex ways to shape Russia's foreign policy choices.

Structural factors include the international balance of power, global economic dynamics, regional security arrangements, and normative frameworks that determine the rules of the game in international politics.

Domestic factors include the institutional arrangements and political processes within the State, societal pressures, and economic conditions. The authors highlight the importance of domestic institutional factors, such as the

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<sup>155</sup> Schmidt B. C., Juneau T., *Neoclassical Realism and Power*, in Toje A., Kunz B. *Neoclassical realism in European politics: Bringing power back in*, Manchester University Press, 2012, p. 73.

role of the president and the influence of the security apparatus, in shaping Russia's foreign policy.

Individual factors refer to the role of political leaders, their beliefs, experiences, and personal characteristics. According to the authors, the personalities and beliefs of Russian leaders have a significant impact on the country's foreign policy. They argue that President Putin's background as a KGB officer has influenced his worldview and approach to foreign policy. Finally, Romanova and Pavlova argue that Neoclassical realism provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics and developing a more nuanced understanding of Russia's foreign policy behaviour.<sup>156</sup>

An interesting trend emerged in the 2010's, that of rediscovering former classical realist scholars as precursors or even direct fathers of Neoclassical realism. Two authors in particular, Edward Carr and Raymond Aron, have been the subjects of such rediscovering.

Dario Battistella's article *Raymond Aron, réaliste néoclassique* explores the influence of Raymond Aron's ideas on Neoclassical realism in international relations theory. In the article, Battistella argues that Aron's ideas on power and international relations can be seen as a precursor to Neoclassical realism. He explains that Aron rejected the idea that international relations can be explained solely by systemic factors, such as the distribution of power in the international system. Instead, Aron emphasized the importance of individual decision-makers and the domestic factors that shape their perceptions of the international system. Battistella also highlights Aron's emphasis on the

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<sup>156</sup> Romanova T., Pavlova E., *Towards neoclassical realist thinking in Russia?*, in Toje A., Kunz B., *Neoclassical realism in European politics: Bringing power back in*, Manchester University Press, 2012, pp. 234-250.

importance of military power in international relations. Aron argued that military power is a necessary component of State power, and that States must be prepared to use military force in order to defend their interests. This emphasis on military power is a key component of Neoclassical realism, which argues that a State's relative military capabilities are an important factor in shaping its foreign policy behaviour.<sup>157</sup>

In his article *A Reassessment of E.H. Carr and the Realist Tradition: Britain, German–Soviet Relations and Neoclassical Realism* of 2017 Keith Smith argues that E.H. Carr's ideas about power and the State have been misunderstood by neorealist scholars. Smith argues that Carr's ideas are more closely aligned with Neoclassical realism, and that his work can provide a useful starting point for understanding the interaction between the domestic and international spheres of politics. Smith argues that Carr's work on the State and power can help us to understand this reluctance. Carr's focus on the importance of the State as a "black box" that shapes and is shaped by both domestic and international factors, Smith suggests, can help us to see why British policymakers were hesitant to embrace the Soviet Union. They were concerned that a closer relationship with the Soviet Union might destabilize the domestic political situation in Britain, which was already fraught with tension over issues such as unemployment and the role of the State in the economy. Smith concludes by arguing that Carr's ideas have important implications for Neoclassical realism, which has tended to downplay the importance of historical context and focus instead on abstract theoretical

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<sup>157</sup> Battistella D., *Raymond Aron, réaliste néoclassique*, Études internationales, Vol. 43 No. 3, 2012, pp. 371–388.

models. He suggests that Carr's work can help us to think more critically about the relationship between domestic and international politics, and to develop a more nuanced understanding of how States make decisions about foreign policy.<sup>158</sup>

Tom Dyson's book "Neoclassical Realism and Defence Reform in Post-Cold War Europe" is an important contribution to the Neoclassical realist literature as it highlights the role of domestic factors in shaping State behaviour. Specifically, Dyson focuses on the case of defence reform in post-Cold War Europe and argues that Neoclassical realism provides a useful framework for understanding the complex interplay between international and domestic factors that influenced defence policy during this period.<sup>159</sup> Dyson uses a case study approach, focusing on the experiences of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom in the 1990s and 2000s. He argues that both States faced similar external pressures to reform their defence policies, but the domestic factors that influenced the pace and scope of these reforms were quite different.

In the case of Germany, Dyson shows how the country's historical experience with militarism and war led to a deep-seated pacifism that made defence reform difficult. In contrast, the United Kingdom was able to pursue more ambitious defence reforms due to its relatively more centralized political system and the greater political will of its leaders.<sup>160</sup>

In the case of France, Dyson argues that its Neoclassical realist approach to

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<sup>158</sup> Smith K., 2017, pp. 89–103.

<sup>159</sup> Dyson T., *Neoclassical Realism and Defence Reform in Post-Cold War Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 7-8.

<sup>160</sup> Ibidem, pp. 47-55.



defence reform was characterized by a focus on maintaining strategic autonomy and preserving France's status as a great power. This was reflected in its decision to maintain a sizeable military budget and its emphasis on developing independent military capabilities, such as nuclear deterrence and expeditionary forces.<sup>161</sup>

In contrast, the UK's Neoclassical realist approach was more focused on accommodating its declining power status and strengthening its ties with the United States. Dyson argues that the UK's defence reforms were characterized by a greater emphasis on interoperability with US forces and a reduced emphasis on independent military capabilities.<sup>162</sup>

Dyson also discusses the relationship between NATO and the EU in the context of defence reforms in post-Cold War Europe. He argues that the development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and the establishment of the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) were driven by domestic pressures within EU member States, rather than by the desire to challenge NATO's primacy in European security affairs. Dyson notes that while some Neoclassical realists have argued that the EU's push for greater defence capabilities is a direct challenge to NATO's dominance, this view is overly simplistic. Instead, Dyson argues that the relationship between NATO and the EU is complex and multifaceted, with both organizations working together to address common security challenges. Dyson also highlights the importance of domestic political factors in shaping the relationship between NATO and the EU. He notes that domestic political pressures, such as public

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 37-44.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 28-35.

opinion and party politics, have influenced the willingness of EU member States to participate in NATO-led missions and to contribute to NATO's collective defence efforts.<sup>163</sup>

Jason Davidson's book *America's Allies and War: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq* of 2011 explores the role of alliances in the foreign policy of the United States during the post-Cold War period. Davidson's work has significant implications for Neoclassical realism, as it highlights the importance of alliance politics in shaping U.S. foreign policy. Davidson argues that the United States relies heavily on its allies to achieve its foreign policy objectives, and that the nature of these alliances has a significant impact on U.S. decision-making. He uses case studies of U.S. interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq to illustrate how alliance politics can constrain or enable U.S. foreign policy. According to Davidson, Neoclassical realism provides a useful framework for understanding the impact of alliances on U.S. foreign policy.

Neoclassical realists emphasize the importance of both domestic and international factors in shaping a State's foreign policy, and alliance politics represent an important international factor that can shape a State's behaviour. Davidson's work has helped to expand Neoclassical realist thinking on the role of alliances in shaping foreign policy.<sup>164</sup> In the case of the Vietnam War, Davidson argues that the US became involved because of its alliance with South Vietnam and its broader commitment to containing the spread of communism. Similarly, in the Persian Gulf War, the US was motivated by its

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<sup>163</sup> Ibidem, pp. 62-75.

<sup>164</sup> Davidson J., *America's Allies and War: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp.11-25.

commitment to defending Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States against Iraqi aggression.<sup>165</sup>

Davidson also looks at US interventions in Lebanon and Somalia, which he argues were driven by concerns about maintaining the credibility of US security commitments and demonstrating resolve in the face of perceived threats to US interests.<sup>166</sup> According to Davidson, the Kosovo intervention in 1999 is an example of how Neoclassical realism can explain the foreign policy decisions of the United States. He argues that the intervention was not driven by humanitarian concerns, but rather by the strategic interests of the United States and its NATO allies in the region. The intervention was seen as necessary to maintain the credibility of NATO and prevent the alliance from becoming irrelevant after the end of the Cold War.<sup>167</sup> Davidson points out that the decision to intervene in Kosovo was not simply the result of domestic politics or the influence of interest groups, but rather a product of the structural pressures facing the United States in the post-Cold War era. In particular, the expansion of NATO and the need to manage the changing security environment in Europe played a key role in shaping U.S. foreign policy towards the Balkans. Davidson also argues that the Kosovo intervention was not an isolated case, but rather part of a broader pattern of U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. He suggests that Neoclassical realism can be used to explain U.S. interventions in other parts of the world, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, which were also driven by a combination of

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 35-37.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 40-45.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 80-83.

strategic interests and structural pressures.<sup>168</sup>

The Iraq War is a prime example of the role of Neoclassical realism in US foreign policy. He argues that the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was driven by both domestic and international factors.

On the domestic level, the Bush administration was motivated by a desire to maintain its political power and ensure re-election in 2004. Davidson suggests that the administration believed that a successful war in Iraq would boost its approval ratings and increase its chances of winning the election. Additionally, the Bush administration's ideological commitments, such as the belief in the spread of democracy, played a role in shaping their foreign policy decisions.<sup>169</sup>

On the international level, the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq was influenced by a desire to maintain US hegemony and contain potential challengers. Davidson argues that the administration saw Iraq as a potential threat to US interests in the Middle East, particularly with regards to its oil reserves, and wanted to prevent any potential challenge to US dominance in the region.<sup>170</sup>

Finally, Davidson examines the issue of burden-sharing within the transatlantic alliance. He argues that burden-sharing is not just a matter of fairness or cost-sharing, but it is a strategic imperative for the United States. Davidson contends that the United States has historically relied on its European allies to share the burden of global security, allowing the U.S. to focus on its own interests and priorities. He points out that during the Cold

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<sup>168</sup> Ibidem, p.105 et p.131.

<sup>169</sup> Ibidem, pp. 136-140.

<sup>170</sup> Ibidem, pp. 145-151.

War, the U.S. relied heavily on its European allies to contain the Soviet Union and maintain global stability. However, in the post-Cold War era, the U.S. has struggled to convince its allies to share the burden of intervention in places like the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Davidson argues that Neoclassical realism offers insights into why burden-sharing has become increasingly difficult. He argues that as the security environment has changed, with the rise of non-State actors and transnational threats, European allies have become less willing to commit resources to U.S.-led interventions. Furthermore, he notes that the U.S. has also struggled to articulate a clear strategic vision that can persuade its allies to join in its efforts.<sup>171</sup>

On the same level of analysis Patrick Mello's book *Democratic Participation in Armed Conflicts* provides a critical analysis of the relationship between democratic participation and the use of military force in contemporary Western democracies. The book examines how democratic political systems have responded to the challenges posed by the use of military force, and how these responses have impacted the decision-making processes that shape foreign policy. This book is relevant to Neoclassical realism because it offers insights into how the internal political dynamics of democratic States can shape their foreign policy choices. Neoclassical realism emphasizes the importance of domestic factors in shaping a State's foreign policy, and Mello's book provides a nuanced analysis of the ways in which democratic participation can influence these factors.

Mello argues that the democratic nature of Western societies creates a tension between the values of democratic participation and the imperatives of military

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<sup>171</sup> Ibidem, pp. 171-176.

strategy. This tension can lead to a range of outcomes, from heightened scrutiny of military decisions to a reluctance to engage in military action altogether. In the case of the Afghanistan involvement, Mello argues that the US decision to intervene was influenced by a combination of structural, domestic, and individual factors.

Structurally, the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror created a sense of insecurity and fear among the American public, which led to increased support for military action in Afghanistan.

Domestically, the Bush administration was facing pressure to respond to the attacks and demonstrate strong leadership, which further pushed them towards intervention.

At the individual level, Mello points out that President George W. Bush had a personal commitment to combating terrorism and had a strong belief in the efficacy of military force in achieving national security goals. Additionally, key advisors like Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld were advocates of a more aggressive foreign policy approach.<sup>172</sup>

Toje and Kunz, with their European approach to Neoclassical realism have tried to highlight the importance of regional powers, and in their case, the European continent. That urge was also felt in the other side of the Atlantic since US Neoclassical realist scholars have actively tried to address this issue. In 2012, *Beyond Great Powers and Hegemons: Why Secondary States Support, Follow, or Challenge* by Kristen Williams, Steve Lobell, and Neal

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<sup>172</sup> Mello P., *Democratic Participation in Armed Conflict: Military involvement in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

G. Jesse challenged the notion that the behaviour of secondary States is primarily driven by the actions of great powers. The book argues that secondary States have agency and their own interests and preferences that drive their foreign policy decisions. The implications for Neoclassical realism are that it expands the understanding of the role of agency and domestic politics in shaping State behaviour beyond the structural and systemic factors emphasized in traditional realist theories.

The book suggests that Neoclassical realism needs to incorporate more nuanced analysis of the domestic factors, interests, and preferences of secondary States in order to accurately predict their foreign policy decisions. Moreover, the book challenges the neorealist assumption that great powers are the primary actors shaping international politics. The authors argue that a more complex understanding of the relationship between great powers and secondary States is necessary for a comprehensive analysis of international relations. They also suggest that Neoclassical realism needs to account for the dynamics of alliances and coalitions among secondary States that can shape their foreign policy decisions.<sup>173</sup>

One of the case studies evaluated by the authors is Ireland's neutrality posture. The authors argue that Ireland's foreign policy behaviour challenges the neorealist assumption that States will always act to maximize their security interests. Ireland is a small, non-nuclear State that has pursued a foreign policy of neutrality, which has led it to reject membership in military alliances such as NATO. The authors argue that Ireland's foreign policy is shaped by a

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<sup>173</sup> Williams K., Lobell, S. E., & Jesse N.G., *Beyond Great Powers and Hegemons: Why Secondary States Support, Follow, or Challenge*, Stanford University Press, 2012.

complex set of factors, including its history, especially British occupation, its domestic politics, and its economic interests. They argue that Ireland's past has led it to reject militarism and to embrace a foreign policy that prioritizes peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Ireland's domestic politics, including its strong pacifist and anti-militarist traditions, have also played a role in shaping its foreign policy. The authors further argue that Ireland's economic interests have led it to prioritize international cooperation and stability over military alliances. Ireland's economy is highly dependent on foreign investment and exports, and it has a strong interest in maintaining an open, stable international system. This has led Ireland to prioritize multilateralism and diplomacy over military force.<sup>174</sup>

Another case study addresses the complex and multifaceted relationship between Western Europe, the US, and NATO. The authors explore the relationship between NATO, Western Europe, and the United States through the lens of Neoclassical realism. They argue that NATO has functioned as a means for the United States to exert its influence in Europe, and that the alliance has evolved over time to reflect changes in the distribution of power within the international system.<sup>175</sup> The authors note that the United States has historically played a dominant role in NATO, providing the majority of its military capabilities and funding. This has allowed the US to shape the strategic direction of the alliance and use it to advance its own interests in Europe. The end of the Cold War and the rise of new powers have had significant implications for the US-NATO-Europe relationship. After the end

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<sup>174</sup> Ibidem, pp. 76-80.

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem, p. 115.



of the Cold War, the US became the sole superpower, which led to a unipolar international system. However, the rise of new powers such as China and Russia, and the re-emergence of regional powers, has resulted in a shift towards a multipolar system. This shift has challenged the US's dominance and has forced it to seek allies and partners to maintain its influence and power. In this context, NATO has continued to be an important alliance for the US to maintain its presence in Europe and project its power beyond the region. However, the relationship between the US and NATO has evolved since the end of the Cold War. The US has pushed for NATO to take a more global role in fighting terrorism and other threats, while European members have been more hesitant to engage in military interventions beyond their region. This has created tensions within the alliance and has led to debates over burden-sharing and the role of NATO in the 21st century. Some European States have sought to deepen their integration and cooperation with each other, creating an alternative to NATO, while others have maintained their close ties with the US and NATO.<sup>176</sup>

In 2011 and 2012 two different works dedicated for the first time some space for Italian foreign and military policies analysis according to the Neoclassical realist paradigm.

*Italian foreign policy in the post-cold war period: a Neoclassical realist approach* is a very well devised article written by Lorenzo Cladi and Mark Webber that examines Italy's foreign policy decision-making in the post-Cold War era through the lens of Neoclassical realism. The authors argue that Italy's foreign policy can be better understood by analysing the interaction of

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<sup>176</sup> Ibidem, pp. 125-127.

systemic, domestic, and individual level factors.

At the systemic level, the authors argue that Italy's foreign policy was largely shaped by the changing international system after the Cold War. The end of bipolarity and the emergence of new security challenges, such as globalization and terrorism, led to a shift in Italy's foreign policy priorities. Italy began to focus more on regional issues, such as the Balkans and the Mediterranean, and placed greater emphasis on its relationship with the European Union (EU).

At the domestic level, the authors argue that Italy's foreign policy was influenced by domestic political factors. Domestic instability, weak leadership, and the fragmentation of political parties all had an impact on Italy's foreign policy decision-making. The authors also highlight the role of interest groups, such as the business community, in shaping Italy's foreign policy.

At the individual level, the authors argue that the personalities of political leaders played a role in Italy's foreign policy decision-making. They highlight the role of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in shaping Italy's foreign policy, particularly his desire to strengthen ties with the United States.

The authors also examine Italy's involvement in NATO's military intervention in Kosovo in 1999 as a case study. They argue that Italy's decision to participate in the intervention was influenced by a combination of systemic, domestic, and individual level factors. The changing international system, domestic political instability, and the personality of Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema all played a role in Italy's decision to participate in the intervention. It is very interesting that authors note how Italian foreign policy since the end of the Cold war can be observed as a pendulum that fluctuates between a more

pro-US and NATO posture, and a more pro-EU posture. Constant instability of the political system has not allowed a coherent and clear conduct of foreign policy on these very important issues, as well as others, of Italy's foreign policy portfolio.<sup>177</sup>

In their 2012 book *Italian Military Operations Abroad: Just Don't Call it War*, Ignazi, Giacomello, and Coticchia<sup>178</sup>, analyse Italian foreign policy, first, and the use of the military device made by Italy as a tool of foreign policy, second. Although the book does not directly address Neoclassical realism, it still provides extremely interesting insights to many elements that are crucial to Neoclassical realism, such as foreign policy history and identity, as well as State-society relationship when it comes to the use of military means in order to attain foreign policy objectives.

The narration of the roots of Italian foreign policy based on Italian identity and stretching it back to the Roman period has been indeed very fascinating and provided many insights. The authors highlight the importance of the idea of the "Romanità," which refers to the belief that Italy is the heir to the Roman Empire and that this legacy has shaped the country's identity and foreign policy. According to the authors, the Roman period was characterized by the concept of Rome's "universalism," which meant that the Roman State considered itself to be the centre of the world and responsible for the governance of all peoples. The authors argue that this legacy has influenced Italian foreign policy in the modern era, particularly in its emphasis on the

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<sup>177</sup> Cladi L., Webber M., *Italian foreign policy in the post-cold war period: a neoclassical realist approach*, *European Security*, Vol. 20, No.2, 2011, pp. 205-219.

<sup>178</sup> Ignazi P., Giacomello G., and Coticchia F., *Italian Military Operations Abroad: Just Don't Call It War*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

importance of high-level prestige and the urge to be among first-rank powers because of its past. Renaissance has further allowed to enrich the Italian cultural background hence further reclaiming a legitimization as a first-rank power. They also discuss the influence of the Risorgimento, the political and social movement that led to Italian unification in the 19th century. The authors argue that the Risorgimento created a sense of national identity and unity that continues to shape Italian foreign policy. They point out that the Risorgimento leaders saw Italy as a great power and aimed to establish the country's presence on the international stage.<sup>179</sup>

In their book, Ignazi, Giacomello, and Coticchia argue that the Italian government and society have long debated the priorities between security and defence. They note that this debate has been particularly relevant in the post-Cold War period, where the Italian political and strategic community has had to adjust to new international security challenges, including terrorism, humanitarian crises, and fragile State governance. The authors argue that the Italian political and strategic community has traditionally prioritized security over defence, reflecting the country's strategic culture as a "geostrategic hub." In this context, Italian foreign policy has been more oriented towards supporting international peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, and regional stabilization efforts, rather than direct military interventions. However, the authors note that this debate has become more complex in the post-Cold War period, as Italy has been increasingly involved in multinational military operations abroad. They argue that the Italian political and strategic community has struggled to reconcile its traditional emphasis on security with

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<sup>179</sup> Ibidem, pp. 15-26.

the increasing demands of military operations, which require a more proactive defence posture.<sup>180</sup>

### *1.2.2: Neoclassical realism as an international relations theory.*

In 2016, already established Neoclassical realist scholars Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliferro after their 2009 book, published a new book, a manifesto, that is the result of the struggle to elevate Neoclassical realism from a foreign policy theory to the dignity of an overall international relations theory.

*Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* presents a comprehensive overview of Neoclassical realism as a theoretical approach to international relations, exploring its core concepts, debates, and empirical applications. The authors begin by examining the core assumptions and concepts of Neoclassical realism, such as the role of domestic factors in shaping foreign policy and the importance of systemic pressures on State behaviour. They argue that Neoclassical realism provides a middle ground between traditional realist and liberal approaches, offering a more nuanced understanding of the complex interactions between domestic and international factors. The book then explores several empirical applications of Neoclassical realism, including studies of great power politics, regional security dynamics, and alliance politics. In each case, the authors use Neoclassical realism to provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the factors driving State behaviour. The authors also address several critiques of Neoclassical realism, including its potential for overemphasizing

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<sup>180</sup> Ibidem, pp. 143-150.

domestic factors and neglecting the importance of systemic pressures. They argue that Neoclassical realism remains a valuable approach to understanding international relations, particularly in its ability to account for the complex and multifaceted factors that shape State behaviour.<sup>181</sup>

Until that moment, Neoclassical realism was a useful set of theories that allowed to understand the dependent variable, foreign policy outcome, thanks to independent variables stimuli filtered through intervening variables. It aimed at exploring the transmission belt between systemic factors and how would they be perceived on the unit level, and once perceived how would they be addressed. And that was it, there was no further explanation of the eventual impact on a broader international system.

Through their book, Ripsman et al. managed to cover this last passage. They introduced the idea of the transmission belt also in a reverse flow in respect to the established theory. By that, the authors introduced the idea that once the dependent variable, the foreign policy outcome, was individuated it would have, in its own right, an impact on the overall international system, the independent variable. And that transmission would itself be subject to the same intervening variables, and mainly the perception of the other States regarding the foreign policy chosen by the observed State. It must be noted, though, that this theory mainly addresses, just as neorealist theory, the great powers, or the superpowers, since their foreign policies have the yield to impact the international structure. Nevertheless, to a lesser extent, this approach may be replicated on a smaller scale in regional scenarios.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ripsman N., Taliaferro J. W., Lobell S. E., *Neoclassical realist Theory of International Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.2-8.

In the book, the authors criticize structural realism for the immediate relation between systemic stimuli and foreign policy decisions made by a State. They highlight mainly four shortcomings of structural realism on this issue: perception and misperception, as highlighted by other Neoclassical realists, the clarity of the systemic signals, that deals with the ambiguity over the nature of both the challenges of the international system and the appropriate responses to them, the problem of rationality, that entails that State's as unit are rational actors, and the need to mobilise State resources as it has already been addressed by previous scholars.<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, the authors catalogue Neoclassical realism theory in three types, from the less expansive in theoretical terms, to the most expansive.

Type 1 Neoclassical realism serves as a mere guide to explaining anomalies in the structural realist paradigm. Such type is common among the first scholars that delved in the insufficiencies of the structural realist theory.<sup>184</sup>

Type 2 Neoclassical realism is what has been discussed until now, a theoretical approach to explaining foreign policy, a very complex and fine set of theories, but nevertheless restricted in the domain of foreign policy theory.<sup>185</sup>

Type 3 Neoclassical realism is the result of the last developments by scholars that allow said theory to become an international relations theory, through the impact of great powers' national foreign policies to the international system, within the realist paradigm.

On the basis of the timeframe that is analysed different kinds of Neoclassical

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<sup>183</sup> Ibidem, pp.20-24.

<sup>184</sup> Ibidem, p. 26.

<sup>185</sup> Ibidem, p. 29.

realism can be applied. Ripsman et al. suggest that in the short term, days, weeks and months, States are necessarily forced to make crisis decisions and short aimed foreign policy decisions according to a fixed international circumstance. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962, or the July crisis of 1914 are excellent examples of this timeframe. In such timeframe structural realist principles, the importance of the system over the unit, prevail<sup>186</sup> along with more behavioural and policy-making theories, such as groupthink.

In the short to medium term, months and years, States usually tend to develop strategic planning. This trend can reach the point of developing a grand strategy, and by that is meant the conceptual blueprint or the organizational principle that animates the State's relations with the world.<sup>187</sup> For example, it can be suggested that nowadays Italy's foreign policy lays on the conceptual blueprint of multilateralism, orbiting around the United Nations, NATO, and the EU.

Passing to a medium to longer term timeframe, years and decades, each major State's grand strategy interacts with each other in the international arena and have an impact on international systemic outcomes. Such outcomes are "observable political phenomena resulting from the coaction and interactions of the strategies pursued by two or more actors in the international arena".<sup>188</sup> Finally, in the longer term, decades, international outcomes and the grand strategies of the principal units can indeed reshape the international structure itself. There are some exogenous factors to Neoclassical realist theory that also tend to shape international structure, such as technology, environmental

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<sup>186</sup> Ibidem, p. 83.

<sup>187</sup> Ibidem, p. 84.

<sup>188</sup> Ibidem, p. 85.



patterns, demographic growth, geography, and unexpected catastrophic events, such as COVID-19.

Regarding intervening variables the authors mainly individuate four such variables: leader images, strategic culture, State-society relations, and domestic institutions.

The intervening variable of leader images refers to the beliefs, preferences, and biases of leaders that affect their decision-making processes in foreign policy. These images can be shaped by a leader's personal experiences, ideology, and cultural background, and can have a significant impact on the direction and outcomes of foreign policy. Leaders may perceive threats and opportunities differently based on their images, which can lead to varying levels of assertiveness or caution in foreign policy decision-making. Neoclassical realists argue that leader images should be taken into account in analysing the behaviour of States in the international system. Leader images can affect State behaviour in three main ways: by influencing how leaders perceive threats and opportunities in the international system; by affecting leaders' policy preferences and priorities; and by influencing how leaders manage information, make decisions, and negotiate with other States. Neoclassical realists also acknowledge that leader images are not static and can change over time due to experience, learning, or new information, which can lead to shifts in foreign policy.<sup>189</sup>

Strategic culture refers to the shared beliefs, norms, and values that shape a State's security and foreign policy preferences. These beliefs and values are deeply ingrained in a society's history and culture, and they help shape a

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<sup>189</sup> Ibidem, pp. 61-65.

State's view of its role in the international system and the threats it faces. The authors argue that strategic culture is an important intervening variable because it helps explain why States may adopt certain foreign policies even when those policies may not be in their immediate self-interest. For example, a State may adopt a more aggressive or assertive foreign policy stance because it believes that doing so is necessary to uphold its national identity and protect its interests in the long term. Furthermore, the authors argue that strategic culture can be both a constraining and enabling factor in a State's foreign policy decision-making. Strategic culture can constrain a State's ability to pursue certain foreign policy goals that are seen as incompatible with its core values and beliefs, while at the same time enabling a State to act more assertively in pursuit of its perceived interests when its strategic culture is aligned with those interests.<sup>190</sup>

The State-society relations intervening variable refers to the interaction between the State and the society within a particular State. This variable recognizes that a State's actions are often influenced by its domestic environment and its relationship with societal groups such as interest groups, social movements, and political parties. These societal groups can shape the State's foreign policy preferences, and their interests and values can create pressure on the State to pursue certain foreign policy objectives. Additionally, the State's internal power struggles and domestic political considerations can also play a role in shaping its foreign policy decisions. Neoclassical realism argues that State-society relations are important for understanding foreign policy decision-making, as they can create both constraints and opportunities

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<sup>190</sup> Ibidem, pp. 67-68.

for States in pursuing their foreign policy goals. A State's foreign policy may be constrained if it goes against the preferences of powerful societal groups or if it faces opposition from domestic political rivals. On the other hand, societal groups can also provide opportunities for States to mobilize support for their foreign policy objectives and create coalitions to advance their interests. Overall, the State-society relations intervening variable highlights the complex interaction between the domestic and international factors that shape a State's foreign policy behaviour.<sup>191</sup>

The domestic institutions intervening variable refers to the formal and informal institutions, such as political and bureaucratic structures, that shape a State's foreign policy behaviour. According to the authors, domestic institutions can affect foreign policy outcomes in several ways. For example, institutions can provide leaders with incentives to pursue certain policies, shape the preferences of decision-makers, and constrain or facilitate decision-making processes. They argue that the influence of domestic institutions on foreign policy behaviour is particularly important for Neoclassical realist theory because it helps to explain why States with similar material capabilities may have different foreign policy outcomes.<sup>192</sup> Within the domestic institutions, the foreign policy executive, which can be an individual leader or a collective body such as a cabinet or national security council, plays a critical role in determining a State's foreign policy objectives, strategies, and decision-making processes. The authors argue that the foreign policy executive's preferences, beliefs, and perceptions can be shaped by a variety

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<sup>191</sup> Ibidem, pp. 71-74.

<sup>192</sup> Ibidem, pp. 75-76.

of factors, including their own personal experiences, ideology, domestic politics, and international pressures. These factors can influence the executive's decision-making process and lead to different foreign policy outcomes. Furthermore, the authors note that the foreign policy executive can also influence other intervening variables, such as strategic culture, State-society relations, and domestic institutions. For example, a foreign policy executive with a particular ideological or strategic outlook may seek to change or reform existing institutions and norms in order to align them with their foreign policy objectives.<sup>193</sup>

After the great impact this Neoclassical realist manifesto had, the next works have still been dedicated to Type II Neoclassical realism, thus focusing on foreign policy analysis, both among major powers, but also regional powers. Antoine Farchakh's work of 2017 on the evolution of Gaullism in French foreign policy in the presidencies of de Gaulle, Chirac, and Sarkozy through a Neoclassical realist approach is a prime example of this type. The author argues that France's foreign policy has been strongly influenced by its Gaullist heritage, which prioritizes an independent, sovereign foreign policy that is not subservient to the interests of other powers. The article analyses the foreign policies of each president in turn, beginning with de Gaulle's focus on nuclear deterrence and the development of an independent European foreign policy. The author argues that Charles de Gaulle's foreign policy was driven by a mix of nationalism, realism, and grand strategy. De Gaulle's belief in France's grandeur and independence led him to pursue a more assertive foreign policy, including developing an independent nuclear capability. The

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<sup>193</sup> Ibidem, pp. 76-78.

author then discusses Chirac's emphasis on balancing between the United States and Europe and his opposition to the Iraq War. Antoine argues that Chirac continued De Gaulle's tradition of pursuing an independent foreign policy, but faced challenges due to changes in the international system, including European integration and the end of the Cold War. Finally, Sarkozy's foreign policy is analysed, particularly his focus on human rights and interventionism in Libya. Sarkozy sought to renew French leadership in Europe and embrace a more pro-American foreign policy. The author argues that Sarkozy's foreign policy reflected a more pragmatic approach, driven by France's national interests, but also influenced by his personal views and his desire to enhance France's role in the world.

Throughout the article, the author highlights the ways in which each president's foreign policy can be understood through the lens of Neoclassical realism, particularly in terms of balancing and the pursuit of national interests. The article concludes by arguing that Neoclassical realism provides a useful framework for understanding the evolution of Gaullist foreign policy in France, particularly in terms of the tension between maintaining national sovereignty and balancing between great powers. The author also suggests that Neoclassical realism can shed light on the broader debate over the role of values in foreign policy, particularly in the context of French foreign policy.<sup>194</sup>

Nicholas Smith's 2020 *A New Cold War? Assessing the Current US-Russia Relationship* uses Type III Neoclassical realism to explain the relationship

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<sup>194</sup> Farchakh, A., *Charles de Gaulle, Jacques Chirac et Nicolas Sarkozy Analyse de l'évolution du gaullisme en politique étrangère française au travers de la théorie du réalisme néoclassique en relations internationales*. Faculté des sciences économiques, sociales, politiques et de communication, Université catholique de Louvain, 2017.

between the two major powers.<sup>195</sup> Smith first analyses the structural dimension of US-Russia relations and the domestic political systems of both the United States and Russia, highlighting the differences between the two countries in terms of their political cultures, institutions, and historical legacies. He argues that these differences have led to fundamentally divergent understandings of the role of the State in society, the nature of democracy and civil society, and the proper balance between security and liberty.

Smith also discusses the impact of nationalism and identity politics in both countries, noting how they have become increasingly salient in the wake of the end of the Cold War and the subsequent changes to the international system. He argues that these factors have played a significant role in shaping both US and Russian foreign policy, particularly in terms of their approaches to issues such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and military intervention.<sup>196</sup>

On the ideological dimension of US-Russia relations Smith notes that the United States and Russia have long been ideologically opposed to each other, with the former promoting liberal democracy and capitalism, and the latter advocating for security and State control. He argues that this ideological divide has persisted even after the end of the Cold War and has been a key factor in shaping the current State of relations between the two countries. The author examines how this ideological dimension has played out in various aspects of the US-Russia relationship, including the conflict in Ukraine, the Syrian civil war, and the 2016 US presidential election.

He also looks at how ideology has influenced the public opinion in both

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<sup>195</sup> Smith N. R., *A New Cold War? Assessing the Current US-Russia Relationship*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.26-29.

countries, with many Russians seeing the United States as a hostile and aggressive power seeking to undermine their country, while many Americans view Russia as an authoritarian State that threatens Western values.<sup>197</sup>

On the psychological dimension of US-Russia relations Smith provides a brief overview of psychological theories that are relevant to understanding US-Russia relations, including cognitive psychology, social identity theory, and prospect theory. He also explores the role of emotions in shaping perceptions and attitudes toward the other country, such as fear, anger, and distrust.

The author then analyses several key events in recent US-Russia relations through a psychological lens, including the 2016 US presidential election interference, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the Syrian civil war. Smith argues that psychological factors played a significant role in these events, including the Russian desire to restore its great power status and the American belief in exceptionalism.<sup>198</sup>

Finally, on the technological dimension of US-Russia relations Smith discusses the history of technological competition between the US and Russia, including the space race during the Cold War, and how this competition continues today in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and unmanned systems. He also analyses the impact of technology on US-Russia relations, including how it can be used as a tool of Statecraft, its impact on strategic stability and arms control, and how it can be used as a means of modernizing military capabilities.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ibidem, pp. 42-48.

<sup>198</sup> Ibidem, pp. 55-57.

<sup>199</sup> Ibidem, pp. 70-73.

Overall Smith argues that the US-Russia relationship has entered a new Cold War, characterized by deep ideological, structural, psychological, and technological differences between the two countries. He believes that both sides have contributed to this situation, with the US pushing for regime change in Russia and Russia using information warfare and cyberattacks to undermine Western democracies. Smith suggests that the two countries are unlikely to resolve their differences anytime soon, and that the current State of affairs could persist for years or even decades. He argues that the US should adopt a more pragmatic approach to Russia, focusing on areas of cooperation while acknowledging and managing areas of disagreement.<sup>200</sup>

Another interesting work using Type III Neoclassical realism is Dean P. Chen's 2017 *US-China Rivalry and Taiwan's Mainland Policy: Security, Nationalism, and the 1992 Consensus*. The book's main argument is that Taiwan's mainland policy has been shaped by a combination of factors, including security concerns, nationalism, and political considerations, and that this policy has been influenced by the rivalry between the United States and China.

Chen argues that Taiwan's security concerns have been a driving force behind its mainland policy, particularly in the wake of the Chinese missile crisis in 1996. He suggests that Taiwan has sought to maintain a balance of power in the Taiwan Strait, using a combination of military and diplomatic means to prevent China from becoming too powerful. At the same time, Chen argues that nationalism has also played an important role in shaping Taiwan's mainland policy. He suggests that Taiwan's leaders have sought to cultivate a

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<sup>200</sup> Ibidem, pp. 82-84.



sense of national identity that is separate from China, in order to strengthen Taiwan's position as an independent State. This has led to policies that promote Taiwanese culture and language, and that seek to distance Taiwan from China.<sup>201</sup>

Chen uses Neoclassical realism to analyse Taiwan's foreign policy choices in the context of US-China rivalry. He argues that Taiwan's mainland policy, particularly its adherence to the 1992 Consensus, can be understood through the lens of Neoclassical realism. Chen explains that Taiwan's decision to adopt the Consensus was not only influenced by the power balance between Taiwan and China but also by domestic political factors, including the role of nationalism in shaping public opinion and the security concerns of Taiwan's political elites.

The author argues that Taiwan's foreign policy towards China can be explained by the interplay of three levels of analysis: systemic constraints, national interests, and domestic politics.

Systemic constraints, such as the power balance between the US and China, shape Taiwan's strategic environment and limit its options.

National interests, such as security and economic concerns, determine the objectives of Taiwan's foreign policy.

Domestic politics, including the role of political parties, interest groups, and public opinion, affect the government's decision-making process and policy outcomes.

Chen also introduces the concept of "balance of nationalism," which refers to

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<sup>201</sup> Chen D. P., *US-China Rivalry and Taiwan's Mainland Policy. Security, Nationalism, and the 1992 Consensus*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

the delicate balance between ethnic identity and national security in Taiwan's mainland policy. He argues that Taiwan's mainland policy has been shaped by its dual identity as both a Chinese society and a democratic State, which has created a tension between the desire to maintain cultural and economic ties with China and the need to defend against military threats from the mainland.<sup>202</sup>

In 2018, an Italian scholar, Paolo Rosa, published *Neoclassical Realism and the Underdevelopment of China's Nuclear Doctrine*. Except from the importance of the book in the broader Neoclassical realist context it is important to note that he is one of the first scholars to have brought Neoclassical realism in Italy, and more precisely in the University of Trento. Until the time this work is being written, he and his colleagues represent the most established school of Neoclassical realism in Italy. Both his 2018 book and future works mainly, but not only, address Neoclassical realism in relation to military and security studies. In his book, Rosa seeks to understand the reasons behind China's relative underdevelopment in its nuclear doctrine in comparison to other nuclear-armed States such as the US and Russia. The author argues that Neoclassical realism is an appropriate framework to explain this phenomenon, as it allows for an examination of both domestic and international factors that have influenced China's nuclear decision-making.<sup>203</sup>

Furthermore, Rosa argues that military doctrines are shaped by both systemic and domestic factors, and Neoclassical realism provides a useful framework

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<sup>202</sup> Ibidem, pp. 42-50.

<sup>203</sup> Rosa P., *Neoclassical Realism and the Underdevelopment of China's Nuclear Doctrine*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

to analyse the interaction between these factors. Rosa emphasizes the importance of domestic variables such as bureaucratic politics, interest groups, and leadership beliefs in shaping military doctrines. He also highlights the role of international pressures, norms, and power relations in influencing military doctrines.

According to Rosa, a Neoclassical realist approach can help explain why some countries develop certain military doctrines while others do not, and how changes in the international system can affect the evolution of military doctrines over time. Rosa also notes that Neoclassical realism can provide a nuanced analysis of military doctrines that goes beyond the traditional balance of power or strategic culture approaches.

By taking into account both systemic and domestic factors, Neoclassical realism can shed light on the complex interactions between State behaviour and the broader international context.<sup>204</sup> Rosa argues that this Neoclassical realist approach can be applied to the case of China's nuclear doctrine. He suggests that China's nuclear doctrine has been shaped by a combination of factors, including its desire for security and status, its perception of the United States as a threat, and the influence of domestic actors such as the military. At the same time, China's nuclear doctrine has been influenced by external factors, such as changes in the international distribution of power and the development of new technologies.<sup>205</sup>

Rosa furthered his research along with his colleagues Benati, Foradori, and Longoni in 2020 analysing Italy's military behaviour in the 1946-2010

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<sup>204</sup> Ibidem, pp. 27-31.

<sup>205</sup> Ibidem, pp. 145-148.

timeframe through a Neoclassical realist lens.<sup>206</sup> The authors first provide an overview of Neoclassical realism and its application to the study of foreign policy. They then review Italy's military behaviour during the period under study, noting the significant changes in Italy's military capabilities, missions, and alliances.

The authors posit that Italy's domestic constraints such as the fragmented and polarised political system regarding international affairs, the policy-decision making process difficulties in coordination between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Defence have rendered difficult the task to set a foreign policy pursuing the interests of a middle-power. They further observe that while other European democracies with similar rank to Italy, such as France and the United Kingdom have had a more positive approach to the use of force when necessary to defend their national interest, Italy has always preferred peaceful options.

When Italy used the means of force it would do so only within a peacekeeping and multilateral setting.<sup>207</sup> The authors use a model to test Neoclassical realist theory in Italy's military posture and they assert that "military behaviour of Italy is a function of its relative power, the levels of elite instability and regime vulnerability, the extraction capacity of the State, and the degree of elite consensus regarding the perception of an external threat and the best way

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<sup>206</sup> Rosa P., Benati S., Foradori P., Longoni G. M., *Neoclassical realism and Italy's military behaviour, 1946–2010: a combined dyad/nation analysis*, Political Research Exchange, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2020.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

to tackle it".<sup>208</sup> Through this empirical and quantitative attempt, one of the first attempts of this kind, the results obtained resulted mostly positive.

Our results support the notion that a middle power such as Italy is responsive to increases or decreases in national strength, but the resulting military policy is highly dependent upon and constrained by domestic considerations that shape the type, direction and pace of the country's reaction to external stimuli. In particular, the analysis provides sound empirical evidence that Italy is more prone to intervene militarily when it experiences conditions of relative internal stability and elite consensus regarding the need to resort to military means.<sup>209</sup>

Many issues faced and techniques adopted in this article will be used in this work regarding foreign policy choices and restricted to eastern Mediterranean region in the domain of energy policy in order to test Neoclassical realist theory in the thematic at hand.

### *1.3: The main criticisms to Neoclassical realism.*

Many criticisms have been addressed towards Neoclassical realism, first among which its eclecticism, or in the worst part of the spectrum it being a neorealist heresy.

Sears argues that Neoclassical realism has made significant progress in the field of international relations theory, particularly in explaining how States translate their structural position into foreign policy actions through the role of domestic intervening variables. However, he also points out that the lack of theoretical precision and agreement within the Neoclassical realist community has led to some degenerative tendencies, such as the possibility

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<sup>208</sup> Ibidem, p. 6.

<sup>209</sup> Ibidem, p. 15.

of confusion with other theories, difficulties in empirical testing, and limitations in explaining change in foreign policy behaviour.

Sears further elaborates on the progressive promise of Neoclassical realism and the potential benefits it offers, such as its emphasis on the importance of domestic political processes in foreign policy decision-making and its ability to provide a more nuanced understanding of State behaviour that goes beyond structural theories. However, he cautions that the degenerative dangers of Neoclassical realism cannot be overlooked, such as the potential for conceptual stretching, the lack of consensus on key theoretical concepts, and the risk of oversimplification and reductionism in analysing complex foreign policy issues. Sears argues that Neoclassical realism has failed to provide a clear methodology for scholars to follow, resulting in a wide variation of approaches and definitions of key concepts. He also suggests that Neoclassical realism's focus on domestic variables at the expense of international factors leads to a limited explanatory power, and that it places too much emphasis on structure and domestic factors, neglecting the role of agency in shaping foreign policy decisions, as well as that many Neoclassical realist studies have not subjected their theories to rigorous empirical testing, relying instead on anecdotal evidence and case studies.<sup>210</sup>

Foulon's 2015 article notes that there are some challenges that need to be addressed in order to make the Neoclassical realist theory more robust. The author suggests that Neoclassical realism needs to provide a more detailed account of the linkages between domestic and international factors. While the

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<sup>210</sup> Sears N. A., *The neoclassical realist research program: Between progressive promise and degenerative dangers*, *International Politics Reviews*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2017.

theory acknowledges the importance of domestic factors, it often does not explain how they actually influence foreign policy decisions. The author argues that Neoclassical realism needs to provide a more nuanced understanding of State behaviour. Specifically, the theory needs to take into account the possibility of multiple State identities, which can influence foreign policy decisions in different ways. Finally, Foulon suggests that Neoclassical realism needs to provide a more precise account of the strategic interactions between States. The theory currently assumes that States are unitary actors, but this is not always the case. States can have multiple actors that influence foreign policy decisions, and these actors may not always agree on what course of action to take.<sup>211</sup>

Ripsman, Lobell, and Taliaferro discuss several criticisms made towards Neoclassical realism. One of the criticisms is that Neoclassical realism does not provide a clear explanation of how domestic factors and international system factors interact to shape foreign policy outcomes.

Additionally, some scholars argue that Neoclassical realism is not sufficiently distinct from other IR theories, such as liberal institutionalism and constructivism. Furthermore, Neoclassical realism has been criticized for its lack of clarity regarding the levels of analysis it focuses on, as well as its ability to account for the role of non-State actors in international relations. Other critics argue that Neoclassical realism does not adequately address issues related to identity and culture in foreign policy decision-making. Finally, some scholars contend that Neoclassical realism is too focused on

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<sup>211</sup> Foulon M., *Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities*, International Studies Review, Vol. 17, 2015, pp. 635-661.

explaining the foreign policies of great powers and cannot be applied to the foreign policies of weaker States.<sup>212</sup>

Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell argue that the eclecticism in Neoclassical realism is not a flaw, but rather a strength. They contend that Neoclassical realism is not a single theory, but a research program that uses different theoretical tools to answer different questions. They emphasize that Neoclassical realism is not just a collection of theories, but a framework for integrating various theoretical traditions. Moreover, they argue that Neoclassical realism is not eclectic for the sake of eclecticism, but because it seeks to provide a more complete and nuanced explanation of international politics by drawing on a range of theoretical insights.<sup>213</sup> In response to the criticism of not being realist “enough”, Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell argue that Neoclassical realism shares many assumptions with traditional realism, such as the centrality of power, the anarchical nature of the international system, and the importance of the distribution of capabilities. However, they also argue that Neoclassical realism differs from traditional realism in its focus on the intervening variables that link the domestic and international levels of analysis. They maintain that Neoclassical realism is not only consistent with realist assumptions, but also offers a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of international politics.<sup>214</sup> The same authors have also answered to the criticism that Neoclassical realism addresses only great powers and not smaller ones by noting that small States face the same challenges as great powers, such as managing security threats, seeking

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<sup>212</sup> Ripsman, Lobell, and Taliaferro, 2016, pp. 162 – 174.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 177.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179.



opportunities to enhance their security, and coping with economic interdependence. Small States may also face additional challenges due to their vulnerability and limited resources. Therefore, Neoclassical realism can provide insights into the foreign policies of small States, especially those with important security concerns, strategic locations, or significant economic ties.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 182.

*Chapter 2: The Eastern Mediterranean region, a geopolitical analysis of the independent variable.*

*2.1: Geopolitical analysis of the actors of the region.*

In this chapter the objective is to provide a grounded analysis of the main actors, the States, of the Eastern Mediterranean. The only actor that will be ignored is Italy as it shall be the centre of our analysis in the next chapter and since the dependent variable, according to Neoclassical realism, is Italy's foreign policy in the area. Each country shall be scrutinised on its main geopolitical aspects, its population, economic data, trade data, political stability, geopolitical and diplomatic disputes, and most importantly its energy resources policies, particularly on natural gas.

The Eastern Mediterranean is mainly divided geologically in two basins: the Ionian basin, comprising Italy, Albania, and Greece, and the Levant basin, comprising Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Cyprus, and Libya.<sup>216</sup> The focus will be mainly set on the Levant basin. The economic, demographic, and other data used are of 2020, or 2021. If there's any updated data it shall be duly signalled when referenced

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<sup>216</sup> Lacoste Y., *Géopolitique de la Méditerranée*, Armand Colin, 2006, pp 19-23.

### *2.1.1: Republic of Turkey.*

Turkey is a key country at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, with a rich history and a complex geopolitical landscape. It is bordered by eight countries and has coastlines along the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Seas, giving it strategic access to important sea routes. Turkey is a member of NATO and has historically played a significant role in regional and global politics. It has a diverse population, with a mix of ethnicities and religions, and its political landscape has been shaped by various domestic and international factors. Turkey has faced various geopolitical challenges, including domestic political tensions, security threats from terrorist groups, and regional conflicts such as the Syrian conflict. Its relations with neighbouring countries, including Greece and Cyprus, have been characterized by disputes over maritime borders and energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey has also been involved in regional conflicts, such as its military interventions in Syria, after the 2011 outbreak of the Syrian civil war, and its engagement in the ongoing conflict in Libya. Additionally, Turkey has pursued an active foreign policy, seeking to assert its influence in the region and maintain its interests in areas such as the Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Middle East.

As of 31 December 2020, the population residing in Turkey increased by 459,365 people compared to the previous year and reached 83 million 614 thousand 362 people. The median age in Turkey, which was 32.4 in 2019, increased to 32.7 in 2020.<sup>217</sup> As of 2021, Turkey's GDP accounts for 819

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<sup>217</sup> TurkStat, 04/02/2021. <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Foreign-Trade-Statistics-2020-37210>

billion dollars, its GDP per capita amounts to 9,661 dollars.<sup>218</sup> As of 2020, Turkey's trade balance had a deficit of around 50 billion dollars.<sup>219</sup>

Turkey has diverse energy resources, including fossil fuels, renewable energy, and hydropower. Turkey has significant coal reserves, primarily located in the Zonguldak Basin in the northwest. Coal accounts for a significant portion of Turkey's electricity generation, but the share has been declining in recent years due to increased use of natural gas and renewables. Turkey is highly dependent on natural gas for its energy needs, with the majority of its natural gas imports coming from Russia and Iran. Natural gas is used for electricity generation, industrial processes, and heating. Turkey has high solar irradiation levels, making it suitable for solar energy production. The country has been investing in solar power projects, and the capacity has been steadily increasing in recent years. Turkey has a substantial hydropower potential, with many rivers and streams suitable for hydropower generation. Hydropower accounts for a significant share of Turkey's electricity production, and the country has been investing in expanding its hydropower capacity.<sup>220</sup> As of 2022, coal is the dominant source of electricity generation in Turkey, accounting for approximately 34,6% of the total electricity generated. Natural gas is also a significant source of electricity generation in Turkey, contributing to around 22,2% of the total electricity generated. Renewable energy sources, including mainly hydropower, wind,

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<sup>218</sup> World Bank Open Data, GDP per capita (current US\$), Turkiye, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=TR>

<sup>219</sup> World Integrated Trade Solution, Turkey Trade Summary 2020 Data. <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/LTST/Summary>

<sup>220</sup> International Energy Agency, Country profile, Turkey, 2021. <https://www.iea.org/countries/turkiye>

geothermal, and solar, contribute to approximately 39,4% of Turkey's electricity generation.<sup>221</sup>

Regarding political stability, Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) have dominated Turkish politics since 2002. They replaced Turkey's parliamentary system with an executive presidential system in 2018 and won presidential and parliamentary elections with support from the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP). The presidential system has concentrated power in Erdogan's hands, allowing him to govern with few checks and balances and suppress political opposition. The AKP's initial economic stability and Erdogan's personal appeal and conservative outlook contributed to their electoral successes. However, the AKP's popularity has declined in recent years due to economic challenges, including currency devaluation, inflation, and a weak labour market. Despite declining popularity, Erdogan is expected to maintain dominance in Turkish politics through authoritarianism, control of State resources and bureaucracy, media control, and support from conservative voters.<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, it must be noted the shift of his policies towards a more autocratic model after the attempted coup d'état of 2016.<sup>223224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources Info Bank. <https://enerji.gov.tr/infobank-energy-electricity>

<sup>222</sup> Economist Intelligence, EIU, Country Profile: Turkey. <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=582118241&Country=Turkey&topic=Summary&subtopic=Political+forces+at+a+glance&subsubtopic=Political+stability>

<sup>223</sup> Perchoc P., *Turkey since the failed July 2016 coup*, European Parliament Briefing, EPRS - European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2016. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/589776/EPRS\\_BRI\(2016\)589776\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/589776/EPRS_BRI(2016)589776_EN.pdf)

<sup>224</sup> Auge B., *The 2016 Failed Coup in Turkey: What Is the Impact on Turkish-African Relations?*, Notes de l'Ifri, Institut Français des relations internationales, June 2016.

On the side of its geopolitical and diplomatic issues they are many and complex. Especially after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine after Russia's invasion on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Turkey's role has acquired a still more complicated place. The maritime disputes between Greece and Turkey have a long history, dating back to the founding periods of the two States. These disputes have traditionally been frozen conflicts with occasional flare-ups. However, the current dispute between the two countries is the longest-lasting crisis since Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus in 1974.

The dispute revolves around three main issues: 1) disagreement over the boundaries of Greek territorial waters and the ownership of certain islands or isles in the Aegean Sea; 2) the question of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the eastern Mediterranean; and 3) the unresolved nature of the Cyprus crisis.

Turkey also contends that other issues, such as the sovereignty or demilitarized status of certain Greek islands, remain unresolved and need to be addressed. Greece, on the other hand, rejects these demands outright as a violation of its sovereignty.

The discovery of natural gas in the disputed seas between Cyprus and the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of North Cyprus in the 2010s has further exacerbated the already tense relations between Turkey and its neighbours. The eastern Mediterranean crisis is not primarily about energy, as no gas has been found in the disputed territories. The roots of the crisis lie in conflicting claims by Turkey and Greece regarding maritime boundaries, exclusive

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<https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/2016-failed-coup-turkey-what-impact-turkish-african-relations>

economic zones (EEZs), and the unresolved Cyprus crisis. Turkey and Greece have different views on the role and extent of islands in generating EEZs, with Turkey taking a more restrictive view and Greece a more expansive one. Turkey also objects to the Greek Cypriots being the sole conductor of energy exploration activities in the eastern Mediterranean, insisting on political equality between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

These maritime disputes are tied to conflicting projections of national sovereignty and have turned into geopolitical confrontations involving other countries such as Cyprus, Egypt, France, and the UAE, due to tensions over energy exploration and the Libyan conflict.<sup>225 226</sup>

Another very important factor in Turkey's posture in the Eastern Mediterranean is its *Mavi Vatan*, the blue fatherland, policy. This policy was introduced by Turkey in the mid-2000s as a maritime doctrine aimed at safeguarding its interests and asserting its rights in the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. The policy has been promoted by Turkish officials, including President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and has been a central component of Turkey's foreign policy strategy in the region. Through such policy Turkey asserts its sovereign rights and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, including its claims over maritime boundaries, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), and continental shelf, as well as its historical and legal rights in these regions. It also seeks to safeguard its national interests, including access to hydrocarbon resources, protection of its maritime trade

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<sup>225</sup> Dalay G., *Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way Out of the Current Deadlock*, Brookings policy briefing, January 2021.

<sup>226</sup> Guzzini S., *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe? Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises*, Cambridge University Press 2012, pp.151-156.

routes, and preservation of its security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea and advocates for the equitable sharing of hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly with regard to the disputed island of Cyprus, and insists on the inclusion of Turkish Cypriots in decision-making processes related to energy exploration and exploitation. In order to obtain such results Turkey aims to enhance its naval capabilities, including the modernization of its naval forces, acquisition of new naval assets, and deployment of naval assets in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, to protect its maritime interests.<sup>227228229230</sup>

### 2.1.2: Syrian Arab Republic.

Syria is a country located in Western Asia, bordering Lebanon to the west, the Mediterranean Sea to the west and northwest, Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, and Israel to the southwest. Syria has a land area of approximately 185,180 square kilometres, making it the 89<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world.<sup>231</sup> As of 2021, Syria has an estimated population of 18.9

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<sup>227</sup> DenizEAU A., *Mavi Vatan, the "Blue Homeland": the Origins, Influences and Limits of an Ambitious Doctrine for Turkey*, Etudes de l'Ifri, Institut Français des relations internationales, April 2021.

<sup>228</sup> Gafarli T., *Against All Odds: Turkey's Position in the Eastern Mediterranean*, TRT World Research Centre, 2019.

<sup>229</sup> Demiryol T., *Between security and prosperity: Turkey and the prospect of energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Turkish Studies, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2018, pp. 442-464.

<sup>230</sup> Rubin A., Eiran E., *Regional maritime security in the Eastern Mediterranean: expectations and reality*, International Affairs Vol. 95, No.5, 2019, pp. 979–997.

<sup>231</sup> CIA World Factbook, country profile: Syria. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/>



million people, with the capital city of Damascus being the most populous city.

The majority of Syrians are Sunni Muslims, while other religious groups include Shia Muslims, Alawites, Christians, and Druze. The Syrian Arab Army is the main branch of the military, with support from the Russian military since the beginning of the civil war.

Syria has faced significant international isolation due to the civil war, with numerous countries imposing sanctions and limiting diplomatic relations. Russia, Iran, and China have remained key allies, while the US, EU, and several Arab countries have been critical of the Syrian government. Furthermore, the ongoing civil war has resulted in a significant refugee crisis, with an estimated 5.5 million Syrians fleeing the country since 2011, and another 6.7 million people internally displaced within Syria. The majority of refugees have sought asylum in neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.<sup>232</sup>

As of today the country remains in a State of civil war, with the government of President Bashar al-Assad continuing to fight against various rebel groups. The conflict has caused massive economic and humanitarian damage, with millions of people displaced from their homes and a large portion of the population relying on aid for basic needs.

The economy has suffered greatly because of the ongoing conflict, with GDP declining sharply since the start of the war. The value of the Syrian pound has also plummeted, causing inflation to soar and making it difficult for people

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<sup>232</sup> Laub Z., *Syria's Civil War: The Descent Into Horror*, Council on Foreign Relations, 14/02/2023. <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>

to afford basic necessities. Despite the challenges, the government has managed to maintain some degree of control over the economy, with State-owned enterprises still playing a major role in many sectors.

In terms of international trade, the Syrian government has faced sanctions and other restrictions due to its human rights record and alleged support for terrorist groups. This has made it difficult for the country to export its goods and attract foreign investment. However, the government has continued to seek out new economic partners, particularly in the Middle East and Asia, in an attempt to diversify its trade relationships and reduce its reliance on the West.<sup>233</sup>

According to the World Bank, Syria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020 was estimated to be 11.08 billion US dollars, while the GDP per capita was approximately 533.4 US dollars in 2020, down from 11,304 US dollars in 2010 before the Syrian conflict began.<sup>234</sup> Syria's trade balance has been significantly affected by the ongoing conflict. Prior to the war, Syria was a net exporter of goods, particularly crude oil. However, the country's exports have declined significantly since the war began in 2011, due to damage to infrastructure and disruptions to production and transportation networks. In 2021, Syria's exports were valued at 739 million US dollars, while its imports were valued at 6.463 billion US dollars, resulting in a trade deficit of 5.388 billion USD.<sup>235</sup> The Syrian economy has been in a State of crisis due to the

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<sup>233</sup> Economist Intelligence, EIU, country profile: Syria. <http://country.eiu.com/syria>

<sup>234</sup> World Bank GDP per capita Syrian Arab Republic, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2020&locations=SY&start=1960&view=chart>

<sup>235</sup> UNCTAD Stat, Country profile: Syrian Arab Republic, 2021. <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/countryprofile/generalprofile/en-gb/760/index.html>

ongoing conflict, which has resulted in widespread damage to infrastructure, decreased agricultural productivity, and loss of human capital.

Furthermore, the imposition of international sanctions has further weakened the economy by restricting access to foreign markets and financing. The country has also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as by the ongoing war in Ukraine, with a sharp increase in the cost of living and decreased economic activity.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), Syria's energy mix is heavily reliant on oil and natural gas. In 2020, oil and natural gas made up 94% of the country's total primary energy supply, while hydroelectricity accounted for 6%. Syria's electricity mix is heavily dependent on natural gas and oil, which account for more than 90% of the country's electricity generation.<sup>236</sup> The natural gas resources of the country are all in the mainland and there has been no search for natural gas within its maritime borders. As consequence of the civil war and of Russian intervention the natural gas fields are subject to a struggle between Russia, that acquired rights for the exploitation of some fields by national companies, and Syria for their overall exploitation.<sup>237</sup> In 2021 Syria produced 3.32 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas and consumed 0.56 bcm.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> IEA Country profile: Syrian Arab Republic. <https://www.iea.org/countries/syria>

<sup>237</sup> Beerli T., *Syria: Russia-Syria Power Struggle Over the Natural Gas, Oil Fields and Infrastructure*, Alma's Blog, Articles, Alma Research and Education Center, June 28, 2022. <https://israel-alma.org/2022/06/28/syria-russia-syria-power-struggle-over-the-natural-gas-oil-fields-and-infrastructure/>

<sup>238</sup> IEA Country profile: Syrian Arab Republic <https://www.iea.org/countries/syria>

### *2.1.3: Republic of Lebanon.*

Lebanon is a country located in the Middle East, bordered by Syria to the north and east, Israel to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west.

Lebanon is a parliamentary democratic republic with a consociationalist political system, which means that the country's political power is divided among its various sectarian groups.

The population of Lebanon is estimated to be around 6.8 million people. The country has a complex ethnic and religious makeup, with the majority of the population being Arab and the largest religious groups being Muslim and Christian. The Shiite Muslim group Hezbollah is one of the most powerful political and military forces in Lebanon. Hezbollah's armed wing is considered a terrorist organization by the United States, Israel, and several other countries.

Lebanon has been heavily affected by the ongoing Syrian civil war, which has resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees into Lebanon. The conflict has also had an impact on Lebanon's economy and security situation.

Lebanon has been the site of numerous conflicts and tensions throughout its history, including a civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990. The country has also been caught in the middle of regional tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran and has been the site of proxy conflicts between these two countries.<sup>239</sup>

Lebanon's political and economic situation remains challenging.

The country is grappling with a dire economic crisis, which has been

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<sup>239</sup> CIA World Factbook, Country profile: Lebanon. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/lebanon/>

exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the devastating explosion at the Port of Beirut in August 2020. The government is seeking a bailout from the International Monetary Fund, but progress has been slow.

Meanwhile, the country is also dealing with significant political instability, which has been driven by widespread protests over corruption and the failure of the ruling class to address the country's many problems.

The government has also struggled to manage the Covid-19 pandemic effectively, with the country recording high numbers of cases and deaths.<sup>240</sup>

The country's GDP in 2021 amount to 23.13 billion USD, with a severe drop from 2018's 54.9 billion USD.<sup>241</sup> The country's trade balance, as of 2021, is in a deficit by 9.267 million USD. Oil represents by far the greatest natural resource used by the country, and this can be replicated in its electricity mix production.<sup>242</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to note that the maritime border with Israel was disputed<sup>243</sup> until a recent deal was struck between the two parties, and one of the causes for such dispute was the presence of the Karish natural gas offshore field that Israel claimed as wholly his while Lebanon claimed part of it.<sup>244</sup> It's maritime borders with Cyprus have been settled with a treaty of 2007, but it

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<sup>240</sup> Economist Intelligence, EIU, Country profile: Lebanon. <http://country.eiu.com/Lebanon>

<sup>241</sup> World Bank Open data, GDP per capita, Lebanon, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=LB>

<sup>242</sup> IEA Country profile: Lebanon. <https://www.iea.org/countries/lebanon>

<sup>243</sup> *Time to Resolve the Lebanon-Israel Maritime Border Dispute*, International Crisis Group Alert, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/east-mediterranean-mena/lebanon/time-resolve-lebanon-israel-maritime-border-dispute>

<sup>244</sup> Hussain H. R., *Lebanon's Maritime Deal with Israel*, Sada, Carnegie Edowment for International Peace, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/88292>

has not yet been ratified by Lebanon<sup>245</sup>, while in regards to the border with Syria neither the land, nor the maritime borders have been settled yet.<sup>246</sup>

#### 2.1.4: State of Israel.

Israel's geopolitical situation is complex and dynamic, shaped by its location in the Middle East and its ongoing conflict with the Palestinians. Israel is a small country with a population of around 9 million people, situated on the eastern Mediterranean coast, bordered by Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan to the east, and Egypt to the southwest.

Israel's relations with its neighbours have been fraught with tension, conflict, and occasional cooperation throughout its history. Israel has fought several wars with its Arab neighbours, including the 1948 Arab Israeli War, the 1967 Six-Day War, and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Israel has also been involved in numerous low-level conflicts and clashes, both with State actors and non-State actors, including Palestinian militant groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The Palestinian issue remains a central challenge for Israel's foreign policy and international relations.

Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) has been a source of international criticism and condemnation, with many countries and organizations viewing it as a violation of international

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<sup>245</sup> Cypriot envoy says any maritime border dispute with Lebanon 'easily' resolved, Reuters, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/cypriot-envoy-says-any-maritime-border-dispute-with-lebanon-easily-resolved-2022-10-28/>

<sup>246</sup> El Hussein R., Iskandarani A., *After Israel, Lebanon eyes maritime border talks with Syria*, Al-Monitor, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/11/after-israel-lebanon-eyes-maritime-border-talks-syria>

law and the Palestinians' human rights. Israel has also faced criticism for its construction of settlements in the West Bank, which many view as a barrier to a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite these challenges, Israel has also developed close strategic relationships with several countries, particularly the United States. Israel is also a member of several international organizations, including the United Nations, and has cultivated diplomatic ties with a number of countries, including those in Europe and the Middle East.

Israel's economy is considered advanced and diversified, and it has become a leading player in several industries, including technology, pharmaceuticals, and defence.

Benjamin Netanyahu has won the last parliamentary elections in November 2022 and took once more office as Prime minister of Israel. Coalition friction, with some ultra-conservatist elements of the Israeli political spectrum, as well as political instability that has denoted the last years of Israeli politics are persistent features of it.<sup>247</sup>

Israel's GDP is one of the largest of the region amounting to 488.53 billion USD in 2021 and having steadily raised in the last few years.<sup>248</sup> Israel's trade balance is in deficit of 31.996 million USD.<sup>249</sup> In 2020, oil was the primary energy resource in Israel's energy mix (34%), followed by natural gas (29,4%) and coal (13%), with the rest being represented by renewables. Its

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<sup>247</sup> CIA World Factbook, Country profile: Israel. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/>

<sup>248</sup> World Bank Open Data, GDP, Israel, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=IL>

<sup>249</sup> UNCTAD Stat, Country profile: Israel. <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/countryprofile/GeneralProfile/en-GB/376/index.html>

electricity mix though, presents 75% of it being produced thanks to natural gas, 23% with coal, and the remaining part with renewables.<sup>250</sup>

As we mentioned in the case of Lebanon, the two countries have reached a historic deal to resolve their maritime border dispute also regarding natural gas offshore fields. In 2010 Israel and Cyprus signed deal on their maritime border definition delimiting their respective Exclusive economic zones (EEZ), who according to the UNCLOS treaty allows each State to exploit mineral resources within its EEZ. The Egyptian-Israeli maritime border, though no treaty has been signed, respects the principle of the median line. Israeli natural gas fields are all offshore and have been recently discovered thus pushing Israeli attention towards the consumption of natural gas instead of oil in its electricity and energy mixes.

The first offshore gas field to be discovered was Tamar field in 2009 with a potential extraction of 282 bcm of natural gas, and Dalit field (8 bcm) while the gargantuan Leviathan field was discovered in 2010 with an approximate extraction capacity of 500 bcm. All these fields have been discovered by the United States company Noble Energy.<sup>251</sup> As of now, most of Israel gas production is directed towards the internal market, but there are already plans for exportation.

The El Arish-Ashkelon gas pipeline connects Israel to Egypt, and it has been used mainly to supply Israel with Egyptian gas in the past. Nowadays the trend has reversed so it is Israel that slowly exports its gas to Egypt, both for

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<sup>250</sup> IEA Country profile: Israel. <https://www.iea.org/countries/israel>

<sup>251</sup> Ratner M., *Natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean*, CRS Report, USA Congressional Research Service, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R44591.pdf>



the Egyptian market, but also to allow it to be exported abroad through the Egyptian Idku and Damietta Liquified natural gas (LNG) plants.<sup>252</sup>

Israeli potential of natural gas exportation is high and thus there are a series of projects to export it other than through Idku and Damietta in Egypt. Two of the alternative solutions that have been envisaged are a pipeline connecting Israel to Turkey and thus carry on the natural gas flow towards Europe through the already existing TANAP pipeline in Turkey. This project has been halted in the last decade especially after 2010 Mavi Marmara incident that caused a rift in diplomatic relations between the two countries that with ups and downs goes on until today.<sup>253</sup> Nevertheless, in very recent times, it seems that the relationship between the two countries are starting to soften, but the pipeline project seems to be far from politically viable, although on the economic side of the equation it could be the most viable solution.

The other project, that shall be duly analysed in a paragraph dedicated to it, is the East Med pipeline. Such pipeline would gather natural gas from Israeli, Cypriot, and potentially Egyptian, gas fields and it would redirect the flow towards Europe passing through the Greek island of Crete, thus mainland Greece itself, and finally it would cross the Ionian Sea reaching Italian shores.<sup>254</sup> This project is alternative to the Turkish pipeline and until today it is the most viable on the political level since Greece, Israel, and Cyprus have reached multiple agreements on the issue. The main problem with the East

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<sup>252</sup> Tsakiris T., *The Importance of East Mediterranean Gas for EU Energy Security: The Role of Cyprus, Israel and Egypt*, The Cyprus Review, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2018.

<sup>253</sup> Efron S., *The future of Israeli-Turkish Relations*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California, 2018.

<sup>254</sup> Ruble I., *European Union energy supply security: The benefits of natural gas imports from the Eastern Mediterranean*, Energy Policy, Volume 105, 2017, pp.341- 353.

Med pipeline is twofold. On the one hand there are a series of technical issues regarding the construction itself of the offshore pipeline, but these are in no way insurmountable. The main issue is of diplomatic nature, the exclusion of Turkey from the project and all the maritime border issues that this raises. All these issues will be appropriately analysed in the section dedicated to the East Med project.

#### *2.1.5: Arab Republic of Egypt.*

Egypt is a regional power in the Middle East with a long history and cultural significance. Its strategic location at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe has given it a key role in regional and global politics. Egypt has faced significant challenges in recent years, including political instability, economic challenges, and security threats from terrorism and border issues. However, the country has made progress in improving its stability and economic growth under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's leadership. Egypt plays an important role in the Middle East's regional security architecture and has been a key mediator in the Israel-Palestine peace process. Egypt is also an important player in the Arab League, the African Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

In terms of foreign policy, Egypt has balanced its relationships with the United States, Russia, and China. However, it has been moving closer to Russia, particularly in military and economic cooperation, as part of its efforts to diversify its strategic partnerships. Egypt has also been strengthening ties with other regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to

counterbalance against Turkey and Iran's influence in the region.<sup>255</sup>

The competition with Turkey is particularly important since the previous government under Mohamed Morsi<sup>256</sup>, expression of the Muslim brothers, was in good relations with Erdogan's Turkey until the 2013 coup d'état by the Egyptian army led by General el-Sisi.

Furthermore, Egypt has an ongoing diplomatic dispute with Ethiopia regarding the project of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.<sup>257</sup>

Egypt's economy has been growing in recent years, although it still faces significant challenges, such as high unemployment, inflation, and income inequality. The country's economic reform program, including currency devaluation and subsidy cuts, has helped stabilize the economy and attract foreign investment.<sup>258</sup> The Egyptian economy is expected to recover gradually, with real GDP growth forecast to accelerate to 5.2% in fiscal year 2022/23 (July-June) from an estimated 3.5% in 2020/21. The tourism sector, a major source of foreign exchange, is expected to rebound gradually in 2021, but not to pre-pandemic levels.

Political stability will be probably bolstered by the next presidential election, which is due in 2024. The government will likely retain a tight grip on power and suppress dissent, but the risk of mass protests remains. In the meantime,

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<sup>255</sup> Tanchum M., *How Did the Eastern Mediterranean Become the Eye of a Geopolitical Storm?* Explainer, Helleniscope, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>256</sup> Agrama H. A., *Reflections on secularism, democracy, and politics in Egypt*, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 26-31.

<sup>257</sup> Nasr H., Neef A., *Ethiopia's Challenge to Egyptian Hegemony in the Nile River Basin: The Case of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam*, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2016, pp. 969-989.

<sup>258</sup> Bassou A., *The geopolitics of Egypt: Strengths, Opportunities, Constraints and Vulnerabilities*, Policy Brief PB-16/20, OCP Policy Center, June 2016.

economic reform is likely to remain slow, with subsidies still weighing heavily on the budget and foreign direct investment constrained by bureaucratic hurdles and security concerns. The country will continue to have a central role in regional diplomacy and conflict resolution, especially in relation to Libya and the Gulf States.<sup>259</sup> Egypt's GDP in 2021 amounts to 404 million USD<sup>260</sup>, while its trade balance is in deficit of around 40 million USD.<sup>261</sup>

As of 2020, Natural gas (59%) represents the main energy resource in Egypt's energy mix, followed by oil (34%), biofuels and waste (4%), and coal (3%). Data is still more clear when it comes to the electricity generation mix. Natural represents 84% of Egypt's electricity production, followed by clean energy (12%), and oil (4%).<sup>262</sup>

As noted before, Egypt's maritime border with Israel is currently settled by the use of the median line method, and the same can be said for the Egyptian-Libyan maritime border. A 2003 agreement between Egypt and Cyprus has demarcated their respective EEZs, and a similar agreement has settled the delimitation of the Greek and Egyptian EEZs in 2020<sup>263</sup> after, and as a reaction to, the 2019 maritime EEZ delimitation agreement between Turkey

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<sup>259</sup> Economist Intelligence, EIU, Country profile: Egypt. <http://country.eiu.com/egypt>

<sup>260</sup> World Bank Open Data, GDP Egypt, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=EG>

<sup>261</sup> UNCTAD Stat, Country profile: Egypt. <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/countryprofile/GeneralProfile/en-GB/818/index.html>

<sup>262</sup> IEAS Country profile: Egypt. <https://www.iea.org/countries/egypt>

<sup>263</sup> Yiallourides C., *Part I: Some Observations on the Agreement between Greece and Egypt on the Delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone*, EJIL: Talk!, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

and the internationally recognized government of Libya.<sup>264</sup>

Since it has been observed how much Egypt is dependent on natural gas we now proceed with the overview of natural gas fields Egypt has on and off shore. Zohr is the largest offshore natural gas field in the Mediterranean and was discovered by Italian energy company Eni in 2015. The field has estimated reserves of around 850 bcm of gas and is located off the coast of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Extraction from Zohr field began in 2017 and has helped Egypt become self-sufficient in gas production after a long period of becoming a net gas importer after having been previously and traditionally a net gas exporter.

Nooros is a natural gas field located in the Nile Delta Basin and was discovered by Italian company Eni in 2015. The field has estimated reserves of around 85 bcm of gas and has been in production since 2016. It is one of the largest gas fields in Egypt.

The West Delta Deep Marine (WDDM) is a series of gas fields located in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Egypt. The fields were discovered in the 1990s and have estimated reserves of around 453 bcm of gas. The WDDM project is operated by BP and has been in production since 2003.<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, Egypt is the only actor in the area to be able to provide an export alternative to natural gas in its liquified form, LNG, thanks to two LNG terminals that liquify the gas and load it on natural gas tankers hence being

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<sup>264</sup> Proedrou F., *A geopolitical account of the Eastern Mediterranean conundrum, sovereignty, balance of power and energy security considerations*, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, Volume 0, Issue ahead of print, 2021.

<sup>265</sup> Abbas N S., Assfour H. M., Abdel wahhab M.Z., Ashour E.A., *About the Egyptian natural gas; an overview, history and prospects*, Journal of Advanced Engineering Trends, Vol. 39, Issue 2, July 2020, pp. 109-117.

able to ship it around the world.

The Idku and Damietta plants have the capacity to export respectively 10 bcm/year, and 6.8 bcm/year.<sup>266</sup> Idku has two terminals, and its respective shareholders are the British Shell (35,5% and 38%), the Malaysian Petronas (35,5% and 35,5%), the Egyptian EGPC (12% and 12%), and French Total (12% and 12%). Damietta's single terminal's shareholders are Italian ENI (50%), Egyptian EGAS (40%) and Egyptian EGPC (10%).<sup>267</sup> There have already been some early agreements on the transportation of natural gas from offshore fields towards Idku and Damietta in order to export it in its liquified form.

#### *2.1.6: Republic of Cyprus.*

Cyprus is a small island country located in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, with a population of around 1.2 million people. It has been a divided island since 1974, when Turkey occupied the northern part of the island following a Greek-backed coup. The division has had a profound impact on the country's politics, society, and economy. Cyprus is strategically located at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia, making it an important geopolitical player in the region.

Cyprus has traditionally maintained close ties with Greece, since the two countries share cultural, historical, and linguistic ties. This has led to close

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<sup>266</sup> Butter D., *Egypt's Energy Ambitions and its Eastern Mediterranean Policy*, in *Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021, pp.69-79.

<sup>267</sup> Gamal M., Attia M., *Developing Gas Trading Hub in Eastern Mediterranean Region: Requirements, Challenges and Changes*, in *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University*, Volume 82, Issue 5, 2022.

cooperation on regional issues, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean. The ongoing Cyprus dispute between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities remains a significant challenge for the country's stability and territorial integrity. Efforts to resolve the issue through UN-led negotiations have so far been unsuccessful.

Energy resources in the form of offshore natural gas reserves have become an important part of Cyprus's geopolitical landscape, particularly since the discovery of the Aphrodite gas field in 2011. These reserves have heightened tensions with Turkey, which does not recognize the Cypriot government's authority to explore and develop the resources.<sup>268</sup> Cyprus' GDP amounted to 28.41 billion USD in 2021<sup>269</sup> while its trade balance is in deficit of 6.4 billion USD.<sup>270</sup> Cyprus' energy mix is composed by 86% of oil, while the rest is shared between biofuels and waste (6.7%), renewables (5.6%), and coal (0.7%). Oil represents 87.7% of the energy mix used to produce electricity, while the rest comprises renewables.<sup>271</sup>

The maritime borders of Cyprus with Egypt, and Israel are settled either with a ratified treaty or a signed one, the border with Lebanon is still unsettled but it should be subject to negotiations between the parties on Lebanon's initiative after the successful deal with Israel. The maritime border with Syria is settled along the median line, and the border with Greece too, although the

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<sup>268</sup> CIA World Factbook, Country profile: Cyprus. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cyprus/>

<sup>269</sup> World Bank Open Data, GDP, Cyprus, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CY>

<sup>270</sup> UNCTDAD Stat, Country profile: Cyprus. <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/countryprofile/GeneralProfile/en-GB/196/index.html>

<sup>271</sup> IEA Country profile: Cyprus. <https://www.iea.org/countries/cyprus>

latter has been contested by Turkey. As it shall be examined when Greece's maritime borders will be the subject of attention, Turkey does not recognize the extent of Greece's EEZ and thus it does not recognize it reaching Cyprus' or Egypt's EEZs. The most problematic issue for Cyprus, with regard to maritime borders, it's the one with Turkey and with the self-proclaimed, and recognized only by Turkey, Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC).<sup>272</sup>

Turkey has claimed that also NRTC should be allowed to have drilling rights in its EEZ. Of course, such EEZ is not recognized by any other State thus there have been cases in which Turkish vessels have hindered other vessels from carrying out their legitimate right of drilling or exploration activities in those maritime blocks that the Cypriot allowed them to carry on such activities.<sup>273</sup>

In 2018, for example, a drill ship of Italy's SNAM company was heading towards the maritime block in Cypriot EEZ for which it had acquired a regular licence for such activities by the Cypriot government. The ship, though, was stopped midway by Turkish military vessels, and thus it had to withdraw, never to return, after some days of tension.<sup>274</sup> The bone of contention regarding the EEZs in this case, as in others in the region, is the presence of

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<sup>272</sup> *Maritime boundaries between Turkey and Cyprus*, World Maritime Boundaries Atlas, IILSS-International institute for Law of the Sea Studies, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

<sup>273</sup> Dalay G., *Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a way out of the current deadlock*, Policy Briefing, Brookings Doha Center, January 2021.

<sup>274</sup> Grigoriadis I., *The Eastern Mediterranean as an Emerging Crisis Zone: Greece and Cyprus in a Volatile Regional Environment*, in Tanchum M., *Eastern Mediterranean in uncharted waters, Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2020.



potentially large natural gas fields.<sup>275</sup>

The Aphrodite natural gas field, discovered near the border with Israel, in 2011 by US company Noble Energy, has been appraised to have a potential 129 bcm of natural gas reserve.<sup>276</sup> Since then Italian ENI has discovered Cronos (approximately 70 bcm)<sup>277</sup>, Calypso, and Zeus (approximately 56 bcm)<sup>278</sup> natural gas fields in a single block and the explorations are still ongoing.

#### *2.1.7: Hellenic Republic.*

Greece is a country located in south-eastern Europe, with a population of around 11 million people. It is bordered by Albania, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria to the north, Turkey to the east, and the Aegean Sea and the Ionian Sea to the west and south. Greece is known for its ancient history, its role in the development of democracy, and its significant contributions to Western civilization.

Geopolitically, Greece is a member of the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations. Its relationship with Turkey has been a significant source of tension in the region, particularly over issues related to maritime borders,

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<sup>275</sup> Yorucu V., Mehmet O., *Cyprus: Hydrocarbons in a Divided Island*, in *Small Islands in Maritime Disputes: Greek Turkish Energy Geo-politics*, Springer Cham, 2022.

<sup>276</sup> NewMedEnergy, Aphrodite gas field profile.

<https://newmedenergy.com/operations/aphrodite/>

<sup>277</sup> *Eni makes a significant gas discovery offshore Cyprus*, ENI Press Release, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. <https://www.eni.com/en-IT/media/press-release/2022/08/eni-makes-significant-gas-discovery-offshore-cyprus.html>

<sup>278</sup> *Eni makes another gas discovery offshore Cyprus*, ENI Press release, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022. <https://www.eni.com/en-IT/media/press-release/2022/12/offshore-cyprus.html>

territorial disputes, and the rights of ethnic minorities. The two countries have been involved in a number of disputes, including over the divided island of Cyprus, the delimitation of maritime borders in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, and the treatment of ethnic Greeks living in Turkey and ethnic Turks living in Greece.<sup>279</sup>

Greece's relationship with its European neighbours has also been complicated, particularly in the wake of the European debt crisis. The country received significant bailout loans from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund in the wake of the crisis, which led to widespread protests and political unrest. The country has since implemented a number of economic reforms, but it continues to face significant economic challenges, including high unemployment and public debt. In recent years, Greece has been working to develop its energy resources, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The country has signed agreements with neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus to explore and develop offshore gas and oil reserves, with the aim of becoming an energy hub in the region.<sup>280</sup> Greece's GDP amounts to 214 billion USD<sup>281</sup>, while its trade balance is in a deficit of 28 billion USD.<sup>282</sup> Greece's energy mix is more complex than the other countries analysed until now and it's composed by oil (47.2%), natural gas

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<sup>279</sup> CIA World Factbook, country profile: Greece. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/greece/>

<sup>280</sup> Economist Intelligence, EIU, Country profile: Greece. <http://country.eiu.com/greece>

<sup>281</sup> World bank Open Data, GDP, Greece, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=GR>

<sup>282</sup> UNCTDAD Stat, Country profile: Greece. <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/countryprofile/GeneralProfile/en-GB/300/index.html>

(27.5%), coal (8.5%), renewables (8.3%), biofuels and waste (6%), and hydro (2.5%). Its electricity is produced by an even more articulated composition of sources, first among which is natural gas (41.3%), followed by renewables (29.5%), hydro plants (11.29%), coal (10.5%), and oil (7.4%).<sup>283</sup>

Greece has one active LNG terminal on Revithoussa Island able to process and regasify 6.9 bcm annually.<sup>284</sup>

Furthermore, currently, there are two major natural gas pipelines that pass through Greece: the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) and the Greek section of the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB) pipeline. The TAP pipeline is part of the Southern Gas Corridor, which aims to transport natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe. The pipeline starts at the Greece-Turkey border, runs through Greece and Albania, and ends in Italy, connecting to the Italian natural gas network. The TAP pipeline has a capacity of 10 bcm per year and began commercial operations in 2020. The IGB pipeline, also known as the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (ICGB), is a cross-border natural gas pipeline that connects the national gas transmission systems of Greece and Bulgaria. The pipeline has a capacity of 3 billion cubic meters per year and aims to improve the security of gas supply for both countries. In addition to these pipelines, there are plans to develop other natural gas infrastructure in Greece, including the East Med pipeline, which would transport natural gas from Israel and Cyprus to Greece and Italy, and the Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Alexandroupolis, which would receive liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments and supply natural gas to the Greek and European

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<sup>283</sup> IEA Country profile: Greece. <https://www.iea.org/countries/greece>

<sup>284</sup> Global Energy Monitor Website, Revithoussa LNG Terminal.  
[https://www.gem.wiki/Revithoussa\\_LNG\\_Terminal](https://www.gem.wiki/Revithoussa_LNG_Terminal)

markets.<sup>285</sup>

With regards to its maritime borders, Greece has several unresolved maritime border disputes with its neighbours. With Turkey, Greece has disputes over the extent of its territorial waters in the Aegean Sea and the delimitation of the continental shelf and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Eastern Mediterranean. The two countries have been involved in several incidents, including military standoffs, in recent years. The situation has been complicated by the fact that Turkey does not recognize the validity of certain Greek islands in the Aegean Sea as bases for the extension of Greece's territorial waters and continental shelf.<sup>286</sup> The most auspicious solution would be a judicial settlement, but it seems subject both to chronic and contingent issues.<sup>287</sup>

As mentioned earlier, after the 2019 agreement between Turkey and the internationally recognized government of Libya, Greece denounced the agreement and also disavowed the Libyan representatives in Athens, while it opened a channel with the representatives of the not recognized government of Tobruk, in eastern Libya led by General Haftar. Greece also rushed to negotiate a maritime delimitation agreement with Italy, in the Ionian Sea, and with Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece still does not recognize the

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<sup>285</sup> Karamaneas A., Koasidis K., Frilingou N., Xexakis G., Nikas A., Doukas H., *A stakeholder-informed modelling study of Greece's energy transition amidst an energy crisis: The role of natural gas and climate ambition*, in *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Transition*, Volume 3, 2023.

<sup>286</sup> Stergiou A., *The Greek-Turkish Maritime Dispute: Resisting the future*, Springer Cham, 2022.

<sup>287</sup> Schaller C., *Hardly predictable and yet an equitable solution: Delimitation by judicial process as an option for Greece and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean*, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2022, pp. 549-568.

Turkish-Libyan agreement because, according to Greece, it violates both UNCLOS treaty and international customary law, especially the principle of *res inter alios acta* regarding harm provoked to a third party by an agreement between two other parties.<sup>288</sup>

#### *2.1.8: State of Libya.*

Libya is a country located in North Africa. It has a total area of 1,759,540 square kilometres, making it the fourth-largest country in Africa. It shares borders with Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan, and Egypt. The country has a long coastline along the Mediterranean Sea. As of 2021, the estimated population of Libya is approximately 6.9 million people. The capital city is Tripoli, which is located on the country's north-western coast. Arabic is the official language of Libya, and Islam is the dominant religion.

The Libyan economy is heavily dependent on the oil sector, which accounts for a significant portion of the country's GDP and exports. However, the economy has been negatively affected by the ongoing conflict and political instability in the country.

Libya has a semi-presidential system of government, with a President and a Prime Minister who share executive power. However, the political situation in the country has been highly unstable in recent years, with multiple rival

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<sup>288</sup> *Presence of Third States as a relevant circumstance in delimitation process in law of the sea and customary international law*, IILSS-International institute for Law of the Sea Studies, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. <https://iilss.net/presence-of-third-states-as-a-relevant-circumstances-in-delimitation-process-in-law-of-the-sea-and-customary-international-law/>

factions vying for power.<sup>289</sup> Libya's GDP in 2021 amounted to 42.82 billion USD, an all-time low in almost 20 years, since even after the 2011 turmoil its GDP had reached 48.17 billion USD.<sup>290</sup> Interestingly enough, and thanks to its energy exports, Libya's trade balance is positive by 10 billion USD.<sup>291</sup> With regards to Libya's energy mix the first energy resource is oil (53%), followed by natural gas (43%), and biofuels and waste (4%). The trend is inverted in the case of the resources used to produce electricity since natural gas covers 73.3% of the mix with the remaining 26.7% is covered by oil.<sup>292</sup> Regarding natural gas export, Italy is the only destination of Libyan natural gas through the Greenstream pipeline that connects the gas field of Mellitah in south-western Libya to Mazzara del Vallo in Sicily, through an offshore pipeline. The pipeline is managed by a joint venture composed by Italian ENI (50%) and Libyan NOC (50%). The good relations that were kept between the Italian government and the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) that de facto rules the western part of the country allowed ENI to maintain a stable flow of natural gas towards Italy to an entity of around 5.6 bcm.<sup>293</sup> The war in Ukraine has severely augmented Italy's need of natural gas thus pushing ENI both to try and boost Greenstream's flow of natural gas but also through new deals for offshore exploration in

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<sup>289</sup> CIA World factbook, Country profile: Libya. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/libya/>

<sup>290</sup> World Bank Open Data, GDP, Libya, 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=LY>

<sup>291</sup> UNCTAD Stat, Country profile: Libya. <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/countryprofile/GeneralProfile/en-GB/434/index.html>

<sup>292</sup> IEA Country profile: Libya. <https://www.iea.org/countries/libya>

<sup>293</sup> Bartrop R., *Oil and Gas in a New Libyan Era: Conflict and Continuity*, in Oxford Institute for Energy Studies Paper, MEP 22, February 2019.

collaboration with NOC.<sup>294</sup>

Libya has been in a State of political and social upheaval since the ousting of former dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The country has been divided between two rival governments: the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli, and the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar based in the east. The conflict has been complicated by the involvement of various regional and international actors, including Turkey, Egypt, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who have provided military and logistical support to different sides in the conflict. The conflict has also fuelled the growth of armed militias and terrorist groups, including ISIS, which have further destabilized the country.

The situation in Libya has been further complicated by disputes over control of the country's vast oil reserves, which have been a key source of revenue for both the GNA and the LNA. The conflict has led to a significant decline in oil production and exports, which has had a major impact on the country's economy and contributed to widespread poverty and unemployment. Efforts to resolve the conflict have been ongoing, with various international initiatives aimed at bringing the rival factions to the negotiating table.

In October 2020, a ceasefire agreement was signed between the GNA and LNA, leading to the formation of a new interim government tasked with preparing the country for elections in December 2021 that never took place.<sup>295</sup>

As of today, thus, the GNA and LNA have split into the effective government

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<sup>294</sup> Vitanza C., *Italy's Eni bets on Libya in push for gas supply diversification*, Independent Commodity Intelligence Services, ICIS, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

<sup>295</sup> Joffé G., *Libya: the new geopolitical arena*, in *The Journal of North African Studies*, Volume 25, Issue 5, 2020, pp. 681-688.

of the country, and each of them has gained the support of different regional and international actors.

The international community has officially acknowledged the GNA authority but still, for differing reasons, a number of countries is backing Haftar's LNA. In the midst of the Syrian conflict Turkey backed the GNA and signed with it the already mentioned 2019 agreement on the maritime delimitation between the two States, and a second agreement on Turkish military support to the GNA. These agreements pushed into the arms of Haftar's LNA Greece, and Egypt. Haftar's LNA also enjoys the endorsement of United Arab Emirates, for mostly ideological reasons, and some sympathy from France in order to temper Turkey, putting the former in a conflicting posture with the Italian government that has always yielded its support towards the GNA in order to protect its energy supply from western Libya.

Russia has also intervened in the Libyan scenario backing Haftar's LNA both for economic reasons, such as future infrastructure projects, arms deals, and sales of agricultural goods, but also to have a larger influence on the flow of hydrocarbons towards Southern Europe. In that scenario Russia tends to accommodate Turkish adventurism, in contrast to the Syrian or Nagorno Karabakh scenarios, in order to avoid costly conflict and in the name of pragmatism.

Thus, Libya has become a chessboard on which multiple conflicts on different scales and different interests are taking place, among which the conflicting



actors of the Eastern Mediterranean have reversed their rivalries in the North African country.<sup>296</sup>

## *2.2: Main controversies and disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean.*

### *2.2.1: Turkey as an emerging regional power, isolationism, and the war in Ukraine.*

Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been Turkey's President since 2014, favouring a presidentialist turn in the nature of Turkey's political system, while he was Turkey's Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014. Although his initial political views were in accordance with a Kemalist view of Turkish international position and internal politics, slowly his views approaching the political Muslim fringes of the Turkish political spectrum as well as embracing what has been called a *neo-ottoman* posture internationally. One of the main masterminds and advocates of a neo-ottoman approach in Turkish international relations was Ahmet Davutoglu, former Foreign Minister of Turkey between 2009 and 2014.

There is an ongoing debate among scholars and analysts over the extent to which Turkey's current foreign policy can be characterized as neo-Ottoman. However, several academic sources have discussed the key features and drivers of Neo-Ottomanism.

Oktay F. Tanrisever argues that neo-Ottomanism is characterized by a desire

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<sup>296</sup> Harachaoui J., *The pendulum: how Russia sways its way to more influence in Libya*, Commentary, War on the Rocks, Texas Security Review, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

to restore Turkey's historic influence in the region, expand its economic and trade ties, and use its military and diplomatic clout to advance its interests. The focus on cultivating closer ties with neighbouring countries, particularly those with cultural or historical links to the Ottoman Empire, is often seen as a key aspect of this approach.<sup>297</sup>

Habib Aydin similarly suggests that neo-Ottomanism is driven by a desire to establish a new role for Turkey as a regional power and to reassert its influence in the Middle East and beyond. Aydin notes that this approach emphasizes economic and cultural ties, as well as military and diplomatic power. It is of particular interest the soft power approach of Turkey in Africa, and approach based on cultural diplomacy, and supported, when necessary, by economic, and military means.<sup>298</sup>

Lars Haugom argues that Turkey's recent "pivot to the East," including its efforts to build closer ties with Russia and China, is part of a broader strategy of expanding its regional influence and positioning itself as a hub for trade and investment. Ulgen suggests that this approach is rooted in neo-Ottomanism and reflects a desire to reassert Turkey's historic role as a bridge between East and West.<sup>299</sup> These sources suggest that neo-Ottomanism is characterized by a desire to restore Turkey's historic influence in the region, expand its economic and trade ties, and use its military and diplomatic clout to advance its interests. The focus on cultivating closer ties with neighbouring

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<sup>297</sup> Tanrisever O. F., *Turkey: rising power or emerging dream?*, in Eurasian integration – The View from Within, Routledge, 2015.

<sup>298</sup> Aydin H., *Neo-Ottomanism Revisited: An Evaluation of Ahmet Davutoğlu's Failed Foreign Policy*, in Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs, Volume 16, Issue 1, 2022.

<sup>299</sup> Haugom L., *Turkish foreign policy under Erdogan: A change in international orientation?*, in Comparative Strategy, Volume 38, Issue 3, 2019.

countries, particularly those with cultural or historical links to the Ottoman Empire, is often seen as a key aspect of this approach.

Turkey's recent military interventions in Syria and Libya have been cited as examples of its more assertive and ambitious foreign policy approach, aimed at protecting Turkish interests and exerting influence in these countries. The country's efforts to position itself as a hub for regional trade and investment, and to promote its role as a regional power, are also seen as key features of neo-Ottomanism.

The long-lasting controversy regarding the TRNC is of crucial importance since because of it Turkey lays claims, on behalf of the TRNC, on internationally recognized Cypriot EEZ.

In the early 2010s, two significant occurrences took place in the Eastern Mediterranean. The first one was a shift in Turkey's foreign policy, which moved away from the "zero problems with neighbours" principle proposed by Davutoglu in 2008. Turkey adopted a more self-centred approach that caused its relationships with Israel, Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus to deteriorate. Consequently, these countries were left with no choice but to seek other alliances to counter Turkish hostility. The second event was the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves near Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel, creating new opportunities and security needs. These two occurrences, together, created a systemic environment that compelled Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Israel to come closer.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Tziarras, *Cyprus's Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and Trilateral Partnerships: a Neoclassical Realist Approach*, in *The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral Partnerships and Regional Security*, PRIO Cyprus Center, Report 3, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2019, p.60.

The already mentioned 2019 double agreement between Turkey and GNA Libya escalated tensions and shifted other actors' postures in the region. The Turko-Libyan Maritime Boundary Delimitation Agreement was signed on November 27, 2019, between Turkey and the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya. The agreement consisted of three main provisions. Firstly, it established an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) boundary extending from Turkey's southern coast to Libya's north-eastern coast, which effectively divides the maritime area between Turkey and Libya. Secondly, it declared that any activities within the Turkish-Libyan continental shelf require the consent of both parties. Finally, the agreement emphasized that it does not prejudice the rights of other States, particularly Greece, Egypt, and Cyprus. The agreement was significant because it provided legal grounds for Turkish intervention in the Libyan conflict, particularly in support of the GNA, which was struggling against the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar. The maritime boundary between Turkey and Libya established by the agreement created a large area of maritime jurisdiction for the GNA, including vast natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean, which Turkey can access for economic and strategic purposes.

Moreover, the agreement signalled Turkey's determination to project power beyond its territorial waters and asserted its willingness to pursue a revisionist foreign policy by challenging the interests of rival powers in the eastern Mediterranean. The agreement faced significant opposition from other Mediterranean countries, particularly Greece and Egypt, who perceived it as a violation of their respective maritime rights and an attempt by Turkey to gain an unfair advantage in the region.

Greece and Egypt responded by signing their own maritime boundary

agreement, which was intended to counteract the Turco-Libyan agreement. Additionally, the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) also criticized the Turco-Libyan agreement, arguing that it violated international law and threatened regional stability. The Greco-Egyptian agreement of 2020 aims to define the maritime boundaries between Greece and Egypt, and to enhance cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The agreement creates an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) between the two countries, which includes the area between the Greek island of Crete and the Egyptian coast. The agreement also affirms the countries' commitment to respect international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Such agreement, as mentioned, is a response to the Turkish-Libyan agreement, and reflects a growing alliance between Greece and Egypt in the face of Turkish aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean. The agreement serves to counteract Turkey's attempt to expand its maritime borders and access hydrocarbon resources in the region. The article notes that the agreement has provoked a strong response from Turkey, which has accused Greece and Egypt of violating its maritime rights.<sup>301302</sup>

One of the best solutions to the issue would undoubtedly be through peaceful means of resolution of disputes among those present in international public law, such as a judicial solution. Many scholars argue that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) could be a viable option for resolving maritime border

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<sup>301</sup> Stergiou, A., *The 2019–2020 Maritime Borders Delimitation Agreements in the Eastern Mediterranean and Their Implications*, in *The Greek-Turkish Maritime Dispute. Resisting the future*, Springer Cham, 2022.

<sup>302</sup> Fahmy W., *The conundrum of delimitation of maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Greece-Egypt agreement in the face of Turkey-Libya agreement*, in *Pro Justitia*, vol. 3, 2020.

disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, but also acknowledge that it may not be the best solution in practice due to several limitations. Furthermore, it is highlighted that the ICJ is recognized as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations and has experience in resolving maritime border disputes, including those involving Greece and Turkey. Additionally, the ICJ can provide a legally binding decision that is theoretically enforceable under international law.

However, there are several challenges with pursuing the ICJ option, including the fact that both parties must consent to the court's jurisdiction, which may not be forthcoming. Moreover, the ICJ may not have the capacity to handle a dispute involving multiple countries such as the current situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Additionally, the process could be time-consuming, and the outcome may not necessarily satisfy all parties involved.<sup>303</sup>

Turkey, thus, has found itself quite isolated in the region. As a consequence of Turkey's posture, France has actively taken the sides of Greece, which is resolute in opposing Turkey's assertiveness in the Levant. France has been actively supporting Greece and Cyprus in their efforts to counter Turkey's assertive moves in the region. It has also conducted joint military exercises with Greece, Cyprus, and Italy and sent its naval assets to the region as a show of support. France has also called for the imposition of sanctions on Turkey and has been advocating for a more assertive EU policy towards Turkey. Such posture is also explainable thanks to the vast presence of Total in the Levant either in upstream or exploration activities.

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<sup>303</sup> Grigoriadis I. N., Belke L. T., *UNCLOS and the Delimitation of Maritime Zones in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in ELIAMEP Policy Brief 131, 2020.

Cyprus is obviously threatened by the new Turkish posture. Egypt has acquired a posture that aims at balancing Turkey's approach in order to preserve its interests. It should be remembered the fact that Erdogan had entertained excellent relations with former Egyptian President Morsi of the Muslim brothers, in line with Erdogan's overture towards Islam.

The same desire to balance Turkey is driving Israeli foreign policy in the region, while Syria and to a lesser extent Lebanon can do little to project their foreign policies in the region for internal issues.<sup>304</sup>

Russia has had a long-standing interest in the Mediterranean region due to its proximity to Russia's southern border, its importance as a hub of global trade and energy transport, and its strategic value for Russia's geopolitical interests. Specifically, Russia has sought to use its influence in the Mediterranean to secure access to warm water ports, protect its economic and energy interests, and counterbalance the influence of NATO and the United States in the region. Russia's interest in the Mediterranean increased significantly in the 2010s due to a combination of factors, including the increasing importance of the region for global energy security and the growing instability in the Middle East. Russia sought to increase its naval presence in the Mediterranean, primarily through its naval base in Syria's Tartus port. This base allowed Russia to project its military power into the region and protect its economic and security interests. Additionally, Russia has sought to establish closer political and economic ties with Mediterranean countries such as Egypt and

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<sup>304</sup> Adar S., *Turkey, the EU and the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis Militarization of Foreign Policy and Power Rivalry*, SWP Comment 2020/C 62, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Libya, in part to counter Western influence in the region.<sup>305</sup> The outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, thus, has had an important impact in the Mediterranean, mainly for energy security reasons, but also for geostrategic reasons.

In this situation Turkey has managed to assert herself as a mediator between the parties and already managed to barter a deal on the exportation of Russian and Ukrainian grain through the Straits and into world markets. This renewed look of Turkish diplomacy along with energy shortages in Europe have in part lowered the tension, among the actors of the area, and loosened Turkey's isolation.<sup>306</sup> Nevertheless, power competition and an enhanced run for rearmament among Mediterranean countries is still ongoing, even encouraged because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>307</sup>

Furthermore, the Eastern Mediterranean has acquired crucial interest after the eruption of the conflict in Ukraine since Europe is struggling to find much needed energy resources, first among which natural gas in order to deprive herself from Russian dependency. Countries such as Germany or Italy that depended to large percentages of their gas imports from Russia, and with large amounts of their energy mix composed by natural gas, are the ones that struggle most. It is still more important to note that such tragedy could have been easily avoided if the reasoning behind natural gas acquisition were not

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<sup>305</sup> Gasimov, Z., *Russia under Putin in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Soviet Legacy, Flexibility, and New Dynamics*, Comparative Southeast European Studies, vol. 70, no. 3, 2022, pp. 462-485.

<sup>306</sup> Toraman Y., *Turkey's role in Silk Road Routes: energy supply security of European Union after Ukraine-Russian War*, Journal of Management Marketing and Logistics, Volume 9, Issue 1, 2022, pp. 16 – 26.

<sup>307</sup> Nedos V., *Regional power competition in the Eastern Mediterranean: the return of naval power and the changes technology brings*, in ELIAMEP Policy paper 96/2022, March 2022.



purely made on economic basis, by buying the most economically convenient supply of gas. Also on financial terms, it is always advised to diversify one's portfolio of shares. Thus, even before the outbreak of the war the diversification of the source of gas importation could have allowed European countries a more consistent foreign policy since their dependence on Russia would be much lower.

In the meanwhile, among other solutions to diversify European gas supply are multiple, such as importing more LNG from global markets, including the United States and Qatar, increasing domestic production through unconventional sources, such as shale gas, although this option is controversial due to environmental concerns, the EU Green Deal, and public opposition.

Other options include developing interconnections and pipelines with neighbouring regions, such as the Southern Gas Corridor from Azerbaijan, the East Med pipeline from Israel and Cyprus, and accelerating the development of renewable energy sources to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.<sup>308</sup> The problem with purely economic reasoning, instead of using economy as a means of one's foreign policy just like the diplomatic and military means, will be discussed again later when presenting the East Med pipeline project.

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<sup>308</sup> Aitken C., Ersoy E., *War in Ukraine: The options for Europe's energy supply*, in *The World Economy*, Volume 46, Issue 4, 2022, pp. 887-896.

### *2.2.2: The counterbalancing States: Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Greece.*

In order to counterbalance Turkey, other actors of the region started to cooperate more and more closely with each other. The main countries to have undertaken such endeavour are Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt. The countermoves to Turkey's expansionism in the Eastern Mediterranean can be divided into three main categories: political, economic, and military. In the political category, countermoves include diplomatic actions by the EU, such as issuing Statements of support for Greece and Cyprus, and increased cooperation between Greece and Israel, as well as with other regional countries.

The EU has also imposed sanctions on Turkish officials and entities involved in the drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the economic category, countermoves include diversification of energy supply and reducing dependence on Turkish transit routes. This can be achieved by developing alternative gas supply routes, such as the East Med Pipeline, and investing in renewable energy sources. In the military category, countermoves include increasing the military capabilities of Greece and Cyprus, such as modernizing their navies and purchasing new weapons systems.

Additionally, the EU has increased its naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean through the Operation Iirini, which aims to enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya.

On the political level, these countermoves include diplomatic efforts aimed at isolating Turkey, building alliances to contain Turkish power, and using international organizations and legal frameworks to challenge Turkish actions. In particular, the European Union and its member States have been

key players in these political countermoves, using economic sanctions and political pressure to constrain Turkey's behaviour in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Additionally, countries in the region have formed alliances to counter Turkey's moves, including the Greece-Cyprus-Israel alliance and the Egypt-Greece-Cyprus alliance.<sup>309</sup> In the case of Greece, she has adopted a more assertive stance towards Turkey due to a combination of factors. Firstly, Greece has been frustrated by Turkey's continued aggression and violation of Greek sovereignty in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Secondly, Greece has sought to leverage its strategic partnership with the European Union and its member States to build a united front against Turkish expansionism. Thirdly, Greece has pursued a more proactive foreign policy, deepening its alliances with countries in the region, such as Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt, and strengthening its defence capabilities. Greece's approach has been characterized by a combination of diplomacy and deterrence.

On the diplomatic front, Greece has sought to engage with Turkey through channels such as the NATO and UN, while also engaging in bilateral talks with Turkey. However, when diplomacy has failed, Greece has also demonstrated a willingness to take a firm stance and respond with military force, as evidenced by its military response to Turkish provocations in the Aegean and the deployment of naval and air forces to the Eastern

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<sup>309</sup> Ersoy, T., *Emerging Alliances, Deteriorating Relations: Turkey, Israel and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in: Sever A., Almog, O., *Contemporary Israeli-Turkish Relations in Comparative Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2019.

Mediterranean.<sup>310</sup>

Since the deterioration of Israeli-Turkish relations in 2010, it has been of prime importance for Greece to ameliorate to the utmost its relationship with Israel, and the same can be said of Cyprus' approach. Since 2013, after the coup d'état of General Al-Sisi in Egypt, the latter was the object of Greek and Cypriot foreign policies in the same manner as Israel was before. Thus, while for Greece and Cyprus Turkey is seen as a clearly systemic rival, if not enemy, they took advantage of the deteriorating relations between Turkey and its regional neighbours in order to create a stable and strong posture vis-à-vis Turkey.

Nevertheless, until now the alliances, or better the groups of likeminded countries, have been two and not just one. On the one hand Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, while in the other Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt. The reason for this is that there are still a series of bilateral issues between Egypt and Israel that do not allow them to sit on the same table on such a strategic, albeit regional, issue. The Israeli-Palestinian question is the focal point of the problematic relations between the two neighbouring countries, but that has not represented a wide array of dossiers on which both countries have managed to collaborate, such as energy, and in particular the Arish-Ashkelon pipeline that unites the two countries. The discovery of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean quadrant has only exacerbated and escalated an already tense region.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Grigoriadis I. N., *Between escalation and détente: Greek-Turkish relations in the aftermath of the Eastern Mediterranean crisis*, Turkish Studies, Vol. 23, No.5, 2022, pp. 802-820.

<sup>311</sup> Tanchum M., *The Geopolitics of The Eastern Mediterranean Crisis: A Regional System Perspective on the Mediterranean's New Great Game*, in Eastern Mediterranean in

The Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt entente began to take shape since 2014. Five summits took place among the three countries were held in each respective country between 2014 and 2018 on a yearly basis and two political documents, the Cairo declaration of 2014, and the Nicosia declaration of 2015 regarding regional cooperation on security and energy issues. In 2018, Egypt took a diplomatic initiative on multiple fronts to guarantee its energy security and in order to become an energy hub for the Mediterranean. To achieve this goal, Egypt agreed with Israel to import Israeli gas for the next ten years from the Tamar and Leviathan fields, either for internal consumption or for export. Secondly, Egypt signed a memorandum of cooperation with the EU for a strategic cooperation in the field of energy. Finally, it signed an agreement with Cyprus in order to build a pipeline from Cyprus' Aphrodite gas field to Egypt's Idku LNG Terminal. On this subject, negotiations were facilitated by the fact that the operators of both Idku Terminal and Aphrodite fields is the Anglo-Dutch Shell.<sup>312</sup>

The other trilateral entente is that of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel. After the security cooperation between Israel and Turkey broke down in 2010, Israel formed strong defence ties with Greece. In 2015, Israel and Greece signed a status of forces agreement (SOFA), which was the first agreement of its kind signed by Israel with any other country, apart from the United States. The

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Uncharted Waters: Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021.

<sup>312</sup> Stergiou A., *Geopolitics and energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean: the formation of new "energy alliances"*, in Tziarras Z., *The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: trilateral partnerships and regional security*, PRIO Cyprus Centre, Re-Imagining the Eastern Mediterranean series: PCC Report 3/2019, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2019.

relationship between Israel and Cyprus was already good too if not or the boundary delimitation issue after part of Aphrodite gas field fell under presumably Israeli EEZ.<sup>313</sup> In January 2016 a historic summit took place in Nicosia, between the heads of Government of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel. In the joint Statement released after the Nicosia summit, there were seven areas of cooperation outlined between Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, including energy, tourism, research and technology, environment, water, immigration, and counterterrorism. A committee led by the directors general of the three Ministries of Energy will be established to explore the feasibility of building a pipeline to transport gas from Israel to Cyprus and Greece. Although energy cooperation is emphasized, there are uncertainties around gas exports, including how much gas Israel will have, if it can export it, to whom, and by what means. Discussions about gas between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus have been ongoing for years with no significant outcomes. While it's technically possible to build a pipeline connecting the three countries, it would be complex and costly, with an estimated price tag of nearly ten billion dollars.<sup>314</sup> Furthermore, in December 2017, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, were joined by Italy in signing a memorandum of understanding to back the construction of the Eastern Mediterranean pipeline. As we shall discuss later, Italy withdrew its direct support on this project, although lately it may be reconsidering its posture.<sup>315</sup> A few months later, in February 2018, a Turkish military navy ship blocked a drill ship of Italy's ENI. As we mentioned previously ENI had to

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<sup>313</sup> Tanchum M., 2021.

<sup>314</sup> Mekel A., *A New Geopolitical Bloc is Born in the Eastern Mediterranean: Israel, Greece and Cyprus*, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2016.

<sup>315</sup> Ellinas C., *Energy and Geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Atlantic Council Global Energy Center, Issue Brief, February 2022.

withdraw its ship, but after this incident it has been noted that ENI reinforced its cooperation with French Total in almost all block allotted to her in Cypriot EEZ for exploration and drilling objectives, thus pushing France in the Levantine quadrant even more directly. France has shown its staunch support for its partners in the region multiple times. In March 2019, the 6th trilateral summit was held between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo as a special guest. One of the aims of the summit was to promote the East Med pipeline and to receive the support of the US. In May of the same month France sign an agreement with Cyprus to service French warships at Cyprus's Mari naval base, while in July Turkey receives the first shipment of Russian S-400 anti-air missiles. In November of the same year Turkey and GNA Libya sign the already described agreements regarding maritime borders as well as security, and the next month a three-day naval exercise off the southern coast of Cyprus takes place between the navies of Italy, France, and Cyprus.

In August 2020, at the apex of a very hot summer in terms of geopolitical tension between Greece and Turkey, a Turkish warship and a Greek one collided thus evoking the fear of a more general outbreak of violence between the parties. France resolutely showed its support towards its Greek ally by sending warships in the contested waters, arriving to the point of sending its navy flagship, nuclear aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle.<sup>316</sup> While later she joined Italy, Greece, and Cyprus in performing naval exercise. It is interesting to note here that, after the aforementioned drills, Italy performed limited naval exercise with Turkey, while German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas invited all

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<sup>316</sup> Tanchum M., p.11.

parties involved in the drills to end them in order to defuse the tension.<sup>317</sup>

Finally, after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the trilateral summit of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel of May 2022 was joined once more by US State Secretary Blinken. During this critical time, the ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the 3+1 format and agreed to increase cooperation in various areas, including energy, economy, climate action, emergency preparedness, and counterterrorism.<sup>318</sup>

### *2.2.3: External actors: United States of America, European Union, Russian Federation, People's Republic of China.*

The EU's position in the Eastern Mediterranean is to promote a peaceful resolution of disputes, respect for international law, and stability in the region. The EU also supports the efforts of regional actors to promote dialogue and cooperation and has expressed concerns about the escalation of tensions in the region. The EU has an interest in the Eastern Mediterranean due to its strategic location and energy resources, and is working on initiatives to strengthen energy cooperation, enhance maritime security, and promote economic growth in the region. After a period of being relatively uninterested and neglectful, the European Union and its member States have become aware of the significant and multifaceted implications of the developing security situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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<sup>317</sup> Ellinas C., p. 14.

<sup>318</sup> United States Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, *Joint Statement on the 3+1 (Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Israel + United States) Foreign Ministerial*, Media Note, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022. <https://www.State.gov/joint-statement-on-the-31-republic-of-cyprus-greece-israel-united-states-foreign-ministerial/>



The EU is now attempting to disentangle the various conflicts in the region, but this is a difficult task given that it has been complacent for decades and has ignored evolving disputes and relationships. Europe must adjust to the new international trends of disorderly multipolarity while protecting its interests, values, and internal cohesion. How well Europe navigates and manages the growing complexity of conflict lines in its nearby areas while safeguarding its interests, values, and internal cohesion will be critical in determining the EU's international role and ambition. This will also test the new European Commission's aspirations to transform the EU into a "geopolitical actor" on the global stage. Given the complexity of the challenges and conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean, the EU recognizes that there are no simple solutions.

Rather than attempting to tackle all conflicts simultaneously, the EU has opted for a compartmentalized approach, prioritizing the resolution of the three core conflicts individually, namely the Greek-Turkish border dispute, the Cypriot question, the war in Libya, while utilizing improvements in one area to advance progress in others.

While some EU member States have taken a more confrontational stance towards the conflicts, a group led by Germany, the European Commission, and High Representative has advocated for a softer approach based on dialogue and de-escalation. As time passes and Turkey continues to engage in militarized provocations, it will become more difficult for the EU to maintain this approach, making the efforts of Germany and others even more urgent. The division of labour approach has shown some positive results, such as the ceasefire in Libya and the resumption of de-confliction talks within NATO for Greece-Turkey relations. However, translating these tactical

improvements into long-term agreements and reconciliation will require significant political capital and a common approach among EU member States to convince all parties to engage in win-win compromises.<sup>319320321</sup>

The US sees the Eastern Mediterranean region as strategically important, especially due to its proximity to Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. The US has been supportive of the 3+1 format, which includes Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and the US, and has advocated for increased cooperation among these countries in areas such as energy, security, and counterterrorism. The US has also expressed concern about Turkey's actions in the region, particularly its exploration activities in disputed waters, and has called for dialogue and a peaceful resolution to the conflicts.

In recent years, the US has become more involved in the Eastern Mediterranean due to the region's growing importance in global energy markets. The discovery of significant natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean has led to increased competition and tensions between countries in the region, as well as increased interest from outside actors such as the US. The US has also been involved in efforts to promote stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as supporting UN-led peace negotiations in

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<sup>319</sup> Dessì A., *Europe and The Eastern Mediterranean: Navigating Complexity, Mitigating Conflict(s) and Fishing for Compromise*, in Tanchum M., *Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters: Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021, pp. 100-115.

<sup>320</sup> Alhan, M.A., *The Problem of Depending on Fossil Fuels in the Energy Policies of the European Union: A Strategic Analysis in the Eastern Mediterranean Region*. In: Dinçer, H., Yüksel, S., *Circular Economy and the Energy Market. Contributions to Economics*. Springer Cham, 2022.

<sup>321</sup> Asderaki, F., *The EU in the Eastern Mediterranean: Multilateral and Bilateral Relations*, in Tziampiris A., Asderaki F., *The New Eastern Mediterranean Transformed*, Springer Cham, 2021.

Libya and urging Turkey to de-escalate tensions in the region.

The US has been critical of Turkey's aggressive behaviour in the region and has supported Greece and Cyprus in their disputes with Turkey over maritime boundaries. The US has a strategic interest in maintaining stability and promoting its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has established partnerships with key countries in the region and has been involved in efforts to promote peace and stability. However, the US's role in the region may be complicated by the shifting geopolitical landscape and the growing influence of other actors such as Russia and China.<sup>322323</sup>

Especially in the midst of the war in Ukraine the US faces more difficulties in positioning herself in the Eastern Mediterranean divisions, since on the one hand Turkey is a precious partner in order to pursue its objectives and *containment* vis-à-vis Russia, while on the other hand it wants to preserve its posture towards its Greek, Cypriot, and Israeli partners.

Russia has been increasing its presence and engagement in the Eastern Mediterranean region in recent years. This includes a number of diplomatic and economic initiatives, such as the establishment of a permanent naval base in Syria, the signing of an energy cooperation agreement with Turkey, and increased arms sales to the region. Russia's policy towards the Eastern Mediterranean is driven by several factors, including its desire to project power and influence in the region, to support its allies and partners, such as Syria and Iran, to counterbalance US and NATO presence in the region, and

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<sup>322</sup> Tziarras Z., 2019.

<sup>323</sup> Goldthau A. C., Richert J., Stetter S., *Leviathan Awakens: Gas Finds, Energy Governance, and the Emergence of the Eastern Mediterranean as a Geopolitical Region*, Review of Policy Research, 2020.

to advance its economic and energy interests.<sup>324</sup>

One of the key ways in which Russia has sought to advance its interests in the region is by developing closer ties with countries such as Turkey and Egypt, which are strategic partners of the United States. Russia has sought to capitalize on the frayed relationships between these countries and the United States, offering itself as a mediator and partner.<sup>325</sup> Of course, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine has put Russia in a different position than before the war. Turkey has acquired an important role for Moscow since it is one of the few interlocutors left to the Kremlin in the Mediterranean. All its private enterprises that operated in the Eastern Mediterranean region, especially in the field of energy resources, are being ousted by the licensing States, while it has been also financially isolated thus rendering business with Mediterranean actors very complicated.

Nevertheless, Russia has kept her influence, through private contractor enterprise Wagner, in Libya, in the easternmost part of the country along with Haftar's LNA thus rendering impossible to ignore her completely as an active actor in the area.

China's role in the Eastern Mediterranean is multifaceted and has both economic and strategic dimensions. China's increasing interest in the region is reflected in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to expand China's economic influence by financing and building infrastructure projects

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<sup>324</sup> Gunay N. A., Korkmaz V., *A New Alliance Axis in the Eastern Mediterranean Cold War: What the Abraham Accords Mean for Mediterranean Geopolitics and Turkey*. *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2021, pp. 61–76.

<sup>325</sup> Strigunov K. S., Manoilo A. V., Rozhin B. A., Simons G., *Energy market wars as a factor of military-political escalation*, Eastern Mediterranean region: A Russian perspective, *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 8 No. 1, 2022.

in countries along the ancient Silk Road, including in the Eastern Mediterranean. China has also established closer economic ties with countries in the region, such as Israel and Turkey, with whom it has signed agreements on trade and investment.

In addition, China has been involved in infrastructure projects in the Eastern Mediterranean, including port development and construction of the Belgrade-Budapest railway, while it holds leasing right in the port of Piraeus, rendering it its most important strategic asset in the Mediterranean in the perspective of the maritime branch of the BRI. From a strategic perspective, China is interested in maintaining stability in the region to ensure the safe passage of energy resources and protect its investments.<sup>326</sup> It has also taken steps to deepen its military ties with countries in the region, including joint military exercises with the navy of Russia.<sup>327328</sup>

Even before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, some analysts believed that Russia and China have formed an alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean due to their aligned actions on the Syrian civil war and cooperation in upgrading their naval coordination in the region. However, a closer examination of their actions reveals that they prefer to maintain relative independence in their foreign policies, working together only when coordination allows them to maximize their actions' effect.

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<sup>326</sup> Kahveci-Özgür H., Duan J., *China's 'Silky Involvement' in the Eastern Mediterranean: A geopolitical upper hand for Greece and Cyprus?*, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2023, pp. 65-81.

<sup>327</sup> *China-Russia drills in Med show shifting strategies*, BBC, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-32686956>

<sup>328</sup> *Chinese Ships Drill In Mediterranean En Route To Joint Exercises With Russia*, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/china-russia-ships-head-for-baltic-exercises/28612017.html>

This model of Russo-Chinese interaction in the Eastern Mediterranean differs from that in Central Asia. Although this cautious approach had yielded some benefits, such as Chinese naval capabilities' enhancement with Russian assistance and tacit Chinese support for Russian actions in Syria, it may not be sustainable in the long run. Growing antagonism between Russia and China with the US and the EU, continued militarization of the region, and its complex conflict dynamics would necessitate more sophisticated and security-focused cooperation strategies for both countries.<sup>329</sup> The outbreak of war in Ukraine halted all this attempts at coordination in the Eastern Mediterranean since Russia's ability of political or economic penetration in the region was halted, and China is concentrating its efforts in the issues regarding the confrontation with the US.

### *2.3: The Eastern Mediterranean pipeline (East Med), and the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum.*

#### *2.3.1: The East Med pipeline.*

the East Med pipeline project, which is a proposed natural gas pipeline that would transport gas from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe. The project aims to diversify Europe's energy supply and increase its energy security by reducing dependence on Russian gas, and that was its objective long before the invasion of Russia in Ukraine. The need to diversify European gas supply

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<sup>329</sup> Shlykov P., Koldunova E. *Russia and China in the Eastern Mediterranean: On Parallel Tracks?*, in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2023, pp. 48-64.

was important especially for those countries, such as Italy and Germany, that depended so much on natural gas, and imported it in large part from one supplier, Russia.

The technical details of the project involve the construction of a 1900-kilometre pipeline that would connect Israeli and Cypriot offshore gas fields to Crete and thus to mainland Greece through 1350 kilometres of offshore pipeline, pass through mainland Greece and reach Italy through another offshore pipeline named IGI Poseidon. Finally, reaching Italy's pipeline network there would be potential future connections to other European countries. The pipeline would have a capacity of up to a maximum of 20 bcm of gas per year, which would make it one of the longest and deepest pipelines in the world.<sup>330</sup>

The project has been carried on and entrusted by a joint venture comprising Italian Edison and Greek DEPA. It is quite interesting to note that the main shareholder of Edison, with a 99.473% share, is Transalpina di Energia Spa, who at its turn is 100% controlled by EDF Electricité de France Sa<sup>331</sup>, who at its turn is controlled with 95.94% of its shares by the French State.<sup>332</sup> On the other hand, DEPA, a Greek State owned enterprise (SOE) has been privatized and in September 2022 100% of her shares was acquired by Italian Italgas<sup>333</sup>,

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<sup>330</sup> Troulis M., *The East Med Pipeline project: Europe's Fourth Energy Artery*, in *Civitas Gentium*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2019, pp. 153-168.

<sup>331</sup> Azionariato Edison. <https://www.edison.it/it/capitale-e-azionariato>

<sup>332</sup> Azionariato EDF. <https://www.edf.fr/groupe-edf/espaces-dedies/investisseurs-actionnaires/l-action-edf/structure-du-capital>

<sup>333</sup> *Depa Infrastructure (Italgas Group): completed the acquisition of the remaining 49% of EDA Thess*, Italgas Press Release. <https://www.italgas.it/en/press-releases-price-sensitive/dep-a-infra-structure-italgas-group-completed-the-acquisition-of-the-remaining-49-of-eda-thess/>

who is controlled by Italian institutional investors with shares amounting to 48%.<sup>334</sup> Thus, once again, the intervention of the French and Italian States in acquiring a driving control in the project signals its political importance for the two Mediterranean actors.

In December 2017, Cyprus, Israel, Italy, and Greece signed an agreement to explore the possibility of constructing a natural gas pipeline from Leviathan to European markets. The European Commission labelled the project technically feasible and economically viable and designated it as a project of common interest (PCI) between the EU and the region. The EU's support for the project means it can receive many benefits, including accelerated planning and permit granting, and lower administrative costs. Furthermore, in June 2022, the project has received official feasibility status by independent parties.<sup>335</sup>

In December 2018, the leaders of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel officially Stated that they were ready to sign an intergovernmental agreement on the project, which is contingent on a EU-funded 100 million USD feasibility study.<sup>336</sup> The United States has also expressed support for the project. In 2020 the Energy Ministers of Greece, Israel, and Cyprus signed the final agreement for the pipeline project, while Italy was absent event in this occasion.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Azionariato Italgas. <https://www.italgas.it/investitori/titolo-e-azionariato/azionariato/>

<sup>335</sup> Sall P., *DNV further confirms feasibility and maturity of the EastMed pipeline*, DNV Oil and gas News, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022. <https://www.dnv.com/news/dnv-further-confirms-feasibility-and-maturity-of-the-eastmed-pipeline-226712>

<sup>336</sup> Apodaca A J., Greensfelder J., *Pipeline or Pipe Dream: The Potential of Peace Pipelines as a Solution to Fragmentation and Energy Insecurity in the European Union*, Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union: Vol. 2019.

<sup>337</sup> *The 'Eastmed Pipeline' – Hard Reality or a Pipedream?*, Prospect Law, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://prospectlaw.co.uk/news/article/the-eastmed-pipeline-hard-reality-or-a-pipedream>



However, some analysts question the practicality of the pipeline due to technical difficulties, unfavourable financial and topographic realities, and seismic and volcanic activity in Greek waters. In economic terms, the proposed gas deliveries may not be competitive with then existing supplies from Russia and various LNG producers worldwide<sup>338</sup>, given that they come from offshore fields that regularly produce more expensive gas than onshore fields.<sup>339</sup>

Furthermore, economically the returns of the project would be difficult to be attractive to investors since before, though, and after COVID-19<sup>340</sup> gas prices had fallen, thus not rendering the project very profitable. In the aftermath of the Ukraine invasion, prices skyrocketed, and the interest was rekindled for the pipeline and for alternative sources of gas importation. This is precisely the issue: the fluctuation of prices is not the only and perhaps not the main index to be taken in consideration when it comes to energy security, and energy dependency, all factors that easily impact the life of a country that is dependent on energy resources it does not produce. Thus, energy becomes a focal point of foreign policy, and it should not be subject to profitability scrutiny alone since other aspects of energy supply are crucial for the survival of a State. Such aspects include the capacity to provide basic services to households, as well as energy to national manufactories and heating to public

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<sup>338</sup> Stratakis A., Pelagidis T., *The importance of Southeast Mediterranean natural gas reserves to EU's Energy Security; a geopolitical and economic approach*, Regional Science Inquiry, 2020, Vol. 12, Issue 2, pp. 11-29.

<sup>339</sup> Stergiou, 2019, p. 18.

<sup>340</sup> Stratakis A., Pelagidis T., *The potential impact of COVID-19 on mega energy projects and LNG shipping infrastructure; the case of EasMed pipeline*, Regional Science Inquiry, Vol.13, Issue 1, 2021, pp.239-259.

services and to households. When it comes to these reflections the mere existence of alternative sources of supply outweighs the profitability of such supply. Long term strategy should overcome short term gains.

The benefits of the construction of the East Med pipeline, though, could be many. The project would provide Europe with a new source of natural gas, further reducing its dependence on Russian gas and increasing its energy security. The lesson should have been learned, that no matter who the supplier is, either friend, foe or adversary, dependency should always be kept low, and the diversification of the portfolio of suppliers should be as diverse as possible. That would entail that although we would be independent from Russian gas, no other actor should represent such a large share of European gas imports.

Even though natural gas will be eliminated as an energy source to reach EU's Green Deal objectives<sup>341</sup>, it is important to note that natural gas is and will stay for some time the best transitory natural resource until renewables or cleaner energies will provide the EU the energy it needs, and unless other cleaner options, such as nuclear energy, will be taken into account. Furthermore, a project such as the EastMed pipeline, can and would be able to allow the transportation of clean (blue or green) hydrogen<sup>342</sup>, thus preserving the importance of the infrastructure even when natural gas will be

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<sup>341</sup> Hainsch K., Löffler K., Burandt T., Auer H., Crespo del Granado P., Pisciella P., Zwickl-Bernhard S., *Energy transition scenarios: What policies, societal attitudes, and technology developments will realize the EU Green Deal?*, Energy, Volume 239, Part C, 2022.

<sup>342</sup> Lagioia G., Spinelli M. P., Amicarelli V., *Blue and green hydrogen energy to meet European Union decarbonisation objectives. An overview of perspectives and the current State of affairs*, International Journal of Hydrogen Energy, Volume 48, Issue 4, 2023.

needed or wanted no more, and allowing the persistent flow of energy resources towards Europe.

On the diplomatic level, the main setback of the pipeline is the absence of Turkey from the project, who envisages the pipeline as a threat towards her intent to become a regional energy hub. Turkey prefers that offshore pipelines would reach her territory and through her reach onshore pipelines connecting to Europe, thus incrementing Europe's dependency on Turkey.<sup>343</sup>

### *2.3.2: The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF).*

The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) was officially launched in January 2019, in Cairo, Egypt. The signing ceremony was attended by the energy ministers of Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority, as well as representatives from the European Union and the United States.

After the first session, the EMGF hosted three more ministerial meetings. Although the discussions held during these meetings were not widely reported, the available information provides a more detailed understanding of the forum's intentions. During the first meeting in January 2019, the ministers acknowledged the relationship between energy development, regional security, and cooperation. The forum aimed to facilitate the development of a regional gas market by fostering cooperation and initiating a structured and systematic policy dialogue on natural gas. The second meeting in July 2019

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<sup>343</sup> Tsakiris T., *Inflammable Waters: Turkey's Strategic Objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean and the East Med Gas Pipeline*, Strategic Sectors, Economy & Territory, IEMED Yearbook, 2020.

confirmed the initial members of the EMGF, including Israel, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan, Italy, and the Palestinian Authority. The meeting considered whether the forum should become a formal international organization and approved the establishment of the Gas Industry Advisory Committee composed of private sector investors and developers. The third meeting took place in January 2020, shortly after Israel, Greece, and Cyprus signed an agreement on the East Med pipeline. During this meeting, member States of the EMGF reaffirmed their commitment to respect each other's maritime rights in accordance with international law. The EMGF also submitted its initial statute for review to the European Commission, and once approved, member States officially signed the agreement to solidify the EMGF.<sup>344</sup> The Charter entered into force after the necessary ratifications on March 9th, 2021.

France joined the Forum in a later moment, in March 2021, while the United States and the European Union have obtained permanent observer status. Among the paths that will be tread by the Forum to achieve its objectives, there is a clear reference on the aim to develop a sustainable regional gas market in the region.

The main governing body of the Forum is the Ministerial Meeting, convened at least once a year and composed by delegations of member States, formulates the general policy of the Forum, and takes the main decisions on the management of the Forum, among which the appointment of the Secretary general and the members of the Executive Board, as well as the latter's

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<sup>344</sup> Mitchell G., *The Eastern Mediterranean gas Forum: Cooperation in the Shadow of Competition*, MITVIM, September 2020.

Chairperson. The second most important body of the Forum is the Executive Board, composed by senior officials representing the Member States, while its meetings are held twice a year. The Board's main functions are preparing the agenda for the Ministerial Meeting, the establishment of Advisory Committees to assist the Forum in achieving its goals, as well as the establishment of Expert Working Groups or Committees that assist the Board itself in performing its functions. The Secretary General of the Forum, currently Mr. Osama Mobarez, has a mandate of three years, represents the Forum, and generally ensures that the budget and the program of work of the Forum are complied with. The Gas Industry Advisory Committee serves the Forum by advising, assisting, and submitting recommendations and studies to the Ministerial meetings and the Executive Board. The Committee includes representatives of business enterprises and industry entities, including international oil companies, national oil companies, traders, shippers, LNG operators, and other interested parties of the private and State-owned sectors. Finally, it is interesting to notice that among the already established working groups there are those related to the decarbonization of the gas industry in order to reduce greenhouse gases, as well as focusing on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, while others focus on the promotion of LNG as a fuel for maritime transportation.

When the EMGF was established, it was already clear that Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey would not be part of it. Although the forum claims not to be exclusive, it would be difficult to envision a way for these countries to join in the current status quo. Syria is still embroiled in a civil war and would not consider normalizing relations with Israel in the near future. Likewise, Lebanese interests are limited because of their conflict with Israel,

exacerbated by their disagreement on the demarcation line between their maritime waters although the recent agreement could lead to a cooldown in their relationship. As a result, commercial interest in exploring Lebanon's waters has been relatively low compared to other Eastern Mediterranean actors. Although Lebanon's participation in the EMGF is possible if they could find a way to avoid direct confrontation with Israeli officials, some in Lebanon suggest that they should team up with Turkey and Syria to create a counter-forum.

In contrast, Turkey's absence from the EMGF poses a challenge to the forum's political legitimacy. Turkey is a NATO member with a significant military, a large economy, and has a growing need for affordable energy. However, Turkey also has a history of grievances with Greece and Cyprus over maritime rights, similar, although worse, to Israel and Lebanon. Moreover, political tensions between Turkey and Egypt and Turkey's strained relationship with Israel make it challenging to see how Turkey could participate in the EMGF without first settling its differences with the primary member States.<sup>345</sup>

The energy situation in the Eastern Mediterranean has been greatly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. This has resulted in a decrease in natural gas prices, a freeze in exploration projects, and a change in the way countries are acquiring natural gas. For instance, Israel, which previously paid a high price for domestic natural gas, with COVID-19 imported liquid natural gas at a much lower cost. Egypt also struggled to sell its LNG and had cut production

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<sup>345</sup> İpek P., Gür V. T., *Turkey's Isolation from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum: ideational mechanisms and material interests*, Energy Politics, Turkish Studies, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2022, pp. 1-30.

at one of its fields. Despite the approval of the East Med pipeline by parliamentarians in Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, the project seemed unlikely to move forward due to the current economic situation. The low prices for LNG could have continued for a long time, as other similar projects came onto the market, making it difficult for expensive infrastructure projects to compete with renewable energy and established LNG providers.<sup>346</sup> The war in Ukraine turned the tide significantly for the natural gas market, thus reinvigorating the importance of the EMGF.

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<sup>346</sup> Mitchell G., 2020.

### *Chapter 3: The energy foreign policy of Italy in the Eastern Mediterranean.*

Italy is heavily dependent on natural gas imports, as it produces only a small portion of its own natural gas needs. According to the Italian Ministry of Economic Development, in 2020 Italy imported 89.5% of its natural gas needs, mostly from Russia, Algeria, and Libya. The main entry points for natural gas imports are the pipeline connections with Russia through Austria and Ukraine, Algeria through Tunisia and Sicily, and Libya through Tunisia and Sicily. Additionally, Italy also receives liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports from various countries, including Qatar, Algeria, Nigeria, and the United States, through its LNG terminals located along its coasts. The dependence on natural gas imports has made Italy vulnerable to fluctuations in global natural gas prices and geopolitical tensions between gas suppliers and transit countries. The Italian government has been trying to diversify its energy sources, particularly by promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency measures, but natural gas will likely remain a significant component of Italy's energy mix for the foreseeable future. The outbreak of war in Ukraine had the effect of reminding the Italian energy policy of how important it still is the diversification of imports of natural resource, particularly natural gas.

#### *3.1: The history of Italian energy diplomacy in the Mediterranean.*

During the First Republic period in Italy (1946-1992), Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean was shaped by a complex mix of domestic political



factors and external pressures. With regards to energy issues, Italy's main goal was to secure its energy supply and ensure a stable flow of oil and gas to its economy in order to guarantee the demand needs by both households and enterprises.

One of the most important developments in Italian energy policy during the First Republic was the creation of the National Oil Corporation (ENI) in 1953. ENI became Italy's main vehicle for securing energy supplies abroad and played a key role in shaping Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean. Through its investments in oil and gas fields in the region, ENI helped to establish Italy as a major energy player in the Mediterranean and build strategic partnerships with key countries such as Libya, Algeria, and Tunisia. Another important aspect of Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean during the First Republic was its relationship with the United States. Italy was, and still is, a member of NATO and a close ally of the US, which meant that its foreign policy was often aligned with American interests in the region. This was particularly evident during the 1970s and 1980s, when the US was seeking to counter Soviet influence in the Mediterranean and ensure a stable flow of oil to Western Europe.

Nevertheless, there have been periods in Italian foreign policy, in the 50's and 60's in which Italy exploited its diplomatic range of action within the boundaries of its Atlantic allegiance through what has been called "neo Atlanticism". Italy was also building relationships with Arab countries in the region, particularly those in the Gulf.<sup>347</sup> The 1970s saw a major increase in

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<sup>347</sup> Manta F., *La diplomazia economica come strumento delle relazioni internazionali: l'esempio Mattei e il marchio "Fiat"*, *Eunomia. Rivista semestrale di Storia e Politica Internazionali Eunomia*, Vol. 7, n. 1, 2018, p. 200.

oil prices, which led to a surge in wealth for oil-producing countries and an opportunity for Italy to build strategic partnerships with them. This was particularly true of Saudi Arabia, which became a key supplier of oil to Italy during this period. However, Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean during the First Republic was not without its challenges. The region was marked by instability and conflict, particularly in the Middle East, and Italy was often caught in the crossfire of these conflicts.

In order to have a better understanding of the development of Italian energy diplomacy in the area three main periods need analysis. From the rise of the Republic in 1946 until the two energy crises in the Seventies, from then until the end of the First Republic in the Nineties, and lastly from the Nineties until the first years of the Twenties in the twentieth century, especially the COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

Since the end of the First World war, the use of oil became dominant in economy, both for civilian and military factories. The Second World war brought with it large discoveries of oil in the Middle East thus enhancing the importance of the trade routes that would bring the precious resource from the Persian Gulf to the most developed economies in the West. That route had to pass through the Suez Canal and thus the Mediterranean, letting the latter find a new geoeconomic importance in the global scenario. The security of oil supply passed through the security of the Mediterranean area. The Italian peninsula is not rich in energy resources such as oil, gas, and coal, thus the import of such goods was strategical for the development of its economy in the aftermath of the war, and a key factor for the subsequent economic miracle.

After the war, most efforts were devoted to rebuilding the country destroyed by bombings, while AGIP (General Italian Oil Company an Italian retailer of automotive gasoline, diesel, LPG, lubricants, fuel oil, and bitumen established in 1926) was assimilated to the institutes wanted by the autarkic fascist policy that had to be eliminated to make room for the development of private initiative. The Anglo-American pressures, in fact, were also for the closure of the institution, given that the interests of London and Washington in the oil sector had grown significantly after a series of large investments. Foreign oil companies, in fact, seemed to want to transform Italy into a kind of refining centre and hub for the commercialization of crude oil from the Middle Eastern area.<sup>348</sup>

In that period, the Big Oil companies, also known as the Seven Sisters dominated the world energy market both upstream and downstream, creating a monopolistic hold of those resources and imposing their terms, shared by all, on the producing countries. These companies were the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), that would later become the British Petroleum Company in 1954; the British Shell Company, also known previously as Anglo-Dutch Company; the American Standard Oil of California Company, nowadays Chevron Corporation; the American Gulf Oil Company, now merged with Chevron Corporation; the American Texaco Company, also merged to Chevron Corporation nowadays; the American Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, later known as Esso, until today's ExxonMobil Company; the American Standard Oil Company of New York, later known as Mobil, then merged to Esso, giving birth to the aforementioned

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<sup>348</sup> Labbate S., *Energia e Mediterraneo: le iniziative italiane nel secondo dopoguerra (1945-1979)*, in *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, n. 73, September – December 2016, p. 27.

ExxonMobil Company. Thus, the Seven Sisters comprised two British and five American juggernaut companies in the energy industry. They would be joined later on by French company Total.

The vision of these companies for the role of Italy in this new economic era were jeopardized by the birth of Italy's new hydrocarbons institution, Eni, and its chairman Enrico Mattei. As a strong advocate for the need to achieve national energy independence, Mattei was capable of both keeping the previous State entity, AGIP, alive and transforming it into Eni. Thanks to Mattei, Italy was able to develop a brief independent oil policy, often in conflict with powerful British, French and American companies operating around the world. The new institution, created in 1953, was entrusted with existing companies in the same sector and, above all, with commissioning research surveys on national territory, starting from the exploitation of promising natural gas deposits discovered in Italy, although they would not be enough to satisfy Italy's demand for gas.

Mattei was aware of the chronic internal shortage of fossil fuels, wanted to resume exploration abroad immediately, especially in the Mediterranean area. Starting from the events of the Iranian crisis of 1953, Mattei concentrated his efforts on extending the activities of the oil company in that part of the world, in an attempt to guarantee stable and advantageous energy supplies to the country. The first important agreement that Mattei's Eni concluded was with Nasser's Egypt in 1955. In that agreement Eni acquired 20% of shares of the International Egyptian Oil Company, and thus Eni entered the arena of the major oil companies, though the latter did not appreciate the autonomous

move of the Italian company.<sup>349</sup> Still, it was only with the following agreement struck by Eni that the renowned Mattei formula was introduced. But before passing to that formula it is important to state that the domestic political environment in Italy was attuned to Mattei's vision since both the Italian President Giovanni Gronchi, holding his office since 1955, and Democrazia Cristiana Party leader Amintore Fanfani, who also held office multiple times the office of President of the Council of Ministers between the 50's and 60's, along with other prominent members of Italian politics were prone towards a more proactive Italian Mediterranean policy vis-à-vis the new waves of decolonization movements in Africa and the Middle East. That set of policies was later labelled as "neatlanticism", since it was considered as a new approach of considering the Atlantic alliance from Italy's perspective. A policy of alignment with NATO, though keeping open channels with Arab countries or other actors of the Non-aligned movement, and later on also discussions with the Soviet Union itself on energy issues.<sup>350</sup> Neatlanticism was a policy that has been dated to last from circa 1958 until 1968.

It is important to underline that although Italy embarked in bilateral negotiations with North African and Middle Eastern countries, her allegiance to the Atlantic Alliance was never put in serious doubt. Thus, in this domestic political environment Mattei could advance his plans of securing energy security for Italy through deals with energy producing Mediterranean and

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<sup>349</sup> Ibidem, p.29.

<sup>350</sup> Onelli F., *All'alba del neatlantismo : la politica egiziana dell'Italia (1951-1956)*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2003.

De Leonardis, *La politica estera italiana, la NATO e l'ONU negli anni del neatlantismo (1955-1960)*, in Tosi L. (ed.), *L'Italia e le organizzazioni internazionali*, CEDAM, Padova 1999.

Middle Eastern countries through Eni.

Following the agreement with Egypt, Italian interests shifted towards Iran. In 1957, a contract was signed between Agip and the National Iranian Oil Company (Nioc), creating the Société Irano-Italienne des Pétroles (Sirip). For the first time, the so-called "Mattei formula" was applied, involving the producer countries in the management of national oil resources: the Tehran government was entitled to 75% of total profits, while the Italian company received the remaining 25%. Strong objections were raised by London and Washington following the signing of this agreement, but these were ultimately quelled in the face of possible reactions from Shah Reza Palhavi. In the end, the Iranian agreement proved to be a significant success for Mattei's activities and Italian interests and was followed the following year by a series of agreements with Libya, Ethiopia, and Somalia for the construction of fuel distribution facilities. Furthermore, after an initial phase of direct promotion by Mattei, the signing of advantageous agreements prompted the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa to express their desire to intensify economic relations with Italy. Thus, it was decided to create an Italo-Arab Centre that, with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had the task of intensifying political and economic relations between the interested States. The president of this new institution was appointed as the Minister for Foreign Trade, Rinaldo Del Bo, while Mattei participated in the steering committee. This was a turning point that did not please the "seven sisters," whose dominant position was further undermined by the birth of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

(OPEC) in 1960.<sup>351</sup> The wrath of the Anglo-Americans was partially put to rest after a 1962 verbal deal with Mattei thanks to which he managed to grant access to international oil consortiums in Iraq and Iran. Until his dramatic end in 1962 he continued to weave precious relationships also with Ben Bella's Algeria for the construction of a natural gas pipeline from Algeria to Italy. Eni's mastermind after Mattei's passing was Eugenio Cefis, Vice President of Eni but with relevant decision-making powers. His vision was quite different than Mattei's since he abandoned the autonomous policy of Eni, in favour of a more cooperative approach towards the Anglo-Americans. The talks for the construction of the gas pipeline from Algeria were abandoned and a deal was struck with Esso in order to provide LNG from Libya to Italy's Panigaglia LNG Terminal. Other deals were struck by Eni with other energy producing countries, but all of them envisioned Esso as a constant partner. The years that followed signed the prelude to the two major energy crises of the 70's.

The 1967 Six Days war unleashed by Israel had the consequence of the very first oil embargo by OPEC countries with international consequences that would envisage what would come in just six years' time. The link between energy supply and international politics and geopolitics was rendered evident, thus a country like Italy that depended deeply on energy imports should have started a serious reflection on the issue. Eni didn't align herself completely on the same approach of the Seven Sisters. The latter tried to negotiate and contain OPEC countries' demands finally finding an agreement in 1971<sup>352</sup>, while Eni would still prefer bilateral agreements that would be its signature

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<sup>351</sup> Labbate S., p. 30.

<sup>352</sup> Ivi.

approach in the energy crises of the 70's.

On October 6, 1973, the Yom Kippur war began, marking the fourth Arab Israeli conflict. As already attempted during the Six-Day War, the Arab oil-producing countries used the oil weapon to influence Western States' relations with Israel, achieving greater success this time. Among the measures adopted, on October 16, the governments of Iran, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar unilaterally decided to increase crude oil prices and announced production cuts. Subsequently, they decided to block exports to the United States and the Netherlands and reduce oil production by supplying differentiated quantities depending on the position taken by each country during the conflict. The energy crisis culminated on November 5 when the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) announced the decision to cut crude oil production by 25% compared to the previous September levels and threatened to make an additional 5% reduction. The European response was the adoption of a joint declaration that marked an openly pro-Arab turning point. The community partners took a critical stance against Israel and the conflict in the hope of mitigating the ongoing oil sanctions, meeting the day after in Brussels. Italy felt almost compelled to adhere to the joint proclamation of November 6 due to the severe economic repercussions caused by the exorbitant increase in oil prices and the limited availability of oil.

Additionally, the country's almost complete dependence on Middle Eastern imports placed it in a difficult position. Italy's chaotic political and institutional instability, characterized by the brief duration of executives, did not help matters. The social tensions that led to the student protests of the autumn of 1968 were exacerbated by the first acts of terrorism. Neither the



Andreotti government (1972-1973), composed of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Liberals, nor the subsequent Rumor governments (1973-1974) with a centre-left majority, were capable of making far-reaching political choices to effectively address a difficult economic situation that had resurfaced. This resulted in phenomena such as stagnant productivity and an increase in public spending, which had disappeared during the economic boom. In this context, the outbreak of a new Arab Israeli conflict and the sanctions imposed by oil-producing Arab countries only worsened the situation: the rise in oil prices led to a decline in industrial production and a strong inflationary process.

Despite uncertainties and doubts, the Italian government found itself in absolute need of finding immediate solutions.<sup>353</sup> Thus, Italy made efforts to ensure a stable and cost-effective supply of crude oil. To this end, and with political support from Foreign Minister Moro, the president of ENI, Girotti, managed to negotiate an important agreement with Tunisia for the installation and operation of a gas pipeline (TRANSMED) that would connect Algeria to Italy via Tunisian territory, somewhat reminding Mattei's project of a decade prior. This agreement was part of the "natural gas option," a strategy of the Italian entity that involved the spread of natural gas throughout the country through import contracts with the Netherlands, the Soviet Union, and Algeria. The preliminary agreement between SNAM Progetti and SONATRACH, the Algerian State oil company, was signed in late 1973, after lengthy negotiations that had begun in 1964. It provided for the conveyance to Italy of 11.7 bcm of fuel per year for twenty-five years starting in 1978, which was

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<sup>353</sup> Labbate S., *L'Italia e l'ENI di fronte alle crisi petrolifere degli anni Settanta*, in *Nuova rivista storica*, Vol. 98, No.2, 2014, pp. 495 – 509.

equivalent to 70% of the country's domestic consumption at that time. The TRANSMED gas pipeline was to be one of the longest in the world, with a planned length of 2,500 kilometres, including 174 offshore, and was to connect the Hassi R'Mel fields in the Algerian Sahara to La Spezia, via the Sicilian Channel and the Strait of Messina.

A second important agreement was signed with Iraq for the construction of an oil pipeline to enhance the existing network that conveyed crude oil in the Mediterranean. The construction was to be carried out jointly by ENI and the Iraqi oil company (NIOC), and it involved a 633 km pipeline to connect the Rumaila Nord oil fields to the pipelines that crossed Syria and Lebanon.

Furthermore, in addition to the initiatives of the oil company, the Italian government was directly called upon to do its part in trying to establish direct agreements to obtain new and safer energy supplies. This was a strategic line suggested from the early stages of the shock from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. among the alternatives under consideration, there was the hypothesis of new relationships with energy-exporting nations in order to create a profitable exchange. That would mean that in exchange for oil, Italy could offer equipment and technical expertise capable of guaranteeing the economic development of the producers somewhat reviving the so-called barter method introduced by Mattei. The need to initiate a dialogue with producer countries was directly urged by the president of ENI on the Rumor government, who called loudly for action in this direction. According to Girotti, the difficulties of oil supply were eminently political, which could not be answered solely through business interventions. The pressures for government mediation in order to seek a direct and profitable relationship with producers also came, unlike the past, from a large part of the industrial

world: new markets were hoped for that until then had not been accessible and appeared unprofitable.

A response to these requests came precisely from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aldo Moro, who sought to revive the policy of bilateral agreements to obtain immediate benefits. This strategy, endorsed by many Western countries, however, offered the opportunity for strong criticism from Washington, especially in the aftermath of the accession to the November 6th community declaration: the United States, while recognizing that European choices were born from the oil crisis, could not accept a significant discrepancy in objectives with its transatlantic partners.

The Italian government, while still committed to cooperation with Europe and the international community, pursued a strategy of direct bilateral agreements with oil-producing countries. The first significant step in this direction was taken during the visit of the Saudi oil minister and the Algerian counterpart for Energy to Rome in early 1974. However, Italian diplomats faced the major obstacle of Italy being seen as too closely aligned with Washington. This was overcome through a public declaration in the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate by Moro in January 1974, acknowledging the legitimate aspirations of the Arab people for their own homeland and calling for an end to Israeli occupation of territories conquered during the 1967 war, while not questioning the existence and integrity of Israel. The Foreign Minister then embarked on a mission to the Middle East to establish direct contacts with oil-producing countries. This trip aimed to provide opportunities for Italy in terms of oil and economic gains, including an agreement with Libya to increase the flow of oil in exchange for technical, scientific, financial, and

industrial support in the African country.<sup>354</sup>

The 1973 crisis had the effect of intensifying ENI's productive effort through the search for new hydrocarbons both on national territory and especially abroad. The most interesting discoveries beyond the borders occurred in Nigeria, the English sector of the North Sea, and Indonesia, while others to be evaluated were obtained off the coast of the Republic of Congo and Trinidad and Tobago. In 1975, two-thirds of the concessions held by AGIP were attributable to offshore wells. On the gas supply front, in addition to the agreement for the pipeline with Algeria, the gas pipeline from the Netherlands, from the Drenthe deposits, and the gas pipeline from the USSR were completed in 1974. However, in 1975, the SNAM Progetti-SONATRACH agreement for the annual import of natural gas into Italy through the TRANS MED pipeline, which was to cross Tunisia, the Sicilian Channel, and all central-southern Italy, was called into question due to new economic demands advanced by the Tunisian government. As a result, in November 1976, the two companies temporarily abandoned the project and entered into a twenty-year substitute contract that provided for the annual supply of eight and a half billion cubic meters of liquefied natural gas by methane tankers, starting from the early 1980s. The following year, after reaching a new agreement with the Tunisian government and within the framework of the ENI program aimed at guaranteeing the quantities of natural gas necessary to face the expected increases in consumption, SNAM Progetti and SONATRACH found an agreement to restore the TRANSMED gas pipeline project, cancelling the previous substitute contract. The new

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<sup>354</sup> Ivi.

agreement in October provided for the Italian purchase of a quantity equal to 12.36 bcm per year for a period of twenty-five years starting from 1981. The pipeline, with a total length of about two thousand five hundred kilometres, crossing Algeria and Tunisia. Finally, in 1978, ENI obtained decidedly positive results from mining exploration operations in the Niger Delta and off the coast of Libya.

The national oil plan introduced in Italy in 1974 offered for the first time a comprehensive energy program as a tool for addressing the problem of source supply. According to Eni President Girotti, the situation appeared more difficult in the peninsula than elsewhere and could not be resolved without taking into account the need to import energy resources from abroad and, consequently, without considering the implications of the case. Unlike in the US, Italy had to confront its limited availability of internal resources, and this required a sectoral program capable of evaluating all conditioning external factors. In this scenario, the ENI executive considered the coherence of objectives between foreign policy, commercial policy, and cooperation with producing countries essential.<sup>355</sup>

The second oil shock, caused by the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the subsequent conflict between the new Khomeinist regime and Iraq's Saddam Hussein in 1980, found Italy unprepared once again due to its strong dependence on oil imports that amounted to almost 80% of its domestic energy needs. Eni attempted to recover its strategic direction from 1973 by expanding its activities abroad, not only through the acquisition of new permits and intensification of efforts in areas where it was already present,

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<sup>355</sup> Ibidem, p. 515.

but also by "assisting governments and State-owned companies of producing countries in the development of their natural resources." The Mediterranean remained a focal point for Italy, as demonstrated by Eni's president Mazzanti mission to Tehran in March 1979, right after the revolution, which led to the partial restoration of supplies and the gradual resumption of Italian activities in Iran. Italy's economic and social situation was strongly influenced by the sudden increase in energy costs caused by the second oil shock, which further impacted the Italian economy due to the revaluation of the dollar. Additionally, the country was still plagued by terrorist attacks to which the government appeared unable to respond effectively. Despite these challenges, Eni's response to the new oil supply difficulties was less critical than in the previous shock, thanks in part to its increased exploration and production of natural gas and oil since 1973.

However, it should be noted that the main agreements signed in the aftermath of the first crisis, such as the Transmed gas pipeline from Algeria, would only yield results in the 1980s. Nonetheless, Eni's actions in 1979 demonstrated a greater ability to respond concretely to international challenges. For example, after Saudi Arabia's decision to denounce and suspend its oil supply contract due to the Eni-Petromin scandal, the Italian company turned from the Middle East to the Mediterranean again in the short term, but gradually shifted its attention towards the Americas, the North Sea, and the Soviet Union.<sup>356</sup>

Italy's foreign policy regarding gas in the 1980s can be understood by examining the country's relationship with its major gas suppliers and the broader international context at the time. One of Italy's main objectives was

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<sup>356</sup> Labbate S., 2017, p. 40.

to diversify its energy sources away from traditional oil suppliers, such as the Middle East and North Africa, and towards more stable and reliable sources in the Mediterranean region. This led to Italy pursuing gas deals with countries such as Algeria and Libya, which had significant natural gas reserves and were geographically closer to Italy than traditional oil suppliers. Italy also sought to promote regional cooperation and integration in the Mediterranean region through energy partnerships.

For example, Italy played a key role in the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995, which aimed to promote economic and political cooperation between the EU and Mediterranean countries. Energy cooperation was seen as a key component of this partnership, with the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Energy Forum in 2005 to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on energy issues. At the same time, Italy also faced challenges in its energy relations with some Mediterranean countries, particularly Libya. Tensions between Italy and Libya escalated in the late 1980s, with Libya nationalizing its oil and gas resources and imposing higher prices on Italy. This led to Italy diversifying its gas sources and pursuing deals with other Mediterranean countries, as well as developing its domestic gas production capacity.<sup>357358</sup>

In general, the end of the Cold War has had a significant impact on Italian foreign policy<sup>359</sup>. In response to this abrupt change in the international

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<sup>357</sup>*La Strategia italiana nel Mediterraneo, stabilizzare le crisi e costruire un'agenda positiva per la regione*, in occasione della 3<sup>o</sup> edizione del Rome Mediterranean Dialogues, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2017. <https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/12/rapporto-med-maeci-ita.pdf>

<sup>358</sup>Labbate S., *Alla ricerca di un Mediterranean role*, Meridiana, No. 101, 2021, pp. 145-168.

<sup>359</sup> Giacomello G., Verbeek B., *Italy's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century, The New Assertiveness of an Aspiring Middle Power*, Lexington Books, Plymouth, 2011.

environment, Italy has adopted a more assertive foreign policy to increase its own prestige and status as a middle power. This transformation is particularly evident in the realm of security policy, where Italian troops have increasingly been involved in military operations abroad, transforming Italy from a "security consumer" to a "security provider."

The flourishing of military interventions, other than war, established by international organizations (UN, NATO, and the EU) and/or the United States, has made Italy's remarkable involvement in peace and security operations possible. Furthermore, there has been broad domestic consensus among political parties, bureaucracies, and interest groups in support of this development in Italian security policy.

Between 1990 and 2008, the change in Italian foreign policy was more limited regarding the balance between Europeanism, meaning support for the European integration process, and Atlanticism, the "special" relationship with the United States. This could be described as an "adjustment change," in which only the intensity of the commitment towards these lodestars of Italian foreign policy was modified. The colour of the coalitions alternating in government accounts for this modest variation, with the centre-right preferring Atlanticism over Europeanism and the centre-left vice versa.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Berlusconi's support for the US-led "war on terror" highlighted differences between Italy and Germany and France as Italy distanced itself from these European allies to follow the US. Berlusconi's personal relationships with non-democratic leaders, such as Putin and Gaddafi, further underlined his preferences for a bilateral approach to foreign policy. However, such divergences should be analysed as a change in the intensity of commitment to multilateralism and bilateralism rather than a



choice of one against the other.

The 2011 debt crisis has significantly influenced Italian policymakers' approach to foreign policy. Together with the failure of the intervention in Libya, concerns about public expenditure have slightly reduced Italy's willingness to provide military resources and troops for peace and security operations outside areas of strategic interest. As a result, Italian security, energy security, and defence policy has given top priority to the Mediterranean and Northern Africa in recent years, while partially side-lining efforts in other regions.

In the domain on energy resources, the 2000s are particularly important for the deal between Eni and Libyan NOC for the construction of the Greenstream<sup>360</sup> pipeline that links Libya to Sicily. The 2011 crisis in Libya, thus, gains an even more important role for Italy since it risked jeopardizing its natural gas supply. The 2010s set the Mediterranean on the spotlight with regards to the migration crisis thus side-lining energy resources issues from the main dossier of Italy. The Eastern Mediterranean acquired new interest too since it is in 2015 that Eni discovered the gargantuan Zohr gas field, along with many other fields<sup>361</sup>, in the Egyptian EEZ, and started extracting it in 2017.<sup>362</sup> Other discoveries in Cypriot EEZ steered Eni's interest in those waters. Since 2013 Eni is present in Cyprus operating in five maritime blocks

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<sup>360</sup> Frappi C., Varvelli A., *Le strategie di politica energetica dell'Italia. Criticità interne e opportunità internazionali*, Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali, No. 12, April 2010.

<sup>361</sup> Tagliapietra S., *Towards a New Eastern Mediterranean Energy Corridor? Natural Gas Developments between Market Opportunities and Geopolitical Risks*, Fondazione ENI Enrico Mattei Working Paper No. 12, 2013.

<sup>362</sup> Prontera A., Ruszel M., *Energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Middle East Policy, Vol. 24, No. 3, Fall 2017.  
<https://eclass.unipi.gr/modules/document/file.php/EBI131/Energy%20Security%20in%20the%20Eastern%20Mediterranean.pdf>

in cooperation with Total, while has participating interests in two blocks operated by Total.<sup>363</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the 2015 White Book of the Ministry of Defence regarding international security and defence has set the security and stability of the euro-Mediterranean region as a “vital national interest” also because of the strong energy dependency of Italy from some of the States of the area.<sup>364</sup>

Other factors impacted Italy’s action in the Mediterranean and more broadly in issues regarding energy resources. A first constraint in Italy’s energy oriented foreign policy is the 2019 EU Green Deal.<sup>365</sup>

The EU Green Deal is a comprehensive plan aimed at making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The plan sets out a number of ambitious targets to achieve this goal, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing the use of renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and promoting sustainable economic growth. As part of the EU's efforts to achieve these goals, there is a push towards a more sustainable energy mix, which includes a significant increase in the use of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power. The EU Green Deal had a noteworthy impact on natural gas suppliers, in particular with regards to long term investments and to the adaptability of the industry to a new normality.<sup>366</sup> For Italy, this shift

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<sup>363</sup> *Eni makes another gas discovery offshore Cyprus*, ENI Press Release, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>364</sup> Il Ministro della Difesa, *Libro bianco per la sicurezza internazionale e la difesa*, 2015. <https://flpdifesa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Libro-Bianco-30.04.2015-5a-versione-def-sul-sito-MD.pdf>

<sup>365</sup> Hafner M., Raimondi P. P., *Priorities, and challenges of the EU energy transition: From the European Green Package to the new Green Deal*, *Russian Journal of Economics*, No. 6, 2020, pp. 374–389.

<sup>366</sup> Fischer L., *What the EU Green Deal means for European gas suppliers: Case study Norway*, E3G, 2021.

towards a more sustainable energy mix is likely to have significant implications. Italy has traditionally relied heavily on natural gas as a primary source of energy. However, the EU Green Deal is likely to lead to a reduction in demand for natural gas in the long term, as the EU seeks to transition away from fossil fuels towards more sustainable energy sources. In response to this shift, Italy has put forward a number of initiatives aimed at promoting the use of renewable energy sources, including plans to develop a hydrogen strategy and to increase the use of solar and wind power. However, there are significant obstacles to the development of these initiatives, including regulatory barriers, a lack of infrastructure, and concerns over the cost-effectiveness of renewable energy.

One of the key challenges facing Italy is the need to develop a more diversified energy mix that is less reliant on natural gas. This will require significant investment in new infrastructure, as well as the development of new technologies to support the transition towards more sustainable energy sources. In addition, there is likely to be a need for significant policy support to encourage investment in renewable energy and to promote the development of new technologies.<sup>367</sup>

Furthermore, the COVID 19 pandemic had a further exogenous impact on oil and natural gas markets.<sup>368</sup> The then envisaged impact involved a drastic reduction in prices of natural gas and a decrease in investments and explorations. For many it was a perfect opportunity to redirect energy

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<sup>367</sup> Coratella T., *The European Green Deal: A political opportunity for Italy*, European Council on Foreign Relations Commentary, 17 February 2020.

<sup>368</sup> Norouzi N., *Post-COVID-19 and globalization of oil and natural gas trade: Challenges, opportunities, lessons, regulations, and strategies*, International Journal of Energy Research, Volume 45, Issue 10, pp. 14338-14356.

industries in the production of green sources of energy as well as making all those investments that before the pandemic would result prohibitive.<sup>369</sup> Clean hydrogen has been proven to be a good replacement for natural gas, and its extraction is linked to that of natural gas. That is the reason why many projects for the construction of gas pipelines have included plans for the convertibility of the pipeline in order to allow the transport of clean hydrogen.

Finally, the recent outbreak of war in Ukraine served as a reminder of the crucial importance of energy security, and thus diversification of the supply. Once Russia invaded Ukraine, it was of paramount importance to minimize as soon as possible Russian gas supply. The EU countries all lowered their imports as much as possible, with Germany and Italy being the most exposed since they depended in large part of their energy supply by Russian gas. The conflict emphasized the importance of fossil fuels in the current energy mix and exposed the limits of the slow transition towards renewables. The partial embargo on Russian oil and the gradual elimination of Russian gas from the EU's energy mix are having a considerable impact on businesses and families in the short and medium run. Fossil fuels were also shown to be influenced by geopolitical tensions, and countries with abundant fossil fuel reserves played a central role in the conflict.

Since the war began, Russia has gradually reduced its gas flows to Europe while increasing its profits through surcharges. The Nord Stream pipeline, the Yamal pipeline, and the undersea explosions that ruptured the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines in the Baltic Sea have contributed to the reduction in Russian

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<sup>369</sup> Mohamedazeem M. M., Seeram R., Sivaprasath P., Yong L., *Advancing green energy solution with the impetus of COVID-19 pandemic*, Journal of Energy Chemistry, Volume 59, 2021, Pages 688-705.

gas flows to Europe.<sup>370</sup> Italy's gas supply situation differs from the rest of Europe due to the government's major and successful efforts to diversify its sources of gas. The Draghi government (2021-2022) has focused on diversification with a Mediterranean focus, including agreements to increase gas supplies from Algeria and Azerbaijan via pipeline, and additional contracts for LNG with countries such as Qatar, Egypt, Angola, Congo, and Mozambique. As of late November 2022, Italy imported only 1.6%, from a 40% figure before the war, of its gas from Russia, with the majority of its gas coming from Algeria and Azerbaijan, and LNG from various countries. However, it will be difficult to replace all gas flows from Russia while also meeting demand for gas.<sup>371372</sup> The coalition government emerging from the last elections of September 2022 offered the leadership of the Italian government to Giorgia Meloni. Her government has continued the policies of the previous Draghi government in regards to gas supply from abroad, while it has announced the intention of rendering Italy a natural gas hub for Europe, as well as preparing a new investment plan for African countries that supply Italy with energy resources in a non-predatory fashion, inspired by Enrico Mattei's formula.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Gili A., *Between transition and security: the EU's response to the energy crisis*, Italian Institute for International Political Studies – ISPI, Commentary 29 November 2022.

<sup>371</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>372</sup> Pastore L. M., Lo Basso G., de Santoli L., *Towards a dramatic reduction in the European Natural Gas consumption: Italy as a case study*, Journal of Cleaner Production, Volume 369, 2022.

<sup>373</sup> Varvelli A., *Gassy ambitions: The obstacles to Italy's planned gas hub for Europe*, European Council on Foreign Relations – ECFR, Commentary, 14 February 2023.

*3.2: Italy, the East Med pipeline project, and the Eastern Mediterranean gas Forum – EMGF.*

As it has been mentioned above, the first step towards the creation of a natural gas pipeline that would transport the energy resource from Israeli and Cypriot offshore gas fields to mainland Greece, and thus to Italy started in December 2017 with the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding in Tel Aviv by Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Italy. In the same year Eni started the extraction of natural gas from the Egyptian Zohr field and redirected it to the domestic market of Egypt in order to help the country obtain once more energy autonomy and then to become once more a net exporter of gas through the natural gas terminals of Idku and Damietta.

In the first months of 2018 Eni's drilling rig is intercepted and halted by Turkish warships, and in the meanwhile Eni, along with Total and Russian Novatek, strikes a deal with Lebanon for the exploration of two maritime blocks within Lebanese EEZ. In June of the same year Egypt balances its domestic gas market and in the end of the year resumes gas exports from Idku and Damietta. In early 2019 the representatives of Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority meet in Cairo to establish the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), with the evident absence of Turkey, but also of Syria, Lebanon, and Libya. In May of the same year Turkish ships are sent to a drilling mission within the Cypriot EEZ which is contested by Turkey, and in July the EU condemns Turkey's action while in Cairo the members of the EMGF meet again with the addition of France, the US, the EU, and the World Bank as observers.

In the last months of 2019 Turkey continues drilling operations within

Cypriot EEZ, while in December Cyprus, Greece, and Israel announce the signature of an agreement for the construction of the East med pipeline early next year. This news is met by the stern condemnation of Turkey that seizes the opportunity and signs the well-known agreement with Libyan GNA authorities regarding the EEZ delimitation between Libya and Turkey as well as the sending of Turkish troops in Tripoli in order to defend the GNA governed territories from the latest LNA attack.

Greece, Cyprus, and Israel sign the deal for the construction of the East Med pipeline in early 2020 but Italy, that had previously signed the Memorandum, does not sign said agreement.

The recent assertiveness of Turkey along with its disregard of international law and peaceful settlement of disputes led Italy to take a more cautious step and evaluate the geopolitical commitment that would be necessary for the construction and protection of a pipeline that would pass though contested waters, in a scenario in which the Turkish navy, along with that of the other actors of the area were, was on the rise.

The summer of 2020 saw a particularly high activity of navies in the Eastern Mediterranean. The apex was reached when a Greek warship collided with a Turkish warship that was escorting a seismic research vessel navigating through contested waters. To this incident followed military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean led by Greece, Cyprus, Italy, and France. In September 2020, the EMGF becomes formally an intergovernmental organization with the approval of a Charter. Later on, France would join the organization, while the EU, and the US would acquire observer status.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Ellinas C., 2022.

In order to assess Italy's posture vis-à-vis the East Med gas pipeline, it is very important to lay clearly the link that binds the Eastern Mediterranean maritime disputes sparked by the discoveries of large natural gas fields, on the one hand, and the Turkish intervention in Libya, on the other.<sup>375</sup> The geopolitical situation does not allow Italy to have a head-on approach to the question, since the stability of Libya is of paramount importance both for the import of resources but also for the immigration question. Furthermore, Italy and Turkey are supporting the same faction, the GNA. Thus, a very heterogeneous combination of supporting parties is observed in Libya, since the Italian and Turkish support for the internationally recognized GNA is met by the French, Greek, Cypriot, Turkish, Emirati support for the LNA. That notwithstanding, there is no direct collaboration whatsoever in the combined support of the GNA by Turkey and Italy thus rendering still more fragile Italy's position vis-à-vis the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>376</sup>

This Italian tentative position is laid plain in the parliamentary hearing proceedings of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Italian Chamber of Deputies of the XVIII legislature (2018-2022) regarding the construction of the East Med pipeline.<sup>377</sup> Indeed, the same instances have been reiterated in

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<sup>375</sup> Gürzel Aka A. G., Bozoglu A. E., Hashimov I. & Pulhan A., *The 'new great game' in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Israel Affairs, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2022, pp. 16-27.

<sup>376</sup> Valenzano C. G., *Mediterranean Equilibria: Italian-Turkish Balancing and Competition over Libya*, IAI Commentaries 21|58, December 2021.

<sup>377</sup> - Parliamentary hearing of Edison: Bollettino delle Giunte e delle Commissioni Parlamentari, Affari esteri e comunitari February 14th, 2023.

Video of the hearing: <https://webtv.camera.it/evento/21763>

- Parliamentary hearing of the Ambassador of Cyprus, Yiorgos Christofides, the Ambassador of Greece, Elena Sourani, and the Ambassador of Israel, Alon Bar, as part of the discussion of resolution 7-00009 Formentini on possible initiatives and dialogues of the Italian Government towards the countries adhering to the Eastmed project, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Video of the hearing: not available.

- Informal videoconference hearing of representatives from Kyoto Club, as part of the discussion of resolution no. 7-00009 Formentini, on possible initiatives and dialogues of the Italian Government towards the countries adhering to the Eastmed project;



the XIX Legislature (2022 – present), and although the project gathers support from many members of the Commission, there is no clear commitment for it. In particular, as of the aforementioned hearings, the centre-left parties highlight the geopolitical barbwire in which Italy would be drawn to and support the idea that the East Med pipeline could lead to an escalation of violence and naval rearmament in the Levant. Furthermore, they counter the idea of a natural gas project since it would go against both the 2015 Paris Agreement on environmental issues<sup>378</sup>, the EU Green Deal national objectives of decarbonization, as well as the technical feasibility and economic profitability of the whole project.

On the other side of the aisle, the centre-right parties support the project of the construction of the pipeline since they see it as a means of granting Italy's energy security through diversification of suppliers, along with an opportunity to meet EU Green Deal objectives through the future adaptability of the pipeline to host clean hydrogen<sup>379</sup>, as well as providing a collaborative

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Informal videoconference hearing of representatives from ECCO, as part of the discussion of resolution no. 7-00009 Formentini, on possible initiatives and dialogues of the Italian Government towards the countries adhering to the Eastmed project;

Informal videoconference hearing of representatives from Legambiente, as part of the discussion of resolution no. 7-00009 Formentini, on possible initiatives and dialogues of the Italian Government towards the countries adhering to the Eastmed project;

Informal videoconference hearing of representatives from Greenpeace, as part of the discussion of resolution no. 7-00009 Formentini, on possible initiatives and dialogues of the Italian Government towards the countries adhering to the Eastmed project. March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Video of the hearing: <https://webtv.camera.it/evento/22074>

- Parliamentary hearing of representatives from ISPI, as part of the discussion of resolution no. 7-00009 Formentini, on possible initiatives and dialogues of the Italian Government towards the countries adhering to the Eastmed project. April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Video of the hearing: <https://webtv.camera.it/evento/22204>.

<sup>378</sup> Skjærseth J.B., *Towards a European Green Deal: The evolution of EU climate and energy policy mixes*. International Environmental Agreements Vol. 21, 2021, pp. 25–41.

<sup>379</sup> Lambert M., *Hydrogen and decarbonisation of gas: false dawn or silver bullet?*, in Energy Insight: 66, The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, March 2020.

framework for the involved actors leaving the door open to the other actors of the Levant that are not yet part of the project.<sup>380</sup>

It can be noted that the present majority coalition, in 2023, is pushing hard in order to get Italy sign the 2022 agreement on the construction of the East Med pipeline, that it hasn't signed yet, and thus allow the project to advance.<sup>381</sup>

The feasibility of the project has been confirmed time and again<sup>382</sup>. On February 14<sup>th</sup> 2023 the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Italian Chamber of Deputies hosted officials of Edison in a hearing, and Edison's CEO Nicola Monti expressed the necessity of receiving political support from Italian authorities in order to advance the project for the construction of the pipeline.<sup>383</sup>

With regards to the perception of the Mediterranean in the security policy of Italy there have been two major shifts in the last years. The first one concerns Italy's EEZ. Italy, although a signatory of the Montego Bay Treaty of 1982, and having ratified said treaty in 1994<sup>384</sup>, had not proclaimed its Exclusive Economic Zone as of Part V of the Convention. The EEZ extends State jurisdiction and certain rights until a maximum of 200 nautical miles. Among those rights Article 56 of the Convention includes the exploration and exploitation of natural resources, whether living or non-living.<sup>385</sup> Whereas two coastal States' maritime border is under 200 nautical miles bilateral

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<sup>380</sup>Parliamentary hearing video of March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023: <https://webtv.camera.it/evento/22074> .

<sup>381</sup> Carrer G., *Gasdotto Eastmed. Fdi e Lega chiedono al governo di fare in fretta*, Formiche.net, 16/12/2022.

<sup>382</sup>*DNV Confirms Feasibility and Maturity of EastMed Gas Pipeline*, Pipeline & Gas Journal, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>383</sup> Parliamentary hearing of Edison officials: <https://webtv.camera.it/evento/21763>

<sup>384</sup> Law December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1994, N° 689.

<sup>385</sup> UN Treaties: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/11/19941116%2005-26%20AM/Ch\\_XXI\\_06p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/11/19941116%2005-26%20AM/Ch_XXI_06p.pdf)

negotiations have to take place in order to define the EEZ border. That is the case of the Mediterranean Sea which hosts a multitude of coastal States with less than 200 nautical miles from each other's maritime borders. Algeria unilaterally declared its EEZ in 2018<sup>386</sup> thus prompting the other coastal countries, such as Spain and Italy, to initiate negotiations in order to establish a negotiated EEZ.

Italy declared its EEZ on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, by law n° 91, which explicitly requires the Italian State to notify its EEZ to adjacent or opposite facing States and negotiate the outer border of the EEZ with said States. Only once those negotiations have been finalised with a treaty, and after such treaty has been ratified by the Italian Parliament, ex Art. 80 of the Italian Constitution such borders will be legally in place.<sup>387</sup> The latest maritime border agreement signed by Italy is the already mentioned agreement with Greece signed in June of 2020<sup>388</sup>, and ratified in June 2021, although it is not purely a delimitation of the two countries EEZs since Greece has not yet declared its EEZ.<sup>389</sup> Other, previous, agreements have been concluded with former Yugoslavia in 1969, Tunisia in 1971, Spain in 1974, and Albania in 1992, while with Malta there has been an exchange of verbal notes for a *modus vivendi* settlement in 1970.<sup>390</sup>

The second development in Italian perception of the Mediterranean took place

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<sup>386</sup> Bonafé B., Pertile M., *From EEZ-phobia to EEZ-mania? The Algerian exclusive economic zone and its consequences*, Zoom Out, Questions of International Law, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

<sup>387</sup> Law June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, N° 91.

<sup>388</sup> Caffio F., *Italia nel club delle Zee del Mediterraneo con Grecia e Turchia*, Affari Internazionali, IAI, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

<sup>389</sup> Law June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, N° 93.

<sup>390</sup> *Accordo con la Grecia sulla delimitazione delle rispettive zone marittime, fatto ad Atene il 9 giugno 2020*, Servizio Studi Camera dei deputati, Dossier n° 391, Documentazione per l'esame di Progetti di legge, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

in May 2022. Since 2015 the Italian Defence Staff had initiated operation “*Mare Sicuro*”, (Safe Sea), which aimed to reinforce the aerial and naval surveillance system in the Mediterranean through the use of additional naval units, protection teams, fixed-wing and rotary aircraft, and unmanned aerial vehicles, to protect communication lines, commercial vessels, and national offshore platforms, as well as to monitor jihadist formations. The operation was also aimed at deterring and countering illicit trafficking and collecting information on terrorist groups and illegal trafficking activities. This operation also affirmed Italy's participation in the operation to support the Libyan Coast Guard's control of illegal immigration and human trafficking. Furthermore, among other objectives of the Mare Sicuro operation there was the provision of surveillance and protection to ENI platforms in the Libyan offshore area, protection of national naval units engaged in search and rescue (SAR) operations, protection of national merchant traffic in the area, deterrence and counteraction of illicit trafficking, and collection of information on the activities of terrorist groups as well as the organization of illicit trafficking and departure points of vessels.<sup>391</sup> The area that the operation covered was the Central Mediterranean and in particular an area of 160.000 square kilometres.

In May 2022, the Italian Defence Staff approved a new directive on the “Strategy of Defence and Security in the Mediterranean”<sup>392</sup> vastly expanding the operational area of what was Mare Sicuro Operation and now becomes *Mediterraneo Sicuro* (Safe Mediterranean) Operation to 2.000.000 square

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<sup>391</sup> Decree Law February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015, N° 7.

<sup>392</sup> Strategia di Sicurezza e difesa per il Mediterraneo, Ministero della Difesa, Edizione 2022.

kilometres.<sup>393</sup> The latest operation furthers the previous' tasks adding to them the defence of maritime communication lines, the control of underwater domain, the safeguarding of economic activities of interest on the high seas, the protection of national fleets, merchant and fishing vessels, as well as vehicles belonging to other State agencies. The military device of the operation includes eight aircrafts and six warships, including submarines and an amphibious transport dock that can embark marines, as well as humanitarian supplies and a multitude of vehicles. This new projection of the Italian navy in a structured fashion is very interesting and it underlines the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean for Italian interests in the area. This approach gains even more importance in the present international contingency after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the importance to guarantee the free and secure navigation of the Mediterranean.

This tangled position of Italy with regards to the East Med pipeline construction is not replicated with regards to the EMGF. Italy has been a strong advocate of the EMGF, signing its Charter on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, ratifying it on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2021<sup>394</sup>, and participating in all the relative proceedings. That should be of no surprise since it fits Italy's tradition of advocating in favour of multilateral settings in order to reach negotiated solutions to common issues and disputes. Indeed, the EMGF could comprise all major stakeholders of the area and thus offer an excellent stage for negotiation and optimization of natural gas commerce.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup>Operazione Mediterraneo Sicuro, Operazioni in Corso, Marina militare italiana. <https://www.marina.difesa.it/cosa-facciamo/per-la-difesa-sicurezza/operazioni-in-corso/Pagine/MareSicuro.aspx>

<sup>394</sup> Law October 28th, 2021, N° 168.

<sup>395</sup> Sukkarieh M., *The East Mediterranean Gas Forum: Regional Cooperation Amid Conflicting Interests*, Natural Resource Governance Institute briefing, February 2021.

The financial contribution of Italy in favour of the EMGF have been envisioned to amount to 130,000€ annually from 2021, while the Italian authorities' missions to the EMGF in order to participate to its proceedings will amount to 8,800€ annually.<sup>396</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that Italian participation to the Ministerial Meetings of the EMGF, the most prominent body of the Forum, has been fluctuating in terms of the Italian officials designated as Head of mission rank. Most of both founder and new members send their respective Ministers of Energy as Head of mission to the Ministerial meetings. Italy has sent its Minister of Energy, or the equivalent name of the Ministry, multiple times, although at least in three out of eight Ministerial Meetings, specifically in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup>, Italy has designated as Head of Mission either its Ambassador in Cairo, the Undersecretary for Economic Development, or the Vice Minister for Economic Development.<sup>397</sup> The choice of sending a lower ranking official to attend the EMGF's most important body meetings, among other Ministerial level authorities by other member States, can be easily attributed to the busy agenda of the Minister, but it could also suggest a lesser interest or intention of involvement by the Italian authorities.

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<sup>396</sup> Nota di verifica n. 304, 23 February 2021, Servizio Bilancio dello Stato, Camera dei deputati, XVIII Legislatura. <https://documenti.camera.it/Leg18/Dossier/Pdf/VQ2842.Pdf>

<sup>397</sup> EMGF Website, Ministerial Meetings section. <https://emgf.org/events/ministeria-meetings/>

### *3.3: Neoclassical realism as a tool of analysis of Italian foreign policy in the domain of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean.*

In order to analyse the Italian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean regarding natural gas it shall be now used the Neoclassical realist approach, and especially the Type II approach as presented in Chapter 1, thus through the lens of a foreign policy theory.

In the first part of the paragraph the independent variable will be presented. The different actors composing the Levantine basin sub-region as presented in Chapter 2 will be take in consideration along with external actors such as the US, Russia, and China. System clarity, as well as permissive/restrictive environment factors will be taken in consideration.

In the second part of the paragraph the intervening variables will be presented. Perception, decision making, and policy implementation will be considered as intervening variables, while leader image, strategic culture, State-society relation, and domestic institutions will be the determining factors.

Finally, the third part will be dedicated to the dependent variable, the foreign policy outcome thus observing whether Neoclassical realism can be applied to explain Italian foreign policy, as well as to be applied in a regional, and not international, context considering middle powers such as Italy, and not great powers.

#### *3.3.1: The independent variable: the Eastern Mediterranean regional system.*

In this section three factors shall be taken into consideration the actors' distribution of power using multiple open-source indexes, system clarity, and an evaluation of an either permissive or restrictive environment. The outbreak

of war in Ukraine had a noteworthy impact on both systemic clarity and permissive/restrictive environment. The systemic change will be addressed by presenting both factors as they were before and after the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

In recent history, the international system has undergone significant transitions. Within a period of fewer than twenty years, the system has shifted from the bipolar order of the Cold War to unipolarity, and now many suggest it is moving towards multipolarity<sup>398399</sup>. However, some scholars have also proposed the idea of unipolarity<sup>400</sup> or non-polarity.<sup>401</sup> The core of the debate centres around whether the United States' power and influence in the international system are declining and whether other States or groups of States have risen to challenge its dominance. At present, it is difficult to determine whether the international system has become truly multipolar, although some argue that the current world order, being fluid and uncertain, has created gaps in power and opportunities for various regions and States to become more influential and assertive.<sup>402</sup>

The global power transitions in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean (MEEM) have been exemplified by the ongoing Syrian conflict since 2011. The war emerged when the US had already withdrawn from the region, having completed major military and peacebuilding operations in Iraq. This

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<sup>398</sup> Zakaria, F., *The Post-American World and the Rise of the Rest*, Penguin Books, London and New York, 2011.

<sup>399</sup> Schweller, R. L., *Maxwell's Demon and the Golden Apple: Global Discord in the New Millennium*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2014.

<sup>400</sup> Huntington, S. P., "The Lonely Superpower.", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2, 1999, pp. 35-49.

<sup>401</sup> Haas, R. N., *The Age of Nonpolarity: What will Follow US Dominance*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3, 2008, pp. 44-56.

<sup>402</sup> Buzan, B., and Waever O., *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.



power vacuum in Iraq was taken over by regional States such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, with Iran ultimately consolidating its influence over Baghdad. This was a significant setback to American strategy and sphere of influence in the region. Thus, the war in Syria presented the US with an opportunity to weaken Iran's regional influence by replacing the Syrian regime with a pro-western one. However, the complexities and unique circumstances of Syrian politics were underestimated by the western States, including the resilience of the Syrian regime and the support provided by Iran and Hezbollah. Eventually, the power balance in the war shifted in favour of the Bashar al-Assad regime in 2015 when Russia intervened at the Syrian government's request. By the end of 2018, Russia, along with Iran and Hezbollah, had helped Assad to regain around 75% of Syria's territories. Furthermore, in December 2018, US President Donald Trump, announced that the US forces would soon withdraw from Syria. This was followed by the August 2021 withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan under US President Joe Biden's Administration.

Russia's tacit openings to Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and beyond demonstrated the intensifying clash between the American and Russian spheres of influence. That was potentially true until Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. After that event Russian influence in the area has severely shrunk. This emerging reality has had three main geopolitical consequences: (a) some middle and smaller powers have found the opportunity to develop a more independent foreign policy; (b) others have attempted to exploit the fluidity to manoeuvre between the two great powers, or at least a great power and a former great power, and maximize their own benefits; (c) new regional tensions or cooperation processes have arisen, making the regional level of

analysis more salient, complex, and important.

Therefore, the regional distribution of power in the 2010s, besides the two main great powers operating in the region, has ended up being quite uneven and unstable, resembling a multipolar regional order. With the exception of Italy and the external actors, Turkey is the most powerful country of the sub-region, as well as the most assertive one. The following method of balance of power measurement through data is inspired by the excellent analysis of Cypriot foreign policy within the Eastern Mediterranean by Tziarras.<sup>403</sup>

Eastern Mediterranean Power Ranking.	Countries	National Power Index (NPI)[1]	Composite Index of National Capability (CINC)[2]	Gross national Income Index (GNI)[3]	Global Firepower Index (GFI)[4]	US News Best Countries Overall Rankings[5]
1.	USA (extra regional)	0.954	.13305758	23,617 trillion USD	1 – 0.0712	4
2.	Russia (extra regional)	0.758	.036472768	1,735 trillion USD	2 – 0.0714	36
3.	China (extra regional)	0.861	.23061772	17,572 trillion USD	3 – 0.0722	17
4.	Italy	0.788	.011425128	2,145 trillion USD	10–0.1973	14
5.	Turkey	0.691	.014790365	807,006 billion USD	11-0.2016	30
6.	Egypt	0.569	.010057217	391,743 billion USD	14-0.2224	35
7.	Israel	0.692	.0042661545	481,164 billion USD	18-0.2757	37
8.	Greece	0.637	.0028390044	213,935 billion USD	30-0.4621	25
9.	Lebanon	0.495	.0010177087	22,231 billion USD	111-2.2381	79
10.	Cyprus	0.490	.00017180944	26,007 billion USD	N/A	N/A
11.	Libya	0.485	.00077437708	43,169 billion USD	80-1.4718	N/A
12.	Syria	0.382	.0026668338	10,617 billion USD	64-1.1095	N/A

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<sup>403</sup> Tziarras Z., 2019.

<sup>404</sup> 1. Singer, J. David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey, *Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965*. in Russett B., (ed) *Peace, War, and Numbers*, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1972, pp.119-48. COW Data 2016.

The National Material Capabilities data set contains annual values for total population, urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditure of all State members, currently from 1816-2016.

2. Morales Ruvalcaba, D., *World Power Index Database*. Retrieved from World Power Index, 2022.

Regarding regional system clarity, the security landscape of the second decade of the 21st century resulted in increased focus on the Eastern Mediterranean as a distinctive geopolitical area with its own set of security challenges and opportunities especially since the discovery of natural gas fields.

This sub-region or security complex saw the emergence of new cooperation networks and disagreements, particularly related to the discovery of natural resources. During the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Eastern Mediterranean experienced two significant changes.

Firstly, Turkey altered its foreign policy<sup>405</sup>, moving away from the "zero problems with neighbours" principle, which led to deteriorating relations with Israel, Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus. This shift left these countries with little choice but to search for new relationships, particularly to cope with Turkish aggression.

Secondly, the discovery of natural resources off the coasts of Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel created new opportunities and security needs. These two events formed the systemic environment that brought Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Israel closer together. Consequently, Turkey adopted a more hostile foreign policy, particularly towards Cyprus and more recently, Egypt and Israel. This situation corresponds to the first element of the definition of clear threats, namely State revisionism or expressed hostility. Turkey is the most potent

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<https://www.worldpowerindex.com/data-wpi/>

3. The World Bank Open Data.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.MKTP.CD?end=2021&locations=US-RU-CN-GR-TR-IL-CY-LB-EG-LY-IT-SY&start=1990>

4. <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>

5. US News 2022 rankings. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/rankings>

<sup>405</sup> Davutoglu, A., *Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007*, Insight Turkey, Vol.,110 No. 1, 2007, pp. 177-96.

State in the Levant sub-region and has the economic capacity to cause harm, and there is a sense of imminence regarding Turkish threats, as demonstrated when the Turkish navy blocked the drillship of the Italian company Eni in 2018 from proceeding to a drilling location within the Cypriot EEZ. Thus, the cooperation between Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Israel initially established for mutual energy-economic gains soon transformed into a cautious balancing act against Turkish power projection and threats.

Regarding permissive/restrictive environment, the ongoing maritime claims and the assertiveness of Turkey have rendered the sub-regional environment all the more restrictive since counterbalancing seems the only option for neighbouring countries. External actors' role is also important.

China is interested in the Mediterranean, and particularly the Eastern Mediterranean for its BRI Initiative, with the Greek port of Piraeus being an important asset.<sup>406</sup>

Furthermore, the USA although initially interested in the area and endorsing collaboration in the area also though the acquisition of observer status within the EMGF, in April 2022 deemed the East Med pipeline “not economically viable”<sup>407</sup> while later on in May of the same year Washington reevaluated the pipeline project in light of the war in Ukraine.<sup>408</sup> Finally, the aforementioned war outbreak brought back to the centre of the stage the strategically important Levantine area because of Russian presence in the area, particularly

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<sup>406</sup> Bastian, J., *The Dragon Reaches the Eastern Mediterranean: Why the Region Matters to China*, Comparative Southeast European Studies, vol. 70, no. 3, 2022, pp. 486-515.

<sup>407</sup> Tugwell P., Georgiou G., *U.S. Says EastMed Pipeline to Europe 'Not Economically Viable'*, in Bloomberg.com, 07/04/2022. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-07/u-s-says-eastmed-pipeline-to-europe-not-economically-viable?leadSource=verify%20wall>

<sup>408</sup> Carrer G., *Eastmed a tutto gas. Arriva l'atteso passo avanti Usa*, in Formiche.net, 09/05/2022.

in Syria.<sup>409</sup> Thus, it may be stated that although the regional system was already passing from being permissive towards restrictive in the years before the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the latter accelerated dramatically this trend. It is also important to note the role Turkey acquired in the war since Ankara has become a mediation stage for the involved parties, thus boosting Turkey's diplomatic prestige and rendering even more difficult any counterbalancing activities by the other regional actors.

*3.3.2: The intervening variables: perception, decision making, policy implementation.*

When it comes to the perception of the regional system by one country, Italy in this instance, two factors have to be taken into consideration for Neoclassical realism, leader image and strategic culture.

By leader image we mean the beliefs or images of individual decision makers that form the Foreign Policy Executive (FPE). It is reminded that the FPE comprises the President, Prime Minister, key cabinet ministers, ministers, and advisors charged with the conduct of foreign and defence policy.<sup>410</sup> In general terms, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Mediterranean more in general, has been at the centre of Italian FPEs attention throughout the 2010s mainly with regards to immigration issues. Another issue that attracted the attention of decision makers was security linked to terrorism issues. The Italian governments of the 2010s, from Mario Monti's (2011-2013), Enrico Letta's

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<sup>409</sup> Gasimov, Z., *Russia under Putin in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Soviet Legacy, Flexibility, and New Dynamics*, Comparative Southeast European Studies, vol. 70, no. 3, 2022, pp. 462-485.

<sup>410</sup> Lobell S., Taliaferro J., Rispman N., 2017, p. 61.

(2013-2014), Matteo Renzi's<sup>411</sup> (2014-2016), until Paolo Gentiloni's government<sup>412</sup> (2016-2018) had to address mainly domestic issues, from the sovereign debt crisis in Europe, to the surge of terrorism, and the migrant crisis, thus perceiving the Mediterranean through the lens of these crises.

In the meantime, Eni was discovering the Zohr field in 2015 and in 2017 began its natural gas extraction from the site.<sup>413</sup>

The area and country on which most Italian interest was invested was Libya. Since the 2011 Arab Spring and the downfall of Ghaddafi<sup>414</sup> that led to civil war and the *de facto* division of the country into the two entities we have mentioned before, the GNA in the west and the LNA in the east.<sup>415</sup> Italian interest in Libya has of course both historical and geopolitical natures, but in the 2010s Italy did not manage to find either a multilateral or bilateral means to help stabilize the country. From then on Italian interest in Libya was mainly threefold: the protection of vital national interests in the country such as the Eni premises that extracted gas and oil<sup>416</sup>, the migrant flux that from Libya and Sub-Saharan Africa crossed the Mediterranean<sup>417</sup>, and the terrorist infiltrations in the country.

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<sup>411</sup> Aliboni R., *L'Egitto e la scommessa mediterranea di Matteo Renzi*, Formiche.net, 09/08/2014. <https://formiche.net/2014/08/renzi-egitto/>

<sup>412</sup> Tramballi U., *Le priorità della politica estera italiana e il Mediterraneo*, in *Sempre più un gioco per grandi: e l'Europa? Scenari globali e l'Italia*, Rapporto ISPI 2018, pp. 209-217.

<sup>413</sup> Meringolo A., *Eni, il super hub del gas nel Mediterraneo*, in *Affari Internazionali*, IAI, November 5th, 2015.

<sup>414</sup> Iacovino G., *Considerazioni politiche e militari sulla crisi in Libia*, in *Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale*, Approfondimenti, n. 34, May 2011.

<sup>415</sup> Palma L., *La caduta di Gheddafi e la frantumazione della Libia*, in *ISPI Backgrounder*, June 18th, 2021.

<sup>416</sup> Varvelli A., Villa M., *La Libia tra conflitto e migranti: ripensare il ruolo delle milizie*, in *ISPI Policy Brief No. 321*, July 19th 2018. [https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/pb\\_varvelli\\_villa\\_18.07.2018.pdf](https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/pb_varvelli_villa_18.07.2018.pdf)

<sup>417</sup> Morgese, G., *Italia, Libia e la questione migratoria*, in *Working papers: sfide storiche, politiche della memoria ed integrazione europea*, Mezzogiorno e area mediterranea, Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, February 2020.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte's governments (2018-2019, and 2019-2021), especially the second, had mainly to face the COVID 19 pandemic crisis. Nevertheless, it was thanks to outer events and mainly Turkish assertiveness that the Italian government was dragged in the Eastern Mediterranean area. Especially after the Turkish intervention in Libya in the aftermath of the December 2019 agreement between Ankara and the GNA Italy could not stay idle when Turkish assertiveness reached its opposite shores. The Conte governments tried to appease and to keep a conciliatory tone vis-à-vis Ankara without taking sides and trying to reach conciliatory terms between the parties involved in the dispute, thus embracing Berlin's view and countering Paris's more anti-Erdogan approach.<sup>418</sup>

Prime Minister Mario Draghi's government (2021-2022) started with a renewed interest in the Mediterranean in concert with and within an EU perspective. His first official visit as Italian President of the Council of Ministers was in Tripoli, Libya, in order to enhance Italy's standing in the North African country, and also to reaffirm its interests in Libya vis-à-vis Turkish influence. This visit took place while European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen were travelling to Ankara for a State visit to Erdogan.<sup>419</sup> Just two days later, Draghi indirectly addressed the term *dictator* to Erdogan after an etiquette gaffe committed by the Turkish President at the expense of von der Leyen during her State visit to Ankara. Draghi's words gave start to a diplomatic riposte since Ankara reached the point of summoning the Italian Ambassador

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<sup>418</sup> Michelin F., *Mediterraneo e non solo. Cosa c'è dietro al telefonata Conte-Erdogan*, in Formiche.net, 16/09/2020.

<sup>419</sup> *La visita di Draghi in Libia*, ISPI Daily focus, 06/04/2021.

in Ankara to express the strongest feelings of condemnation for the words of the Italian PM.<sup>420</sup> The difference between the previous governments was that Draghi intended to work very closely with EU authorities and to advance the interest of the EU towards the Mediterranean seen as EU border and not just a regional theatre just for the coastal EU countries. In December 2021 he reiterated his vision for a shared energetic policy among Mediterranean countries pointing towards renewables, green hydrogen, and more in general the green and digital transitions in the area. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that natural gas would be a transitional resource in the middle-term.<sup>421</sup>

The outbreak of war in Ukraine after Russia invaded it on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, resulted in a comprehensive reassessment of Europe's energy situation. Italy, in particular, which relied heavily on Russian gas imports, faced an even greater imperative to revise its energy policy. In a matter of months, the urgent international situation prompted decisions that upended decades of national energy policy, with far-reaching consequences that will likely endure for years to come. The Draghi administration pursued both short-term crisis management and a shift away from reliance on Russian gas towards other suppliers. ENI and SNAM, longstanding national industry leaders, played significant roles in these efforts. The resurgence of State involvement in energy, following the onset of conflict, was not confined to Italy but was also evident in other major European nations.

Italy consumes around 72-73 bcm of natural gas annually. In 2021 Italy

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<sup>420</sup> “«Erdogan dittatore». Bufera diplomatica dopo le parole di Draghi. Ankara convoca ambasciatore italiano”, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 08/04/2021.

<sup>421</sup> ““Una visione condivisa per il Mediterraneo”, il discorso di Draghi a MED 2021”, ISPI Commentary, 03/12/2021. <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/una-visione-condivisa-il-mediterraneo-il-discorso-di-draghi-med-2021-32527>



consumed circa 76 bcm, while in 2022 the consumption drastically fell to 68.5 bcm.<sup>422</sup> In 2021 96% of natural gas consumed in Italy was imported. The current energy crisis is exacerbated by the fact that 40% of Italy's imports in 2021 were from Russia, with Algeria (31%), Azerbaijan (10%), and Qatar (10%) being the other major suppliers.

This dependence on Russia is not a recent development, as the country has been importing Russian gas since the Cold War era, and by the 1990s and 2000s, it had become crucial to the country's energy security. The close collaboration between ENI and Russia's Gazprom was instrumental in this, and it continued even after the Cold War had ended. Until 2022, Moscow was considered a reliable energy partner, especially when compared to the politically unstable countries of North Africa and the Middle East. This policy of reliance on Russian gas was not changed by Italian governments even after the conflict in Ukraine in 2014 and the annexation of Crimea by Russia, which led to a further increase in gas imports from Moscow.

In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was once more an external factor that catapulted Italian foreign energy policy in incessant actions.<sup>423</sup> In that instance Italy commenced a frenetic round of negotiations in order to abandon Russian gas in favour other suppliers. The primary aim of the Draghi administration was to increase imports of liquefied natural gas, LNG, while also developing new infrastructure and enhancing gas pipeline imports from Algeria, via the Transmed pipeline and Azerbaijan, via the TAP. Coordination with Eni and Snam was crucial to achieving these objectives.

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<sup>422</sup> Bilancio Gas, Ministero dello Sviluppo economico, dicembre 2022.

<sup>423</sup> Curcio F., *Draghi in Israele: la strategia italiana nel Mediterraneo orientale*, Istituto Analisi Relazioni Internazionali, 07/07/2022.

In response to the outbreak of war, there was an intense diplomatic effort that involved senior management at Eni and the government, including the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and the Minister for the Ecological Transition, as well as the President of the Republic, who made a State visit to Mozambique in the summer of 2022. The cooperation between the Italian Government and ENI yielded prompt results, notably the increase in gas imports from Algeria, which quickly became the country's primary supplier. As of June 2022, approximately 33% of gas imports originated from Algeria, followed by LNG (22%), Russian gas (17%), and Azerbaijani gas (15%), which was also increasing in volume. Compared to the same period in 2021, imports from Algeria surged by approximately 20%, and those arriving via the TAP pipeline soared by almost 40%. While ENI has no presence in Azerbaijan, it maintains a presence in all of the other countries targeted by Italian "energy diplomacy." In terms of LNG, the Italian Government negotiated new deals with Egypt (for up to 3.5 billion cubic meters per year), Qatar (for up to 1.4 billion cubic meters per year), and Congo (with a gradual increase to 4.6 billion cubic meters per year). Additionally, imports of approximately 3.5 billion cubic meters were expected from countries such as Angola, Nigeria, Mozambique, Indonesia, and Libya.<sup>424</sup>

After the September 2022 parliamentary elections, the new government that took office in October of the same year is that of Giorgia Meloni leading a centre-right parliamentary coalition. Upon the inauguration of Giorgia Meloni's new government, there was no departure from the previous Draghi-led government's approach to energy security. Earlier in October 2022,

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<sup>424</sup> Prontera A. & Lizzi R., *The necessary reorientation of Italian energy policy*, Contemporary Italian Politics, 2023.

Meloni held meetings with members of the former government, notably the Minister for the Ecological Transition, to discuss critical European matters like the price cap, as well as national planning.<sup>425</sup> It is important to note though that Meloni has given particular attention to the Mediterranean area and the sea-dimension of Italy. During a State visit in April 2023, Meloni declared that she would announce an Africa energy cooperation plan, that she has also called a new “Mattei plan for Africa”<sup>426</sup> in October of 2023.<sup>427</sup>

The second factor that must be taken into consideration for the perception variable is strategic culture. By strategic culture, international relations scholars have attributed to it two different meanings. It is either the organizational culture, such as that of military or bureaucratic organization, or a wider notion of strategic culture comprising entrenched beliefs, worldviews, and shared expectations of a society as a whole.<sup>428</sup> For the purpose of the present analysis the second notion of strategic culture will be taken into consideration.

In Ignazi, Giacomelli, and Coticchia book of 2012 *Italian Military Operations Abroad. Just don't call it war* the authors have performed a very deep analysis in Italy's cultural roots going as far as ancient Rome, passing through Renaissance Italy and finally facing the post-Cold War period. According to them, pacifism and multilateralism are deeply embedded in the cultural-ideological code of post-1945 national political elite, nurtured both from

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<sup>425</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>426</sup> “Meloni in Etiopia: «A ottobre presentiamo il piano Mattei per l’Africa»”, Redazione Politica, Corriere della Sera, 14/04/2023.

<sup>427</sup> “Italy to announce Africa energy cooperation plan in October, says PM”, Reuters, 14/04/2023. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/italy-announce-africa-energy-cooperation-plan-october-says-pm-2023-04-14/>

<sup>428</sup> Lobel S., Taliaferro J., Ripsman N., 2017, p. 66.

Christian Democrats (DC) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) although on the extreme poles of domestic politics. The role of the Catholic Church seen as a cultural shelter after the Second World War and its arguing in favour of pacifism and of the Western anti-communist alliance heavily influenced the Christian Democrats. On the other hand, the anti-capitalist Italian Communist Party advocated for neutrality in the first decades of the Republic. In the Seventies, under the leadership of Enrico Berlinguer, the PCI endorsed openly NATO. Nevertheless, neutralist, as well as anti-NATO positions were taken by the PCI in the following years.<sup>429</sup> According to the authors, even after the end of the Cold War Italian strategic culture remains based on multilateralism and peace.

After more than 20 years since the end of the Cold War, the Italian strategic culture still lacks consistency and congruity. The ‘common language’ on defence and security issues among Italy’s political parties is still based on bipolar frames such as multilateralism and peace, regardless of the real context of the military interventions. If the gap between the image of the MOA<sup>430</sup> that the public and their leaders have and the actual conditions where soldiers are deployed persists, it will ultimately impact on the nexus between politics and the military. Painting a rosy picture – ‘just don’t call it war’ – can undermine this delicate and yet crucial relationship even in modern democracies.<sup>431</sup>

Another very interesting approach towards Italian strategic culture is that of Paolo Rosa, who defines it as *accommodationist*. The strategic culture of Italy during the liberal (1861-1921) and fascist (1922-45) periods shared many

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<sup>429</sup> Ignazi P., Giacomello G., Coticchia F., *Italian Military Operations Abroad. Just don’t call it war*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 25-27.

<sup>430</sup> Abbreviation for “Military Operations Abroad”.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 186.

features of hard *realpolitik*, as identified by Johnston.<sup>432</sup> This included a belief in war's centrality to international relations, negative views of rivals, a positive perception of military power, and a culture of aggression.

However, Italy's post-war strategic culture is one of accommodation, that means that it views war as an exception rather than the norm in international relations and prioritizes cooperation between nations. Military force is not seen as a legitimate foreign policy instrument, and negotiation, compromise, and international institutions are preferred methods for conflict resolution. Those who hold this strategic culture avoid risky actions, which means they are reluctant to engage in power politics. This shift in strategic culture can be attributed to several factors.

Firstly, Italy's defeat in 1945 led to the emergence of a pacifist tendency that is institutionalized in the Constitution's Article 11. The Armed Forces also suffered disrepute, and the defence industry was downsized. Defascistisation further contributed to the myth of the compassionate Italian soldier, which reinforced the narrative of a country reluctant to use military force.

Furthermore, the polarization of internal politics encouraged low-profile choices in security and defence. Externally, the military clauses of the 1947 peace treaty limited Italy's ability to modernize its Armed Forces. However, Italy's inclusion in the Western bloc and the Cold War slowed down the bureaucracy's clean up by remnants of the previous regime, but it allowed the development of the defence industry. The author also agrees on the

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<sup>432</sup> Johnston A. I., *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1995.

determinant impact of Catholic groups, as well as political forces of the left in the framing of the strategic culture of the Italian Republic.<sup>433</sup>

Finally, Ceccorulli and Coticchia have tried successfully to analyse the Italian strategic culture in the case of the Italian intervention in Libya in 2011.

According to them, one of the phenomena that explain the strategic culture that drives Italian foreign reflects a post-bipolar perspective in which armed forces are deployed to address non-military challenges. The country sees itself as a security provider and regards contemporary threats as multidimensional, shaping its national military and strategic culture. The Italian defence policy aims to guarantee a stable border area, rather than merely protect its frontiers, by deploying armed forces. The approach and structure of Italian armed forces have been described as highly effective in addressing complex emergencies, as the country's political and military actors interpret the current security environment through shared conceptual frameworks and on-the-ground experience. Moreover, the skills developed during domestic operations against organized crime and terrorism have equipped Italian troops with the necessary training to operate effectively in the urban context of present-day crises.<sup>434</sup>

The second variable is decision making, that according to Neoclassical realist theory can be influenced by three factors: strategic culture, State-society relations, and domestic institutions.

The importance of strategic culture in the domain of decision-making is that

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<sup>433</sup> Rosa P., *The accommodation State: Strategic culture and Italy's military behaviour*, *International Relations*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2014, pp. 93-94.

<sup>434</sup> Ceccorulli M., Coticchia F., *Multidimensional Threats and Military Engagement: The Case of the Italian Intervention in Libya*, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 20 No.3, 2015, p. 308.

it can prevent the State from responding fluidly to international stimuli, be they challenges that have to be balanced, or opportunities that are not seized. In the case of Italy, the accommodationist posture that Rosa suggests, and that is shared in the present study, would prevent the FPE in decision-making situations to balance a regional actor that could be way too assertive in an area of strategic importance for the peninsula. On the other hand, it would also explain perfectly the unwillingness of a part of the FPE to support the construction of the East Med pipeline since it would be seen as engaging in power politics. It further explains the willingness and keenness with which Italy contributes in the development and growth of the EMGF.

By State-society relations, the Neoclassical realist school defines the character of interactions between the central institutions of the State and various economic or societal groups. Important aspects include the harmony between the State and society, the trust of the society towards State leaders on foreign policy issues, the distributional competition among societal coalition to capture the State, the level of social and political cohesion within the State, public support for general foreign policy and national security objectives.<sup>435</sup> In the last two decades Italy has faced severe deterioration in State-society relations, especially a widespread feeling of distrust and of resignation towards the Italian State. Since the birth of the Republic, political fragmentation has been a constant in Italian politics, especially within the largest parties of the first republic such as DC and PCI.<sup>436</sup> Furthermore, Italian political parties took an iron foothold within the State in the first republic,

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<sup>435</sup> Lobel S., Taliaferro J., Ripsman N., 2017, pp. 70-71.

<sup>436</sup> Posner A., Italy: Dependence and Political Fragmentation, in *International Organization*, Vol. 31, No. 4, *Between Power and Plenty: Foreign Economic Policies of Advanced Industrial States*, Autumn 1977, pp. 809-838.

giving birth to the all-Italian term *partitocracy*, while with the dawn of the second republic a mostly personalistic approach was undertaken. In contemporary Western democracies, personalization has emerged as the most significant political trend, with a shift from collective to individual actors and institutions. Italy exemplifies this shift from party-centred politics to the centrality of political leaders, as demonstrated by Berlusconi's Forza Italia, which combined leader dominance with direct citizen engagement. Over the last two decades, this model has appealed to citizens across the political spectrum. However, with the rise of the Five-star Movement after the 2013 general election, it has become apparent that personal parties are evolving by utilizing new technologies to alter their scope and organizational structures and sliding towards a paradigm that has been defined *populist*.<sup>437</sup> It is widely accepted that populists hold differing views on the international system, but it remains to be seen whether they actually enact substantive changes when in power. Domestic institutions play a crucial role in either restraining or enabling populist foreign policy, depending on the policy domain and context. For example, Italy's decentralized parliamentary system may limit the leverage of a populist executive, while a relatively centralized presidential system, such as that of the United States, does not guarantee *carte blanche* for populists to implement their agenda. Instead, they must navigate the existing system and work with establishment figures, leading to a mixture of contradictory policies. Furthermore, the interaction between domestic processes and international structures complicates matters, and the relative influence of each depends on a country's structural position in the

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<sup>437</sup> Musella F., *The personalization of Italian political parties in three acts*, Contemporary Italian Politics, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2020, pp. 411-424.



international system. Italy's structural position in the international system serves as a major constraint, particularly in monetary affairs, where challenging Brussels and Berlin is only possible within certain limits due to the implicit threat of being pushed out of the Eurozone. Exiting the Eurozone would be costly and humiliating, making it impossible for any government to ignore these costs. In the realm of foreign affairs, however, Italy has more agency in migration policy due to weaker international pressure in this domain.<sup>438</sup>

By domestic institutions, Neoclassical realist theory involves State structure and domestic political institutions that often formalize State-society relations. All those formal institutions often provided by constitutional law that stage the boundaries of the political game and through which societal pulses and needs can be transferred into the State apparatus set the importance of domestic institutions. The quality of domestic institutions can be derived also from their efficiency in responding to systemic stimuli.

There are two main poles when it comes to domestic institutions, democratic and non-democratic domestic institutions. In healthy democracies, domestic institutions follow the classic division of powers between the legislature, the executive, and the judicial, as well as a set of checks and balances between those powers that illustrate clear boundaries that cannot be overridden. Within a State, the most important group when it comes to foreign policy is the already mentioned FPE, thus it is of crucial importance to understand the checks and balances that FPE members have to respect within their domestic institution's framework. Democracies have been often criticized for their

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<sup>438</sup> Giurlando P., Populist foreign policy: the case of Italy, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 27:2, 2021, pp.251-267.

inefficient methods in decision making and policy implementation since the process may involve more officials, FPEs tend to be proportionally wider in democracies, and it may be lengthier compared to a non-democratic State, in which decisions can be taken swiftly by the leader who can also choose the FPEs that surround him.

Government vulnerability is another important factor since FPEs usually include members of the executive branch, thus a government that is vulnerable to removal from office is less likely to balance or counterbalance a threat if it fears such removal.<sup>439</sup>

Republican Italy is well known for its short-lived governments (68 governments in 75 years since the Republican Constitution entered into force in 1948), and for the complex coalition politics that lead to the formation of a government that is bound to the legislative through the necessity of the confidence of the latter. Two key phenomena that have emerged are the erosion of the role of Parliament and the consolidation of presidential powers. Despite lacking executive powers, the role of the Italian president as a stabilizing force has gained significance over the past two decades due to the emergence of new political forces that have become more vocal in contesting the country's traditional pro-European Union economic policies and Atlanticist foreign policies<sup>440</sup>.

However, the most notable issue is the deterioration of the parties, the party system, and the political culture they embody. The quality of Italian democracy is being adversely impacted by poorly organized, personal parties

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<sup>439</sup> Lobel S., Taliaferro J., Ripsman N., 2017, pp. 75-79.

<sup>440</sup> Bastanin C., Even after Mattarella's reelection, Italy's political system remains unstable, in Order from chaos, The Brookings Institution, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

that lack political culture. Throughout its history, Italy's parliamentary republic has demonstrated flexibility and adaptability, responding to changing circumstances, and sometimes even improving as a result. Despite challenges, such as the need to contain the excesses of Berlusconi, the institutional framework of the Italian Republic remains strong and able to withstand difficulties. However, the economic situation in Italy has been lacklustre since the early 1990s, which has complicated the search for political solutions. Although it is not appropriate to look for economic explanations for political problems, Italy's fragmented and corporatist society, characterised by interpersonal mistrust, makes it difficult to find solutions. The most significant weakness in the political system is the nature of parties, and the fragmented nature of the party system.<sup>441</sup> The disappearance of parties in a functioning democracy raises serious questions, and while different scenarios are possible, it is clear that a democracy without parties is of poor quality and unsatisfactory.<sup>442</sup>

The third and last variable to be taken into account as an intervening variable is policy implementation. The factors that influence policy implementation are the same of decision making, thus strategic culture, State-society relation, and domestic institutions.

As we have already analysed them previously with regards to policy making, in this instance some specific problems of the Italian policy implementation process will be addressed. Since the 2001 constitutional reform, a hybrid

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<sup>441</sup> Sapelli G., *The Historical Reasons behind Italy's Instability*, IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2017, European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2017.

<sup>442</sup> Pasquino G., *The State of the Italian Republic*, Contemporary Italian Politics, Vol, 11, 2019, pp. 195-204.

federalist system was applied in Italy. Some State functions are delegated from the central State to the Regions, and also some policy implementation has been delegated to the Regions or the Comuni (municipalities).

Regional authorities in Italy have significant discretion in policymaking due to unclear national standards and the involvement of lower levels of government. This causes confusion in the communication between the implementation and policy formulation levels, resulting in a patchwork of implementation bodies without effective coordination or articulation of interests.

The creation of State-Regions Conferences since 1981 was intended to allow subnational entities to express their views and interests to the central government, but these conferences have become platforms to secure funding rather than networks focused on concrete policy issues. Institutionalized consultation procedures that influence policy design are also lacking. There is no direct connection between policy formulation and implementation, and even the central government's implementing agencies often lack formal provisions on consultation.

In the past, political parties acted as informal channels for consultation, but since the erosion of the party system in the 1990s, no alternative mechanism has emerged that includes the implementation level in policy formulation.<sup>443</sup>

The smooth functioning of a political system is crucial for the success of sustained development initiatives. A stable political environment provides the foundation for administrative reliability, which leads to efficient

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<sup>443</sup> Knill C., Steinbacher C., Steinebach Y., *Sustaining Statehood: A comparative analysis of vertical policy-process integration in Denmark and Italy*, in *Public Administration*, Volume 99, Issue 4, 2020, pp. 758-774.

implementation methods, and fosters a sense of shared purpose among civil servants. Conversely, political instability creates obstacles that lead to imprecise management, incoherent programming, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation, ultimately impacting the outcomes of structural fund expenditures.<sup>444</sup>

### *3.3.3: The dependent variable: Italian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.*

Having observed the Eastern Mediterranean regional system, the independent variable, in the first paragraph, the set of intervening variables such as perception, decision-making, and policy implementation along with the factors that shape them, in the second, now is the moment of illustrating the foreign policy outcome, the dependent variable. The analysis will be divided in two timelines.

The first will be the shorter term, comprising days, weeks, and few months. In this timeframe a State will have to navigate fixed international structures thus it can only react to external stimuli such. Such cases include crisis decision-making, and policy responses to unexpected events.

The second timeframe will cover the short-to-medium term, comprising months and years, but not decades. In this timeframe policymaking is more forward looking and policy makers can engage in strategic planning. In such instance the coherence of the foreign policy outcome to the Neoclassical realist theory will be tested. Neoclassical realism should be able to explain

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<sup>444</sup> Milio S. How Political Stability Shapes Administrative Performance: The Italian Case, *West European Politics*, 31:5, 2008, 915-936.

the grand strategy choices of States as determined by the independent variable, the structure of the system and its distribution of power, as well as all the intervening variables that may distance the State from pursuing what the observation of the structure of the system may suggest.<sup>445</sup>

With regards to Italy's energy security it has been explained that Italy mostly depends on importation of energy resources to accommodate its consumption. Thus, foreign policy in the domain of energy security is necessary in order to reach the desirable outcome.

From the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Italy had to navigate in a low clarity system, especially in the Mediterranean, since the post-Cold War international system offered no clear information on the nature of eventual threats nor clear opportunities.

Whereas clarity and uncertainty pertain to the *scope* of information that the system provides, the strategic environment pertains to the *content* of that information.<sup>446</sup> Thus, until the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, the structure of the system was quite permissive. In a low clarity and permissive environment, all factors influencing the intervening variables could be relevant to explain a country's foreign policy outcome. This time horizon is short-to-medium, and in that instance it would be possible to observe strategy planning from Italian policymakers vis-à-vis energy security.

The balance of powers observed in the Eastern Mediterranean in paragraph 1 suggests that Italy is one of the major regional actors, thus it could easily have a say in the area's major issues. That was not the case until the Libyan crisis in 2011 when the region was destabilized by the Arab Springs. Even in the

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<sup>445</sup> Lobel S., Taliaferro J., Ripsman N., 2017, pp. 82-84.

<sup>446</sup> Ibidem, p. 52.

Libyan case, as we have mentioned previously, Italy did not take a leading role, and advocated cautiousness to its allies. From then on Libya and the immigration question became the major issues that Italy wanted to manage. From the mid-2010s the discoveries of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the assertiveness and aggressiveness of Turkey somewhat cleared and restricted the structure of the regional system.

Italy did not intervene unilaterally and did not manage to either avert or join Turkey's intervention in Libya in support of the GNA in 2019. Though both Turkey and Italy support the GNA there has been no collaboration platform between the parties nor has Italy undertaken any measure to denounce Turkey's intervention other than general invitations to all parties involved in Libya to desist from their involvement. The stabilization of Libya remains a primary objective for Italy both for its geopolitical proximity, its link to the migrant crisis, and the energy resources managed by Eni in the western part of the country that provide Italy with precious supplies of oil and natural gas. Italy's main approach was multilateral in the Libyan crisis.

Neorealism would suggest that Italy should endeavour a balancing action towards Turkish assertiveness in the regional system, either by itself or, better, in coalition with those countries that perceive the same threat from such aggressiveness. The Italian non-balancing posture towards Turkish assertiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Italian companies such as Eni, Edison, and Snam have vital interests in the legal exploration, extraction, and commercialization of natural gas, and in Libya, which is of strategic importance for the peninsula's security, can be explained by the intervening variables of Neoclassical realist theory.

The Italian leader image of the FPEs of the Eastern Mediterranean was of no

significance whatsoever until the discovery of offshore natural gas fields. Even afterwards the Mediterranean, both Central and Eastern, was perceived as a source of problems regarding immigration. Also, the Libyan crisis was mostly declined through the lens of the immigration question. Once Turkey became more assertive the perception changed, but even then the change was minimal.

Strategic culture offers the best explanation in order to understand the Italian perception of the Eastern Mediterranean issues as well as the Libyan question. As Rosa explained, and we agree, Italian strategic culture has remained *accommodationist* even in the post-Cold War era. An accommodationist strategic culture views interstate relations as predominantly cooperative and rejects the use of military force as a legitimate tool of foreign policy. This strategic culture favours negotiation, compromise, and the utilization of international institutions to address conflicts. Its elites, the FPE, prioritize caution and avoid unnecessary risks, thus avoiding actions that may lead to dangerous consequences. This explains perfectly why some Italian decisionmakers, as Stated previously, although acknowledging Turkey's aggressiveness, its violating international law, criticising its intervention in Syria, they would suggest a careful policy of not getting involved in the construction of a pipeline that would only exacerbate Turkey as well as leading to an escalation, while supporting the work of the EMGF.

Also State-society relations and domestic institutions help explain Italy's posture since both decision making and policy implementation are inhibited from political fragmentation, the rise of populist movements, as well as distrust towards State authorities. Costly and risky foreign policies are not easily enforced also when they may be crucial like the case of energy security.



Very difficultly could any Italian party gather votes by proposing higher energy bills in order to diversify natural gas supply and thus buying more expensive as in relation to cheap Russian gas. Furthermore, Italy's domestic institutions suffer from chronic issues that have been analysed previously and that inhibit decision making and policy implementation in terms of effectiveness and fast delivery.

Until that point Italy's posture was mostly reactive. The idea of patrolling Central Mediterranean waters with its navy was shaped in 2015 as a reaction to the immigration question, not envisaging an a more holistic strategy. The establishment of its EEZ took place only after Algeria had declared its own and was jeopardizing Italian maritime boundaries close to Sardinia.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine restricted further the structure of the system and imposed a much shorter time horizon in order to achieve energy security for Italy as well as to further secure the Mediterranean. Neoclassical realist theory suggests that in such situations leader image and strategic culture are the main factors influencing the intervening variables. In such crisis-management situations the FPE moved in concert towards securing Italy's natural gas supply from countries other than Russia. In close coordination with Eni, Italy managed to succeed at such endeavour. Furthermore, the parliamentary majority backing the government are presently pushing in favour of an Italian commitment to sign the agreement on the construction of the East Med pipeline.

As noted previously, in May 2022 the Italian navy expanded its range of action also in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Finally, it is important to note that grand strategy planning is very difficult to achieve in Italy since the political instability and the complex decision-making process renders medium-term planning a nightmare.

## *Conclusion*

In the first chapter the birth of the realist school was illustrated along with all the major authors that enriched the theory until Carr began what is now known as the classical realist theory. Through the limits of such theory to explain the dynamics of the Cold War the Neorealist school of Kenneth Waltz offered a very convincing explanation on the importance of the systemic structure and how it explains the actions of the State, the most important unit of analysis for realism. The end of the Cold War and the change of the systemic structure incentivised the need to offer different explanations to different phenomena and after Rose's 1998 article a new school of thought within the realist tradition took its foothold, Neoclassical realism. In the same chapter the main theoretical premises of Neoclassical realism were presented. The international system structure still yields a fundamental role, as in neorealism, but other factors influence the final foreign policy outcome of the States. The intervening variables, such as perception, decision-making, and policy implementation, have an important role in order to comprehend a State's posture. In elaborating on Neoclassical realism's development from a foreign policy theory to a theory of international relations in its own right the main criticisms and concerns towards it were addressed.

In the second chapter, the independent variable was addressed. By that, a geopolitical analysis of the State actors of the Eastern Mediterranean was presented. Furthermore, the main diplomatic, geopolitical, and economic issues pertaining the area were illustrated. Finally, special attention was dedicated to the Eastmed pipeline project as well as the birth of a new intergovernmental organization, the East Mediterranean Gas Forum.

The third chapter was dedicated to understanding Italy's posture in the Eastern Mediterranean in the last decades. Firstly, a historic overview of Italy's management of energy security, particularly in the domain of natural gas, was offered as well as an overview of the major foreign policy choices linked to energy security. Secondly, the intervening variables pertaining Italy were addressed, analysing factors such as Italy's leader image, strategic culture, State-society relation, and domestic institutions. Finally, the foreign policy outcome, the dependent variable, was illustrated so as to test Neoclassical realist theory in a regional context considering a middle-power.

The result was the confirmation of the validity of the Neoclassical realist theory. In particular, the leader image, but even more so the strategic culture can help explain reasonably the choices Italy took in its energy diplomacy within its broader foreign policy with regards to the Eastern Mediterranean. These two factors helped explain the inability of Italy to have a more impactful role in managing the Libyan crisis since 2011, as well as to why it has an overly accommodating, reactive, almost apprehensive, posture towards engaging more proactively in the Eastern Mediterranean with respect to the natural gas fields that are explored, operated, marketized by Eni.

The Eastmed pipeline project is a valid choice, though mostly a geopolitical and long-term solution, while the Egyptian LNG terminals offer a softer solution, but a short-term and an insufficient one vis-à-vis the strategic needs of Italy in the energy domain.

Italy has the prerequisites to become a security provider in the Levantine sub-region in collaboration with other like-minded countries, while continuing to strive for an agreement with Turkey in order to stabilise Libya and finding a

collectively profitable *modus vivendi* with regards to the natural resources discovered in the Levantine basin.

The recent Italian navy operation *Mediterraneo Sicuro* is definitely on the right path towards becoming a security provider actor in the area. Its aeronaval device should be still enhanced though, since the new operation covers a far greater area than the previous one of 2015, relegated to the Central Mediterranean, though the number of warships and aircraft has not increased as of now. The Italian navy is one of the most powerful ones in the Mediterranean, thus offering the perfect opportunity to become a security provider but also to undertake joint security provision missions with allied or partner countries of the area.

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