



# Conflict Studies Quarterly

Issue 44, July 2023

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ISSN 2285-7605

ISSN-L 2285-7605

Accent Publisher, 2023

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# Nigeria: The State of Social Cohesion. Implications for Policy

Fidelis ALLEN

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**Abstract:** The development of socially diverse societies depends on social cohesiveness. Yet the subject has remained mainly understudied. This article discusses the level of social cohesion in Nigeria and its consequences for policy. Using primary and secondary data from the African Polling Institute's annual Nigeria Social Cohesion Project, as well as interview-based primary and secondary data collection methods, the paper illustrates the poor state of social cohesion in Nigeria. People are less willing to work together and have less faith in government officials and institutions. The study participants, except for the North, criticized social cohesion issues of lack of inclusive and participatory political and policy processes and equity in recent appointments to important federal government agencies. Strangely, most participants take pride in being Nigerians and would refuse to move elsewhere permanently in the globe if given the chance. In the meantime, there are no social cohesion policy frameworks other than those that are diagonally pushed, including an unworkable Federal Character Principle. The article makes several

recommendations, including the creation of a social cohesion research unit at each of Nigeria's three levels of government – federal, state, and local – whose main responsibility would be to ensure that each government policy was examined from the standpoint of social cohesion theory. Nigeria's social cohesion can be increased by offering social services, selecting public officials who reflect the diversity and needs of society, and defining governance more broadly through the prism of social cohesion. This means that, in a deeply divided society like Nigeria, social cohesion can be adopted as a means of preventing destructive conflict.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, social cohesion, policy, government, social services, conflict.

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 44, July 2023, pp. 3–18

DOI: 10.24193/cs.q.44.1

Published First Online: July 03 / 2023

## **Introduction**

For society to flourish and thrive, strong social cohesion is a prerequisite (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Carron *et al.*, 2016; Chuang *et al.*, 2013; Friggeri *et al.*, 2011; Murphy, 2012; Tuckman, 1965; Yang & Tang, 2004). Scholars have identified several indicators that can be used to define social cohesion, including willingness, capacity, mutual trust, national identity, and a strong sense of belonging on the side of the populace. These indices are crucial for policy development and execution by the executive, judicial, and legislative institutions. They collectively reflect societal growth. For the well-being of individuals and society, social cohesion is crucial.

For the third time in three years, the Africa Polling Institute (API) has conducted a national survey on Nigeria's social cohesiveness. Focusing on equity, trust, identity, social justice, patriotism, self-worth, and expectations for the future, it has measured social cohesion. The socioeconomic and political elements, as well as the indicators of tolerance, culture, and security, were clearly excluded from the survey (API, 2019). This article contributes to the body of knowledge on nation-building, national integration, and national identity in Nigeria by using an enlarged set of indicators to represent the difficulties that frequently cause citizens and the nation to become divided. Introduction, background, literature review, the status of social cohesiveness, implications, and conclusion are the five sections that make up the article.

## **Background to the emergent threats to social cohesion in Nigeria**

Scholars concur that the post-colonial state of Nigeria has seen serious dangers to each citizen's sense of identity and readiness to work with people from various ethnic and religious groups for the benefit of the larger community (Easterly *et al.*, 2006; Friedkin, 2004; Moody & White, 2003; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017; Stansfeld, 2009; Van Der Meer & Tolsma, 2014). Poor management of Nigeria's ethnic diversity is one of the country's major problems. The declaration of the State of Biafra by Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, leader of the Eastern Regional Government, in 1967 was a violent rejection of the existing structure and ethnic relations in the country. It also became apparent as a danger to social harmony. The secessionists and federal forces would engage in a three-year civil war as a result of this declaration. Nearly four decades after the end of the war, the suspicion of ethnoreligious groups seems to have endured amidst various government policies for nation-building and national integration. Sentiments against oneness or a united Nigeria have been expressed and continue to manifest among citizens and groups in parts of the country, with some even querying the logic of the nation-state of Nigeria and the notion that it is working in the interest of all.

These are possible indicators of a nation with poor social cohesiveness that requires more thorough research to assist analysis and add to the body of knowledge for the purpose of influencing policy. Every public policy or piece of legislation should take

social cohesiveness into account, according to advocates. Important lessons can be learned from the examples of Canada and the European Union, where multiculturalism and the integration of immigrant groups are critical challenges that every policy must consider. Nigeria deals with multi-ethnic and multi-religious variations of these issues, and it must be taken care of that they never overrun the nation. In addition, as with other studies on social cohesion, the policy implications are an important aspect that Nigeria under-analyses.

In the case of Nigeria, social cohesion has not been sufficiently investigated. According to scholars, social cohesion is the willingness of people to work together for collective progress and prosperity, equity, social justice, inclusion, identity, shared values, mutual trust, national identity, and a sense of oneness. Yet this is a key element that needs to be considered in the development and implementation of public policies in Nigeria and the development of the country. Scholars have attempted to comprehend and explain the situation by focusing on the associated nation- and state-building challenges without sufficiently considering the potential policy ramifications. The body of literature also demonstrates a dearth of thorough conceptualizations of social cohesion that take into account regional variations. There are unresolved threats to ethnoreligious and political relations that have had implications for social cohesion. Several years after the war, there still are sentiments and signs of lack of sufficient patriotism, equity, and willingness of citizens from the different ethnic and religious groups (in the southwest, southeast, south-south, middle-belt, and northern region) to cooperate toward securing the sanctity of the geographical map of the country. These are values and behaviours necessary not only for securing a corporate Nigeria but also for making social cohesion stronger in the interest of the development of the country.

The study uses information from the African Polling Institute (2019), previously published works, and one-on-one interviews to answer the following three questions: What is the Nigerian society's level of social cohesion? What effects will this have on how policies are created and carried out? What are some ways to improve social cohesion?

In light of this, the study's objective was to develop a set of policy recommendations to strengthen social cohesion in Nigeria by examining the current situation in the nation and using a broader range of indicators to reflect the problems that have a tendency to divide citizens and the nation, as seen in the literature on nation-building, national integration, national identity, and political processes in the post-colonial era of the country.

## **Literature Review**

There is no universally accepted definition of social cohesion as a concept. Researchers may have an issue with this. Nevertheless, a lot of them have exercised their freedom to define the concept in order to meet their own research goals, creating what one author has called "a concept of convenience" (Chan *et al.*, 2006). Despite the lack of a precise

and widely accepted definition, the idea has gained popularity among researchers and decision-makers. Due to the concept's adaptability, they have been able to use case-specific indicators to analyze social cohesiveness problems. Some academics, for instance, define social cohesion as the degree of inclusion, socioeconomic security, and social empowerment (Spiker, 2014).

The Canadian government is credited with popularizing social cohesiveness, starting in 1996 when it established a Social Cohesion Network as a crucial component of its approach to formulating policies in a country marked by social variety. Likewise, the European Union has done so, using it as a compass for all its member states' policies (Berger-Schmitt, 2002; Boucher, 2013; Farole *et al.*, 2011; Hervieu-Léger, 2003; The European Trade Union Institute, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose & Fratesi, 2004).

The study of social cohesion has been characterized by two approaches: sociological and psychological (Berry, 2013; Helly, 2003; Holtug, 2016; Markus & Kirpitchenko, 2007; Reitz *et al.*, 2009; Taylor & Foster, 2015; Uslaner, 2010; Wilkinson, 2007). The European Union's request for social cohesion-sensitive policies and the Canadian government's establishment of a cohesion network in 1996 have brought the argument over the potential contribution of social cohesion to national prosperity to the fore. However, because of the non-African context of these studies, generalization has proven to be challenging, particularly when it comes to the impact of social cohesion and the policy implications based on indices that are culturally, socially, economically, and politically different from those of African societies like Nigeria (Meagher, 2009; Nolte, 2004; Cox & Sisk, 2017; Shittu *et al.*, 2013; Ukiwo, 2005). Notions of social cohesion are embedded in the analyses of nation-building, state-building, security, and national integration challenges, which the country has continued to face, without a clear positioning of the key defining concepts (Ajaebili, 2015; Akpome, 2015; Bamidele, 2015; Bello-Imam, 1987; Lenshie, 2014; Maiangwa, 2016).

The cohesion of Nigerian society is impacted by two contrasting theoretical policy languages. Scholars have examined the issue of social cohesiveness in relation to their pursuit of "genuine federalism" which they define as a rejection of marginalization, flawed federalism, and ethnic dominance. The persistent struggles for secession by groups in some parts of the country are also part of the evidence of a social cohesion crisis in the country. The Nigerian civil war is still a significant historical event and a topic of discussion over why some sections of Nigerian society desire to split apart. Perhaps the closest definition to the ideal that guided data collection for this study is Dick Stanley's (2003) definition of social cohesion: "the willingness of members of society to cooperate with one another in order to survive and prosper" (p. 6) The most obvious issues with social cohesiveness in Nigeria are its unclear definition, its complexity, and the lack of innovation and imagination in the selection and use of the indicators. It is also the biggest measurement problem that hinders the development

and application of policy. With nearly 200 million people of various social, racial, and religious backgrounds, there is still much to learn about Nigeria.

### ***Methodology***

The study consisted of two parts: fieldwork and a thorough desk analysis of secondary sources of data. Due to the nature of the problems it aimed to address, it utilized a mix of qualitative and quantitative designs. To embody a nationally representative sample of all significant ethnoreligious groups, the study relied on three sets of data: the African Polling Institute's Social Cohesion project database, which was funded by the Ford Foundation, a thorough literature review, and interviews with participants from across the six informal geographical maps of the nation. The snowball method was used to proportionally choose the participants.

To ensure complementarity and examine the prevalence of erroneous responses, the data collecting, and analysis procedures were triangulated. A proportionate number of people of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Ibo, Ijaw, Efik, and Urhobo ancestry underwent interviews. Others included atheists, Christians, Muslims, and African traditionalists. The reason is that in Nigeria, residents' perceptions are closely tied to sub-national identities, and as a result, these factors may have an impact on how they interpret social cohesion. Tables, graphs, and interpretive qualitative content analysis approaches were used to analyse the data obtained from the three sources.

### ***The State of Social Cohesion in Nigeria***

No matter their ethnicity, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, or religion, most Nigerians believe that their nation is not as unified as it could be. Many people would prefer to live in a united Nigeria, but they tend to agree that the circumstances aren't right and might even be growing worse. To give one recent example, Amaka Anku (2022) wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that "Nigeria's leaders must restore trust in the country's institutions". She expressed the annoyance of the majority of research participants who complained about how these leaders in crucial institutions like the legislative and executive branches of government had abused public confidence. The country's lack of social cohesiveness is seen in the frequent calls by groups and people from various regions for either a reorganization of the federal system or its total dissolution into separate sovereign entities. There are signs of a waning interest, and people's readiness to coexist and work together for the common good is eroding over time, particularly in the southeast of the country. We observed a growing feeling of injustice rooted in exclusion from mainstream governance on the federal front.

Using an API database and information gathered through interviews and desk reviews, we evaluated people's notions of identity, trust, impunity, social justice and equity, self-worth, future expectations, patriotism, and involvement. The social cohesion index of

Nigeria for the year 2021 was 44.2 percent (API, 2021). As was the case in 2019, this average is less than 50%. If the backdrop of rising insecurity and complaints throughout the nation is properly taken into account, this conclusion is not difficult to explain. The newfound solidarity of State Governors in the southwest, south-south, and southeast, who rapidly gathered to begin planning for alternative security institutions outside of the present formal security, reflects the growing hostility in the nation caused by the problem of insecurity. They were also noted for being frank about the necessity for state police to deal with the threats.

Since 2015, there has been a deepening of the power disparity between those in authority and those outside who fear being assaulted by bandits. With more prominent political and ethnic leaders calling for the federal system to be restructured, mistrust of organizations like the Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) in the southeast and separatist movements in the southwest and south-south has risen. They have continued to complain about exclusion from mainstream political positions in the country and the centralisation of power and control in Abuja, and the concentration of political opportunities in northern Nigeria under the present APC-led federal government with Muhammad Buhari as president.

The belief that the current administration can handle the nation's problems has continued to drop as more people live with a sense of irritation over the problem of insecurity, which they see as a major duty incumbent upon every government to address. The majority of survey participants and API statistics believe that residents have not yet been entirely persuaded that the current administration can end the problem of insecurity.

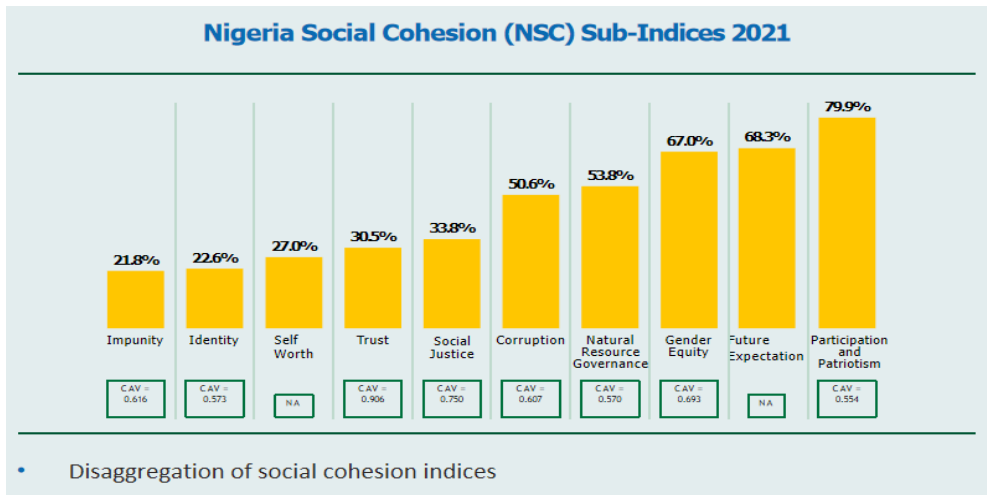
As Figure 1 shows, the study adopted API's ten key indicators of social cohesion and utilized data from questions pertaining to them, namely, impunity, self-worth, trust, and social justice, showing the percentages for each of the variables and the indicators of social cohesion, such as impunity, identity, corruption, gender resource governance, gender equity, future expectation, and participation and patriotism.

Social justice and unequal natural resource administration, according to a sizeable part of Nigerians, especially those from the south-south and southeast, are crucial defining concerns when it comes to the desire of citizens to collaborate for the common good of the country. Even the question of participation and patriotism, which form an important element of any discussion of social cohesion, is on the high side at 79.9%. Why do you think so many people think this way? Their sense of belonging and confidence that justice and fairness can be assured in a country with a vast diversity of individuals from diverse ethnic and religious groups have a lot to do with winning the cooperation of citizens from every ethnopolitical and religious group.



ID	Quotation Name	Document
2:5	The stress of everyday living.	South-South 3 Edo State Traditional Rulers
2:6	Not enough effort	South-South 3 Edo State Traditional Rulers
2:11	I'm not sure	South-South 3 Edo State Traditional Rulers
3:6	they are trying	South-West
3:9	I think they are trying.	South-West
4:8	Quite low and unimpressive	NORTH 1
4:15	avoid all sorts of ethnicity	NORTH 1
5:3	You have to accommodate,	NORTH-MIDDLE BELT BENUE
5:5	If we make amends, Nigeria will be a better place	NORTH-MIDDLE BELT BENUE
5:7	remove that barrier called tribalism	NORTH-MIDDLE BELT BENUE
5:8	yet inactive,	NORTH-MIDDLE BELT BENUE
9:4	Obviously no	SOUTH-SOUTH IJAW 2
9:8	Well, there is a 100% possibility	SOUTH-SOUTH IJAW 2
9:9	The govt is not making any concerted effort	SOUTH-SOUTH IJAW 2

**Figure 1:** Sample comments by some interviewees



**Figure 2:** The state of social cohesion in Nigeria

**Source:** African Polling Institute 2021.

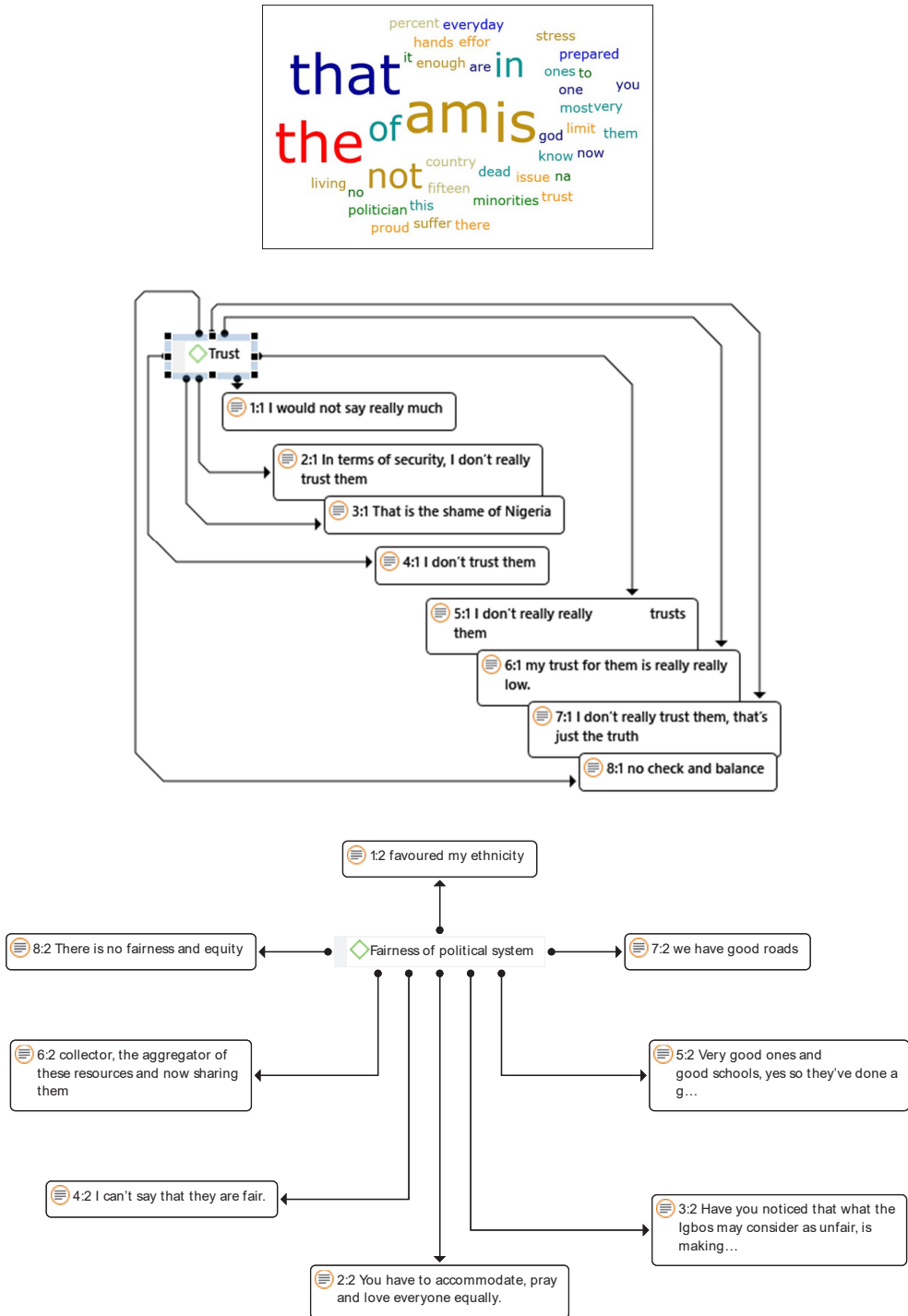


Figure 3: Atlas.ti key words of views on the state of social cohesion in Nigeria.

## **Impact of the State of Social Cohesion on National Integration and Development**

Nigeria's current lack of social cohesion has adverse social, economic, and political effects on the country's integration and progress. In general, it has a negative impact on both society-society and state-society interactions. Both have influenced national integration and development. Starting with the nature of state-society relations and its implications, the growing lack of trust by citizens in their leaders and state institutions has undermined the evolution and development of a strong state capable of providing national security in Nigeria. Although there is disagreement over what constitutes a strong state, some standards have been established to gauge state power. These include "the depth of penetration of society by the state, breadth of penetration, and state autonomy" (Davidheiser, 1992, p. 464). The depth of penetration, for instance, refers to "the magnitude of transformation at the state's behest" (Davidheiser, 1992, p. 464). Evaluation of state strength is mostly based on the state's capacity to adopt policies that change society and the populace. Nigeria is an exception to this. Instead, citizens and ethnic groups in Nigeria are contesting the state more and more. This is because they feel perpetually excluded from the sociopolitical power structure and tend to want constant political autonomy. Conflicts over divergent views of citizenship and the legitimacy of the sources of political authority are therefore common in the nation. As a result, a clear trajectory of the development of ethnically motivated separatist agitations as a distinguishing characteristic of the Nigerian state from the colonial era can be seen. For example, in the 1990s, the Ogoni people of the Southeastern Niger Delta spared headed a non-violent movement for political autonomy, citing cases of ethnic domination by the majority ethnic groups, which they argued manifested in the structural deprivation of their indigenous rights to own and control oil resources in their land. Indeed, the structural marginalization of the Ogoni has been compounded by the political economy of oil extraction by the Nigerian state and the Oil giant, Shell, which had devastated the Ogoni environment with the corresponding loss of traditional sources of livelihoods, dearth of social infrastructure, rising poverty and violent social conflicts. The Ogoni people's wrath and animosity toward the Nigerian state have grown because of these societal circumstances. Animosity by individuals and organizations toward the state takes on various shapes and manifestations in various parts of the nation. For instance, civilian outrage over police brutality and human rights violations in Nigeria was evident during the EndSARS protests by young people in October 2020. Young people came together in protest for the first time in Nigerian history, defying ethnic manipulation, religious differences, and elites' political mobilization to fight against poor governance and defend their freedoms. After the Presidential Elections on February 25, 2023, that rage once more erupted in the nation. Youth protested in Abuja and other cities, claiming that the Independent National Electoral Commission had broken its own rules of engagement by conducting the polls, which rendered their ballots invalid.

In regard to society-society relations, Nigeria's escalating citizenship crisis is permanently destabilizing the country. The dichotomization of citizenship into indigene/settler has compounded society-society relations in such a way that ethnic hatred appears to have been institutionalized horizontally. A case in point is the Yoruba people's recent attacks on the Igbos in Lagos following the February 25, 2023, presidential elections. The attacks manifested in mob actions and killings of the Igbos and targeted locking and burning of Igbo-owned shops in Lagos. While the recent altercations between the Igbo and Yoruba have deep roots in the indigene-settler question and provocative statements over the ownership of Lagos, the proximate cause was that the Labour Party, whose presidential candidate, Peter Obi, an Igbo man popularly won the Presidential Election in Lagos, thereby defeating Ahmed Bola Tinubu, the acclaimed strong man and father of Lagos politics. The defeat of Bola Tinubu, the All-Progressive Party Congress' presidential candidate, was seen by the Yoruba as a sign that the Igbo population was beginning to dominate Lagos state and needed to be restrained. The Yoruba fears were further complicated by the electoral projections that the Labour Governorship Candidate, Mr. Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour whose wife is Igbo was most likely to win the gubernatorial election of Lagos state. As in the 2015 election, the Igbo was threatened with genocidal attacks or being frustrated out of Lagos. Historically, and as in other cases of ethnic violence, what the Igbo-Yoruba ethnic and political confrontations reinforce is that rather than Nigerian citizens conceive and define themselves as one indivisible people who owe and demonstrate allegiance to the Nigerian state, they privilege ethnic loyalties based on a problematic interpretation of primordialism. In other words, the unresolved nationality question merely played out once again and again in Lagos between the Igbo and Yoruba people. Indeed, the dialectical contradictions of strong attachments to primordial sentiments lead to the saliency of ethnicity in the distribution of social opportunities like employment and promotion in workplaces instead of merit and competence. All these constitute other forms of structural violence in Johan Galtung's terminology that threaten people's sense of security, safety, and belonging. Consequently, the socio-economic and political development of the country has been sacrificed on the altar of ethnicity and defective society-society relations.

### **Implications for Peacebuilding and Prevention of Destructive Conflict**

The present decline in social cohesiveness in Nigeria suggests that regions are very susceptible to destabilizing conflict. There are several examples of societies where social cohesiveness has been advocated as a means of averting such violence. It is offered as a strategy for promoting peace in places like Côte d'Ivoire, where that process has proven to be rather fragile (Cox & Sisk, 2017; Fokou and N'Da, 2018). The country needs to strengthen its social cohesion approach to peacebuilding, as evidenced by the persistent post-conflict agitations for a separate state of Biafra in southeast Nigeria by members of the Indigenous People of Biafra, or IPOB, and similar agitations in south-south by

oil-producing communities as well as those in the southwest for a state of Oduduwa (Amadi *et al.*, 2023).

### **Policy Options for Strengthening Social Cohesion: The Reinvention of the Social Contract**

Reinventing the social contract between citizens and the state is a crucial policy recommendation for addressing Nigeria's diminishing social cohesiveness and its ramifications for growth. A "dynamic agreement between state and society on their mutual duties and responsibilities" is what social contracts are (Cloutier *et al.*, 2021, p. 8). As a result of such an agreement, state institutions are established, leadership acts are taken, and national policies are developed and put into effect that is in line with public expectations, resulting in social harmony and the advancement of the country as a whole. As it is in Nigeria today, the social contract appears to have broken down both within the context of state-society relations and society-society relations as noted earlier. Our main proposition is that "... a healthy social contract, in which state policies reflect the demands and expectations of society, leads to more stable, equitable, and prosperous outcomes relative to those that do not." (Cloutier *et al.*, 2021, p. 8; see also Sulkunen, 2007). This paper, therefore, focuses on three key specific policies to forge a healthy social contract in Nigeria to promote inclusive development and a cohesive society.

The regional dynamics of historical grievances, which are the root of separatist aspirations, must first be addressed. For instance, in the Southeast, the IPOB agitation and demand for a separate homeland for the Igbo is driven by resentment over exclusions that date back to the Nigerian civil war. The expectations of the Igbo people in Southeast Nigeria thus border on inclusionary politics. More specifically, there is a widespread view amongst the Igbo that they have been denied access to the Presidency since Nigeria became independent. Accordingly, a deliberate zoning of the presidency by the major political parties to the Southeast that speaks to some form and expression of consociationalism democracy will assuage feelings of political marginalization in mainstream national politics and reduce tensions in Igboland. Similarly, in the South-South, dating back to the colonial time and post-independence, particularly from the 1970s when there was the oil boom, there has been a gradual evolution of a centralized federal system in Nigeria that deprive the oil minorities of their rights of ownership and equitable distribution of the benefits of the oil. To put it differently, "since the oil boom in the 1970s, oil revenues reoriented an already-fractious social contract around rent distribution via a multi-ethnic provisioning pact" (Cloutier *et al.*, 2021, p. 51).

Therefore, rather than adopt violent state repression of ethnic-based demands, a policy must respond to the diverse regional grievances through negotiated political settlements in order to close the gap between state-building and nation-building, which often thus throws up challenges of socio-political cohesion and state legitimacy crisis (Nyiayaana,

2021). The implementation of the 10 years of residency in any part of the country for a Nigerian to claim full citizenship rights will address the dialectic of the indigene/settler discriminations and contestations that reflect a broader crisis of citizenship and ethnicity. By itself, ethnicity weakens government institutions and encourages corruption.

Second, a policy must seek to regain citizens' trust in the governments and state institutions at all levels. Here good governance and putting in place accountability mechanisms aimed at checking systemic corruption in all areas of our national life is the answer. This will include strengthening the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission. Good governance will, for example, foster economic prosperity, social inclusion, and social justice in the distribution of opportunities, thereby making every citizen have a sense of belonging and patriotism. In a way, ensuring a mutual constitution of state obligations, and citizenship entitlements and duties, will promote the interactions of social cohesion, cooperation, integration, and national development. One concrete way of doing this is the initiation of the social cohesion research unit at the three levels of government in Nigeria – federal, state, and local – whose primary duty should be to ensure analysis of every government policy from the perspectives of social cohesion theory. Overall, providing social services, making appointments in government positions to reflect the diversity and needs of society, and framing governance generally from the lenses of social cohesion can help improve Nigeria's social cohesiveness.

Third, continuous reorientation of citizens and inculcating in them values of hard work, accountability, patriotism, nationalism, and unity will contribute to the process of producing active citizens who are able to resist ethnic hatred, corruption, and the instrumental mobilization by political elites for narrow personal gains. It is argued that active citizens build strong and effective states. The National Orientation Agency should be strengthened to work harder in this direction.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria's existing level of social cohesion foretells a serious threat to the country's sustainability and ongoing survival. There is increasing distrust in government and national institutions by Nigerian citizens. Yet, the level of ethnic distrust amongst the different ethnic groups is also deepening, and while this trend is historical, it has been particularly pervasive since 2015 due to the ethnic approach to governance by the Muhammadu Buhari regime. Nevertheless, all hope is not lost. Cooperation and integration that hinge on the policy of reinventing the social contract in relation to addressing specific regional grievances of marginalization such as the structural crisis of fiscal federalism and regaining citizenship trust in government will be helpful. Second, policy frameworks that promote national citizenship rather than ethnic and state-based citizenship expressed in the form of native/stranger distinction of 'we versus them' is

desirable. The implementation of the 10 years residency policy for Nigerians to qualify as a member of a community or village where he/she resides will ensure the realization of full citizenship and citizenship rights to all Nigerians. This policy will help to reduce the centrifugal tendencies associated with the communitarian nature of the African conceptions of citizenship that characterize social life in Nigeria. It is imperative to establish social cohesion research unit in all agencies of government whose primary function will be to analyse all government policies and decisions to ensure that they are sensitive to and consistent with social cohesion requirements. Finally, the decline in social cohesion in Nigeria makes sections of the country vulnerable to destructive conflict. The post-civil war environment in all regions of the country, especially in the southeast, requires careful application of a social cohesion approach to governance. This recommendation is supported by the existing literature.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors are grateful to Nigeria's Tertiary Education Trust Fund for providing grant for this research.

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# Cameroon: Leopard and Conflict Between Ardo Sabga and Fon of Babanki Tungo, 1937–1946

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the nature of disagreement over the treatment of leopards between Ardo Sabga and the Fon of Babanki Tungo between 1937 and 1946 in the North-West Region of Cameroon. It argues that this was a result of differences in the cultural backgrounds of these two eminent personalities greatly respected by the people under their leadership. Ardo Sabga was a Fulani Muslim and leader of the Fulani community and the Fon of Babanki Tungo was the indigenous traditional ruler of Babanki Tungo within whose territory the Fulani had been allowed to settle. Ardo Sabga, a later migrant into the North West Region, found no fault in killing leopards. One reason for doing so was that his cultural background did not recognize the leopard as a sacred animal that should be revered. Secondly, leopards were preying on the young calves of the Fulani which was greatly detested by the cattle owners. In the tradition of Babanki Tungo, like elsewhere in the North West Region, the killing of a leopard was prohibited because it was associated with royalty and respect. The animal is accorded enormous divine characteristics. As a sacred animal, it is expected that everyone should treat it with reverence.

In this paper, the qualitative method has been used to understand people's perceptions of the leopard as a sacred animal. Some statistics have also been presented to explain this phenomenon that is buried in the traditions and customs of different people around the world. The killing of leopards as sacred animals led to a clash between Ardo Sabga, who committed the act, and the Fon of Babanki Tungo, who vehemently detested it. The British colonial administration was drawn into the conflict to mediate between the belligerents.

**Keywords:** Ardo Sabga, Babanki Tungo, conflict, Fon, Fulani, Leopard, custom.

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 44, July 2023, pp. 19–35

DOI: 10.24193/csq.44.2

Published First Online: July 03 / 2023

## Introduction

Different civilizations or cultures of the world have given some animals special respect. Such animals have sacred attributes which make them associated with divine and mystical characteristics. The myths and legends attached to these animals make everyone in the community revere them. For each civilization or culture, there are several of these sacred animal species with divine characteristics. While in certain communities and countries, some animals are considered sacred, in others they are not. The ecosystem determines the animal that is given special or divine characteristics by the people. The belief that animals are sacred beings or are attributed sacred attributes dates back to the history of different communities in different parts of the world.

In several ancient civilizations, divine characteristics were accorded to animal species that were found around them (Demarco, 2019; MyAnimals, 2018). These divine characteristics were never attributed to animals not found and unknown to the people. These sacred animals were associated with legends and myths that defined the people they were. The myths and legends were linked to the way the people interpreted the world around them, including also their leaders who were thought to have divine powers or who were attributed such powers. Table I below presents some examples of animals and birds which were given divine characteristics or attributes and revered by their people.

The Babanki Tungo fondom, which is the area of study, is found in the North West Region of Cameroon. It is located between Bamenda town (precisely Bambili) and Bamesing village, *en route* to the Ndop plain (Jumbam, 2012). Ardo Sabga left Banyo and arrived in the North West Region, which administratively then was known as the Bamenda District of German and eventually British Southern Cameroons.<sup>1</sup> This was in 1916 at the heart of the First World War. He was welcomed by the Fon of Babanki Tungo and given the highlands of the fondom to settle and graze his cattle. The Fon of Babanki Tungo who welcomed Ardo Sabga in 1916 was Laliku. His relationship with the Fon and the indigenous people was very cordial at the beginning of his stay in this area. Awasom (1983) contends that, to reciprocate Fon's good gesture of providing Ardo Sabga with a place to settle unperturbed, Ardo was full of joy and gratitude to him. In return, he offered the Fon 10 cows and this was also appreciated by him. Amadou (2009), on his part, contends that the Babanki Tungo highland was eventually to become a permanent settlement for Ardo Sabga and his followers.

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1 Bamenda was made a military district under the German colonial administration and then eventually came under British control when Germany was defeated and punished after World War I. For more information on this, see V. J. Ngoh *Cameroon 1884–Present: The History of the People* (Revised and Updated Edition).

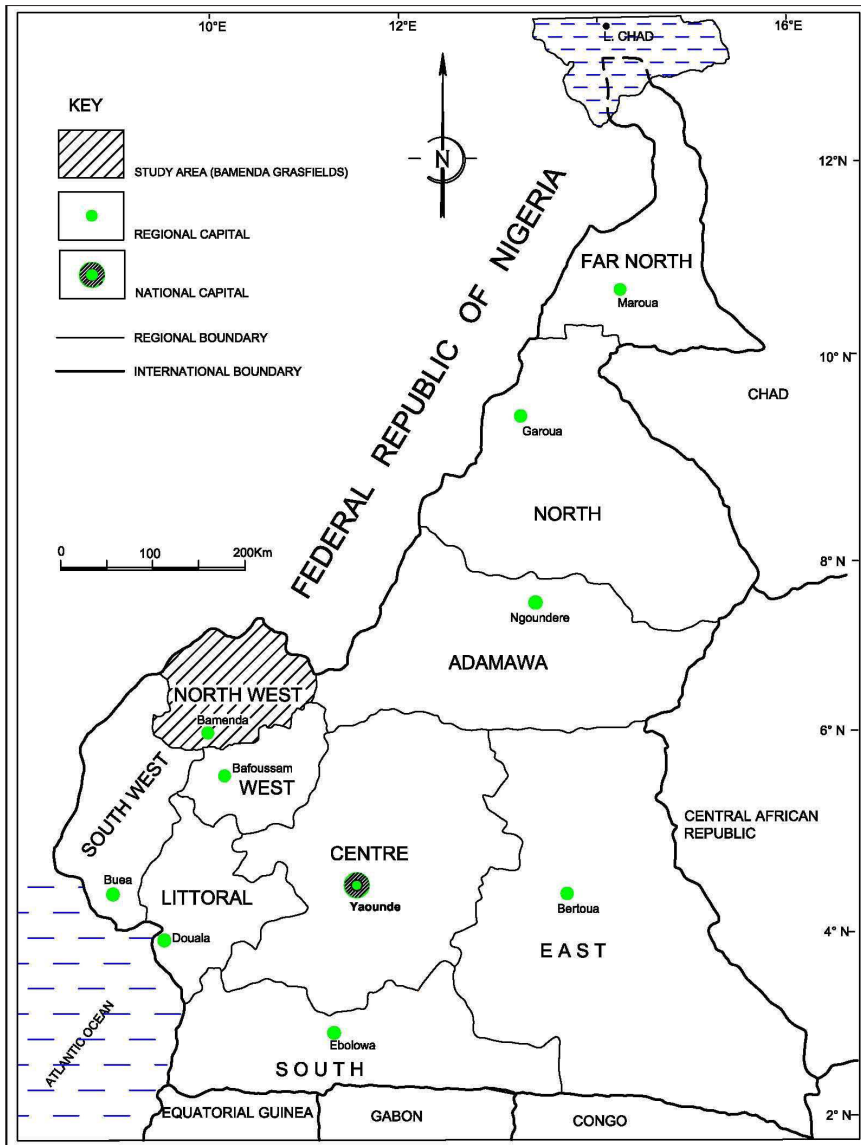
**Table I:** Sacred Animals and Birds in Communities in Some Countries

Country/Community	Animal	Divine Characteristics
Thailand	Elephant (white elephant)	Symbol of royalty and prosperity
India	Cow	Symbol of life, health, prosperity, and wealth (Only cows that did not give milk were sacrificed in the community)
	Dog	Guards to the doors of heaven
Mexico	Jaguar	Fertility, strength, and power
China	Tiger	One of the four powerful celestial gods besides turtle, dragon, and phoenix
	Lion	Protector of evil. (Lion-headed gods and goddesses were fierce deities who destroyed the enemies of the gods.)
	Monkey	Worshipped as god Hanuman and believed to be the incarnation of Buddha and seen in all temples
Northern Europe	Wild Boar	They represented courage, strength, prophecy, and magic
Western Europe		Symbol of health and protection. Warriors feed on its flesh before battles
USA	Eagle	Symbol of freedom, healing, power, valor, and vision
Peru, Mexico, Guatemala	Leopard	This was worshipped as a god
Northern Europe, First Nations of America	Owl	Wisdom and magic

**Source:** MyAnimals, 2018; Ayres, 2016; Ethan, n.d.; Demarco, 2019.

The highland on which Ardo Sabga came to settle was later to be called the Sabga Hill, and today it appears as such on maps and administrative documents of Cameroon (Amadou, 2004). This Sabga location has retained its initial prestige of being the earliest settlement for the Fulani in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon. The community is also highly respected among the Fulani and a source of reference to Fulani migration into Cameroon's Western Grassfields (Amadou, 2004). The historic importance of Sabga as the first Fulani settlement in this part of Cameroon has made it become the headquarters of Fulani settlements found in the region.<sup>2</sup> In Maps I and II below are the locations of Sabga and Babanki Tungo in the North West Region of Cameroon.

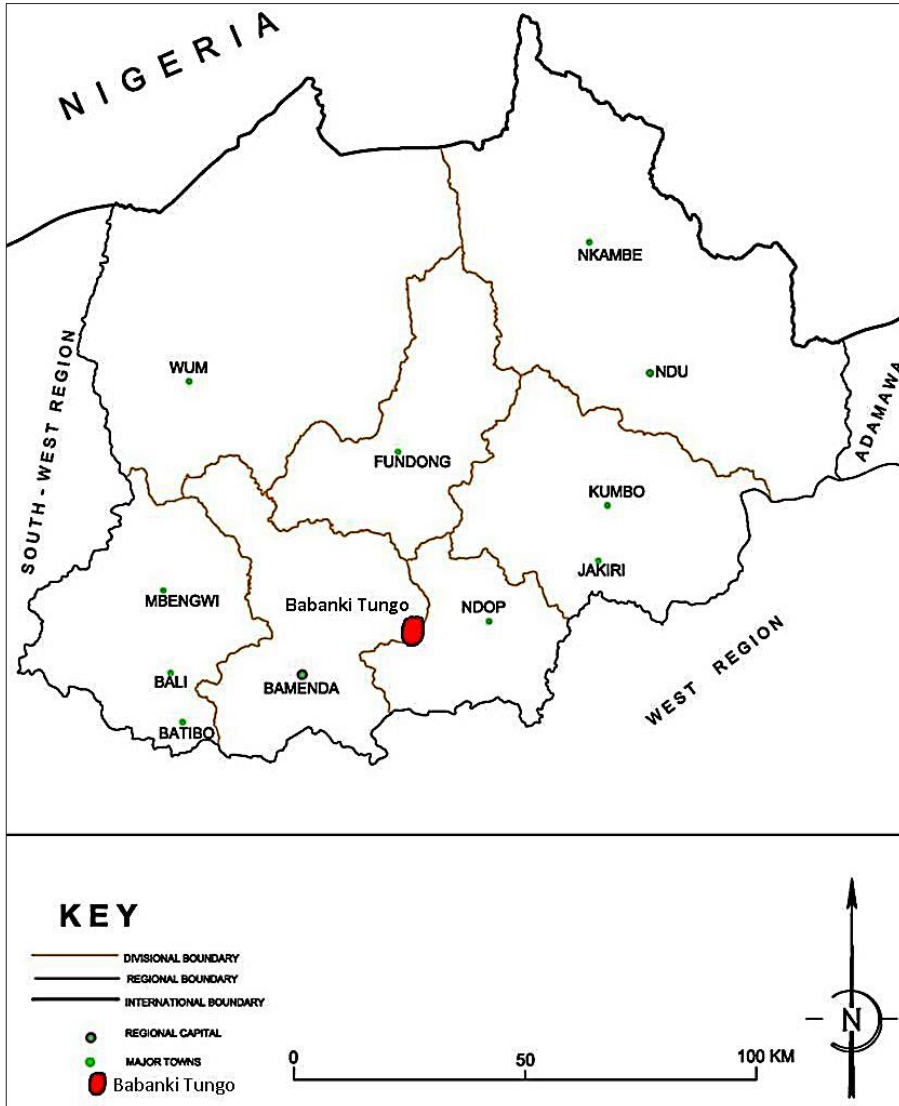
<sup>2</sup> The appellation "Grassfields" is a broad term used to refer to the whole region of western Cameroon which includes the North West and West regions of the country. It is located between the Cross River basin and the two affluence of the Benue (Katsina Ala and Donga) in the North and the Mbam and Nkam in the East. Our focus is on the North West Region which lies the Babanki Tungo fondom. The North West forms what is known as the Western Grassfields while the West Region is the Eastern Grassfields. Also, see P. N. Nkwi (1989) for more justification of the appellation "Grassfields".



**Map I:** Location of the North West Region in the Republic of Cameroon

**Source:** Adapted by the author from the Administrative Map of Cameroon of 1982, NIC, Yaounde

The entente between Ardo Sabga and the Fon of Babanki Tungo did not last long because in the late 1930s, there was disagreement between them. The disagreement was a result of the fact that Ardo Sabga started killing leopards that were found around the hills of Babanki Tungo. These leopards were a menace to him because they regularly invaded



**Map II:** Location of Babanki Tungo in the North West Region of Cameroon

**Source:** Adapted by the author from the Administrative Map of Cameroon of 1982, NIC, Yaoundé

his herds and killed his calves (NWRAB,<sup>3</sup> File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1937)). Leopard attacks on calves became incessant and the Ardo Sabga could not bear it any longer

<sup>3</sup> NWRAB is an acronym for North West Regional Archives Bamenda.

and explained why he killed many of them. In order to protect his animals from being killed, Ardo Sabga set traps and many of the leopards were killed much to the chagrin of the Fon of Babanki Tungo (NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1937)). This was the genesis of chagrin against Ardo Sabga by the Fon of Babanki Tungo. According to the tradition and customs of the people of Babanki Tungo, fondom leopards are prohibited from being killed by whosoever.

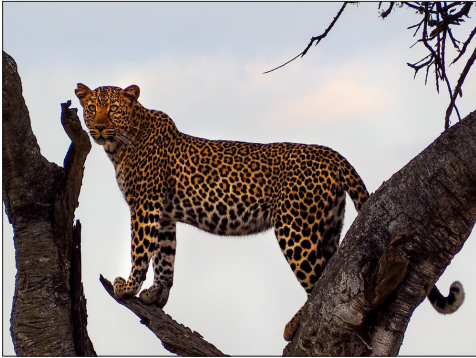
In a personal communication with Christopher Nebayi on October 20, 2021, he spoke of the sacred attribute of the leopard. According to him, like any other person, an indigene of Babanki Tugoh fondom or not, at the site of a leopard on his farm, runs away or hides. The reason is that these are considered incarnated fons who move around to sanctify the land from evil forces (see photos 1 and 2 below). This view was shared by several other informants that we discussed with, notably His Royal Highness Sunjo I in a personal communication on March 18, 2021, Abubakar Ousmanu in a personal communication on July 24, 2021, and Mohammed Ismaila in a personal communication on December 18, 2020. If the leopard was an incarnation of the Fon, then no one could dare confront or kill it because this was sacrilegious. This was even more so because evil forces menacing the peace of the fondom were deterred from doing so by the presence of the fon in the form of the leopard. Mbuy (2000) contends that "In the Grassfields, there are tribal totems, animals and birds dedicated to specific groups..." (p. 20). The leopard was therefore an important sacred animal in Babanki Tungo that no one was expected to toy with for whatever reason.

The importance of the leopard in different communities that venerate it is aptly captured by Stacey Demarco (2019) in these words:

... leopard watched the people yet were very rarely seen themselves. Their paw prints might have been occasionally found on a ridge overlooking the valley, but not spotted. These watchers of the skies rewarded those who helped others. Leopards ever watching would place obstacles in the path of those who did evil for them to realize their mistakes and change, and if something was not right the leopard would wail mournfully for all to hear...

From what Stacey said of the leopard, one would see in the animal-human attributes of care, reward, and sympathy. Different communities, including Babanki Tungo, believed that leopards were helpful to them because, as Nebayi (2021) said, they sent away evil forces from the farms. They often placed obstacles in the path of those who were evil and did evil things so that they could repent and be good. Leopards also had feelings for when something untoward happened, they mourned through the sounds they made. Leopards were, therefore, part and parcel of the human race, and respect for the role they played in communities that gave them respect.





**Plate 1:** Photo of a Leopard



**Plate 2:** Leopard Wailing

**Source:** Unsplash photos for everyone (n.d.) Leopard.

Retrieved on October 25, 2021 from [Unsplash.com/s/photos/Leopard](https://unsplash.com/s/photos/Leopard).

When a leopard wails as in plate II above, it is a signal that something bad would happen (Demarco, 2019). Considering the importance of the leopard to the community, its incisor and faeces were hunted for several uses. In the Nso` *fondom*, for example, witch doctors used these for healing, fortune telling, and divination (Shuufaay wo kongir, personal communication, July 5, 2005; Faay wo Taantoh, personal communication, December 30, 2006 and Christopher Nebayi, personal communication October 20, 2021). These witch doctors were a highly respected social class because of their ability to heal the sick, foretell something that would happen to an individual, and for divination. The incisors and feces of these leopards contributed to giving them such respect in the community.

Divine attributes were not only associated with the leopard but with other animals in some communities of the North West Region of Cameroon. Animals with divine or sacred attributes included the lion, deer, and birds like the owl, *turraco bananarama* (a red feathered bird locally known in Nso` as *fern/Feng*, among the Laimbwe as *Idooh* and a host of others (Shuufay wo Kongir, personal communication, 5 July 5, 2005 and aay wo Taantoh, personal communication, December 30, 2006). Mbuy (1992), argues that "In the Grassfields, there are tribal totems, animals and birds dedicated to specific groups...". This is a function of the environment and what it offers in terms of animals. Whenever any of these animals were killed either deliberately or not, the carcass, including its skin, was taken to the Fon's palace to strengthen his authority as ruler of the people. The leopard, for example, known in the Nso *fondom* as *ba'a*, was sacred and reserved only for the Fon.

The Fon of Babanki Tungo, on receiving news that Ardo Sabga was killing leopards, sent an injunction order to him (Bouba Sanda, personal communication, January 13, 2019). The order called on Ardo Sabga to cease further killing these sacred animals and to respect Babanki Tungo tradition and customs (NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2

(1937)). A summons also served him to appear in the palace of Babanki Tungo and answer charges against him. This summons fell on deaf ears and Ardo Sabga continued to kill more leopards, much to the chagrin of the Fon and his people. The refusal to appear before the Fon for interrogation was considered disrespect for a leader of the people who had assigned the piece of land on which Ardo Sabga and later Fulani arrivals settled (Ardo Jaja, personal communication, December 22, 2018 and Pius Vugah, personal communication, October 11, 2020). The Fon expressed anger and consternation with the attitude of Ardo Sabga and threatened to evict him from his fondom if he continued to defy his instructions (NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1937)); Ardo Karimo, personal communication, August 29, 2021 and Stephen Vuningseh, personal communication, August 29, 2021).

This nonchalant attitude of Ardo Sabga could be explained on several grounds. He was bound by Islamic beliefs, practices, and the *pulaaku*.<sup>4</sup> Ardo Sabga, therefore, did not bother about the Fon's summons. He considered that both of them had nothing in common but the fact that it was the Fon who assigned him to the piece of land he occupied at Sabga (Ardo Karimo, personal communication, August 29, 2021).<sup>5</sup> Indigenous beliefs and practices were not in conformity with Islamic principles and were not to be respected by practicing Muslims of whom Ardo Sabga was one. The action could also be seen as a deliberate attempt to challenge the authority of the one who had given the Ardo land on which to settle and graze his cattle. The clash or disagreement between the Fon of Babanki Tungo and Ardo Sabga was similar to what Crapo (2002) said about the attitude of human beings. According to him:

In the real world of human life, individuals differ from one another in many ways. So it is more accurate to think of culture as a system of symbols, customs, ideas, and feelings that are constantly being negotiated and redefined by members of a society as they interact and communicate with one another. It is also this dynamism that allows indeed, impels each culture to change with the passing of time.

From this view held by Crapo, one thing that is certain is the fact that customs can be negotiated and redefined as people interact with others. This was not certainly what Ardo Sabga wanted the Fon of Babanki Tungo to understand because he did not even respond to his summons which would have given him the opportunity to explain himself and which might have led to an *entente* or a truce between the two over the killing of calves by leopards. In fact, it was the absence of this negotiation that led to a clash in

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4 *Pulaaku* stand for Fulani virtues and code of conduct (for more, see Lucy Davis, 1995).

5 Ardo Sabga was a stranger and the first Fulani moslem to settle in the Bamenda Grassfields from the Futa Toro Region in Senegal (see NWRAB, File No. NA/b. (SAB) 1940/2, and National Archives Buea – NAB, Special Report (1920) for details).

relations between Ardo Sabga and the Fon of Babanki Tungo. They all differed in several aspects of belief, custom, and tradition and this explains their uncompromising posture over the incident of the killing of leopards by Ardo Sabga.

According to Kottak (1991), "People everywhere think that familiar explanations, opinions, and customs are true, right, proper, and moral. They regard different behaviors as strange or savage". The refusal of Ardo Sabga to meet the Fon over the killing of leopards was certainly considered not only strange but very strange because, among the people of the Western Grassfields of Cameroon, the Fon cannot summon someone and he or she will turn it down. If this happens, it is not only an affront to the Fon but to the entire community since the Fon is an incarnation of all that the community represents. On the other hand, Ardo Sabga regarded the action of the Fon in stopping him from killing leopards as strange. This was because he thought that the Fon would support him kill these animals that were killing his calves. Keeping cattle was very important for the economy of the area and for the *jangali* which was a cattle tax paid to the government by cattle owners through traditional rulers.

In 1937, Ardo Sabga applied for a gun from the colonial authorities so that he could kill more leopards. His application was sent through the Senior District Officer for Bamenda Division, the largest division in British Southern Cameroons<sup>6</sup> to the Resident in Buea. Part of the application read thus:

I have the honor most respectfully to apply through you to the Senior Resident, Buea , Cameroons Province to bear a short gun-double barrel.

I beg to state that I arrived here in the Bamenda Division and was known by the Government as Bororo Headman [herder] up to date.

I hope this humble application will meet you with your kind consideration and approval. (NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1937)).

There was no clear reason advanced by Ardo Sabga why he wanted the administration to approve of him possessing a gun. One thing that was however clear in his application was the fact that the colonial government had recognized him as a Bororo leader *cum headman*. There was a wider implication of this statement. He was most probably claiming legitimacy and authority like any other community leader such as the Fon of Babanki Tungo. This leadership claim was however problematic because no two leaders

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6 Bamenda Division until 1949 corresponded to the present North West Region of Cameroon. This large administrative unit was divided into a smaller Bamenda Division, Nkambe, and Wum Divisions in 1949 following the reorganization of the administrative unit. This reorganization led to the creation of two provinces in British Southern Cameroons. The Cameroons Province which was the name given to the entire territory before 1949 was now limited to Victoria, Kumba, and Mamfe Divisions while Bamenda, Nkambe, and Wum Divisions were under the Bamenda Province.

could lead in the same community without serious conflict over territorial control. Ardo Sabga was a leader of the Fulani community in Sabga in his own right. This was one of the earliest Fulani settlements in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon and had influence over other Fulani settlements in the region in later years. In spite of this, this should not have warranted him to claim control of a portion of the territory under the control of the Fon of Babanki Tungo. The territory had been assigned to him to settle and carry out his activities and not to claim ownership as his application seemed to have insinuated. Besides, considering the problem Ardo Sabga had with the Fon of Babanki Tungo over leopards killing his cows, one can understand that the application for a gun was to facilitate the continuous killing of leopards to save his cows from being all killed by these leopards.

The British colonial administration did not respond to the application of Ardo Sabga for a gun. Having waited in vain for a probably positive response, Ardo Sabga decided to petition the District Officer for Bamenda Division in 1941 hoping that this time around the colonial administrator will respond to his preoccupation with being able to hold a gun. In his complaint to the District Officer, he talked about four of his cows that were killed by a tiger [leopard], and three of them were left seriously wounded in the process. The Ardo pleaded with the District Officer to send a police constable or someone else to come and kill the animal that was menacing his cattle (NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1937)). Even as Ardo Sabga wrote to the administration for a second time suggesting the line of action to take, he was certainly aware that it would be a difficult venture which might not be accepted by the District Officer. This was surely because of the distance between Babanki Tungo and Bamenda Station<sup>7</sup> and the fact that the operation could only be done at night (Ardo Karimo, personal communication, August 29, 2021, and Stephen Vuningseh, personal communication, August 29, 2021).

Ardo Sabga might have thought that, although the first time the administration failed to grant him permission to hold a gun, this time around, the District Officer would allow him to do so. When the District Officer failed again to grant his heart's desire and considering that leopards were constantly killing his cows, Ardo Sabga took matters into his own hands. The failure of the District Officer to grant him the right to hold a gun led him to launch a ferocious hunt for these leopards right into their hiding places. This action was in defiance of Babanki custom and tradition (NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1937)) which attracted the anger of the people. Using traps, the Ardo killed several leopards. Their carcasses and peels for each of them were graciously shared

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<sup>7</sup> Bamenda station was by then the base of the British colonial administrative officials of the by then Bamenda Division. Bamenda Division this time was one of the four administrative divisions constituting the Cameroons Province of the Nigerian Federation during the British Mandate of the territory (see V. G. Fanson (2017) and V. J. Ngoh (1919) for more information).

with his friends. To kill a leopard especially consciously was an offense to the Fon of Babanki and his people. To make matters worse, the fact that the carcass and peel were given to friends and not the Fon who was the incarnation of custom and tradition was treasonable (Shuufay wo Kongir, personal communication, July 5, 2005 and Faay wo Taantoh, personal communication, December 30, 2006).

When the Fon of Babanki sent for the carcasses and peels of some of the leopards killed, Ardo Sabga snubbed him. This could be interpreted as disrespect for authority because everyone in Babanki Tungo land was answerable to the Fon and Ardo Sabga was not to be an exception to the rule. Feeling humiliated by Ardo, the Fon wrote to the District Officer, Bamenda to complain about the behavior of Ardo Sabga which was not in line with the custom and tradition of Babanki Tungo (NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1937)). This incident showed clearly that the Ardo was not ready to receive instructions from the Fon who had given him the place to settle when he got to the Bamenda Grassfields in the first place. On February 9, 1946 Ardo Sabga in his reply to a letter of reprimand from the District Officer wrote:

I have the honor to reply to your letter no. 1972 of 01/15/1946 and beg to inform you that I have an iron trap which I bought about 27 years ago and have killed several tigers [leopards] with it. When a tiger is caught in the trap I have to send People with arrows to kill it. I have stayed in Babanki land for 21 years and have killed several tigers but the chief never asks for any.

All tigers [leopards] are killed; the skins are always presented to the Europeans whom I like. I am not eating tiger [leopard], the meat is always given to pagans.

I am not a hunter but when it [leopard] catches my calf or calves then I must set a trap and then kill it. Our Fulani customs differ [sic] from the people here, I mean the Babankis. All that is required here is not known in my own country [sic]. The District Officer may ask the Fulani about this matter NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1946).

In this reply to the District Officer for Bamenda Division, Ardo Sabga continued to refer to the leopard as a tiger. Babanki Tungo custom did not prohibit the killing or hunting of tigers but leopards. He confirmed the fact that after a “tiger” [leopard] was killed; the carcass was given to “pagans” who were his friends. He gave the leopard peels to European friends and not to the Fon as tradition demanded. He also pointed out that the Fulani custom was different from that of the indigenous people and called on the District Officer himself to verify from the other Fulani. The question one might ask is why did Ardo Sabga prefer to give the carcass of a leopard to the so-called “pagan” friends and the peel to Europeans than to the Fon? Was it a deliberate attempt to undermine the authority of the Fon and to create networks of protection against his defiance of instructions of the Fon? If he had been in Babanki land for 21 years and the Fon had

never asked for the leopard killed why did Ardo Sabga not give this to the Fon when he asked for it? What would the Ardo have done to protect his cattle which was the source of his livelihood without killing leopards which were menacing them? These were tough questions to answer considering that Ardo Sabga was a cattle rearer and the custom did not warrant the killing of leopards for whatever reason.

The crisis was finally brought to an end on February 18, 1946 when the District Officer wrote to Sabga stating that "Leopards, when caught must be handed over to the village Head and reported when this has been done. Local customs must be observed not Fulani customs in this matter." NWRAB, File No. Na/b. SAB 1940/2 (1946). One could argue that the decision of the District Officer was a solution but also a source of problems for co-existence between Ardo Sabga and his followers on one hand and the Fon and his subjects on the other. The fact that Ardo Sabga was called upon to hand over any leopard caught to the Fon or Village Head was certainly to maintain the authority and integrity of the Fon. British colonial administration was built on Indirect Rule with the traditional or natural rulers playing an important role in the chain of administration. The emphasis that local custom was to be observed even by the Fulani was a source of the problem. European colonial administrators in different parts of Africa were not comfortable with the Fulani who were adherents of the Islamic religion which has always been in conflict with Christianity. How could the Fulani who had a different cultural practice be forced to observe indigenous customs and traditions? Why did the District Officer not talk of co-existence but for one culture to swallow another one?

### **Indigenous Ways of Preserving the Environment and Contemporary Conservation Conflicts**

Babanki tradition and customs prohibited the hunting and killing of some animal species because of the need to preserve them and the ecosystem. Among these animals were leopards, lions, tigers, and a few others including *tauracobannermani* bird. These were considered sacred in Babanki fondom and preserved and in so doing, the environment was also preserved. Hideouts of these animals in the fondom were to be avoided by everyone and no fire was to be set on them so that these species and the environment surrounding them were preserved for posterity. Any Babanki subject or foreigner who mistakenly killed any of these animals reported quickly to the Fon's palace with the carcass<sup>8</sup> (Christopher Nebayi, personal communication October 20, 2021). Defaulters were summoned and punished by the traditional council of the fondom. This tradition is still

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8 While the feathers of *tauracobannermani* birds were used only by the Fon to decorate dignitaries, notables, and people who in any way contributed to the development and advancement of the fondom, Leopard peels were reserved for the Fons bed or placed on his throne or were he placed his feet while sitting.



binding and everyone including foreigners residing in Babanki is obliged to abide by this. In similar areas of the savannah areas of the Bamenda Western grass fields, indigenous preservation of the environment was in the form of prohibiting people from harvesting culturally valuable plant and animal species. This was because of their importance for ritual ceremonies and therapeutic purposes. This was the case for example in the Mankon Fondom which is located not far away from Babanki Tungo. Other conservation practices included resource rotation, food taboos, and restrictions on harvest limits. The keeping of sacred forests around palaces for several ritual purposes went a long way to preserving environmental degradation (Ngambouk & Ngwa, 2019; Kah, 2015).

In spite of efforts that were made to preserve the environment, especially flora, and fauna, there have emerged conflicts threatening attempts at conservation today in Babanki Tungo and other ethnic groups of the Western Grassfields of Cameroon. One of these is the lack of cultural sensitivity which has proven to be antithetical to conservation initiatives (Ngambouk & Ngwa, 2019). Many people who are insensitive to cultural norms that promote the preservation of the environment for sustainable livelihood have gone ahead to destroy what is left of this environment. The increasing number of farmer-grazier conflicts in this part of Cameroon is not healthy for the preservation of the environment. The conflict has not led to the destruction of crops but also over-grazing which has led to soil erosion and flooding in river valleys leading to losses in deaths and destruction of property (Sop *et al.*, 2015; Ngwoh, 2018).

Other contemporary conservation conflicts in and around the area of study are a result of changes in land tenure, competition for supremacy, succession crisis to the headship of villages, conflicts over the management of natural resources, and the Anglophone crisis among others (Sobseh & Dze-Ngwa, 2021; Muntah, 2020). These and related conflicts have had a devastating impact on the environment. Several water bodies have dried up because of the destruction of vegetation around them for fuel wood and commercialization of timber. Government efforts at conservation are even at variance with indigenous methods of conservation (Ngambouk & Ngwa, 2019) and instead of the two working in tandem, they are rather at variance. There is, therefore, a need for a convivial relationship between indigenous and modern methods of conservation to mitigate the conflicts arising from efforts to preserve the environment.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the conflict that ensued between the Fon of Babanki Tungo and Ardo Sabga over the killing of leopards considered sacred animals in the customs and traditions of the people. The paper has shown that it was not only the Babanki people that had reverence for certain animals but a practice in different countries and ethnic groups around the world. Ardo Sabga's killing of leopards might not have been considered a deliberate attempt to defy the custom and tradition of Babanki

Tungo . He was forced to do so given that such animals were enemies to his cows, the very source of his livelihood and under his care. He killed leopards not just for fun or for the sake of killing them but because these were a menace to his cows. There was therefore no other way of securing his cattle from killing than to employ a deterrent method. Fulani custom it should be noted, did not recognise “sacred” animals as was the custom of Babanki Tungo. The fact that Ardo Sabga in his petition to the District Officer of Bamenda mentioned “Tiger” and “Buffalo” instead of the leopard was a glaring indication that he did not know the difference between these animals. The buffalo has as its habitat the river and the tiger is a different animal from the leopard. One could also say that Ardo Sabga was ignorant of the cultural significance of the leopard as long as it was not part of his own culture. For him to have defied the Fon’s order by killing leopards, was certainly because leopards continued to decimate his calves with no compensation from the traditional leader of Babanki Tungo. This repeated incident actually showed the clash that existed between the culture of the host and those who migrated to settle in the area.

The District Officer’s peace initiative to end the conflict was only partially good. His decision brought to an end the petitions that the Fon of Babanki and Ardo Sabga were trading against each other. The Fon’s threat to evict Sabga from his territory also ended. However, the District Officer’s peace initiative was a raw deal on several counts. The Officer ordered Sabga to respect Babanki custom by not killing leopards. This order was without any concrete measures or suggestions made to prevent leopards from killing their calves. Such an order was therefore not a good solution to the conflict that had embroiled the Fulani and Babanki communities. Neither the District Officer nor the Fon could stop hungry leopards from attacking Ardo Sabga’s herd and Ardo Sabga could not also sit and continue to watch his herd, considered to be the only source of his livelihood, continue to decline because of leopards.

This half-baked peace initiative of the District Officer for Bamenda added to the animosity or enmity that later developed between the Fulani and the indigenous people. The refusal of Ardo Sabga to declare and or pay his jangali tax dues to the Fon of Babanki as mandated by the British colonial administration was certainly one of the ramifications of the bad peace deal he had with the Fon over the issue of leopards killing his animals (NWRAB, File No. Na/b (SAB) 1940/2 (1939)). This view is also held by some of the persons interviewed in the course of this research (Ardo Karimo, personal communication August 29, 2021 and Stephen Vuningseh, personal communication, August 29, 2021).

Ardo Sabga, besides being a stranger in the North West Region of Cameroon was a Muslim who practiced the Islamic faith. With an Islamic background that had nothing to do with sacred animals, he killed leopards for killing his calves. He would have done so not because he had hatred for the custom and tradition of Babanki Tungo but for the leopard that was at the center of the conflict. The leopard seemed to have declared



war on young calves and it was in retaliation that Ardo Sabga became merciless against these marauding leopards which then attracted the furry of the Fon of Babanki Tungo and then the intervention of the colonial administration. The Fon of Babanki in whose land Ardo Sabga settled did not get into conflict with Ardo Sabga because he hated him in particular but because as a custodian of Babanki Tungo tradition and custom, he was compelled to protect leopards. Had he not been loving, he would not have asked Ardo Sabga to settle on the Sabga Hill. The fierce conflict between the Fon of Babanki Tungo and Ardo Sabga, eminent personalities of their respective communities could best be explained as a consequence of friction between two different and fend off or repelling cultures that co-incidentally found themselves operating in the same geographic space. The District Officer's failure to recognize this and to take the appropriate measures to ensure peace only exacerbated the problem in one way or the other. It was the colonial administration that tried to handle the conflict although with difficulties.

We have also shown that the people of Babanki Tungo like other ethnic groups of the western grassfields of Cameroon developed indigenous methods of preserving the ecological balance for sustainability. Due to changes over time and pressure on the environment, there have been conflicts in the area and there is a need to revisit these conservation methods and blend indigenous and modern methods to good effect. This will go a long way to promote peaceful co-existence and tolerance which are important in the survival of the environment.

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# Determinants of Failure in a Two-Level Negotiation Game

Panagiotis KALENIS

**Abstract:** The article examines the impact of the activity of the parties involved, as well as of third parties, on the effectiveness of strategic negotiations with non-state organizations. It affirms that third-party implication in the form of mediation has been a core part of peace formation initiatives in the deeply divided Israeli and Palestinian societies, beset by competing cultural and ethnoreligious grievances. At first, key aspects of negotiation regarding the demarcation of the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA), the significance of concessions, power asymmetry, and the level of conflict are specified through theoretical integration. The aim is to facilitate the study of the Israel-Palestine conflict, upon which negotiation theory is applied. Further on, the analysis conducted herein proves that domestic politics and third parties' priorities have limited the necessary flexibility and undermined the respective processes. The article argues that third-party interference has been ineffective and has protracted the conflict's dynamics, thwarting peace formation, and thus contributing to a deterioration of the status of the polities involved. To partly verify the findings, an interview with a member of a Palestinian Diplomatic Representation was conducted. The conclusion entails the imperative that a substantial interest in resolving a conflict is required to be based upon the commitment and capability of each and every party involved while avoiding a self-serving bias, third-party partiality, and the augmentation of frustration due to arbitrary activity.

**Keywords:** Negotiation, ethnopolitical conflict, radicalism, third actors, international organizations, Israel, Palestine.

## Introduction

After the end of a mandate, territorial sovereignty may be contested between groups. An incompatibility over territory surfaces, in which the actors involved strive to prevail, adopting an antagonistic *modus operandi* (Wallenstein, 2002). Then, the underlying dispute may gradually take on

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 44, July 2023, pp. 36–54

DOI: 10.24193/cs.44.3  
Published First Online: July 05 / 2023

the dimensions of existential conflict. As long as human needs, including identity, participation, and cultural/ethnic security, are not met, violence becomes the conduit of communication of frustration and anger, expressing a high concern for the status quo (identity-based conflict) (Burton & Dukes, 1990). At this point, the parties resort to sub-optimal political options and convey narratives that function as the causal link between the exercise of the moral right to exist and violent retribution (Ellis, 2020). Furthermore, the Western perception of the conflict cannot lead to resolution as gains are not diffused in the societies involved, creating a situation that mirrors domestic politics trapped in demagoguery and the appeasement of radical forces.

As Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), declared in 1974 (United Nations General Assembly – 29<sup>th</sup> Session, 2282<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Meeting) “... *Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. I repeat: do not let the olive branch fall from my hand*”. This message was perceived as a call upon all stakeholders, nominally devoted to peace, to act. Delivered in a very specific way, it clarified the existence of a negatively connoted sole alternative. The mundane, recurrent call upon the parties to cease hostilities, the withdrawal of foreign support or the lack of impartiality, and the aim of an ulterior ending of terrorism/threat of violence pestering all communities, are core elements characterizing the related procedures. On the other side, the international context in which this message was conveyed meant to suggest that, notwithstanding the well-intended interference of a third party, sometimes the *modus operandi* lacks a genuine intention to move towards a settlement, existing only to maintain the conduit of communication and the ‘*raison d'être*’ of the mediator.

This article begins with a well-needed conceptual integration of negotiation theory into conflict management and examines certain aspects of the pathway followed by the negotiating parties and mediating third actors, in a ‘causality-result’ scheme. Subsequently, it outlines the extent to which a two/three-level game approach sheds light on the derivative implications in the negotiation process. While evaluating the outreach of the actors involved, the article concludes with the key determinants of failure, with homage to peace formation theory, domestic politics, and third-party interference. At the same time, it is processed under two fundamental constraints: (a) a Western democratic perception (liberal bias – Mac Ginty, 2006) and (b) scarcity of credible intelligence. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of the implications of this study for scholarship and policy.

The case of Israel-Palestine is chosen because of three core elements:

1. The withdrawal of a foreign force (mandate) in the past;
2. The emergence of radical groups with a powerful ethnoreligious base (sacred vs political/secular values); and
3. The existence of robust Western implications, whereas the populaces involved are Muslim/Jewish.

## Methodology

Primary and secondary sources in the form of journal articles and academic books, as well as an interview with a member of the Palestinian Authority's diplomatic mission, were used as sources for specific aspects of the topic, mostly drawn from the realm of sociology, conflict management, diplomacy, and the studies of international negotiations.

## Integration of sociopolitical concepts in the Negotiation Theory

Iklé (1964) introduces the concept of negotiation as a "continual threefold choice" leading to (a) the acceptance of available terms; (b) opting for no agreement, or (c) the continuation of bargaining. Negotiation is indeed a collective decision-making process. It is a matrix of sets of proposals, out of which the one satisfying both parties prevails. Effectively reducing the counterpart's alternatives constitutes a sign of power (resources – relative ability to impose one's will). On the other hand, failing in satisfying a basic need in existential conflict often constitutes the motivational basis of radical behavior and, if the desired need is not met, deviant methods to attain a goal will be employed in the absence of alternatives. Through this prism, it is useful to lay the conceptual foundation, a comprehensive theoretical framework, consisting of negotiation parameters in conflict management. This will facilitate the assessment of the Palestine-Israel case and the extraction of causal links between the interference of third actors and the results of the respective processes.

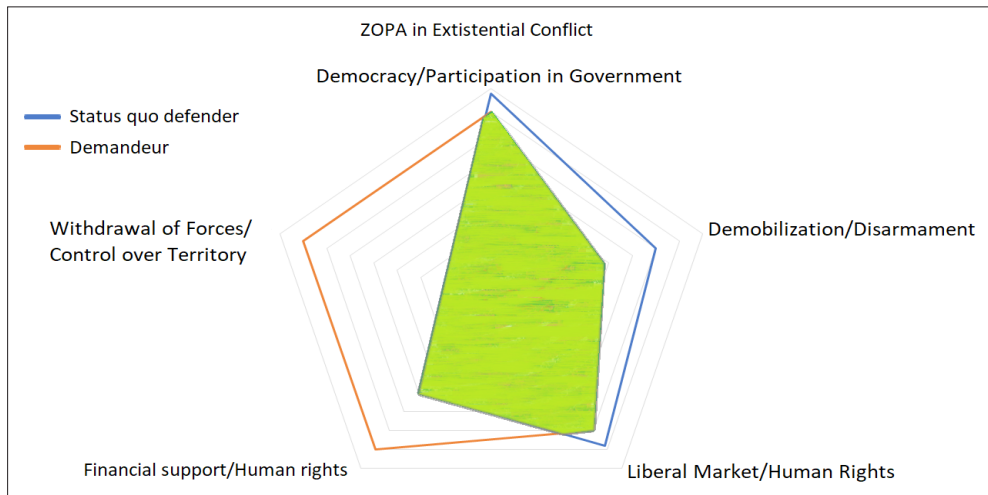
## Repression, mutual reassurance, and recognition

In ethnopolitical conflict, an anachronistic up-to-bottom polity eventually features a social group's *repression*, as the status quo-defender adopts oppressive practices against the weaker party (demander), to maintain its advantages (negotiation power). Political violence erupts and, on the level of organizations and states, negotiation is instrumentalized to prevent its escalation (Della Porta, 2014). Starting from the pre-negotiation phase, *mutual reassurance* is crucial to convincing the parties upon a common table and, progressively, to concede to the necessary extent. The existing depth of the initial distrust demands that each party offers continuing evidence to establish trust in one another's general direction (Lewicki *et al.*, 1998). Acknowledgments, symbolic gestures, or confidence-building measures prove trustworthiness, especially before risks, which are yet *terra incognita*. Communication expresses positions, extracts information, and directs the interaction between the parties. The mere act of opening communication channels may carry a negative connotation, that of implying an underlying *recognition* of the opponent's national or religious identity, political rights, or the right of intervention as if the situation comprised zero-sum terms (Kelman, 1987, p. 357). In terms of legitimization, recognition brings another aspect of the functions of negotiation: the actors are apprehensive, fearing that being 'entrapped' in a series of progressively

costly concessions may jeopardize inalienable values (sacred values), such as security and ethnoreligious identity, which at a certain extent includes the negative image of the other (Kelman, 2007). This makes it even harder for third actors to effectively mediate or intervene, although reciprocal recognition stands as a sort of power equilibrium and a stipulation of negotiation. After all, negotiation is a delicate process that requires careful attention to the underlying power dynamics and the potential threats to each party's values and identity.

### BATNA, ZOPA, and frustration

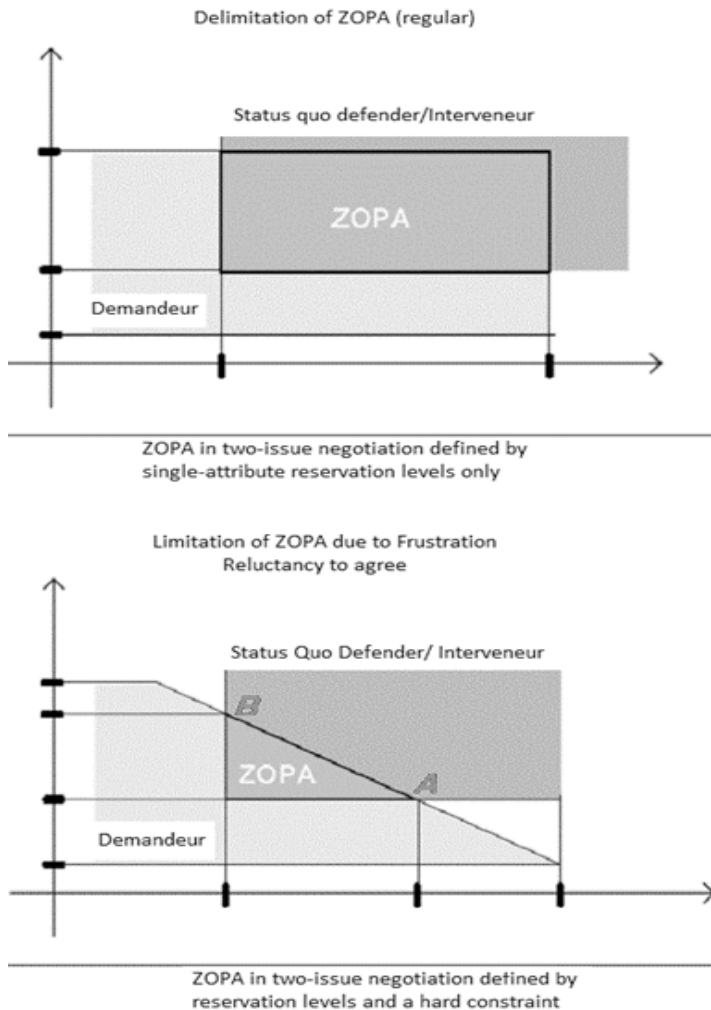
Parties engaged in a so-called existential conflict are afraid to make needed concessions, albeit the status quo may have become increasingly painful, to an extent that they recognize that a negotiated agreement better serves their interests (in the Best/Worst Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement [BATNA/WATNA] dipole: the party has already approached the Reservation Price-Red Line of existence). In the scheme presented below, the core demands of the parties in existential conflict are demarcated and taken into consideration. Mirroring the protection of democracy (in a Western liberal perception) by the status quo defender, the demander pursues participation in the government, representing an ethnic/religious minority. The prerequisite, in this case, is that both communities are tolerant enough to coexist in a unitary polity. If this is not met, the strife for control over territory emerges, as the communities prefer total autonomy and, progressively, indisputable sovereignty.



**Figure 1:** The delimitation of ZOPA in Existential Conflict

In the framework of negotiation, the constant demand for a withdrawal of foreign/oppressive forces can be linked to the settlement of the conflict as a whole. Such aspirations

are crucial for the demarcation of the parties' win-sets and the evaluation of settlement possibilities. Yet again, given that not all societal stakeholders in the local populace are satisfied, the lack in the *diffusion of gains* (e.g., political, financial) shall lead to a possibility that is to be reckoned with: highly frustrated groups will assume the role of the demander in the future, affecting main or derivative talks. *Frustration, anger, and exhaustion* arm the hand of the weaker party, bearing decisive importance in the delimitation of the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA), formatted in the inaugural phases of negotiation. In a generalized implementation of the concept of the ZOPA in existential conflict, the scheme that represents the 'cost of delay' in reaching an agreement can be presented as follows:



**Figure 2:** The shrinking of ZOPA due to Frustration in Existential Conflict



Frustration takes the place of the 'cost of delay' deriving from the protraction of the conflict (and the negotiation process), resulting in the shrinking of the ZOPA. And, naturally, as the ZOPA shrinks, so does the aspiration of avoiding the transformation of the conflict into war.

### **Balance of Power and the Importance of Flexibility**

Zartman's (2000) 'ripeness theory' entails two perceptual prerequisites, which, albeit not always sufficient, are necessary for the transition of a severe conflict into a negotiation: (a) the parties are experiencing a *mutually hurting stalemate* that obstructs the implementation of their agenda, inflicting unacceptable costs. Regarding unacceptable costs, one can understand the impetus introduced on the premise of a recent or imminent catastrophe (terrorist/war threats); and (b) *optimism* about reaching a mutually acceptable settlement denotes the parties' perception of the situation, a distinctive hope of a 'negotiated way out', as Zartman (2000) suggests.

This approach persuasively lays the foundation for the inauguration of negotiation, although it does not mention the impact of the protraction of a conflict, the frustration pestering the populaces involved, and the irresolution connected to causal explanations – why continue investing in grinding processes that seldom bear fruits? Especially in cases of hardline politics directing negotiations, this perception is a non sequitur. Bercovitch (1992) suggests that more successful negotiations are the ones having results early on in the conflict. Thus, how can one remedy this matter? An essential component of successful negotiations is the *balance of power* between the parties to the conflict. In order to inaugurate negotiations, the parties' perception of asymmetry needs to be "*replaced by a realization of symmetry*" (Zartman, 1995, p. 148) – in another formulation, that happens when the parties "*see themselves as moving toward equality*" (Zartman, 2000, p. 228). Realizing they can neither unilaterally impose their will on nor eliminate the counterpart, they collaborate (from zero-sum to cooperative perception). Mutual recognition is a form of *power balancing* and a prerequisite of negotiation.

To better organize my thoughts, I must revert to a theoretical conception, explaining the parameters of *equality*. In order to engage in a negotiation, a party must be in a position to make demands and reduce the other's alternatives. Common experience shows that relative power is the key to being respected, recognized as an interlocutor, and making demands. Quite elaborately, Burton & Dukes (1990) suggest that gross asymmetry between contending groups denotes the possibility that the preponderant party is more possible to reap benefits, meaning that the concept of 'power' includes the "*capacity to coerce or defeat another party*" (Pruitt, 2009, p. 24). Pruitt (2009) suggests that a curvilinear relationship exists, where inequality and the possibility of conflict escalation are intertwined. Specifically in existential conflict, the term 'defeat' bears a unique connotation, that of annihilation. Thus, violence is what the parties resort to, in a

spiral of conflict characterized by progressively forceful tactics. In the face of inequality (a high degree of power asymmetry), the more disadvantaged group shall opt for 'mala in se' acts, to compensate for the deficit of power (presumably negotiation capital). The deployment of forceful tactics by both sides adds up to an intractable conflict. Also, predicting the negotiations' collapse and because of the low level of the preferability of a solution, the negotiating personnel will have the tendency to follow a hard line, in disregard the negotiating partner, as the worst-case scenario is already a given.

**Table 1:** The Effect of Negotiation on Existential Conflict

*The effect of Negotiation in existential conflict (A to B to C)*

A. Communication	B. Recognition		C. Legitimization / power balance
- Positions	concessions		alteration of BATNA
- Information	if	frustration	then shrinkage of ZOPA
- Interaction	repression		escalation of conflict

As communication is quintessential in conflict prevention, the dissemination of information and the discipline needed to avert arbitrary acts are ensured in Track One Diplomacy, at least on a theoretical basis. The latter possesses the capacities, both material and financial, to obtain much-needed leverage in negotiations (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000). Political power, steering the negotiations and outcomes, is its vantage point. But given that it is conducted at the formal, international level, with protocols and timetables, it limits the well-needed flexibility, that is the creative capacity to deviate and counter-propose (Mapendere, 2005).

*Flexibility* is the most prominent factor that *prima facie* influences the fate of negotiation and defines the ability to adopt new points without substantial divergence and loss of value. In this respect, demarcating the boundaries in negotiation restricts the options and the ability to circumvent stalemates. Seldom does it add impetus to the undertaken task, overcoming convulsions regarding the formulation of the agenda, bearing in mind that negotiation with a group regarded generally as terrorist is different during a generalized conflict than during the development of an incident/attack. The Intifada (1987–1993, 2000–2005) and the terrorist attacks heralded new strategies against the 'oppressors'. The radicalization of religiously inclined groups and individuals was a fundamental indicator of a deep-rooted and severe conflict. According to Lederach (1999), confrontation brings the conflict to the surface and the dynamics of the conflict determine the range of options, from violent to non-violent. He further observes that the pursuit of peace involves some sort of confrontation. The variant implied, providing a catalytic effect on the transformation of confrontation into a negotiation (unbalanced

to balanced power) is the interference of a third actor. In the next step, confrontation moves toward negotiations. Within the broader progression of conflict, the multiplicity of peace-building and reconciliation activities attests to the creative nature of negotiation, barely effective when in its distributive form.

### **Symbolism: Negotiating sacred values**

Two of the core elements of the Israel-Palestine conflict are religion and ethnic origin (identity-based, in contrast to interest-based conflict). Whereas there is no need to emphasize the 'peaceful' or 'polemic' nature of each religious belief, one can easily observe a radicality intrinsic in the names of organizations through which the communities express and protect their identity. Inalienable, sacred values (in contrast to secular/political values) of each side are projected like banners. And symbolism, without doubt, affects the communication and the effectiveness of any rapprochement initiatives. To be more precise, I remind the names of organizations engaged in the domain of security on each side:

- Harakat almuqawama al-Islamiyya ( Hamas acronym, 'Islamic Resistance Movement') denotes the Islamic character of the movement (Sunni); Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami Filastin (PIJ acronym, 'Palestinian Islamic Jihad');
- Tsva ha-Hagana le-Yisra'el (The Army of Defense for Israel; IDF) beyond bearing a quite emotional word mark (in contrast to, e.g., 'US Army', 'Bundeswehr'), was established by key figures of paramilitary Jewish organizations (Haganah, Irgun, Lehi), while the official internet site of the Israeli Armed Forces reads, regarding its goals, as follows: 'respecting the values of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state (even the word 'Jewish' comes before 'democratic' (Lüders, 2015).

By mid-1949, the independent state of Israel was established. It occupied almost 80% of mandate Palestine, including a part of Jerusalem. The Arab-originating Palestinian population was dispersed, calculated at more than 700,000. Violence in the form of armed fighting and expulsion (offensive and passive aspect) during the Disaster (al-nakba) has since constituted a great part of the Palestinian ethnoreligious identity. Gradually, what had begun as a conflict between the Zionist and Palestinian movements claiming possession of one land, transformed into a zero-sum game hosting a Pan-Arabic struggle against Israel, which to this day is perceived as a Western imperialistic proxy (Litvak, 1998). The religious conceptualization of the conflict offered the ground for causal explanations engulfing a victim approach and a justified code of conduct (just war, vindictive motivation). In such situations, as if there is no other alternative, *indivisibility* plays a crucial role.

At this point, it is essential to attempt a historical reference to better locate key sources of the conflict as well as determinants of failure in the peace-building process. Even when the risk-prone Palestinian and the risk-averse Israeli negotiators reached some

common ground on fundamental issues, such as security, the fate of Palestinian refugees, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian areas, and the status of Jerusalem, they ultimately reached an impasse on the issue of sovereignty over the sacred site of the Haram El Sharif in the old city. Hassner (2003) suggests the element of *non-fungibility* is quite problem-creating in this matter. In this context, the parties' perception is limited to the non-substitution and the lack of reciprocity. Thus, there are no conditions under which the wills could coincide or dove-tailing (the creation of value through exchange) could be possible. Also, as far as the role of leadership in negotiations is concerned, Palestinian Authority president Yasser Arafat encouraged his delegation to demonstrate flexibility *but not budge on this one thing: the Haram [El-Sharif] is more precious to me than everything else.* (Hassner, 2003).

Regarding the mirroring of Israeli sacred values in the negotiation *modus operandi*, the main internal political conflict is not between conservative, liberal, and social democratic, nor between peace- and settlement-supporting political movements, but between three major right-wing/ultra-nationalist parties that engage in governance, one led by Benjamin Netanyahu ('Likud' – Consolidation), the second ('HaBayit HaYehudi' – The Jewish Home / Yamina political alliance) led by past Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, the third ('Yisrael Beiteinu' – Our House of Israel) led by former Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman (Lüders, 2015). All these names imply the need to establish a safe space for the Jewish people and accentuate the historical bond with the territory. In the elections that have taken place, it seems as if the Palestinian grievances were barely taken into account in the internal Israeli struggle over identity and sovereignty, serving merely as a subject in the domestic political parties' security agendas (the recurrent threat of violence). Israel's creation of facts (*Fakten zu schaffen*), in the sense of an *acquis* (precedent), e.g., through the building of a Wall ('Apartheid') and settlements in occupied areas, is indicative of an assertive strategy in which there is hardly any flexibility for future concessions, while the negotiation style remains competitive.

### **The Impact of International and domestic politics**

Kelman (2011) focuses on the principle of '*attainable justice*' and the conformation with '*international law and the international consensus*' (p. 33). He suggests that partial support devalues concepts such as democracy and human rights, strengthening marginal movements that strive to be mainstreamed into politics, contributing to the "radicalization on the street". Because of the mundane repetitiveness of UNSC Resolutions, the international community is criticized for viewing the Palestinians more as a humanitarian problem than as an autonomous political actor.

When ethno-political groups with strong religious facets collide, it is usual that they experience negotiation myopia, which can be roughly described as not realizing the existence of an opportunity to settle the dispute because of biases. Military power, political

infrastructure, and external funding may rekindle the party's self-serving bias, which is a concept of overestimating one's relative power while adopting a coercive stance. Also, in every round of terrorist phenomena and reprisal raids, the emotional barrier of anger and demand for retribution is offered for domestic political manipulation (demagogy). As inner tendencies needed to be satisfied (Likud vs Labor Party, Fatah vs Hamas), shifts in domestic politics can be observed, a development leading to hardline negotiation tactics. Thus, violent acts not only promote insecurity and distrust (until recently, the ruling coalition in Israel never hosted an Arab party) but also influence core elements, such as mutual recognition and legitimacy.

It is quite surprising that, despite the defeat of the First Intifada by 1991, a sense of a significantly reduced military power dominated the Israeli public (Oren, 2009). Predicting the recurrence of violence in a second Intifada, the Israelis elected, in 1992, a more negotiation-prone government that promised to settle with the Palestinians (Savir, 1998). The 1992 coming of Yitzhak Rabin into power was a pivotal point. Substantial negotiations began, conducted in the obscurity of a 'moderate' façade of the Palestinian delegation, covertly controlled by the PLO. The Organization refused to allow any concessions, albeit Israel was willing to negotiate with those 'moderate' representatives (Pruitt *et al.*, 1997). Seven years later, the majority of the Israeli public believed that the Palestinians wanted peace (Ben-Eliezer, 2012). Yet again, the failure to reach an agreement on the status of the Haram [el-Sharif] was decisive for the failure of Camp David negotiations in July 2000 and led to the Al Aksa Intifada (2000–2005) (Hassner, 2003). The number of people believing in the settlement of the dispute declined. To appease the domestic audience (Ben-Eliezer, 2012) before the new wave of violence, Prime Minister Barak tried to have it both ways: on one hand, he communicated Israel's willingness to deliver generous concessions; on the other, he blamed Arafat for hostilities, implying the possibility of a war against the Palestinians.

In the course of time, the agenda set by all parties (as clarified in the Oslo process/ 'End Status Negotiations') (Asseburg & Busse, 2016) included the crucial issues to be attended to: the status of a future Palestinian State, the fate of the Israeli Settlements in West Jordan, in the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, access to the Old City of Jerusalem and the Holy Lands, the allocation and management of resources (especially the water). The variety of the issues above could have been an enabler/facilitator regarding the process (in terms of negotiation, as an opportunity for package deals, 'horse-trading', tit-for-tat), but reality came to contradict the expectations, as the 'win sets' of the parties (namely the total of quantitatively and qualitatively acceptable solutions, demarcating the ZOPA) were immensely narrow. More precisely, there could not be any terms of trade that a Palestinian entity would undergo. On the other hand, Israeli security was of fundamental importance to the government, not to be 'exchanged' with land (West Bank – land for peace).

Another drawback was the lack of a sincere and developing *credible commitment* even during each pre-negotiation period, perceived by theory as a functional need (Saunders, 1985). The strategic ease of a void of meaning ‘arrangement of the negotiations’ (strategic protraction by Palestinians) regarding the Clinton Parameters in the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, attests to the lack of commitment.

Often, a two-level game approach eloquently explains the effect of a negotiator’s interest-driven prioritization on the procedure. An example of the effect of domestic politics is that of the Israeli elections of 2001. Back then, it was incumbent on Prime Minister Barak to not concentrate his attention on the national elections, abandoning the negotiations that were ‘ripe’ enough and Arafat endorsed (Shamir & Shikaki, 2005). In this case, it is worth mentioning that the winning right-wing party Likud, as was expected, shifted the Israeli strategy to a less cooperative one (Barak’s communique of 8<sup>th</sup> February 2001 – Track One Diplomacy is affected by electoral cycles in a two-level game). On the other hand, as it is often asserted in the theory of negotiations, repetitiveness in bargaining procedures may pave the road for the parties, having made the necessary concessions, to adopt a cooperative style (e.g., 2005 Israel’s disengagement plan, ‘Sharon-Plan’, providing a unilateral, voluntary withdrawal from the Gaza Strip – dismantling Israeli settlements). However, as the examples provided show, the choice of a negotiating strategy is also related to the level of incompatibility, especially in existential conflict, as well as the parties’ inner discrepancies.

Palestinian politics were, at some point, characterized by a sharp division (2007 Hamas–Fatah civil war). The US-led and EU-supported ‘West Bank first’ approach may have fuelled the inner rivalry between Fatah (headquarters in Ramallah, West Bank) and Hamas (Gaza Strip), regarding which group should be perceived as the main interlocutor (or which territory/population should come first in the respective negotiation agenda). This may be the reason that the Arab attempt to mediate a power-sharing agreement between the mentioned groups failed in late 2008 (Asseburg, 2009). This gap inflicted a great blow on Palestinian institutions, which seemed to lose their legitimacy. Regarding this matter, the diplomat commented that “... a *major obstacle is that Israel refuses elections in Jerusalem as in 1996, 2005, 2006. This bears a political significance as if Jerusalem is driven out of the equation...*”. After all, reverting to the decisive role of the self-serving bias in intractable conflict, I would like to accentuate the fact, that before the British mandate ended, the Arabs rejected the UN General Assembly 1947 Plan for the Partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states.

### **Barriers and Power Asymmetry**

Hamas expressed Palestinian frustration. It vented it into an asymmetric “power to hurt”, to compensate for the existing imbalance (Thomas 2014). Territorial control was a prerequisite, as it added to the ability to coerce concessions after entering negotiations,

Table 2: Timeline of key incidents/procedures

Suez Crisis of 1956  Israel, France and the UK occupy the Canal, whereas the USA as world power obliges them to abandon their plan. The Arab world perceives the actions as an offensive led by the old colonialists, resulting in the creation of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)	1967 to 1974  Fatah (the largest faction of the PLO) multiparty confederation, also engulfing the military wing of PLO - al-'Asifah / al-Aqsa Martyrs engages in terrorist actions	1979  The Yom Kippur War led to negotiations and the 1979 Peace Agreement (Egypt-Israel with the mediation of the USA)	1987-1992  1st Intifada: The Palestinian Stone war based on inequality, lack of fundamental resources (emergence of Hamas)
1992  Secret talks began resulting in the Oslo I Accord (1993) and the Israeli-Jordanian Peace Agreement (1994), again with the involvement of the USA	1995  Oslo II Accord (1995) – Rabin's Assassination and Camp David II (2000)	2000-2005  2nd Intifada	2001  Taba Summit (US mediated) in January 2001, the internal political timetable prevented reaching an agreement on all the issues (Israel elections)
2006/2007 2006 PNA (Palestinian National Authority) elections won by			
2015 UN General Assembly Abbas gives the coup de grace to the moribund peace process			



whereas, from Israel's point of view, this struggle would be interpreted as an indicator of 'an imminent victory rather than a stalemate' (Asal, Gustafson & Krause, 2019). This self-serving bias was articulated through *disregard* for the counterpart's identity or even its dehumanization. After all, negotiation, if perceived as a zero-sum situation, is a tug-of-war where each player tests the opponent's resilience.

Israeli prime minister Barak (1999–2001), at some point, announced a new initiative to renew the peace process with the Arabs, but he ignored the Palestinians' request to deal with them first, at a time when he should also negotiate with the Syrians. His tacit refusal simply confirmed that he did not respect the Palestinians as equals (Ben-Elezier, 2012). Under Netanyahu, Israel did not implement the three stages of the second redeployment stipulated in the Oslo agreements. Another indicator of disregard/power is that, on September 28, 2000, inner politics led the then-Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon to visit Jerusalem in order to assert Israeli sovereignty over the sacred site, a move regarded by Palestinians as a callous provocation. But where does this 'arrogance' derive from?

Israel's negotiation power sources can be divided into three categories:

- **Financial:** US aid for Israel is by far larger than the aid of the USA to any other country (around \$ 3 billion each year in direct foreign military financing (FMF), and about \$ 2 billion in forms such as Migration and Refugee Assistance account (MRA), sum constituting 1% of Israel's GDP) (Congressional Research Service Report – February 2022);
- **Military:** Israel is in 17th place among all states of the world (absolute military and defense expenditures) and among the top group in regard to their relative size (military expenditures constituted over 5% of the GDP since 2012 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute – SIPRI). Israel, a country with advanced military and nuclear capabilities, has not signed the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) (Haller, 2015);
- **Political:** Regarding UNSC Resolutions, the U.S vetoes in favor of Israel amount to 45 in a total of 82. Also, the EU is Israel's biggest trade partner (29.3% of its trade in goods in 2020) and has signed an Association Agreement (entered into force in June 2000).

Israel has adopted a defensive narrative against terrorism, essentially endorsed by powerful third actors. In the Palestinian diplomat's words, *"USA doesn't worry about Israel's security, they support Israel for strategic reasons and the EU "also refrains from taking measures forcing Israel to accept a two-state solution, given that, in relation to their bilateral agreements, there is no reference to conditionality regarding the respect of Palestinian rights, although it possesses the necessary instruments to force Israel. On the contrary, the EU even imports products made in settlements in occupied areas, just placing an origin label on them"*.

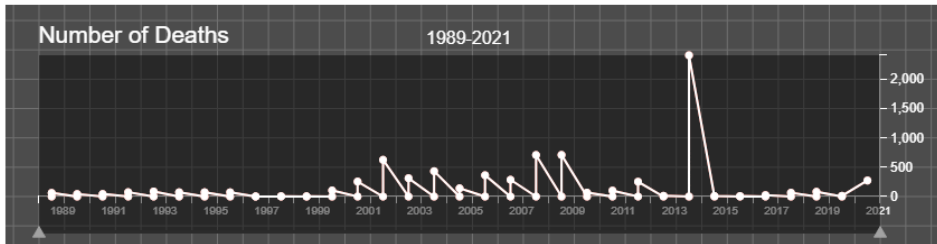
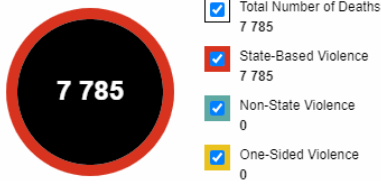
The Oslo Accords (1993) accentuates the interrelation between every subject of the main negotiation agenda, especially as sub-negotiations need to commence (fragmentation). Furthermore, they may have failed because of this asymmetry. They included no agreement on Arbitration, or the interpretation of the corpus (e.g., stipulating that *"neither party should refrain from actions jeopardizing the implementation"*, the Ambassador pointed), disregarding the possibility of occupational activities and confiscations. Other than that, *"the Madrid Conference was process-oriented, not end-result oriented, a fact that led to the implementation of a sort of a macro-engineering of the populace. Despite the momentum created by the participation of a third-party facilitator, Arafat's recognition of Israel (in Rabin-Arafat correspondence in letters, which became corpus of the accords), a 'five-star' recognition (recognition of the counterpart, its right to peace and its right to security), was not answered with a reciprocal level of recognition"*. Also, regarding self-determination, the intent of the correspondence was only limited to recognition of the counterpart as a representative/interlocutor, speaking of self-rule but no sovereignty (addressed only functional issues, e.g., municipal, health, education), raising questions about Zionism and its *modus vivendi*.

Asymmetry of power did not function according to Pruitt's theory (an impetus being introduced towards negotiation); it was rather an obstacle to reaching a permanent solution. Simultaneously, third-party interference aiming at policing the negotiation/conflict management process and introducing an equilibrium can be negatively assessed. As Ambassador Salah Abdel Shafi put it *"our hope for a balance through the engagement of the US, EU, Russia, as guarantors for a two-state solution [...] was eventually not materialized and was essential 'morally reinforced' and thwarted by, at a maximum level, mere verbalisms condemning Israel's acts"* (personal communication, January 10, 2022). He emphasized the need for a more engaged EU (*"don't just be a payer, be a player"*), also holding the Israeli government accountable for not allowing the Palestinian people to conduct national elections, given that the respective process is not allowed in the city of Jerusalem because of the city's status implications. Furthermore, this vast asymmetry of power between Palestine and Israel was not a deterrent factor in the recent example of the 2014 war, as well as recent violent incidents. The prolonged detrimental nature of this antagonism is obvious in the following chart:

On the Palestinian side, the efforts towards a two-state solution have been paralyzed by the absence of a unified leadership and coherent strategy (centrifugal forces: intra-Palestinian violence in 2007 between the nationalist Fatah in the West Bank and its Islamist rival Hamas in the Gaza Strip). Hamas is excluded from negotiations by the United States and Israel and is considered a terrorist organization, thus legitimacy and representativeness remain under doubt. On the other hand, the settler population has exceeded the number of 500,000, growing at a faster rate than the rest of the Israeli population (Bunton, 2013). Those settlers perceive Jewish sovereignty over all of the territory as a Biblical right.

# Israel: Palestine

## Number of Deaths



**Figure 3.** The death toll of conflict (Uppsala Conflict Data Program – UCDP)

After more than 60 years of conflict management, the acquis is supplemented by the November 2012 United Nations resolution (A/RES/67/19) that raised the status of Palestine to that of a non-member observer state, reaffirming Israel's right to peace and security within its pre-1967 borders, also undermining the legitimacy of the Israeli settlements. The implications of the current situation, maintained (in fact it deteriorated) for decades, can be summarized in a 2010 quote by former Prime Minister Barak *"If there is only one political entity, named Israel, it will end up being either non-Jewish or non-democratic ... If the Palestinians vote in elections, it is a binational state, and if they don't, it is an apartheid state."* Recent events fuelled by attempted reforms in the Israeli judicial system partly confirm this citation. It goes without saying that the prolongation of the conflict was reinforced by this disequilibrium and the lack of a coherent approach by similar (on the criterion of identity, religion, traditions) actors, which were also interested in the outcome or had invested in the procedure. In this respect, one should observe the dynamics of the conflict, which may lead to stagnation or even deterioration in the position of a party. For instance, as the diplomat evoked, the Arab League Peace summit in Beirut (2002) emphasized the conditionality entailing Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories and the normalization of its relations with Arab countries. The latter was achieved without any amelioration in the Israel-Palestine relations, thus negatively affecting Palestine's position (see Abraham Accords of 2020). Third-party interference changed its orientation to facilitate self-interests, ignoring the significance of timing and protraction.

## Conclusions

This article provides a solid conceptualization of socio-political parameters in negotiation, adding to the scholarship that has addressed the preconditions of existential conflict management. It draws examples from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, arguing that the conflict is characterized by fluctuating political circumstances and changing preferences, making it difficult to reach a negotiated settlement. The diffusion of external positivity has led Palestine, whereas not constituting a state (declarative vs constitutive theory), to be **recognized** as an interlocutor by Israel, shedding light on the role of external actors (facilitation by the third parties, SC-Res. 1397). On the other hand, either the **autonomous activity of a party** (e.g. territory occupation, terrorist strikes) or **the stalling of the common effort** eventually led to the collapse of the negotiations and more radical actors emerging (intifada, Islamic radicals). This is linked to preferences changing over time and the stakeholders' emphasis on losses. The political circumstances in the course of these serious conflicts fluctuated, fundamentally related to the **level of the incompatibility**, so that mediation by powerful intermediaries did not eventually impose a settlement. Constant ambivalence led to failure.

The existence of a third party may have helped the groups approach **symmetry** in perceived power, which offered the ground to explore the possibility to reach a negotiated settlement, but in a hesitant and distorted manner. What is quite striking is that Hamas and Israeli settlers (as well as NGOs and civil society representatives) were frustrated because of their **exclusion** from the negotiation, soon assuming an undermining stance. The parties' proneness to protracting the conflict indicates that they avoided showing vulnerability by not yielding to terrorist/assertive activities. On the contrary, negotiation and peace formation demand mutually beneficial **concessions**, both by the status quo defenders and the demands. Yet again, the protraction led to increasingly more **frustration, anger, and exhaustion** which further opened the window to unilateral, illicit acts.

Key determinants of failure were identified in the examined case: managing the domestic audiences (endogenous factor) or appeasing the mediator (exogenous factor) were prioritized in the parties' agendas, correlated to **political costs**, given that the strategy previously followed had been non-tolerant of the counterpart. Furthermore, the **reputational costs** of not adhering to what was already agreed upon in an international framework did not necessarily obstruct the counterpart in maintaining its *modus vivendi*, meaning that measures such as **sanctions** were even obstructed because of the **mediator's partiality**, destabilizing the balance of power. Regarding the **lack of credible commitment/lack of operational coherence**, asymmetrical levels of risk exposure (e.g., the land-for-peace formula in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations) had aggravated the conflict. In the face of the possibility that the agreement would not be respected, the replacement costs were perceived to be unacceptably high by the parties relinquishing a non-returnable asset (e.g. land plus sovereignty, government).

Thus, the parties hesitated to commit themselves to the negotiation, as the exposure to loss deriving from improper or deceptive actions had been considerable, perceiving the situation as sequestration.

In contrast to being celebrated by the international community proponents, the mentioned results seem to disregard the needs of the local stakeholders and former antagonists. Despite the participation, in a protagonist role, of International and Regional Organizations as well as powerful Third party-states and NGOs, technocratic notions shaped the procedures (multi-round negotiations, promise for financial support, fragmentation of the agenda), reaffirming a Western understanding of conflict management. The usefulness of the findings lies in the perception of the need to reconfigure the facilitators' priorities in future or existing conflicts, devoid of self-interest and oriented in a positive outreach. If the aforementioned prerequisites are not effectively met, any peace initiative is doomed to be moribund.

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# Economic Interdependence and Conflict in Eastern Mediterranean: The Case of the Maritime Conflict Between Türkiye and Greece

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**Abstract:** In the Eastern Mediterranean, there are maritime territorial disputes between different states, particularly Türkiye and Greece. This study examines the impact of economic interdependence on the ongoing disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, focusing on the relationship between these disputes and economic interdependence and hypothesizing that economic interdependence creates a security dilemma between states. This hypothesis is tested through the dispute between Türkiye and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye and Greece, which have a long history of disputes in the region, have important themes of competition on regional and global grounds, particularly maritime jurisdictions. The study focuses on the relationship between these themes of competition and economic interdependence and reveals the security dilemma that this interdependence creates between the two states. Copeland's trade expectations model is used to analyze this relationship. The model focuses on the impact of trade and economic interdependence on states and discusses the conflict-peace possibilities that may arise from this impact. However, this study takes the security dilemma out of the military realm and moves it to the economic realm, supporting Copeland's model by arguing that economic interdependence can also create a security dilemma situation. In the study, the periods of crisis in Türkiye and Greece were analyzed together with their defense expenditures to reveal their perceptions of "suspicion" and "concern". In the end, it was concluded that Türkiye has more security concerns than

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 44, July 2023, pp. 55–77

DOI: 10.24193/csq.44.4  
Published First Online: July 05 / 2023

Greece. When this situation is analyzed through the security of identity, it is seen that ontological insecurity emerges.

**Keywords:** Economic interdependence, Türkiye, Greece, Security Dilemma, Eastern Mediterranean.

## **Introduction**

For many years, the Eastern Mediterranean region has been characterized by the problems and disagreements of the countries in the region and has often been characterized by conflict and crisis. However, this situation has started to change recently, and energy security has become the main motivation here. In this regard, the new energy resources discovered off the coast of Israel in 2010 and afterwards have had a great impact.

One of the most important disputes in the region for many years has been between Türkiye and Greece, which is also the subject of this study. The main topics related to this dispute, which can be traced back to the World War I and World War II periods, are the population exchange, the determination of territorial waters in the Aegean Sea and the Cyprus problem. Although the problem regarding population exchange has been resolved, the problem regarding the rights of the countries in the Aegean Sea and the political status of Cyprus still persists. There are many studies in the literature on Turkish-Greek relations (Ak, 2018; Alibabalu, 2022; Gök & Mavruk, 2022; Heraclides, 2011; Küçük, 2021). Many of them address problems related to the Cyprus issue (Stergiou, 2019; Axt, 2021; Grigoriadis, 2022; Günay, 2007; Günar, 2020; Dalay, 2021) and some of them also address territorial disputes (Çelikkol & Karabel, 2017; Tziarras, 2019; Ellinas, 2022; Şihmantepe, 2013). However, most of the recent studies have been shaped around the refugee problem and the Eastern Mediterranean. In these studies, which are especially based on European security and energy security, Turkish-Greek relations have been constructed to analyze drilling activities and military exercises in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean. Unlike all these studies, this study analyzes the maritime conflict between Türkiye and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean through the economic interdependence theory. While economic interdependence normally causes bilateral relations to evolve into cooperation, this study tests the hypothesis that it increases the likelihood of war by causing a security dilemma.

Türkiye and Greece have important themes of competition on regional and global grounds, particularly maritime jurisdictions. The study focuses on the relationship between these rivalry themes and economic interdependence and reveals the security dilemma created by this interdependence between the two states. In this study, firstly, economic interdependence is discussed as a conceptual framework and how it creates

a security dilemma is explained. Discussing the conflict-peace possibilities of economic interdependence on Türkiye–Greece relations, this study tests the concept of security dilemma in the economic field by removing it from the military field. Copeland’s trade expectations model is used to analyze this relationship. Secondly, the themes of economic interdependence in the Eastern Mediterranean are discussed. In particular, how economic interdependence emerged in the region, the discovery of energy resources in the region and the policies of the countries in the region after the discovery of these new resources are explained. Greece, Türkiye, and the island of Cyprus are of particular importance here. Finally, energy security in the region is analyzed through the cooperation of the countries with rights. Thirdly, the Türkiye–Greece dispute is explained together with the element of “concern” that also causes the security dilemma. Here, the historical background of bilateral relations is discussed, and it is explained how the conflict that has been going on for years has created a security dilemma and how their foreign policies have been shaped in this process. In particular, the discovery of energy resources in the region is evaluated together with the attitude followed by the two countries in their foreign policies. Fourthly, how the process leading to the security dilemma in bilateral relations was shaped was explained through the military activities in the region. In particular, the crises in the relations between Türkiye and Greece and the change in the military activities of the countries during the crisis periods were observed and the direction of the security dilemma was analyzed.

As a result, this study concludes that, contrary to popular belief, the economic interdependence in the Eastern Mediterranean creates a security dilemma between Türkiye and Greece. As a supporting factor, the change in the defense expenditures of both countries, military activities and crisis periods were taken as an intersection point and as a result, it was observed that Türkiye perceived a greater threat compared to Greece.

### **Conceptual Framework**

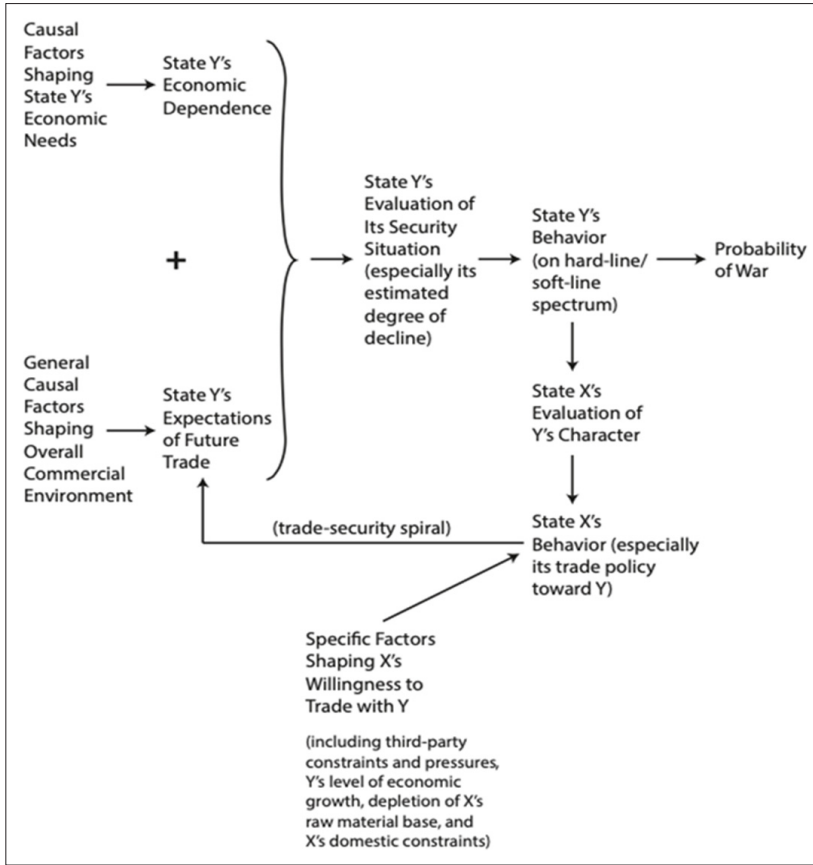
The relationship between economic interdependence and war is one of the most debated topics in the international relations literature. While there are assumptions that economic interdependence has a diminishing effect on the likelihood of war, this study is based on the assumption that economic interdependence may have an increasing effect on this likelihood. This proposal stands out as a critique of the liberal approach and assumes that economic interdependence can also lead states to war. This claim leads us to knock on the door of realism as a critique of liberal theory. Trade ties are capable of creating a state of peace, as the liberal tradition claims. However, the argument that economic interdependence creates vulnerability for states, which realism emphasizes as a counterargument, is noteworthy. This vulnerability is fuelled by the dependent state having negative expectations for its economic future. In other words, when a dependent state is worried about its access to resources, realism kicks in and the state starts to

see war and conflict as the lesser of two evils. This anxiety that emerges in states and shapes their long-term policies leads us to the concept of the security dilemma.

The security dilemma, one of the most important conceptual approaches of classical realism, in Herz's words (1950), states that do not feel secure in an anarchic nature prepare for the worst and constantly seek to acquire power, resulting in a vicious circle of competition. In support of Herz, Butterfield (1951) also refers to Hobbesian fear, emphasizing the uncertainty that persists in the mutual intentions between states and the anxiety that arises as a natural consequence. Thus, each state can only rely on itself (self-help) for security. Jervis (1982), on the other hand, defines the security dilemma as the unintended consequence of defensive actions and focuses on the process by which *"the means that one state concentrates on in order to increase its security turn into a factor that reduces the security of another state"* (p. 169). Even if mutual goodwill is assured, every state emphasizes the possibility that it may face aggressive actions in the long run. This possibility and the concerns that states have been revealed through the security dilemma approach and the steps taken on the military ground. The study moves the security dilemma out of the military realm and into the economic realm and, in support of Copeland's work (2015), argues that economic interdependence can also create a security dilemma situation. At this point, there is an important theme that unites the security dilemma approach and the thesis put forward by Copeland (2015): *states' concern about each other's long-term actions* (p. 39).

In fact, this concern has such significant effects that states may favor conflict or peace. The paper uses Copeland's (2015) model of trade expectations to analyze this concern and the potential for conflict. The model focuses on the impact of trade and economic interdependence on large states and discusses the potential for conflict and peace. The study applies Copeland's analysis of great powers to regional powers and analyzes the effects of trade and economic interdependence on these states in terms of conflict and peace possibilities. Accordingly, the model states that state policies are shaped by assessments of the security situation and forecasts of the long-term power position in the system through the fictionalization of state Y and state X. It is the behavior of the dependent state that shapes the likelihood of conflict or peace in a region, and this state is referred to as state Y in the model. At this point, the level of dependence of state Y and its long-term trade prospects are very important for the model. If the leader of state Y needs access to state X's territory in terms of raw materials, investment, and markets, and is optimistic that state X will open this space to Y, it will be politically peaceful. However, if there is mistrust regarding the long-term activities of State X, then a negative change in the peaceful attitude of State Y can be observed.

With these points emphasized, as shown in Figure 1, one of the most important themes guiding X's economic policies towards Y is its assessments based on past experiences. If these assessments are unfavourable, state X may restrict resources, investment and



**Figure 1:** The Causal Logic of Trade Expectations Model

Sources: Copeland (2015, p. 49)

market access or take steps to support it. This approach between X and Y, which is particularly informed by past experiences, creates a trade-security spiral in the region. Thus, X's restrictive stance on trade leads Y to more assertive foreign policy making, which in turn pushes X to be tougher in its already restrictive trade activities, which in turn may increase Y's propensity for conflict. This cycle is crucial to see how the security dilemma emerges in the trade-security spiral. In this study, this spiral is measured through Türkiye's economic interdependence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### **Türkiye and Greece in the Political Economy of the Eastern Mediterranean: Rising Economic Interdependence**

Economic interdependence, constructed by Copeland (2015) through the trade expectations model, is one of the most important issues in the political economy of the Eastern Mediterranean. This trade interdependence manifests itself especially in the energy

field, making coordination between importers, exporters, and transit states necessary. This coordination is claimed to encourage cooperation between states in line with the peace pipelines hypothesis (Demiryol, 2019). However, as Copeland (2015) emphasizes, this dependency may increase competition and conflict possibilities, not cooperation. In terms of this approach, which constitutes the main thesis of the study, as seen in Table 1, two states stand out in terms of energy dependence: Türkiye and Greece.

**Table 1:** Natural Gas Reserves in Selected Countries  
in the Eastern Mediterranean

Country	Natural Gas Reserves (Trillion Cubic Feet)
Türkiye	0.11
Greece	0.04
Egypt	63.30
Israel	6.22
Lebanon	0.21

**Sources:** U.S. Energy Information Administration (2022)

Although the Eastern Mediterranean region has a geostrategic importance, the hydrocarbon deposits discovered in the region, especially in the early 2000s, have led to an increased interest in the region. The recent increase in the energy needs of states and the aggressive foreign policy pursued by Russia, which has a dominant role in the energy supply for many countries, especially Europe, has also increased the need for energy reserves in the region. As a result, the Eastern Mediterranean has emerged as a new area of competition for countries both in the region and outside the region with the issue of energy security. Although the Eastern Mediterranean has been discussed together with its energy reserves and the interest in the region has increased in the last two decades, the attempts of the countries in the region regarding energy reserves date back to earlier periods. The Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC)'s attempts in 1979 could not be continued as they were blocked by both Türkiye and the UN (Çalık Orhun, 2017). The root of this problem lies in the long-standing problems between Türkiye and Greece regarding the status of the island of Cyprus. Apart from this, another problem is related to the exclusive economic zones of the riparian states in the region. The exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which covers the area of 200 nautical miles from the coastline of a state, is the water layer outside the territorial waters, the seabed and its subsoil, and the maritime area where the coastal state is granted exclusive rights and powers (Pazarcı, 2012).

However, the EEZs of the countries in the region overlap with each other, which has led to some disputes over energy security. The first EEZ-related agreement was signed between the GCASC and Egypt. Thus, thanks to the EEZ declared in 2003, the seismic



**Map 1:** EEZ Boundaries

**Sources:** Prince Michael of Liechtenstein (2020)

research and drilling activities of the GCASC started to increase (Furuncu, 2020b). Another factor affecting energy security in the region is the fact that riparian countries are composed of countries that can be characterized as ‘failed states’, and this situation creates problems both in the extraction and export of energy resources. The right to explore and extract energy resources is a right that all riparian states have. However, the GCASC acts as if the resources around the island of Cyprus belong only to itself and ignores the rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Thus, exploration licenses were unilaterally granted first to the US Noble Energy in 2011 and then to the Israeli Delek company. This situation caused the TRNC to make an agreement with the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) in order to protect its rights (Çalık Orhun, 2017). In addition, a continental shelf delimitation agreement was signed between Türkiye and the TRNC in 2011, allowing TPAO to conduct exploration and drilling in certain parcels (Ateşoğlu Güney, 2020). Although no hydrocarbon reserves have yet been discovered in the parts where Türkiye has been drilling, reserves have been found in some areas announced by the GCASC. Among these, Noble Energy discovered 129 billion cubic meters of natural gas in the Aphrodite field in 2011 and the Italian company Eni discovered 169–226 cubic meters of natural gas in the Calypso field in 2018 (Furuncu, 2020a). Although these areas are stated as belonging to the GCASC, it should not be forgotten that the TRNC also has rights in all discoveries related to Cyprus.

Cyprus is an important country not only for Türkiye-Greece relations but also for countries outside the region due to its strategic location. It is an air and naval base, especially for countries that want to gain naval and air superiority in the Eastern Mediterranean.



The characteristic of Cyprus as an aircraft carrier provides the opportunity to intervene immediately in any conflict that may arise in the region, especially in the Middle East (Cankara, 2016). With the newly discovered hydrocarbon fields, four different energy fields have emerged around Cyprus, which play a key role in Türkiye–Greece relations. These are Leviathan, Aphrodite, Nile, and Herodotus. The GCASC made an agreement with Lebanon in 2007 and Israel in 2010 on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas, but the fact that the Cyprus problem is a political problem has also manifested itself here (Kökyay, 2021). Ignoring the TRNC and acting as if all rights on the island of Cyprus belonged only to itself, the GCASC unilaterally invited international energy companies to the region to carry out drilling activities in line with the agreements it made with Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel (Ateşoğlu Güney, 2020).

In 2009 and 2010, with the discovery of significant amounts of natural gas in the Tamar and Leviathan regions and the discovery of unexplored energy resources in the region, the interest of the riparian countries in the region started to increase (Ataman & Güler, 2020). The table below provides information on the natural gas reserves recently discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean.

**Table 2:** Natural Gas Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean

Country	Discovery Name	Discovery Date	Reserves (Billion Cubic Meters)
Israel	Tamar	2009	305
	Leviathan	2010	649
	Tanin	2012	26
	Karish	2013	39
	Royee	2014	96
Cyprus	Aphrodite	2011	129
	Calypso	2018	150
	Glaucus	2019	142
Egypt	Zohr	2015	850
	Great Nooros	2016	85
	West Nile Delta	2015	77
	Atoll	2015	42

**Sources:** U.S. Energy Information Administration (2023)

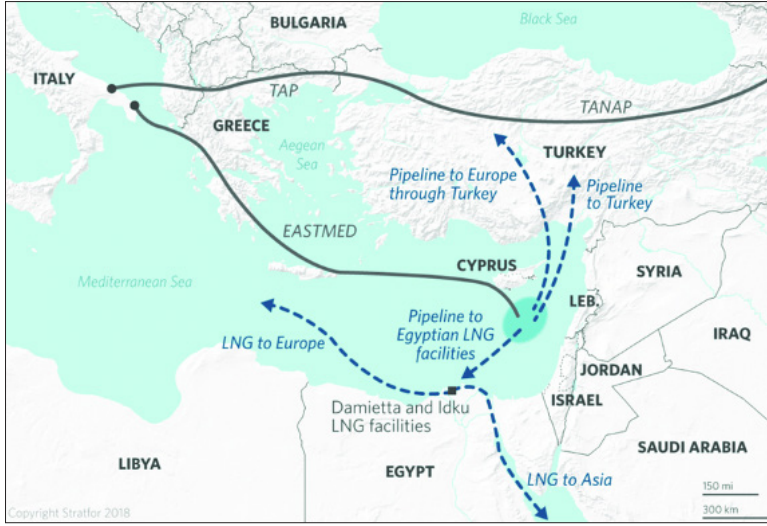
In this respect, it is clearly seen that Egypt, Israel, and the GCASC are the richest countries in the region in terms of energy resources. Egypt's economy is largely dependent on oil revenues. Therefore, it is greatly affected by the fluctuations in oil prices. One of the largest recent discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean (850 billion cubic meters) was made in the Zohr field in 2015 (Furuncu, 2020b). Egypt's first goal with regard to

natural gas discoveries is to meet domestic demand and reduce foreign dependency as much as possible. Only after domestic demand is met, Egypt is expected to become an energy transfer center (Kurt & Duman, 2020). Thus, Egypt expects to profit from the energy trade. As a matter of fact, Egypt obtains most of its natural gas production from the Eastern Mediterranean. While the GCASC is a country with limited industrial production due to limited raw materials, the agricultural sector is the backbone of its economy. Although its EU membership and relations with Greece provide economic benefits, this is not a sustainable situation. As a matter of fact, GCASC is an importing country in the field of energy (Karagöl, 2020). Therefore, its need for energy is increasing day by day. Another country in the region that imports energy is Israel. Therefore, it is very important that energy security is sustainable.

The reserve discovered in Israel's Leviathan region corresponds to approximately two-thirds of all natural gas reserves discovered so far (Furuncu, 2020b). These natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have caused Israel to get excited. Israel has been continuing its drilling activities in the region since 1998. However, during the period when Türkiye-Israel relations were strained, it was seen that the GCASC turned this tension into an opportunity and made attempts against Türkiye and the TRNC. Israel started exporting natural gas to Jordan for the first time in 2020 in line with the agreement made by Noble Energy in 2016 (Kurt & Duman, 2020). As a result of the turmoil in the region due to the Arab Spring, Muammar Gaddafi died in Libya, one of the important countries for the Eastern Mediterranean, and civil war broke out in 2014. The power struggle in the country is still ongoing between the militias led by General Haftar, who staged a coup in 2016, and the Libyan National Army and the UN – recognized Government of National Accord. As a result, this situation led to a decrease in the country's hydrocarbon production and thus affected the economy (Karagöl, 2020). Due to its location in the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya is very important in terms of both natural gas and oil production. Therefore, the political instability in the country must be ended as soon as possible.

Türkiye, on the other hand, is one of the most advantageous countries in terms of energy security in the region with its energy infrastructure. Its international projects for energy imports to Europe (TANAP and TurkStream) have been of particular importance for Europe in this period of strained relations with Russia. Due to its strategic location, Türkiye will have an important role in the transportation of these energy resources, especially to Europe.

The fact that the costs of alternative routes are higher than the planned route through Türkiye makes Türkiye the preferred choice in this regard. The route planned through Israel-Cyprus-Türkiye for energy transportation to Europe is the most suitable among the existing routes, but Israel, Greece, and the GCASC are determined and insistent on the realization of the EastMed project as they approach the issue politically (Özekin,



**Map 2:** Eastern Mediterranean Energy Transmission Routes

**Sources:** Stratfor (2018)

2020). Of course, the support of the EU and the US is also key here. However, the EastMed pipeline, which is planned to be built, will have to travel a very long way to reach Europe and as a result, only 4% of European consumers will be met (Kurt & Duman, 2020). However, the 'Agreement on the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction Areas' that Türkiye signed with the Libyan Government of National Accord in 2019 overlaps with the EastMed pipeline route and naturally requires the parties' permission to use this route. This agreement will also give Türkiye a legal advantage in the region.

Türkiye's drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean have gained momentum since 2019. Oruç Reis and Barbaros Hayrettin seismic research vessels, Yavuz, Fatih and Kanuni drill ships are operating there (Furuncu, 2020a). Türkiye's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean can be interpreted as protecting the rights of both the TRNC and itself. However, these activities have occasionally strained relations with the GCASC and Greece, as well as with the EU and the US. While the international community expected the EU to play a de-escalating role in the Eastern Mediterranean due to its 'mediator' role in many crisis regions, the EU supported the claims of the GCASC and Greece as a party (Ateşoğlu Güney, 2020). Türkiye, which claims to be a central country in the region for energy trade, shows its weight in the region by conducting 'energy diplomacy' through energy supply security. However, Türkiye was not invited to the Gas Forum as a result of its periodic problems with some other countries in the region (Egypt and Israel) (Kökay, 2021). The aim here is to exclude both Türkiye and the TRNC from the natural gas equation in the Eastern Mediterranean and prevent them from having a say here. For this reason, the 'Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum' was established

in early 2019 between Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Greece, the GCASC, and Italy (Kavaz, 2020). However, the Russia-Ukraine crisis revealed Europe's urgent need for energy and the importance was attached to the transportation of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean to the European market. Unfortunately, it is still undecided how these energy resources will reach Europe. The debate over the discovery and subsequent routes of energy resources highlights two important themes in the Eastern Mediterranean: the growing interdependence in the region and the deepening rivalry between Türkiye and Greece. When viewed through these two themes, the "suspicion" factor gains importance in the perceptions of trade that Copeland emphasizes, which is fuelled by the mistrust of the two states.

### **"Security of Identity" as an Explanatory Unit**

The points raised through energy geopolitics show that the theme of identity has an important place in the confrontation between Türkiye and Greece as two rivals in the region. Studies on the impact of identity on security perception in international relations emphasize the ontological security approach (Rumelili & Adisönmez, 2020). As emphasized in this approach, physical security and identity-based security explanations should be considered together, especially in situations of recurrent conflict. This method, which facilitates understanding the nature and driving force of conflict in protracted conflict situations, focuses on the security of identity as a complement to the themes of energy and physical security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ontological security, which means securing identity across time and space, provides this security through routines (Sarı Ertem & Düzgün, 2021). Routines are maintained through any relationship (conflict or cooperation) established with the opposing identity. The continuity of the status quo is very important, otherwise, ontological insecurity emerges. Therefore, when it comes to the role of identity in the rivalry between Türkiye and Greece, historical data is quite revealing.

From this point of view, the long-standing maritime disputes between the two states and their sovereignty claim in connection with these disputes are important points that include the long-term factor of "distrust" and "suspicion". These themes, which also reveal the importance of historical memory for nations, are evident in the minorities issue, the Cyprus dispute, and the disputes over the Aegean Sea. These topics, which express the formation of a sense of identity-based mistrust between the two states, came to life, especially in the atmosphere caused by the Turkish War of Independence. In this period, the struggle against the Ottoman "yoke" offered Greece the opportunity to expand its territory and build a Greek nation. The modern Turkish Republic, on the other hand, emphasizes the struggle for independence against the Greek occupying troops in Western and Central Anatolia during the same period. This process, which represented a critical issue for both Greece and Türkiye in the process of gaining their national identity, became very prominent under the heading of minorities. In the conferences held

in Lausanne, it was decided to exchange the Orthodox Greeks remaining in Türkiye and the Muslim Turks remaining in Greece regarding the status of the peoples who would remain beyond the borders (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2014). This issue continued to be a point of disagreement during the process and the question of who would be considered residents remained. In addition, the events of September 6–7, 1955, and the abrogation of the Residence, Trade and Seyrisefain Agreement in conjunction with the 1964 Decree were developments that put the Greek presence in Türkiye in a difficult situation. With the 1930 Treaty, both the problem of population exchange was solved, and arrangements were made regarding the property of the Turkish and Greek people. With the events of September 6–7, 15 people lost their lives and martial law was declared on the night of September 6 as a result of the escalation of hate speech and incitement against the Greek people living in Istanbul. Another development that supported the perception of mistrust in bilateral relations was the abrogation of the Residence, Trade, and Travel Treaty. Signed in 1930 between Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü and Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, the Agreement allowed citizens of both countries to travel and trade with each other. In 1964, Türkiye announced its unilateral termination of the Agreement. The process of deportation, blocking of bank accounts and liquidation of businesses significantly weakened bilateral relations.

As a subjective concept, ontological security, which has more to do with perceptions (Sarı Ertem & Düzgün, 2021), is noteworthy due to the importance that states attach to identity in foreign policy decision-making processes. As a matter of fact, while these developments came to the fore as steps that fed the concerns based on the “security of identity” between Türkiye and Greece, the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation (Aksu, 2014 pp. 5–6) initiated a long period of “suspicion” and “anxiety” in bilateral relations. In fact, the Cyprus problem dates back to the 1950s, when minority disputes between the two states remained intense. In this period, the Greek Cypriots’ desire to be annexed to Greece and Greece’s favorable view of this desire was the main development that led to a Turkish–Greek conflict. In the face of this demand regarding the Island, which was left to the British sovereignty with the Treaty of Lausanne, Türkiye stated that the Island was under British sovereignty. Negotiations started between Türkiye, which wanted the island to be left to itself if this domination was to end, and Greece, which was positive about the demands of the Greeks, and Britain decided to transfer its sovereignty over the Island to the Republic of Cyprus (Günay, 2007). With this decision taken in exchange for two sovereign base regions, it was decided that the political equality of the two communities and the status of the island would be under the guarantee of Britain, Greece and Türkiye.

Although this step painted a positive picture of long-term stability on the island, disagreements over the exercise of constitutional rights and powers revived unrest among the communities and this process turned into *de facto* conflict. While the 1963

massacres known as “Bloody Christmas” triggered difficult-to-repair divisions between the communities, the pro-enosis Nikos Sampson’s coming to power with a *coup d’état* and moreover his desire to connect Greece to Cyprus influenced Türkiye’s decision to intervene in the attacks. With these developments, the Cyprus Peace Operation was launched on July 20, 1974, and this operation was the only time after the Turkish War of Independence that the two states engaged in hot conflict. With the operation, the Turks retreated to the north of the Island and the Greeks to the south. For the societies that started to live under separate administrations on both sides of the “Green Line”, no initiative was observed to put into practice the UN Security Council’s resolutions on the establishment of a federation based on the political equality of the parties (Aksu, 2014). In the process, even though steps were taken by the UN Security Council with the Annan Plan, a UN Plan aiming to unite the island as an independent state by eliminating the divided structure of the Island of Cyprus between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots, no results were obtained due to the Greek Cypriots’ no vote. The most important division between the two communities after the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation was the inclusion of the Greek Cypriot Southern Cyprus in the EU (Güner, 2020), which on the one hand deepened the rift between the peoples of the island and the other hand strengthened the relationship based on “suspicion” between Türkiye and Greece.

In this process, the issue of identity insecurity, which gained momentum between the two states with the Cyprus problem, also manifested itself in the dispute over the Aegean Islands. The issue of the Aegean Islands takes the two states back to Lausanne, and the main theme of the dispute is that Greece increased its territorial waters from 3 miles to 6 miles and its airspace from 3 miles to 10 miles between the two world wars (Şen, 2015). After the Second World War, the cession of the Dodecanese Islands to Greece deepened the dispute. The Aegean Islands, which represent an important area in the rise of threat perception between the two states, represent critical areas that brought hot conflict to the agenda starting in the 1970s and throughout the 1990s. After the 1982 signing of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Greece expressed its desire to increase its territorial waters in the Aegean from 6 to 12 miles (Şen, 2015), and Türkiye became increasingly concerned that the Aegean would be turned into a Greek lake. These concerns were reflected in the letter written by the then-Turkish Foreign Minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil to US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on April 15, 1976:

*“The main ambition of the Greek Government is to create a fait accompli by extending the territorial waters to 12 miles and thereby gain a political victory over Türkiye. Such a move would turn the Aegean Sea into a Greek lake and, as a result, would eliminate Türkiye’s natural and established customary rights in this sea (Küçük, 2021, p. 30).”*

Aside from these growing concerns in Türkiye, Greece shapes its security strategy with the “fear of Türkiye” that dominates its security culture. Seeing Ankara as a revisionist



country that challenges the Lausanne Treaty and ultimately aims to change it, Greece acts with the perception of a “threat from the East”. The perception of “threat from the East” has manifested itself in Athens with the annexation of the islands. In terms of its territorial expansion, Türkiye states that it has been “exploited from its coasts to the midline” (Axt, 2021) in the face of Greece, which annexed the Ionian Islands, Thessaly, Macedonia and Crete, Epirus and the Eastern Aegean Islands and Western Thrace through the “Great Idea – Megali Idea” (Ak, 2018), the idea of reviving the Byzantine Empire. Hercules Millas draws attention to Turkish and Greek history, the mutual steps taken and the impact these steps had on both sides:

*“For historical reasons, each side perceives the other as a possible threat and a challenge to its own identity. It realizes every action accordingly and this creates a vicious circle (Heraclides, 2011).”*

The mutually nurtured perception of the other and the threat is carried to such a point that both sides begin to need each other as “enemies” and this need has been determined by “chosen traumas” and “chosen victories” (Heraclides, 2011). The bilateral and identity-based mistrust fed by historical developments has persisted in the post-2000s and has manifested itself, especially in maritime strategies. For Türkiye, this strategic approach has been realized through the Blue Homeland doctrine, while Greece has been acting with the goal of creating deterrence in the seas through armament on the islands and alliance relations. The Blue Homeland Doctrine, which was implemented in line with the goal of becoming a great naval power, was brought to the agenda by Admiral Cem Gürdeniz in 2006 (Grigoriadis, 2022; Denizeau, 2021). The doctrine, which includes all of Türkiye’s declared and undeclared maritime jurisdiction areas, aims to ensure Türkiye’s effectiveness in the 462 thousand square kilometers covering the EEZ, continental shelf, internal waters, and territorial waters.

The doctrine, which is considered an important approach to establishing influence in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, is viewed with suspicion by Greece due to its intensified activities in the Mediterranean (Heraclides, 2011). The “fear of expansionism” towards Türkiye is also discussed through the doctrine and it is aimed to create deterrence against these steps through alliances in the international arena, especially armament in the islands. These steps, which focus on the goal of regional expansion in both states, are very important in terms of seeing the security dilemma created by identity-based insecurity among the actors.

### **From Suspicion to Security Dilemma**

The historical elements that emphasize suspicion and mistrust show that relations between Türkiye and Greece have been shaped in a process dominated by long-term conflict dynamics. While this process dates back to 1923, the table below shows how suspicion and conflict are intertwined when we look at the crises between the two



states as a whole:

**Table 3:** Crises in Türkiye–Greece Relations

Long Lasting Conflict No Military Violence	Long Lasting Conflict Threat of the Use of Force	Long Lasting Conflict Limited War
Crisis of September 6–7, 1955	1964 Cyprus Crisis	1974 Cyprus Crisis
1974–76 Aegean Crisis	1967 Cyprus Crisis	
1974–80 NOTAM Crisis	1987 Aegean Continental Shelf Crisis	
1981 Limni Crisis	1996 Kardak Rocks Crisis	
1984 Western Thrace Crisis	1997 S-300 Missile Crisis	
1994–95 Aegean Crisis	1998 Syria – Ocalan Crisis	

**Sources:** Aksu (2014, p. 13)

In 1997, during this period when maritime disputes were at the forefront, Türkiye announced its new naval strategy titled Towards the High Seas. This strategy emphasized the desire to operate on the high seas and emphasized long-term maritime interests and security. This strategy, announced at a stage when maritime disputes with Greece intensified, underlined the goal of taking an active role in the nearby basins (Özgen, 2017). The doctrine, which includes the aim of advancing the ongoing defense industry, also emphasizes the modernization of the navy and has found its place under the Blue Homeland approach. The Towards the High Seas approach, which is a reflection of an assertive foreign policy, has been revised due to technological developments and increased energy exploration activities, especially as of 2010. Underlining the qualities of being reliable in cooperation, deterrent in crises, and decisive in combat, and the goal of *“being strong at sea in order to be secure in the homeland and being present in all seas in order to have a say in the world”*, Blue Homeland emphasized a wider geographical area compared to the previous strategy (Özgen, 2017).

The doctrine, which considers the protection of sea lines of communication as an important goal, aims to establish influence on energy routes in this way. In this way, it will be upgraded from the Medium Regional Power Projection Capability to the Medium Global Power Projection Capability (Özel, 2021). Overseas exercises, modernization of defense and alliance relations are considered as supportive steps in this direction. In the face of this approach of Türkiye, which has set out long-term strategic goals regarding maritime jurisdictions with the Blue Homeland doctrine, Greek Prime Minister Miçotakis said (Cumhuriyet, 2023), *“Turkish revisionism, expressed with the Blue Homeland doctrine, is embedded in the DNA of all Turkish parties. I am always ready to discuss the only difference between us, which is the delimitation of maritime zones. The policy of strong deterrence and strong alliances must continue”*.

This approach put forward by Miçotakis gives important clues regarding both the view of the Blue Homeland doctrine and the steps Greece will take in the face of this step. In

fact, before the Blue Homeland doctrine, Greece had already determined a maritime strategy in favor of maintaining the deterrence and strong alliance approach mentioned above. In this sense, it would be appropriate to say that there is continuity in its regional strategy in the face of the Blue Homeland doctrine. The concepts of revisionism, deterrence, and strong alliances used by Miçotakis when it comes to Türkiye and maritime strategy have been addressed in a way to include military expenditures, especially after 2010. In this period, Greece, which emphasized military expenditures despite the economic crisis, acted in line with the goal of shaping Türkiye's long-term steps in the region with its "balancing engagement strategy" (Ifantis, 2018). As internal and external stabilizers, steps have been taken to strengthen alliance behavior on the one hand and deepen security strategy on the other.

From Türkiye's perspective, the Maritime Jurisdiction Agreement with Libya stands out in these steps, which are reflected in the alliance behavior of both states. In fact, Türkiye started to question the Western security umbrella in the process from the doctrine of Towards the Open Seas in 1997 to the Blue Homeland in 2015. In this questioning, which also manifested itself in naval activities, Türkiye emphasized the importance of relations with NATO and Western states, but also emphasized the importance of expanding areas of cooperation. From this point of view, the increasing energy competition after 2010 and the effect of the crisis areas with Greece, the Continental Shelf Delimitation Agreement signed with the TRNC on September 21, 2011 was followed by the Libyan Maritime Jurisdiction Areas Agreement dated November 27, 2019. After this agreement, the two states signed a Defense and Cooperation Agreement on November 28, 2020. Following Türkiye's steps, Greece signed an EEZ Delimitation Agreement with Egypt on August 6, 2020 (Acer, 2020).

While Greece objected to the agreement on the grounds that it "*violates the continental shelf areas of its islands*", Greek Foreign Minister Dendias stated that "*a treaty has been signed that is the absolute opposite of the illegal, null and void and legally baseless memorandum of understanding signed between Türkiye and Tripoli. With the signing of this agreement, the non-existent Turkish-Libyan agreement ended up where it belonged all along: in the trash can*" (Reuters, 2020). Regarding the agreement signed between Greece and Egypt, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said, "*There is no maritime border between Greece and Egypt. The so-called maritime delimitation agreement signed today is null and void for Türkiye. Our understanding will be demonstrated in the field and at the table*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2020).

In addition to the Agreement signed with Egypt, Greece and the US defense contacts in the region have also been remarkable for Türkiye. On October 5, 2019, Greece and the US signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement (U.S. Department of State, 2021a). The US described the document as "*an effective document to react to current security challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean*", and the agreement included the activities to

be carried out by the US-Greece-NATO in Alexandroupoli, Larissa, and Stefanovikio. Pompeo, who met with Greek Foreign Minister Dendieas during the agreement process, stated that *“they told the Turks that illegal drilling activities are unacceptable, that they are trying to ensure that legal activities take place in every area where international law prevails, and that they will continue to take diplomatic steps on this issue as they always do”* (Gülbay, 2022).

In addition to Greece, the United States, which has established close contacts with the GCASC, lifted the arms embargo it had been imposing since 1987 (Atlamazoğlu, 2023) and gave important messages that they would improve their cooperation in the field of defense (U.S. Department of State, 2021b). France, as another state with close relations with Greece and the GCASC, has been conducting military exercises in the region in line with the goal of “increasing its defense potential”. Interpreting this alliance as *“encouraging the Greek Cypriot-Greek duo to dangerously escalate tensions further”*, Türkiye sent a research vessel accompanied by warships to the region, which Greece claimed to be its EEZ, and Greece responded with a similar step. During this period, Greece’s purchase of weapons systems and warships from France was another source of tension in bilateral relations. In this process, the US stated that it would use its military and diplomatic presence in the region to reduce tensions between the two NATO member states (Gülbay, 2022).

Although dialogue initiatives between the two states were launched during the process, no success was achieved. The 2020 EU Leaders’ Summit was an important date in terms of these initiatives. At the summit, Greece demanded sanctions against Türkiye and criticized Germany for its arms sales to Türkiye. While no sanctions decision came out of the summit, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s statements before the summit that *“we need to address differences and disagreements, but we also need to recognize that Türkiye is part of NATO and part of the Western family”* drew attention (Gülbay, 2022).

Both states did not refrain from taking military steps, and the establishment of a base and the deployment of military equipment by Türkiye at the intersection of the Aegean and the Mediterranean demonstrated the aim of establishing military activity in the region (Choulis *et al.*, 2021). Since 2006, Türkiye’s Operation Mediterranean Shield with attack boats, unmanned aerial vehicles, submarines and helicopters has been another dimension of Türkiye’s activity in the region, while Greece has been sending important messages about its maritime domain with similar steps. The MEDUSA military exercise, which is carried out regularly with Egypt and the Greek Cypriot Administration, is one of the important steps taken in this direction in the region (Gök & Mavruk, 2022). The military exercises that Greece conducts every year with Egypt have been described by Ankara as *“an effort to escalate tension in the Mediterranean”*.

In addition to alliance behavior and military exercises, another issue that has been emphasized has been the arms race. Especially after the 1996 Kardak Rocks crisis,

both states took steps to increase their armaments, which is important in observing the mutual increase in threat perception. The sovereignty claims that emerged after an accident on the reefs and the eventual transformation of the issue into a security problem brought along the military structuring efforts of the two states in the region. The lowering of mutually erected flags and the confrontation of warships around the reefs raised tensions in the region. In the process, the crisis was calmed down, especially with the US statement that it would intervene in the first use of force (Gök & Mavruk, 2022). This incident, which took place in an area with a relatively weak strategic and regional position such as the Kardak Rocks, caused negative comments in terms of the military consequences of an incident that could shift to strategic areas (Şihmantepe, 2013; Gök & Mavruk, 2022). As shown in the tables below, there have been significant increases in armament rates after 1996:

**Table 4:** Comparison of Defense Expenditures of Türkiye and Greece (1990–1999)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Türkiye	8157	8385	8820	9751	9534	9794	10961	11424	11970	13217
Greece	5986	5677	5900	5759	5858	5983	6342	6758	7364	7710

**Sources:** Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020)

**Table 5:** Comparison of Defense Expenditures of Türkiye and Greece (2009–2019)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Türkiye	11385	11184	11280	11556	11868	11955	12302	14423	15480	19649	20796
Greece	9628	7398	5957	5268	4920	4880	5175	5390	5386	5757	5732

**Sources:** Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020)

A comparative analysis of the period from 1990 to 2020 shows to what extent the Kardak Crisis process increased the armament tendency. On the other hand, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is possible to say that the threat perception has increased more in Türkiye than in Greece. Looking at the data on Türkiye, it is observed that while the increase continued after 2009, Greece has relatively cut its defense expenditures. When this difference is evaluated in terms of the security dilemma, it shows that there is a higher level for Türkiye.

## Conclusion

Although the problems between Türkiye and Greece have a long historical background, bilateral relations are mostly managed through perceptions. The perception that the other is perceived as a threat and especially that this perception is made through identities has recently been demonstrated in security studies with the ontological security understanding. Türkiye and Greece, which have a tense relationship model due to the

Aegean Islands and especially the Cyprus issue, have been caught in the middle of a new struggle with the energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially after 2010. Here, it has been observed that the problem of territorial waters, continental shelf and EEZ in the Aegean Sea has deepened even more. After analyzing the cooperation and activities of Türkiye and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean with the understanding of economic interdependence, it has been seen that bilateral relations have evolved into a security dilemma with the effect of suspicion and anxiety factors. Historical conflicts and crises have a great impact here. As a matter of fact, the change in the defense expenditures of both countries has enabled us to produce data that supports this situation.

This study, which discusses the impact of economic interdependence on the maritime dispute between Türkiye and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean, analyzes the defense expenditures of both Türkiye and Greece in times of crisis and reveals that Türkiye has more security concerns than Greece. It is normally assumed that economic interdependence has an effect on bilateral relations that reduces the likelihood of conflict. However, this study shows that economic interdependence can create a security dilemma and increase the likelihood of conflict. Contrary to approaches that address the security dilemma through military activities, this study applies Copeland's trade prospects model and analyzes the relations between Greece and Türkiye through economic and trade activities. Political approaches to economic and commercial activities have been particularly manifested in the mutually emerging theme of identity security. As both states saw their commercial security in jeopardy in the long run, they acted to compete in many areas, especially in the determination of energy and trade routes. Türkiye and Greece, which do not see their identity as secure, have tended to shape their alliance behaviour in parallel with energy exploration in the region and to take steps towards defense. This situation supports Copeland's assumption that a state that sees its commercial security in danger and is suspicious of the other state will be caught in a security dilemma.

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# Middle East: States Rivalry in the Horn of Africa. Key Drives, Geopolitical Implications, and Security Challenges

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**Abstract:** The entanglements of Middle East states in the Horn of Africa are debilitating the politically volatile region. The Middle East states power projection schemes and the race to build up military bases have been threatening the security of the Horn region by exporting the regional rivalries in the Middle East to the Horn of Africa. Typically, as is so often the case, the rival Middle East states become more attracted to the geopolitically crucial Horn region with conflicting core interests, and the local political actors have not been casual observers; instead, they use their playing cards to shape the involvement of Middle East powers. In this vein, the growing integration of the Horn region with the Arabian Peninsula security dynamics and the rising interests of Middle East states to militarize the Horn of Africa are ending up exacerbating the stability of the Horn of Africa more than ever before.

**Keywords:** Horn of Africa, Middle East states, rivalry, geopolitics, security.

## Context

Throughout history, the Horn of Africa has been the center of gravity for the rivalries of varieties of international and regional security players. The region also has a long-established tradition of hosting military bases for regional and global actors (Medani, 2012). Alongside, international and regional security actors' rivalries for military bases have briefly risen in the sub-region after the 9/11 terrorist attack (Lefebvre, 2012a).

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 44, July 2023, pp. 78–97

DOI: 10.24193/csqr.44.5  
Published First Online: July 05 / 2023

Maritime security and the surge of pirate attacks in the 2000s are among the major rhetoric fodder for the rise of overseas actors' security engagement in the Horn region (Yimer, 2020). The asymmetric military buildup and outside engagement with clashing interests have substantially challenged and exacerbated the security dynamics of the region.

Geographically, the Horn of Africa is located at the strategic crossroad between Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. The region also has proximity to the strategic waterways- Red Sea, Bebel-Mandeb, and Gulf of Aden. Literally, the Horn of Africa consists of Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. However, from the point of geopolitical proximity and transnational causes, the Horn region comprises three more nations – Kenya, Sudan, and South Sudan.

In the past two decades, the proactive policies of global and regional actors become a cumbersome security challenge for the Horn region that sometimes ends up with minor conflicts while other times escalate into all-out wars. The increasing role of global and regional powers as security providers made the Horn region the primary victim of overseas political tensions. Thus, any kind of political tension from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Hormuz Strait to the Eastern Mediterranean has a profound impact on the political and security dynamics of the Horn region regional subsystem. In the past two decades, if one has to consider the Horn region from the point of external actors' privileged position in dictating the political and security narrations of the region, the regional order and/or the regional subsystem is becoming more volatile and multipolar as never before. The growing active role of emerging Middle East actors (i.e., Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Qatar, Iran, and Turkey), on the one hand, and the traditional global players in the region (i.e., U.S.A., Britain, France, and Russia), on the other, complicated the political, ideological, and economic volatility of the Horn region that sometimes end up with broken order (Todman, 2018).

From the point of its geographical proximity and geopolitical significance, the oil-rich Middle East actors see the Horn of Africa as a unique sphere of influence for their ideological, political, economic, and geostrategic rivalries. While setting their approach to influencing the Horn countries, the Middle East rival actors employ interventionist foreign policy to achieve their cause in the region. The four simple reasons, among others, that helped the Middle East actors to employ interventionist policy against the Horn region are (i) the geographical proximity of the region to the Middle East; (ii) the traditional interstate and intrastate rivalry among the Horn countries; (iii) the active role of non-state militant actors in the politics of the Horn region regional subsystem and; (iv) the patterns of unstable economic system in the region.

Additionally, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)–Qatar crises (2017), on the one hand, and the Saudi–Iran cold war, on the other, have also imported the Middle East actor's ideological and political rivalry to the Horn of Africa sub-system. Yet again, the Arab

Spring (2011) – which causes ‘psychological and epistemological rupture’ in the Middle East, and the war in Yemen (2015) – which boiled the Middle East proxy – spillover to the sub-system (Gerges, 2014, p. 1).

In this context, this article tries to address questions such as: What is the rationale behind the growing appearance of Middle East states on the horizon of the Horn of Africa in the last two decades? Why and how do Middle East states clashing interests cause geopolitical turmoil in the Horn region? How regional rivalries in the Middle East region do exacerbate the security and stability of the Horn of Africa?

### **Middle East Actors Rivalry in the Horn of Africa: Key Derives**

The Middle East actors are seeking to become a primary regional player in the security, political, ideological, and economic activities of the Horn of Africa. The growing systemic shift in the Horn of Africa region, in particular, and the entire East Africa, in general, invites emerging Middle East actors to be active political and security players in the Horn region (Marsai & Szalai, 2021). The traditional global actors in the region (i.e., United States, United Kingdom, France, and Italy) are increasingly leaving the horizon of the Horn region rivalry for emerging Middle East and Asian actors. In this manner, while the Middle East regional actors have been involved in the security and political affairs of the Horn region, they have diversified interests and foreign policy priorities. In other words, the divergent security, economic, and political strategies together with priorities of key derive have been the complementary part of the greater power rivalry between the Middle East actors in the Horn of Africa (De Oliveira & Cardoso, 2020).

### **Saudi Arabia**

Defining Saudi’s place and position in the politics of the Horn of Africa has an imperative value in understanding the risk of Middle East actors’ power rivalries in the Horn region. In recent years, the security role of Saudi in the Horn of Africa has been visibly growing, and Riyadh has been accepted as an emerging Middle Eastern actor in determining the patterns and systems of interactions amid the Horn countries. While we talk about the interventionist foreign policy approach of Saudi in the Horn region, for instance, the domestic unhealthy patterns of interstate and intrastate interactions among the Horn countries have always been serving as a pull factor for Riyadh’s active role in the region.

In this vein, in its interventionist foreign policy, Saudi used to use peace negotiation between hostile Horn nations as a rhetoric fodder. A case in point, for instance, is Riyadh was the primary player behind the Djibouti-Eritrea rapprochement scheme. Though both Isayas and Omar Gulleh remain hostile for years, on September 17, 2018, Riyadh hosted the two party’s peace talks and rapprochements. As a result, after years of shattering and hostile relations, Djibouti and Eritrea have started working to normalize their broken political, security, and economic interactions (Lyammouri, 2018).

In the same tone, the role of Saudi in the normalization scheme of Ethiopia and Eritrea was not minimal. Saudi is also active in the politics of Somalia and Sudan. Beyond question, however, Riyadh has motives for employing an interventionist foreign policy approach in the Horn region. Riyadh's primary motive for the affairs of the Horn of Africa can be linked with security issues. The security dimension of Saudi's involvement in the Horn of Africa, in fact, has four main ins and outs:

- (i) The growing influence of other Middle East actors (i.e., Iran, Qatar, and Turkey) in the Horn region's political, security, and economic affairs is not desirable for Riyadh – as this would be a grave challenge for its national interests by developing anti-Saudi block in the region;
- (ii) Saudi's desire to prevent the spread of Shiism in the region. Meaning, the growing ideological confrontation of Saudi with Iran in the Middle East and Riyadh's plan to re-establish itself as a leading ideological and political figure in the region appears a key driver for the latter's active involvement in the politics of the Horn region.
- (iii) To prevent the anti-Riyadh axis of resistance and to establish a pro-Riyadh axis that would hypothetically prevent external actors' proxy and military engagement, as it would lead the geographically near Horn region into a potential mess. To put it differently, Riyadh does not want to see another failed state (i.e., Yemen, Syria, Iraq) near its border that would invite global and regional actors' involvement.

Additionally, the growing strategic interest and computations among the Middle East players in the Red Sea region have also alarmed Riyadh to reconsider its regional policy towards the Horn countries. Particularly, since the start of the Yemen crisis, the strategic competition among the emerging Middle East states in the Red Sea region reached its pinnacle more than ever before, and Riyadh worked to establish its axis in the region. On the bases of the renewed Middle East player's rivalry in the Red Sea region, for instance, *Egyptian-Saudi pressure which led to Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan all cutting ties with Iran. Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia have [also] contributed troops to the Saudi coalition, while Eritrea has allowed its territory-especially the port and airbase at Assab-to be used for air strikes into Yemen* (De Waal, 2017, p. 18). Now, therefore, it is possible to say that the geographic factor has also been fevering and forcing Riyadh to closely supervise the affairs of the Horn of Africa.

The other dimension of Saudi's involvement in the Horn of Africa has economic features. Saudi is increasingly asserting itself on the economic activities of the Horn region on an unprecedented scale. The main derives of Riyadh's economic interests in the Horn region is to diversify its oil-based economic sources. In this context, Horn countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya are potential new markets for Riyadh's industrial products. Additionally, the Horn of Africa has geographical proximity to the maritime roots of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aiden, and the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. The roots are strategically vital lifelines of world trade. Since Saudi has a close geographical position for

the above-mentioned maritime roots, it employed the policy of intervention and active engagement in the political, economic, and security issues of the Horn region ever since the post-colonial era. Notably, the magnitude of Saudi's interest on the affairs of Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan is high (Mahmood, 2020).

### **United Arab Emirates (U.A.E)**

The other Middle East actor that has been actively engaging in the political, economic, security, and ideological affairs of the Horn region is the U.A.E. The tie of the small port city of the Gulf with the Horn of Africa is not something new; rather, the Emirati had a strong link with the Horn region in the area of maritime trade long before the formation of the Emirati as a nation-state. However, with time, Abu Dhabi has been interested in presenting itself as an active actor in the political, security, economic, and ideological issues of the Horn region. To this end, the U.A.E. has changed its passive foreign policy into active engagement and has emerged as one of the main external players in the affairs of the Horn of Africa since the 2011 Arab Spring. The growing reluctance of traditional powerbrokers (i.e., the U.S.A., France, and Britain) has also helped Abu Dhabi and other emerging regional actors to easily penetrate the security and political platforms of the Horn of Africa. Unlike the UN, AU, and traditional Western actors, for instance, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh had successfully solved the long-standing hostility between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Thus, *the Eritrean-Ethiopian rapprochement, as well as a flurry of other Horn of Africa diplomacy, has greatly boosted Gulf states' visibility as geopolitical actors along the Red Sea* (Crisis Group Middle East Briefing, 2018, p. 2). The success of the Ethiopia and Eritrea reconciliation also helped Abu Dhabi to minimize opposition over its military bases at Assab (Mahmood, 2020). This active role of the U.A.E. in the Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement scheme also helped to raise the global prestige of Abu Dhabi (Donelli & Dentice, 2020).

Yet again, it is also imperative to note that while the traditional European actors' concerns in the Horn region mainly focused on 'ending piracy and its disruption of trade flows', Abu Dhabi sees the Horn of Africa as an emerging market for post-oil diversification and food security strategy efforts (Berland *et al.*, 2022).

In this sense, the vision of Abu Dhabi's political influence in the Horn of Africa has been based on the principle of political alliance, aid politics, infrastructure building, port contracts, and military base contracts. Especially, in the last two decades, the Horn of Africa has taken a central place in the foreign policy of Abu Dhabi toward Africa. The growing geopolitical and strategic influences of Abu Dhabi become a challenge and an opportunity for the Horn region. It is a challenge because Abu Dhabi is keen to protect its port contracts and military base contracts from other emerging rival actors in the region (Donelli & Dentice, 2020).



Particularly, if not managed properly, Abu Dhabi's growing appetite to dominate the geopolitical activities of the Horn region would end up further importing the Gulf crises to the Horn of Africa. On the opposite side, given the proactive foreign policy of Abu Dhabi on the Horn Region, the growing Gulf countries' political, economic, and ideological rivalry will be a possible pitfall for the geopolitical stability of the Horn region.

U.A.E. has been blamed for middling the internal and transnational realpolitik of the Horn of Africa. In the process of its organized presence, in the region, for instance, Abu Dhabi uses tools such as military aid and military training instruments, among others. To empower the capacity of the pro-Abu Dhabi local actors, for instance, Emirati gave training to the Somali army between 2014 and 2018. In the same tone, under the penon of fighting the threat of piracy on the Bab el Mandeb Strait, Abu Dhabi trained and empowered the Puntland Maritime Police Force since 2010 (Ribé, 2020).

However, the geopolitical projects of the Emirati in Mogadishu were not seen positively by certain regional rival actors (i.e., Qatar and Turkey) and the rivalry between Abu Dhabi and Qatar on one hand as well as Abu Dhabi and Turkey on the other blurt out in Somalia since 2017. The situation, all the same, challenged the active engagement foreign policy orientation of Abu Dhabi in Somalia and, on the flip side of the coin, undermined the regional stability of the Horn of Africa by inviting the Gulf crises to the region. Eventually, Emirati withdrew itself from Mogadishu and developed a new foreign policy approach to Somalia – 'wait and see' while other actors such as Turkey and Qatar assumed a good relationship with Mogadishu and become the main player in the politics of Somalia (Melvin, 2019a).

Moreover, U.A.E. halted all kinds of humanitarian and military support to Mogadishu as retaliation. The Emirati leadership then closed the Sheikh Zayed Hospital, which was built in Somalia to supply free medical care for poverty-stricken citizens. Abu Dhabi also decided to suspend a military program that started in 2014 to train Somalia's security forces. The new rift between Somalia and the U.A.E. is most likely going to deepen over time while the Emirati support continues for the regional administrations in Somaliland and Puntland (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2018).

Yet again, it is imperative to note that despite the U.A.E. employing a wait-and-see policy approach on Mogadishu, it continued to employ a more proactive and multidimensional foreign policy approach toward the remaining Horn countries than ever before. Some of the reasons for the proactive and multidimensional foreign policy orientation of Abu Dhabi over the Horn of Africa can possibly be that.

First, Abu Dhabi is working to transform its diplomatic, political, economic, and military formations in the changing global environment. In this sense, the situation in the Horn region looks like a double-spaced challenge for the Emiratis. One, the influence of traditional global actors is declining while the roles of emerging regional actors are rising.

Two, although the influence of Abu Dhabi looks good in the neighboring nations, the presence of Turkey and Qatar as important actors in the politics of Somalia abates the chance of Abu Dhabi's active engagement in its foreign policy orientation to shape the playing field of the Horn region. Meaning, with the growing involvement of emerging regional actors in the Horn region's political, economic, and security activities, Emiratis do not want to be a casual beholders. Thus, one of the reasons for the proactive foreign policy approach of the U.A.E. in the Horn of Africa stems from the aspiration of Abu Dhabi to play a central role in the changing geopolitical dynamics of the Horn region rather than being a peripheral spectator. However, this proactive policy orientation of Abu Dhabi has both challenges and opportunities. It is a challenge *because the UAE's capabilities to pursue such an ambitious agenda remained limited. It was an opportunity because the UAE could become the leading foreign policy actor in the region. Abu Dhabi has still been struggling to locate itself between these two policy options* (Telci, 2022, p. 77; Donelli & Dentice, 2020).

Second, the Horn of Africa is currently the most suitable and strategic area for Abu Dhabi as to the model of economic activities. The growing interest of Abu Dhabi to emerge as a hub for diversified economic activities of the gulf region would remain in the air if Emirati failed to secure the important water passage of the Horn of Africa – Bab-al-Mandab, the narrow passage from the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea. For Abu Dhabi to secure its strategic interests and to emerge as a hub for economic diversification, the maritime roots around the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Hormuz should be secured. To satisfy its maritime security need, thus, Abu Dhabi has built military bases along the maritime coasts of the Horn region in areas such as the *islands of Berbera (Somaliland-Somalia), Bossaso (Puntland-Somalia), Socotra (Yemen), Perim (Yemen) and Assab (Eritrea). These bases will help the U.A.E. to become a strategic power in the Gulf of Aden and the Suez Canal passage* (Telci, 2022, p. 77). As U.A.E. and certain regional actors' economic, military, and security engagement increases, traditional (i.e., America and Europe) actors' engagement also increased in the region. The rising interest of non-traditional actors to have military bases and port facilities in the Horn region, thus, alarmed the traditional actors to balance the growing challenges of emerging regional actors such as the U.A.E., Turkey, China, and Saudi, among others.

Third, although the Horn of Africa has become the region where traditional and emerging actors compete to have a say in the political, economic, security, and ideological affairs of the region, the fear of Iran, in many ways, is another shortcoming that increases the activity of U.A.E. in the region. The increasing military capacity and political capital of Tehran in the Horn of Africa is accepted as a grave challenge for U.A.E.'s geopolitical interest in the region. Thus, Iran's growing regional influence and its active role in the war in Yemen have been considered a serious geopolitical and geo-economic challenge for Abu Dhabi in the Horn of Africa. Conversely, the growing rapprochement between

Abu Dhabi and Israel fired Tehran's engagement in the affairs of the Horn. Thus, while discussing the Tehran-Abu Dhabi rivalry in the Horn of Africa, the economist stated that Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in particular, are increasingly active in the Horn. Tensions between them rose after the UAE established diplomatic ties with Israel last year, a move that Iran furiously condemned (The Economist, 2021).

## Iran

The other Middle East actor that has been actively engaging to influence the geo-economic and geo-political landscape of the Horn of Africa, as do the security and ideological competitions, is Iran. Geopolitical, geo-economic, geostrategic, and ideological competitions are the main driving reasons for Tehran's active engagement in the Horn of Africa. In the process of its engagement, however, Teheran employs economic aid, humanitarian aid, military aid, and financial support. In the ongoing Middle East states rivalry, while Iran tried to establish a good relationship with Eritrea, Qatar has been able to form friendly relations with Somalia. In the same vein, Saudi Arabia managed to establish good relations with Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, as Turkey has formed pleasant relations with Somalia, Djibouti, and Ethiopia.

However, it is imperative to note that the relations between Middle East actors and Horn countries are not long-lasting; rather, there are inconsistent relationship configurations between the Horn countries and the Middle East actors. Telci (2022) illustrated the concept of Middle East states fluctuating relationship with the Horn nations as follows:

*The case of the UAE is a good example of such fluctuating relationship patterns. The Emirati leadership has developed good relations with Djibouti and Somalia for a long time. However, particularly since 2015, both countries have distanced themselves from the Emirati influence. These countries considered the Emirati involvement in their political processes as a risky policy choice. The UAE experienced a recent crisis with Djibouti due to the mismanagement of the Doraleh Port that has been under the control of DP World, a leading port management company that belongs to Dubai (p. 79).*

Another important point in the observation of Iran's engagement in the affairs of the Horn of Africa is the fact that Teheran's tactical and strategic alliance with the politically hostile and marginalized nations. The sensible strategic alliance between Iran and Eritrea, for instance, partly stemmed from the growing isolation of the latter from global and regional politics. On the ground, however, it is apparent that the *Eritrean-Iranian alliance seems an unlikely partnership [because of] a political and ideological mismatch between the Islamic Republic and a 'devoutly' secular Eritrean regime* (Lefebvre, 2012b, p. 117).

It is also apparent that in 2008, noting its nearness to Eritrea and Djibouti, Tehran proposed to mediate Asmara and Djibouti. Additionally, to further strengthen its bilateral

strategic cooperation with Djibouti, in 2009, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Djibouti. Yet again, in 2009, Iran sent two warships to the coastal water of Somalia under the name of fighting piracy. This growing tie of Tehran with Horn countries was not taken plainly by Riyadh. Subsequently, *after dubious backdoor deals with Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Djibouti and Somalia switched sides and severed diplomatic relations with Iran in January 2016* (Mesfin, 2016, p. 7).

Still, the ideological and geopolitical rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh in the Middle East region put at odds the computing interests of the two Middle East actors in the Horn of Africa. Indeed, as many spectators argued, the ideological struggle between Saudi and Iran on the Sunni-Shiite sectarian division, which is currently challenging the peace and security of Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, is also a threat to the stability of the Horn region (Mesfin, 2016).

### **Qatar**

In the growing patterns of the Middle East actors' complicated engagement in the Horn of Africa, Qatar has sought to emerge as an influential political, economic, and security player. Qatar's increasing assertiveness in the Horn region has been observed for the following three simple reasons"

- (i) Thinking of the region as the proper spot for building military bases and port facilities to secure the economic, political, and ideological motives of Doha;
- (ii) Bearing in mind that financial support, military support, and economic aid as tools for winning rival actors' interest in the region, and
- (iii) Having the region (i.e., Horn) as the right venue to defuse the crises in the Gulf region. Given that, it is instructive to note that while the Gulf crises boiled the politics of the Gulf region, the ramification has been sensed beyond the Gulf shores (Mahmood, 2020).

It is apparent that the divergence of the Gulf actors has become more visible following the Arab Spring. Gulf nations split up also observed in the Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C.), which traditionally had provided an institutional platform for the Gulf States' partnership. The growing uncertainty of Gulf actors in the politics of the Gulf shore significantly contributes to the computing attitudes of Gulf nations over the geographically proximate overseas regions such as the Horn, among others. Given that, the Horn of Africa has been one of the regions in which the rival Gulf powers flexed their financial and military muscles. All along their rivalry, the Horn region has been a venue to sideline the interest of a certain Gulf state over the other. Saudi Arabia and U.A.E., for instance, sidelined Doha's interest in Somalia, while Qatar and Turkey did the same to challenge Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in Eritrea (Telci, 2022).

Although Qatar is blamed for proxies and middling of conflicts in the Horn of Africa, Doha is one of the longstanding Middle East players in the region that can be remembered

for facilitating the peace talk between the government of Sudan and the Darfur rebel group in 2008. Additionally, Doha initiated the peace talk between Eritrea and Djibouti to defuse the 2008 border conflict between the two nations. With this in view, for instance, Doha became the major peacekeeping force<sup>1</sup> supplier in the Djibouti-Eritrea frontier dispute (Mahmood, 2020).

Here are the three simple reasons why Qatar has been actively involved in the geo-political and Geo-economic competitions of the Horn of Africa. First, in many respect, political and economic interests have been the main theme for Qatar's engagement in the Horn of Africa. Doha's desire to build an influential political position in the Horn of Africa stemmed from the ambition to emerge as an iconic political figure in the existing power dynamics of the region. Thereby, politically, Doha's active engagement as a peacemaker between conflicting nations has the motive to conceptualize itself as a vital global actor in offering a peaceful solution for the complications in the region. Second, economically, as the strategic waterways of the Horn of Africa (Bab-el-Mandeb, Red Sea, and Gulf of Aiden) are vital in the global maritime trade, Doha needs to secure its interests in the strategic maritime root through creating strategic and security partnerships with the local actors (Bruno, 2021). Additionally, Qatar is thoughtful that Horn countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan, among others, have been growing economically, in which Doha is keen to benefit from the emerging economy of these countries. In other words, Qatar's appetite is increasing day by day to benefit from the emerging markets of the Horn region. In view of this, by coordinating its hard power and soft power, Qatar has been working to be seen as a vital player in the Horn of Africa. Third, the preoccupation of Qatar in the Horn region is to maximize its military influence in the region vis-à-vis certain Gulf actors (i.e., Saudi Arabia and U.A.E) and to use the region as a logistic hub to counter proxies from other Middle East rival powers (Fabricius, 2017).

## **Türkiye**

The other active operator in the geopolitics and geo-economic landscapes of the Horn of Africa is Turkey. The increasing role of Ankara as a security and strategic partner with the Horn countries is not coincident; rather, it is part of Ankara's calculated rapprochement scheme toward Africa. Since 1998 the trajectory of Turkey's relations with Africa has been scoring progress over progress. Given this, in 2005, the Africa-Turkey relationship reached its pinnacle, and Ankara officially declared it the 'Year of Africa' (Özkan & Akgün, 2010). It is also possible to speak that over the past two decades, Turkey as an aid provider, financial source, and security and strategic partner with the Horn countries scored good achievements, even better than the traditional actors

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1 As Gerald M. Feierstein (2020, p. 3) noted, following the June 2017 Gulf crises, however, both Eritrea and Djibouti backed the Saudi, U.A.E., and Bahrain sides. Afterward, Qatar withdrew its peacekeeping forces from the Djibouti/Eritrea border.

(i.e., Europeans and America) and emerging actors (China, India, U.A.E. Saudi, Qatar, and Iran). Ankara's security achievements in the Horn region, for instance, were tested successfully in its security engagement at Mogadishu, which the traditional Western actors failed to attain for several decades.

In the run-up to rooting itself as an invincible actor in the region, Turkey has been employing both soft power and diplomatic approaches. Thereby, more often than not, in the evolving patterns of the Middle East actors' overlapping engagement in the Horn of Africa, Turkey has been more comfortable approaching countries in the region. The historical tie between the Horn of Africa and the Ottomans has often been used as rhetoric fodder for the smooth and easy engagement of Turkey in the geopolitical landscape of the Horn region (Telci, 2022). Additionally, civil society organizations such as the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), Turkish Maarif Foundation, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Turkey Red Crescent (Kizilay), and Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) have an imperative role in the soft power diplomacy between Turkey and the Horn countries (Özkan, 2021).

Turkey also uses instruments such as political cooperation, economic incentives, military aid, humanitarian assistance, and financial support, among others, to win the competition in the Horn region. In the patterns of Turkey's rivalry with emerging and traditional actors, in the region, each of these instruments (tools) is used whenever necessary and proper. Sometimes the above instruments are jointly employed to successfully curtail other actors' challenges. For instance, Political cooperation, military aid, investment, and humanitarian assistance tools have been employed by Turkey in Somalia to emerge as a dominant player in the politics of Mogadishu. Unlike Abu Dhabi, which focused on building port facilities and military bases in Somalia, Turkey's military activity in Somalia, for instance, has a package to train police forces and the national army of Somalia. Thereupon, the Ankara vs. Abu Dhabi geopolitical battle over Mogadishu ends up with the victory of the former. Then, while U.A.E. has developed a belligerent and confrontational attitude towards Somalia, Turkey emerged as a vital security ally for Mogadishu (Telci, 2022).

These complicated patterns of extra-regional actors' involvements with diversified interests have always been exacerbating the stability of the Horn region and induced complexity of foreign policy designs for the Horn nations.

### **Middle East Actors Rivalry in the Horn of Africa: Geopolitical Implications**

The increasing assertions of Middle East players in one of the geopolitically vital but volatile regions of the world – the Horn of Africa – have both positive and downside geopolitical implications. Middle East actors' (Saudi Arabia and the UAE's) role in the restoration of peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea, for instance, has definitely had



positive geopolitical effects in the Horn of Africa. The Middle East actors also played a positive role in the complex transition process in Sudan following the downfall of Albeshir's government. Additionally, Middle East actors are hard at work in investment activities, mediation, peacekeeping, maritime logistics, and providing humanitarian aid (Donelli, 2020).

On the other hand, in the past two decades, Middle East actors' has been viewing the Horn of Africa as an experimental region to show the depth of Middle East players' political, military, economic, and diplomatic capacities. In the process of showing themselves as international stakeholders, on the global stage, however, the Horn region's geopolitical landscape become more fragile than ever before. The geopolitical downside of Middle East actors' intricacy in the Horn of Africa stems from the more ambitious interests of Middle East players in the region to show themselves as international stakeholders.

However, the ambitious and complicated engagements of Middle East actors in the Horn of Africa, in many ways, have affected the local political landscape of the region. What is more vital is that, as the rival Middle East players become more attracted to the geopolitically crucial Horn region with conflicting core interests, the local political actors have not been casual observers; rather, they use their playing cards to shape the involvement of outside players in the region. In this regard, for instance, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea try to use their strategic position along the shore of the Horn region as a card to influence the configuration of extra-regional actors' activities in the region. In the same tone, in the pattern of shaping external actors' involvement in the region, Ethiopia and Kenya try to use their influential political and economic status as a card to further their domestic interests. In this regard, so far, many scholarly works have overlooked the role of local actors in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa; rather, many of them have been stressing the implications of extra-regional players on the geopolitical dynamics of the region. Thus, it is imperative to note that in the geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa, the local political complications should not be oversimplified in shaping the complex problems of the wider region. Meaning, the local politics of the Horn region too has a profound impact on shaping the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa by inviting external actors to the regional complications. As Guido Lanfranchi noted, for instance, *[the] two-way connection between geopolitics and local politics is particularly evident in the experiences of Somalia and Djibouti* (Lanfranchi, 2021). That would normally be the case that *on the one hand, the geostrategic position of these two countries on the Horn's shores has historically attracted many foreign players, which have deeply influenced local political landscapes. On the other hand, by seeking to leverage foreign backing to their own advantage, local political actors have brought their struggles to a regional and global level* (Lanfranchi, 2021).

Particularly, since the 2011 Arab Spring, the rivalry between Middle East powers in the Horn region has been unprecedentedly growing. For the growing Middle East players'



involvement in the Horn region, the local collaborators' role is not minimal. This is the case because, on the side of the premise, the Middle East actors cultivate collaborations with the local actors of the Horn region to use them as a proxy in the broader Middle East and North Africa regions. On the flip side, the local actors align with extra-regional actors to find potential external patronage for the local complications. Although this two-way nexus between the local actors and extra-regional players – with varieties of goals – has complicated the geopolitical landscape of the volatile Horn region, there has been no/little move by the local actors, even, to reduce the influence of extra-regional actors. Rather, local actors tried to use all the necessary tools at hand to align with extra-regional actors. However, the local actors' collaboration with Middle East actors has been profoundly challenging the local balance of power and deteriorating the peace of the region more than ever before (Ragab, 2017).

Regarding the growing engagements of the Middle East actors in the Horn of Africa and its geopolitical implication for the region, for instance, reports of the United States Institute for Peace stated the following:

*In the last five years, the geopolitical landscape of the Red Sea arena has been fundamentally reshaped. The Horn of Africa is now an integral part of and in fact the link among the security systems of the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific, and the Mediterranean by virtue of the strategic importance of and competition for influence over the Red Sea and the states that border and depend upon it for trade and transit. Middle Eastern states are asserting themselves in the Horn of Africa in ways unprecedented in at least a century, and the Red Sea arena is becoming increasingly militarized. As in the eastern Mediterranean, the export of Middle Eastern rivalries into the Horn of Africa – with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Egypt contesting Turkey and Qatar for dominance – is fueling instability and insecurity in an already fragile, volatile, and conflict-prone region (Senior Study Group on Peace and Security in the Red Sea Arena, 2020).*

Moreover, the two-way uncontrolled, and unbalanced nexus between local actors (seeking external patronage) and Middle East players (potentially using the local actors as proxy agents) has also been challenging the security of the region. This is the case because, *through these alliances, international disputes can quickly spill over into domestic politics, potentially magnifying existing local tensions if each party perceives that it can rely on strong foreign backing (Lanfranchi, 2021).*

Middle East tensions spilling over to the Horn of Africa is remarkably evident during the 2017 Gulf crises. The diverging position of the Middle East powers' rivalry over regional issues reached its pinnacle in the so-called 'Gulf Cries' in 2017. The escalations of rivalries between the rival blocs of the Middle East powers soon spilled over to the Horn of Africa. As a result, countries such as Somalia become the primary victims of importing the tensions between Middle East rival blocs. The spillover of Middle East powers' rivalry,

in one or other ways, has contributed to the production of more conflicts and tensions in the political divisions of Mogadishu. For instance, as Guido Lanfranchi (2021) noted, *the dispute between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Federal Member States (FMSs) – rooted in political disagreements over federal power-sharing – has been hardened by the increasing reliance of both sides on rival foreign sponsors (Turkey and Qatar for the FGS; the UAE for the FMSs)* (Lanfranchi, 2021).

On the other hand, the geopolitical crises of the volatile Horn region have been shaped by the extra-regional players' dispute over military bases in Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan. For many reasons, the Middle East actors' military base competition in the Horn of Africa is ignored, while unrelated developments got much weight. However, the competition over military bases in the Horn of Africa is a reason behind the instability in the region, where countries have been repeatedly engulfed by deep-rooted authoritarian systems; and where Middle East players and global actors have become the chief backers and financiers of these authoritarian governments. It is also unfortunate to note that neither the global actors nor the regional Middle East players are much worried about authoritarianism in the Horn of Africa so long as their interests are protected (Melvin, 2019a).

The other side from which the geopolitical complications of the Horn of Africa stems is from hosting multiple foreign actors' military bases at a very little distance from one another. For instance, the tiny port state of the Horn region, Djibouti, hosts more than seven military bases from different flags with diversified geopolitical interests. What is astonishing is that despite the foreign military bases in Djibouti being located at a very limited distance from one other, the government of Ismail Omar Guelleh is still inviting additional nations to open their military bases in Djibouti. In this regard, Horn nations such as Djibouti are using their strategic position as leverage to shape the geopolitical makeup of the Horn of Africa and to emerge as influential actors on the regional stage. Additionally, Djibouti is trying to use its strategic significance to balance the influence of a single foreign actor's domination over the domestic and international policies of the country. However, there is also a possibility that hosting multiple nations' military bases will challenge the sovereign states of the tiny port nation by importing proxies of belligerent nations. The other possible risk of renting military bases to multiple global actors is the decline of the legitimacy of the host government on both the domestic and international levels. This is indeed the case because hosting different flag states, in one or other ways, limit the free decision-making capacity of a nation that hosts the military of several flags. Djibouti can be taken as a good example of this scenario because Washington strongly challenged Omar Guelleh's government for hosting Beijing's military facility at a little distance from Camp Lemonnier (America's Military base in Djibouti) (Yimer, 2021).

## **Middle East Actors Scramble for Influence: Security Challenges for the Horn**

In the new and shifting geopolitics of the Horn of Africa, the role of emerging regional actors is not minimal. The assertive move of Middle East states to emerge as a dominant security provider and power projection to the Horn of Africa influenced major political changes in the region. These political changes include redistribution of power, realignment, and regime changes. In the last two decades, the competing nature of the Middle East players' involvement together with their growing appetite for military and economic presence in the Horn region exacerbated the security of the Horn region. The relative silence of the traditional actors to curtail the rivalries of emerging actors also further complicated the security complex of the sub-region more than ever before. Emerging Middle East states unprecedented military action, port development, area competition, and base build-up risk militarizing the Horn of Africa. Correspondingly, the political and ideological battles amid the Middle East states in the Horn of Africa have reportedly rise security tension in the sub-region. In this vein, it is imperative to note that 'rising powers' involvement in the Horn has facilitated geopolitical tensions and regional rivalries that risk militarizing the region and impacting human security by reinforcing more state-centric conceptions of security concentrated on territorial and border disputes (Kabandula & Shaw, 2018, p. 13).

The militarization and areal completion of Middle East states in the Horn of Africa particularly grow following the Arab Spring (2011), the war in Yemen (2015), and the split in the GCC (2017). The armed conflict in Yemen, for instance, invites Iran to project its power beyond the Gulf. Saudi Arabia on its part, however, does not want to see Iran's active appearance in the Yemen crisis. As a result, the Saudi-Iran proxy started in Yemen in which Iranian-backed al Houthis while the Saudi lead bloc backed the government of Yemen. Subsequently, the armed conflict in Yemen and the proxy role of Middle East players in the war increased the geopolitical significance of the Horn of Africa for its strategic location (Ragab, 2017).

As noted in the above sections, the political split in the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) and the subsequent fragile political atmosphere amid member states cause the reshuffling of regional power distribution and realignment. In the political alteration and polarization of regional differences, the Riyadh-Abu Dhabi-Manama axis marginalized Qatar from the group of GCC. The rift in the GCC invites Turkey to assert itself as Qatar's close ally both materially and symbolically. Turkey goes to the extent of airlifting foods and medical supplies as well as the Ankara-Doha joint commando force was established in Doha. This fragile political arena in the Middle East has manifested and spilled over to the Horn of Africa in many different ways as [...] *regional states aligned either for or against Qatar. Tensions increased and led to even more involvement of Middle East states in the Horn of Africa* (Donelli & Cannon, 2021, p. 6). Thereupon, the growing areal

interest and economic engagement of the Middle East states in the Horn of Africa and their ill-calculated intervention in the affairs of the Horn nations have progressively damaged the security of the region in provoking retaliation amid hostile nations of the region. To present it differently, the clashing interests of Middle East nations and the power imbalance with the Horn nations have been creating insecurity and exacerbating the stability of the region.

The progressive militarization of the Horn of Africa, on the other hand, has enhanced the volatility of the region where certain Middle East power easily legitimizes their appearance in the region. The situation also shattered the regional balance and distribution of power. Additionally, the growing competition of certain Middle East states to the Horn region increased the possibility of alignment and realignment in the sub-region where Middle East states are surely behind this blatant initiative. In the process of this alignment and realignment, therefore, the order and the system of the sub-region wind up importing the power rivalries in the Arabian Peninsula to the Horn of Africa, which ends up exacerbating the stability of the region. In this context, Eritrea and Sudan, for instance, *in an attempt to gain the utmost benefit from the worsening of Middle Eastern tensions, decided to break their relations with Teheran, in favor of a rapprochement with the Gulf monarchies* (Donelli & Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021, p. 9). Above all, the multilayered domestic problems of the Horn of Africa such as intrastate and interstate conflict; insurgency and counter-insurgency activities; the presence of some weak and failed states; and the growing importance of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aiden in the global geopolitics, among others, exposed the Horn of Africa for a permeable external influence. Once more, *the lack of a sustainable and autonomous economic system has accentuated the quest by HOA [Horn of Africa] states for extra-regional partners (external dependence) and the risk of their increasing political interference* (Donelli & Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021, p. 8). In this vein, in the trajectory of the Middle East states relations with the Horn countries, the former has begun to view the latter *as a laboratory in which they can experiment with their ability as international stakeholders* (Donelli & Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021, p. 8).

However, the rationale that the Middle East states have the ability to present themselves as stakeholders in the security of the Horn of Africa faces three critical problems. One, Middle Eastern states' interventionist policy and polarized rivalry attract the attention of other non-Middle Eastern actors such as Turkey and China, among others, to the Horn of Africa. After the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, particularly, Turkey approached Qatar to counter Gulf monarchs' dominant states in the Gulf of Aiden and Red Sea areas in particular and the greater Horn region at large. Turkey's policy of strengthening its hard power in the region has pushed the Gulf Monarchs to double their hard power build-up in the Horn of Africa that in turn invites the local actors to choose their sides. Thereupon, certain Middle East states' ability to act as international stakeholders have over and over again been challenged either with the involvement

of traditional global actors or with the rising powers' interventionist policy to the region. Two, the power projection of Middle East states to the Horn of Africa as security stakeholders are somehow imperfect. It is imperfect because some of the Middle East states themselves are found in an unstable security environment where a multilayered complication has been mushrooming. Thereupon, as the security dilemma in the Middle East is not lower than the security dilemma in the Horn of Africa, the presence of Middle East states as stakeholders in the security of the Horn of Africa is a simple calculation to defuse their regional rivalry in the Middle East to the Horn of Africa. Three, although the Middle East states assert themselves as stakeholders in the security of the Horn of Africa, their power projection failed to mitigate the security burden of the region. Rather, Middle East states power projection further militarized the Horn of Africa where the security condition is exacerbated at all hours of the day and night.

## Conclusion

The ongoing power rivalries amid Middle East states in their region are spilling over to the Horn of Africa. The fact that the Horn of Africa is geographically proximate to the Arabian Peninsula and the competing and sometimes overlapping interests of the Middle East states over the Horn region emerged as a major challenge for the security of the region. In this vein, Middle East states power projection and the race to build up military bases in the Horn of Africa are transforming the region into a major hotspot for wider international security competition and militarization. Above all, over exporting the regional rivalries in the Middle East to the Horn of Africa, the former (i.e., Middle East states power projection) has substantially been contributing to the volatility of the latter.

In the same manner, the rising interests of certain Emerging Middle East state to militarize the Horn of Africa on the one hand, and the passive spectatorship of the traditional global actors on the other is ending up destabilizing the Horn of Africa more than ever before. In parallel, it is not usual to see tensions rise in the Horn region when extra-regional competitions in areas like- the Middle East, the Gulf, and the Indio-Pacific rise. This is the case because major actors in the Middle East or the Gulf or the Indio-Pacific regions have military bases in the Horn region. In this sense, *the emergence of crowded international security politics in the Horn of Africa raises ... proxy struggles, growing geopolitical tensions, and a further extension of externally driven security agendas in the region* (Melvin, 2019b, p. 30).

Typically, as is so often the case, as the rival Middle East players become more attracted to the geopolitically crucial Horn region with conflicting core interests, the local political actors have not been casual observers, rather they use their playing cards to shape the involvement of outside players in the region. Thereupon, *[Horn of] African states are not mere passive actors but seek to maximize their benefits from the Middle*

*East competition, [and] they appear to be largely at the mercy of the alliances with their Middle Eastern partners* (Donelli & Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021b, p. 15).

Thus, on all these dimensions, understanding why and how the Middle East states' rivalry has been rising in the Horn of Africa requires an understanding of the integration of the Horn region with the Arabian Peninsula security dynamics. In this sense, the possible prospect scenario is that the expansion of the Middle East and Gulf region security space to the Horn of Africa, at best, raises the geopolitical and geo-economic tension in the region, at worst, triggers an all-out war amid Horn nations that would cause the broken regional order to collapse. However, the point here is not to dwarf the Middle East states' economic and humanitarian aid in the Horn of Africa but rather to show it is the 'black box' of the looming danger in the region – a danger that arises from the competition over military bases and power projection.

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