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Deniz ÜNVER

Independent Researcher

With its location in between Asia, Africa, and Europe, it is no doubt that the Eastern Mediterranean occupies a significant place in global commerce.[1]. In addition to this, its strategic location provides the shortest sea route between Asian and European markets[2] . As a matter of fact, approximately 12 percent of global trade and goods, worth more than 1 trillion dollars, passes through the Eastern Mediterranean annually[3]. The regions position as a route for energy transportation is another notable point,[4] since almost 70 percent of Europes energy demand is transported through the Mediterranean Sea[5]. In this respect, the Peoples Republic of China is one of the major global actors that show great interest in the region.

China is accepted as a newcomer in the region even though it has increased its economic influence in the Mediterranean[6]. The region is essential for China since the eastern Mediterranean Sea constitutes a crucial part in Chinas Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). So far, China has made itself apparent in many of the countries in the region. For instance, it is known that it has invested in the Suez Canal Industrial Zone in Egypt[7]. Also, China has been building the ports of Egypts New Administrative Capital. The country has been involved and invested in many clean energy projects in Greece[8]. Moreover, it is known that China has been involved in many projects on transportation, technology, and other industries in Israel,[9] while the Emba Hunutlu power station constitutes the largest

Chinese investment in the country. In the case of Israel, the aim of Beijing can be explained as seeking a way to access to the high-tech industry of Israel, which has alarmed the US[10]. In Turkey, China has been in negotiation to finance the Canal İstanbul project[11], while the private sector of China has participated in mining, transportation, and energy projects in the country[12]. Another striking example is the case of Libya. In Libya, Petro China, which is a state-run company of China, has engaged in business with the National Oil Corporation (NOC)[13]. In Syria, China has engaged in a reconstruction role since 2017.[14] Finally, in the north of Lebanon, China is expected to be involved in the expansion of the Tripoli port[15].

It can be said that Chinas port construction is crucial for the Chinese influence in the world. Even though the Chinese government does not officially explain its overseas activities, publicly available information shows that China currently has a foothold in at least 100 ports in 63 countries[16]. For this reason, China has invested heavily in the ports in the Mediterranean to increase its influence in the region just as in the other parts of the world[17]. The Pireus Port in Greece (which is crucial for Chinas trade with the European Union)[18]; Cherchell in Algeria; Port-Said and Alexandria in Egypt; the ports of Ashdod and Haifa in Israel; the Kumport terminal at Istanbuls Ambarlı port; and the ports of Savona, Trieste, Genoa, and Naples in Italy[19] are the known examples of Chinese port investment strategy. Indeed, as reports by the official Chinese media have stated, Chinese President Xi Jinping has visited a port almost every year ever since 2013,[20] which shows the importance attributed to the international ports invested by Beijing.

Apart from economic relations, Beijing has increased its military presence in the Mediterranean as well. Accordingly, in May 2015, it conducted its first military exercise in the region with Russia[21]. According to US sources, the Mediterranean has turned into one of the most militarized regions in the world[22].

Nevertheless, the recent political disputes and tensions over the natural resources have shown that the Eastern Mediterranean's security and stability is essenttial for the future of the Chinas Belt and Road Initiative[23]. In January 2009, the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC), Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine participated the EastMed Gas Forum[24] and the exclusion of Turkey intensified the existing tensions in the Mediterranean. The statements of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis were the sharpest indicators of the conflict which continues in the region[25]. Moreover, the presence of the US navy, which backs Greece and GASC, also deepens the tension between Turkey and Greece/GASC.

It can be suggested that China has so far been careful not to enter in any form of conflict in the region to realize its economic goals. This can be analyzed from many of the Chinese moves towards conflicts in the Mediterranean. For instance, in Syria, Beijing has vetoed UN resolution together with Moscow while putting its embassy in Damascus to work throughout the conflict[26] to increase its level of investments in the country. Another point to remember is that China backed Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya during the civil war, which explains the 20 billion dollars worth of investment Libya received by the Chinese government.[27] Both examples point out that the Chinese presence in the region is meant to ensure that China achieves its economic ambitions while avoiding

military conflicts.

However, different countries in the region have different approaches towards the presence of China. For Turkey, China is seen as a crucial actor for the realization of the Middle Corridor Initiative. With the Middle Corridor Initiative, Turkey plans maximize its strategic location between Asia, Middle East, and Europe by becoming a hub for East-West trade[28]. To do so, Ankara and Beijing have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to unify Turkeys Middle Corridor Initiative with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative[29]. This motivation was confirmed with the statement of Adil Karaismailoğlu, Turkeys Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, who stated that; with the Middle Corridor, Turkey will turn into a new global logistics base[30].

It is obvious that Chinese influence has been growing in the Eastern Mediterranean, just as in many other parts of the world in parallel with Chinas increasing economic power. Concerning the region, Chinas general policy seems to be about avoiding antagonizing any of the regional actors, while China continues negotiations with Turkey on the port of İzmir[31] and Canal İstanbul, both of which occupy strategic places in the future of the BRI. However, the Chinese stance on the Cyprus issue and on Ankaras position remains ambiguous. China supports the presence of the UN peacekeeping mission in the island while not intervening in any part of the conflict[32]. China has also distanced itself from Turkeys standoff with some Mediterranean countries over the use of natural resources in the waters surrounding the island of Cyprus. It is an indisputable fact that having the longest coastal line in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey stands as a regional power in the Mediterranean whose influence cannot be denied either by China or the rest of the world. Consequently, Chinas ultimate stance towards Turkey in the region will have significant geopolitical implications.

**Photograph: https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/04/28/are-japan-and-china-competing-in-the-middle-east/*

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About the author:

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Posta: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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