

Cyprus-Egypt Geopolitical Cooperation in Energy and Regional Security in the Eastern Mediterranean

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the geopolitical dynamics of Cyprus-Egypt relations in the context of energy and security cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The central issue addressed is how this bilateral partnership has evolved and what strategic interests underpin it. This research is guided by the question: how do Cyprus and Egypt construct and pursue their geopolitical interests through energy and security collaboration, and what are the broader implications for a regional constellation in the Eastern Mediterranean? Using a qualitative approach informed by Geopolitics Theory, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), and Balance of Threat Theory, the study reveals that the Cyprus-Egypt cooperation is beyond natural resource exploration. Instead, represents a regional alliance aimed at counterbalancing Turkish influence. The author argues that this partnership signals a transformation in Middle Eastern geopolitical boundaries of the Middle East. The article concludes that Cyprus-Egypt relations exemplify a new geopolitical synergy that contributes to the emerging architecture of regional energy and security while prompting a redefinition of the Middle East's cultural and political scope.

Keywords: Cyprus, Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Geopolitics, Middle East.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji dinamika hubungan geopolitik antara Siprus dan Mesir dalam konteks kerja sama energi dan keamanan di kawasan Mediterania Timur. Permasalahan utama dalam studi ini adalah bagaimana kerja sama bilateral ini berkembang dan apa kepentingan strategis yang melatarbelakanginya. Penelitian ini berangkat dari pertanyaan: bagaimana konfigurasi kepentingan geopolitik Siprus dan Mesir dalam menjalin kemitraan di bidang energi dan keamanan, serta apa implikasinya bagi konstelasi regional di Mediterania Timur? Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan Teori Geopolitik, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), dan Balance of Threat Theory, penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa kerja sama Siprus-Mesir tidak sebatas eksplorasi sumber daya alam, melainkan upaya membangun koalisi kawasan untuk menyeimbangi kekuatan Turki. Penulis berargumen bahwa kemitraan ini mencerminkan transformasi lanskap geopolitik Timur Tengah yang melibatkan aktor non-Arab seperti Siprus, dan memperluas cakupan Timur Tengah secara geo-budaya. Simpulan utama dari artikel ini adalah bahwa hubungan Siprus-Mesir mencerminkan sinergi geopolitik baru yang berkontribusi pada pembentukan arsitektur keamanan dan energi regional di Mediterania Timur, sekaligus membuka diskusi lebih lanjut tentang redefinisi batas budaya dan politik kawasan Timur Tengah.

Kata Kunci: Geopolitik, Mediterania Timur, Mesir, Siprus, Timur Tengah.

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Mediterranean has undergone a significant strategic transformation, driven by the discovery of substantial natural gas reserves in the waters of Egypt, Cyprus, and Israel. More than a decade after major gas finds in the Levant Basin in 2009 and 2010, the discovery of the Zohr gas field in Egypt in 2015 and the Aphrodite field in Cypriot waters in 2011 has brought renewed global attention to the region. These developments have prompted coastal states to re-evaluate their foreign policies and regional alliances, with Cyprus and Egypt emerging as key actors whose bilateral cooperation has notably intensified (Sukkarieh, 2021). Within this context, Cyprus and Egypt have cultivated a close partnership based on shared objectives, namely, ensuring security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, operationalizing energy cooperation, and boosting economic developments in both countries (Youssef, 2024).

This cooperation has not emerged in isolation. It is unfolding amidst intensifying geopolitical competition, particularly due to Turkey's assertive claims over maritime zones that overlap with Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). As a traditional regional power, Egypt views its energy partnership with Cyprus as a strategic opportunity to reinforce its leadership in global energy markets and counterbalance Turkey's growing influence in the region.

The energy diplomacy has been further institutionalized with the creation of the Eastern Mediterranean (EMGF), which consists of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine (Abdel-Razek, 2024). The Cyprus-Egypt partnership has a robust security component in addition to its energy component. Since 2015, both countries have participated in yearly joint military drills called "Medusa," which frequently involve Greece and occasionally France and the UAE (Youssef, 2024). These exercises are tangible reactions to growing maritime threats, such as illegal drilling, territorial water violations, and Turkish maneuvers in disputed areas, in addition to being symbolic displays of diplomatic closeness (Kollias et al., 2016).

This geopolitical partnership presents an intriguing case study when analyzed through the lens of Middle Eastern security dynamics. Despite Cyprus's common geographic ties to Europe, its political affiliations, security collaborations, and energy alliances increasingly reflect its embeddedness in the broader Middle Eastern affairs. This

shift aligns with the framework of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), as articulated by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, which argues that regional security systems are not defined solely by geography but are shaped by perceived threats, shared interests, and evolving alliance structures (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

Recently, the discovery of offshore gas in the Eastern Mediterranean has reshaped regional dynamics, making energy a hot topic for researchers. One of the foundational contributions in this area is the work by Andrea Prontera and Mariusz Ruszel (2017), which explores how energy resources have emerged not merely as economic assets but as strategic tools in foreign policy strategies. Their study focuses on the interlinked energy strategies of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Turkey, showing how gas pipelines and exploration projects are embedded within broader regional security considerations. They argue that energy cooperation functions as both a mechanism for conflict diffusion and a means of geopolitical positioning, particularly in relation to Turkish assertiveness in the region (Prontera & Ruszel, 2017). However, their analysis tends to concentrate on the multilateral cooperation patterns involving Israel and gives less emphasis to bilateral dynamics, particularly those between Cyprus and Egypt.

Building on the historical underpinnings of regional diplomacy, Sevki Kiralp (2022) investigates Cyprus' relations with Egypt and Israel during the Makarios era. His study uncovers a pattern of diplomatic reciprocity between President Gamal Abdul Nasser and Archbishop Makarios, especially in the context of international platforms such as United Nations debates on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Kiralp shows that while Israel did not pose a direct threat to Cyprus, both Nicosia and Cairo perceived Turkey as a shared geopolitical concern. Importantly, the paper sheds light on the multifaceted nature of Cyprus's bilateral ties, highlighting economic, cultural, and technical cooperation with both Egypt and Israel (Kiralp, 2023). While this work provides valuable historical context, it does not delve into the contemporary strategic calculus of energy and security cooperation between Cyprus and Egypt in the post-2010 gas discovery era.

In a related study, Ioannis N. Grigoriadis (2014) examines how energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have introduced new political-economic dimensions into a region's strategic landscape. His analysis posits that natural gas reserves serve as catalysts for both cooperation and conflict among states such as Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt. Grigoriadis underscores the dual nature of these developments: while energy offers

opportunities for economic interdependence, it also exacerbates territorial disputes and maritime jurisdiction tensions, especially in the absence of an inclusive regional governance mechanism (Grigoriadis, 2014). Notably, his work situates Israel as a central actor in emerging alliances, thereby leaving the Cyprus-Egypt dyad somewhat underexplored.

While these studies contribute significantly to the understanding of the Eastern Mediterranean's energy geopolitics, they often frame the region through a multilateral lens, most commonly incorporating Israel as a focal point of energy cooperation. What remains underexplored is the specific bilateral cooperation between Cyprus and Egypt, particularly in the geopolitical realm of energy diplomacy and security coordination in response to perceived threats from Turkey. This article seeks to address that gap by isolating the Cyprus-Egypt relationship from the broader Israel-centric narratives, thereby allowing a more focused examination of how both countries construct their strategic partnership in energy and regional security. By doing so, this research offers a distinct analytical contribution to the existing literature, emphasizing the importance of dyadic frameworks in a region often analyzed through trilateral or multilateral configurations.

This article seeks to address the following core research question: What are the strategic interests of Cyprus and Egypt in their energy and security cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, and how does this alliance reshape the regional security architecture of the Middle East? In pursuit of this question, the study analyzes how shared threat perceptions, particularly concerning Turkey, have driven Cyprus and Egypt to develop closer strategic alignment. It further explores the broader geopolitical implications of this partnership in transforming traditional alliance patterns and enabling cross-regional integration. The article's methodology is qualitative and is founded on a review of the literature and geopolitical analysis.

The geopolitical cooperation between Cyprus and Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean is thoroughly examined in this study using a multifaceted theoretical framework. It specifically uses the Balance of Threat Theory, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), and Geopolitical Theory to explain the fundamental forces behind and ramifications of this changing cooperation. Together, these theories collectively provide a robust lens through which to understand how energy resources, perceived threats, and regional security dynamics shape state behaviour and alliance formation in the Eastern

Mediterranean. Firstly, Geopolitics Theory serves as a foundational lens for understanding how geographical factors, including the control and distribution of natural resources, influence international power dynamics and foreign policy decisions (Cope, 2024). This theory posits that states utilize their geographical position and resource endowments as strategic tools to secure political and economic advantages. In the context of the Eastern Mediterranean, the recent discovery of a substantial natural gas reserve by Cyprus and Egypt has fundamentally reshaped their geopolitical interests. Geopolitics Theory helps explain how these energy resources are not merely economic assets but have emerged as critical strategic tools that drive bilateral and multilateral alignments, compelling states to re-evaluate their foreign policies and regional alliances. The theory demonstrates how strategic pursuit of energy security and export opportunities, intertwined with maritime jurisdictional claims, directly shapes the diplomatic and security interactions between Cyprus and Egypt, and their broader regional positioning.

Secondly, the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), as articulated by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, is crucial for situating the Cyprus-Egypt alliance within the broader Middle Eastern security dynamics. RSCT argues that regional security systems are not solely defined by geographical proximity but are primarily shaped by patterns of amity and enmity, perceived threats, shared interests, and evolving alliance structures among geographically proximate states (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This framework highlights how the security concerns of actors within a region are so interlinked that they cannot be considered in isolation. For Cyprus and Egypt, despite Cyprus often being politically associated with Europe, its political alignments and security partnerships increasingly reflect its embeddedness in the Middle Eastern affairs, particularly in response to shared regional challenges. RSCT thus helps in understanding how their cooperation forms a security interdependence, where their collective security is bolstered by addressing common threats and interests, effectively creating a sub-complex within the wider Middle Eastern security constellation.

Finally, Balance of Threat Theory, developed by Stephen Walt, provides a vital framework for understanding the strategic rationale behind the coalition-building efforts of Cyprus and Egypt. Unlike traditional balance of power theory that focuses solely on states' capabilities, Balance of Threat Theory posits that states form alliances primarily in response to perceived threats, which are influenced by a combination of aggregate

power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived aggressive intentions (Walt, 1985). In this study, the theory is particularly relevant in explaining how the assertive posture and unilateral actions of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, including its claims over disputed maritime zones and increased naval presence, have heightened threat perceptions for both Cyprus and Egypt. Consequently, their deepened strategic cooperation, including joint military exercises and the institutionalization of energy diplomacy through platforms like the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) can be understood as a direct response to counterbalance what they perceive as a common external threat from Turkey. This theoretical approach therefore helps to explain the strategic interests behind their alliance, which is driven not merely by shared economic interests but fundamentally by a collective effort to deter perceived aggression and maintain regional stability.

Academically, this article contributes to Middle East Studies by shifting the focus away from dominant regional actors such as Iran, Turkey, and the Gulf States, and instead highlighting Cyprus as a non Arab actor with growing relevance in regional geopolitics. The study expands current understandings of cross-border geopolitical alignments and the role of energy in shaping regional power structures. It also underscores Egypt's evolving strategy to reassert its regional leadership through energy and security diplomacy. Ultimately, this article aims to broaden the analytical scope of Middle Eastern cultural and geopolitical studies by demonstrating that ethnic or religious affiliations do not solely shape regional identities. Rather, they were continually reconstructed through shifting strategic interests and cross-regional interactions. The Cyprus-Egypt partnership exemplifies how geopolitical and cultural boundaries can be renegotiated within contemporary geopolitical frameworks.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to deeply understand the motifs, strategies, and geopolitical implications of Cyprus-Egypt cooperation in the energy and security sectors. The primary goal of this descriptive research is to systematically, factually, and accurately depict the facts, characteristics, and relationships between the investigated phenomena.

Data collection for this research was primarily conducted through a literature

review. The author comprehensively gathered information from a range of sources, including academic publications such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books that extensively discuss Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics, Cyprus-Egypt relations, and East Mediterranean energy and security issues. Furthermore, we meticulously consulted official documents, encompassing reports and policy papers issued by the governments of both Cyprus and Egypt, alongside those from pertinent regional and international organizations like the European Union, and specialized regional forums such as the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). To ensure a well-rounded perspective, we also drew from reliable international media, closely analyzing news stories and investigative pieces from respectable journals that frequently discuss the Eastern Mediterranean's changing geopolitical environment.

The collected data was then rigorously interpreted and analyzed using geopolitical analysis. This particular approach enabled us to systematically identify and examine the narratives, representations, and symbols employed by state actors to frame their partnership and justify their strategic alliance. In addition to this, a comparative regional analysis was specifically utilized to observe how Cyprus and Egypt strategically position themselves within the broader regional security structure and various energy coalitions. This comparative lens allowed us to critically assess their stance relative to other key regional actors, particularly Turkey and Israel. This rigorous and multi-faceted analytical process ensures that all arguments and claims presented throughout this article are firmly based on accurate, comprehensive, and thoroughly validated information obtained from a variety of credible sources.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Eastern Mediterranean has historically been important because of its geographical position as a gateway to the eastern areas of the Mediterranean and the Middle East (Esber, 2018). In recent years, the region has gained international engagement due to discoveries of natural gas in the waters off the coast of Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel. Discoveries were first made in 2009 within Israel's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), followed by discoveries in Cyprus's EEZ in 2011 and 2018, and Egypt in 2015 (Johansson, 2018). Cyprus, Egypt, including Israel view this potential of natural gas as beneficial for the region. For Cyprus, the gas is seen as transformative for its geo-strategic position by its political leaders, who see an increased opportunity to actively contribute

to stability in the Eastern Mediterranean (Adamides, 2022). The government looks to strengthen Cyprus's relations with regional neighbours and, in this context, has concluded agreements with Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon. Turkey remains excluded from any of these regional dialogues. It supports the internationally unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) following the 1974 war and division of the island. Ankara and the TRNC oppose Cyprus's authority to explore, extract natural gas, and to sign bilateral agreements. Turkey also asserts ownership over a section of the Cypriot EEZ located southwest of the island, which includes parts of various maritime blocks, contending it is part of the continental shelf, and is determined to protect Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot rights by any means necessary (Adamides, 2022). Therefore, Cyprus is leveraging these natural gas discoveries to enhance its partnership with Egypt, as both share mutual interests in geopolitical energy, security, and addressing regional threats.

Strategic Interests of Cyprus and Egypt in Energy Cooperation

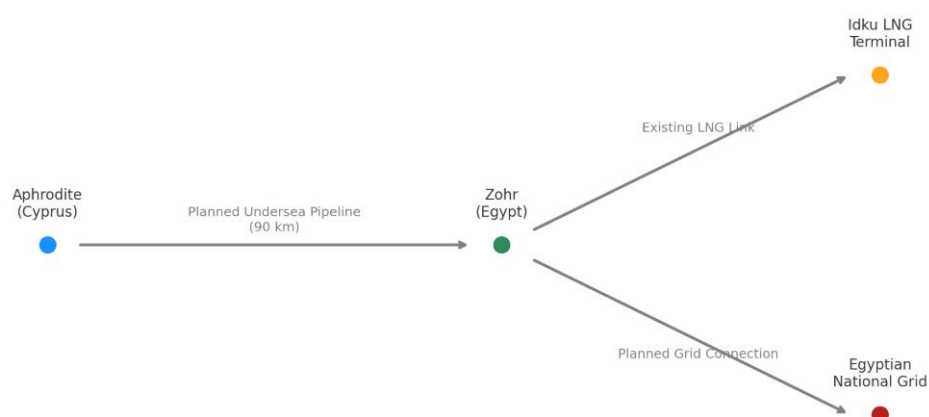
The discovery of massive natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Egypt's Zohr field in 2015 and Cyprus's Aphrodite field in 2011, has transformed the region into a new strategic frontier in energy geopolitics (Koktsidis et al., 2021). These developments have catalyzed the emergence of energy as a central axis in regional alignment, elevating both Cyprus and Egypt from peripheral actors to pivotal stakeholders in the evolving geopolitical constellation. Cyprus, with significant offshore gas reserves, has faced a persistent challenge in commercializing its source (Abdel-Razek, 2024). Conversely, Egypt, once a net exporter of gas, has recently been grappling with a severe domestic energy shortage. The convergence of these contrasting realities has led to mutually beneficial partnerships, whereby Cypriot gas is directed toward Egypt's processing infrastructure, which in turn enhances Cairo's energy security and export capacity (Youssef, 2024).

Cyprus has long faced political and economic challenges that limit its integration into the Middle East (Demiryol, 2019). For instance, despite being geographically proximate, any energy cooperation with Turkey is rendered nearly impossible due to longstanding disputes related to Northern Cyprus (Eissler & Arasıl, 2014). As a result, alternative export routes, such as the East Med pipeline connecting Cypriot and Israeli gas fields to Greece and Italy, have been considered. However, these projects have failed

to secure adequate funding and have faced opposition from Turkey, making regional alignment with the Middle East even more complicated. The United States has also been hesitant to support these efforts due to the risk of exacerbating regional tensions.

For Cyprus, the discovery of the Aphrodite gas field in 2011. Followed by four smaller discoveries, signalled its potential to emerge as a regional gas actor. However, its small domestic market and limited demand have stalled full-scale development. Political and technical obstacles such as the geopolitical rivalry with Turkey, the non-viability of the East Med pipeline, and logistic challenges of deep-sea extraction have rendered alternative export routes unfeasible (Tsakiris, 2017). In this context, Egypt's well-developed liquefaction infrastructure has emerged as a strategic market. The planned 90-kilometer underwater pipeline connecting Cyprus's Aphrodite gas field with Egypt's Zohr field exemplifies this pragmatic approach. A planned pipeline connecting Cyprus's Aphrodite gas field to Egypt's liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities will cost between \$800 million and \$1 billion (Reuters, 2018). The pipeline is designed to transport up to one billion cubic feet of gas per day, which will be either liquefied for re-export or channelled into the Egyptian national grid (Abdel-Razek, 2024). By leveraging Egypt's existing infrastructure and avoiding politically sensitive transit corridors, Cyprus can finally unlock its gas reserves while gaining geopolitical leverage as a reliable energy contributor to Europe's diversification efforts.

Figure 1. Schematic Energy Flow: Cyprus to Egypt (Aphrodite - Zohr - LNG/Grid)



Reference: (Theia Consulting Group, 2024)

The picture provides a simplified yet strategic overview of the planned and

existing energy infrastructure connecting Cyprus's Aphrodite gas field to Egypt's Zohr gas field, and subsequently to two key endpoints: the Idku LNG Terminal and the Egyptian National Grid. To the left of the picture is Aphrodite, Cyprus's first and largest offshore gas field. It is the starting point of the planned 90-kilometer undersea pipeline, which will transport raw gas directly to Egypt's Zohr field, an already developed offshore production site in the Eastern Mediterranean. This undersea connection is not just a technical project; it symbolizes a strategic realignment.

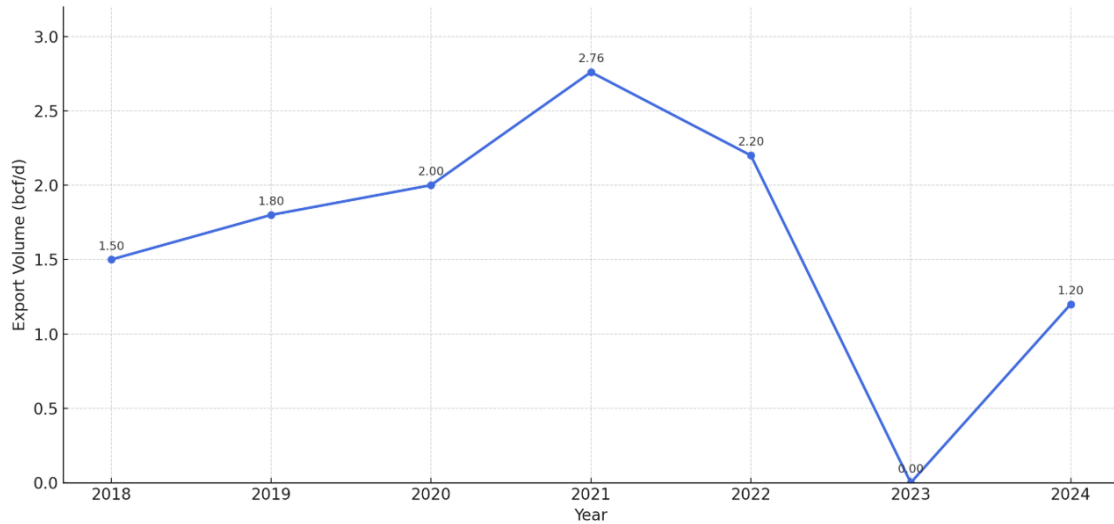
With processing capacity, export infrastructure, and expanding domestic energy needs, Egypt is a suitable partner for Cyprus, which lacks domestic demand and faces geopolitical barriers when exporting gas through Greece and Turkey. The flow of gas splits into two directions once it reaches Zohr: upward, in the direction of the Idku LNG Terminal, a long-standing hub for the export of liquified natural gas to Europe and other countries. As part of a long-term strategy to incorporate Cypriot gas into Egypt's domestic energy system, this route takes advantage of Egypt's advantageous location as a regional energy gateway, descending toward the Egyptian National Grid. These alternative attempts to lessen Egypt's dependency on external sources, especially gas imports from Israel, whose dependability is being called into question due to geopolitical tensions, and address the country's recent gas shortages.

The Zohr field acts as a central hub, both technically and geopolitically. Where imported gas is processed and rerouted based on Egypt's internal consumption needs and export ambitions. Thus, Zohr becomes not just a production site but a regional energy node of strategic importance.

From Egypt's point of view, cooperation with Cyprus is an urgent strategic necessity. After reaching a peak production of 2.76 billion cubic feet per day in 2021, Egypt's flagship Zohr gas field has experienced a sharp decline, dropping to 1.2 billion cubic feet per day by early 2024 (Abdel-Razek, 2024). This downturn, attributed to technical issues such as reservoir pressure depletion and water infiltration, transformed Egypt from a net exporter to a net importer of gas by 2024. To close the gap between production and domestic consumption, especially during high-demand summer months, Egypt resumed LPN imports for the first time since 2018, relying on a floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU). In this context, securing Cypriot gas through pipeline supply becomes not only economically efficient, due to lower processing costs compared

to LNG, but also strategically vital for national energy resilience. Moreover, pipeline-based imports from Cyprus could reduce Egypt's overreliance on Israeli gas amid growing regional instability, thereby strengthening its autonomy and energy security.

Figure 2. Cyprus-Egypt Gas Export Trend (2018-2024)



Reference: (Bowden, 2025)

According to the picture above, between 2018 and 2021, energy cooperation between Cyprus and Egypt experienced a phase of steady growth, marked by the initiation of natural gas exports from Cyprus's Aphrodite field to Egypt's liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals, particularly Idku and Damietta. During this period, export volumes rose from 1.5 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) in 2018 to a peak of 2.76 bcf/d in the third quarter of 2021 (Theia Consulting Group, 2024). This growth phase symbolized the apex of bilateral energy diplomacy, as both countries capitalized on Egypt's existing infrastructure to channel gas exports to Europe, thus avoiding the financial and geopolitical complexities of constructing multilateral pipeline networks. This increasing energy flow also signified a strategic synergy between the two nations.

However, this upward trend came to a halt in 2022, ushering in a crisis phase characterized by a sharp decline in export volumes. This primary cause was the diminishing output from Egypt's Zohr gas field, which had served as the backbone of the country's LNG production. By 2023, Cyprus's gas exports to Egypt had ceased entirely, with volumes dropping to zero. Several factors contributed to this disruption, including declining reservoir pressure at Zohr, a national gas deficit in Egypt ranging between 1.2 and 1.3 bcf/d, and financial instability due to the government's delayed payments to

international energy firms. Notably, the Italian company Eni had received only 25% of the \$1.7 billion owed to it by the Egyptian government as of late 2024, leading to a suspension of drilling operations. These developments exposed Egypt's structural vulnerability to domestic production fluctuations and fiscal stress, which in turn undermined investor confidence and destabilized its energy partnerships. In early 2024, tentative signs of recovery emerged, with export volumes rebounding modestly to 1.2 bcf/d in the first quarter. This partial recovery was supported by renewed commitments on both sides (Theia Consulting Group, 2024).

Thus, the Cyprus-Egypt gas partnership is rooted in reciprocal strategic interests. This bilateral cooperation was institutionalized through a 2018 agreement to construct a subsea pipeline connecting the Aphrodite gas field directly to Egypt's LNG terminals. Cyprus gains access to both regional and European markets through Egyptian facilities, while Egypt mitigates its energy deficit, diversifies its supply source, and reinforces its role as a regional energy hub. More broadly, this partnership laid the groundwork for the formation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) in 2018, co-initiated by Cyprus and Egypt alongside Greece, Italy, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority (EMGF, 2025). While the EMGF is formally an energy cooperation platform, its structural exclusion of Turkey and emphasis on international law (United Nations Convention Law of the Sea) underscores its latent geopolitical dimension. The forum thus functions as an Energy Geopolitics coalition that articulates a counter-hegemonic vision to Turkish regional ambitions. This cooperation illustrates how resource complementarities and geopolitical imperatives can foster pragmatic alliances, even amid broader regional fragmentation.

Balance of Threats Against Turkish Expansion

Beyond energy, Cyprus and Egypt gave institutionalized cooperation in the domains of maritime security and military coordination, largely in response to perceived threats emanating from Turkey's assertive posture in the Eastern Mediterranean (Alibabalu & Sarkhanov, 2022). Since Ankara intensified its unilateral gas exploration in the contested waters of Northern Cyprus, which is administered by the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), and bolstered its naval presence, regional anxieties over Turkish expansionism have escalated. Beyond the region, Turkey's

behaviour sets a dangerous precedent. If left unchecked, it could embolden other countries to disregard international norms, fostering instability in maritime regions in the Eastern Mediterranean or even on a global scale. The consequences extend far beyond the Eastern Mediterranean, threatening the global maritime order that underpins peaceful cooperation and security (Evriviades, 2025). Cyprus affirms a collective commitment to tackling any possible regional instability and security by implementing a comprehensive strategy that integrates regional alignment, international attention, and legal action. And investment in energy and security. Strengthening ties with necessary partners such as Egypt, Greece, Israel, and Lebanon (Government of Cyprus, 2025). In this context, the Cyprus-Egypt plus Greece through a trilateral security partnership has evolved as an informal balancing mechanism, strategically designed to counterbalance Turkish influence (Grigoriadis, 2020). This is essential in combating the backdrop of Turkey's revisionism that challenges the status quo and has led to the creation of strategic military-energy alliances among Cyprus, Egypt, and Greece (Proedrou, 2023).

The increasingly assertive foreign policy of Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, marked by military involvement in Cyprus, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and the Eastern Mediterranean, has raised serious concern among neighbouring countries (AP, 2021). Cypriot Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides argues that Turkey is pursuing a neo-Ottoman agenda aimed at national hegemony, as reflected in its establishment of a drone base in Northern Cyprus and refusal to engage in lawful maritime delimitation. These developments signal not just a projection of power but a strategic posture perceived as aggressive and destabilizing by other actors in the Eastern Mediterranean (Kaliber, 2024). This regional anxiety can be analyzed through Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory, which posits that states form alliances in response to perceived threats rather than sheer power. Turkey's geographic proximity, growing military capabilities, and revisionist intentions elevate its threat perception, particularly for Cyprus. In response, Cyprus has deepened strategic cooperation with Egypt, Israel, and the United States, not merely to balance power, but to counter what it views as a potential threat (Tziarras, 2019). This alignment, along with proposals for a regional security organization, reflects a collective effort to deter Turkish expansionism and maintain stability in the region.

Since 2014, Cyprus-Egypt plus Greece have conducted regular joint military exercises, most prominently the "Medusa" in Egyptian and Cypriot territories. These

operations are more than signalling gestures, they aim to enhance naval interoperability, reinforce political cohesion, and project a message of collective deterrence (Johansson, 2018). Additionally, Israel also prioritizes a strategic military-energy alliance with these countries to keep Turkish aspirations at bay, even if this possibly comes at the cost of a more massive gas export strategy. Israel's moves amplify Turkey's view of regional exclusion. Turkey considers the allocation of (potentially energy-rich) seawaters in the region unfavourable and hence challenges the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean, employing both brokering bilateral deals with other regional actors (such as Libya and others) and undertaking unilateral military exercises and energy exploration (Proedrou, 2023).

Analyzed through the lens of Regional Security Complex Theory, Cyprus and Egypt's alignments reflect the logic of regional securitization whereby geographically proximate actors from security interdependencies in reaction to common threats. The pattern conforms to RSCT's assertion that regional complexes emerge when security concerns are so interlinked that the security of each actor cannot be considered in isolation (Kaliber, 2024). Symbolically, these exercises represent a narrative shift away from security being monopolized by singular hegemonic actors such as Turkey or NATO. Instead, they emphasize a bilateral approach to regional order-shift, rooted in shared energy interests, respect for international maritime law, and mutual concerns over sovereignty and territorial integrity. The partnership framework thus constitutes a counterweight to Turkish assertiveness and exemplifies the practice of strategic balancing under conditions of regional flux (Kiralp, 2023).

Implications for Regional Geopolitics and Cyprus's Role in the Middle East

The Cyprus-Egypt partnership transcends functional cooperation in energy and security (Youssef, 2024). It actively contributes to the re-constellation of the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical landscape. This alliance represents the formation of a new regional axis anchored in stability, legalism, and inclusive multilateralism, particularly in contrast to revisionist or unilateral tendencies exhibited by other regional actors. From the perspective of critical geopolitics, this partnership challenges static regional categorizations and illustrates how spatial imaginaries are redefined through strategic interaction. Cyprus and Egypt, often considered peripheral to dominant Middle Eastern

or European power structures, have repositioned themselves as central players in shaping a new regional order. Their alliance promotes an alternative vision of regionalism that privileges legal norms (such as UNCLOS), cross-cultural dialogue, and functional integration.

Through a common Mediterranean heritage and long-standing diplomatic ties, the partnership also reaffirms Cyprus's cultural and historical ties to the Arab world, especially Egypt. The alliance gains a geocultural dimension from the religious and cultural intersection of Islam and Orthodox Christianity, which supports the notion that regional cooperation needs to be constrained by civilizational binaries. The Middle East's traditional borders are further blurred by Cyprus's membership in the EMGF alongside Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan, signifying a move toward a more flexible and hybrid regional identity. This change reflects the theoretical idea that regions are socially constructed spaces influenced by changing political, economic, and cultural interactions rather than being unchangeable entities.

Finally, geopolitics and energy cooperation between Cyprus and Egypt offers a compelling case study of how geopolitical alliances can function not only as instruments of strategic balancing but also as platforms for redefining regional identities and fostering cooperative security architectures. Cyprus, long viewed as a marginal actor, is now emerging as a strategic pivot connecting Europe, the Middle East, and the broader Mediterranean.

CONCLUSION

The geopolitical and energy partnership between Cyprus and Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean is an excellent study to use as a reference for how countries with shared interests can respond to threats and potential cooperation for mutual benefit. In this cooperation, Cyprus and Egypt not only face the same threats but also need each other in the context of energy utilization, especially gas. This cooperation can serve as a framework for how countries that have similar circumstances to Cyprus and Egypt can cooperate.

From a security perspective, Cyprus and Egypt's cooperation through bilateral and trilateral include Greece in a military exercise, functions as a regional balancing mechanism. This aligns with Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat Theory, which posits that states form alliances not only based on power but primarily in response to perceived

threats. A classic example of balancing behaviour intended to deter perceived aggression from a common external power is reflected in Cyprus-Egypt defense strategies. A mini lateral security arrangement that opposes hegemonic tendencies and provides a type of regional order based on respect for sovereignty and shared interests is emerging as a result of their cooperative efforts.

Furthermore, the implications of this bilateral extend beyond the current geopolitical environment. By extending the parameters of the conventional conception of the region, it helps to shape Cyprus's changing identity within the Middle East constellation. Cyprus holds a hybrid geopolitical position as an EU member with deep historical, religious, and cultural ties to the Arab world. Cyprus is able to use its function as a bridge to the Middle East and Europe because it links two continents. The prevalent belief that the Middle East is solely Arab or Muslim is challenged by its active involvement in regional affairs. Therefore, this partnership encourages academics to embrace more inclusive and hybrid frameworks of regional analysis and to reevaluate the fluidity of regional identities.

There are ramifications for Middle Eastern studies from this shift. In order to better capture the dynamic interactions between state and non-state across conventionally rigid regional borders, it emphasizes the value of alternative analyses like interregionalism, constructivism, and geocultural theory. Because of their increasingly important roles in determining the geopolitics of the larger Middle East, so-called "peripheral" actors like Cyprus must be included in academic research. The Cyprus-Egypt model presents a strong argument for strategic cooperation based on respect for one another, legal framework, and multilateral engagement to regional policymakers. Energy resources, which are frequently a cause of conflict, can be used as tools for cooperation.

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