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**The U.S. – Cyprus relations evolution following the Eastern Mediterranean Security
and Energy Partnership Act (2019-2024)**

Thesis

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The U.S. – Cyprus relations evolution after the “Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019”

Abstract

The Eastern Mediterranean has become an increasingly contested energy–security arena, where unresolved conflicts, undelimited EEZs, and Turkey’s assertive maritime posture intersect with new hydrocarbon discoveries and heightened European energy diversification needs following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Against this backdrop, this thesis investigates how the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019 reshaped U.S.–Cyprus relations from the 2018 U.S.–Cyprus Statement of Intent through 2024, and which actors drove the shift, while assessing implications for regional stability within a Regional Security Complex Theory framework emphasizing great-power “penetration” via alignments rather than “overlay.” Methodologically, the study employs multi-source qualitative secondary research combining content analysis of academic and policy materials and news reporting with a comparative assessment of U.S.–Cyprus relations before and after the Act. The analysis finds that the Act constituted a pivotal policy and institutional inflection point: it formalized U.S. support for the Greece–Cyprus–Israel partnership (3+1) and energy diplomacy, while embedding Cyprus more directly into U.S.-linked security architectures. Concrete outcomes included the acceleration of structured bilateral mechanisms, progressive removal of the U.S. arms embargo, expanded access to security assistance and interoperability tools, and new cooperation platforms such as CYCLOPS and the New Jersey National Guard State Partnership Program, alongside enhanced crisis-response cooperation. The shift was enabled by bipartisan congressional action and diaspora-linked advocacy, compounded by Turkey’s S-400 procurement and deteriorating U.S.–Turkey and Turkey–Israel relations, and by U.S. efforts to curb malign influence, especially from Russia. Overall, the Act helped reposition Cyprus from a constrained small state to a consequential security partner and operational hub, with implications for deterrence, energy security, and the consolidation of a flexible, institutionally “thickened” regional security complex in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Key words

Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, United States, Energy Partnership Act, Regional alliances,
Regions Security Complex

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The U.S. – Cyprus relations evolution after the “Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019”

1. Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean is a region that includes the states of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. Situated at the geographic crossroads of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, it has for millennia been an arena of competition. The region is characterised by turbulent periods and crises arising from national rivalries, conflicts, and civil wars. The Cyprus issue, due to Turkey's illegal occupation of Northern Cyprus, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the civil wars in Lebanon and Syria, and the Greek-Turkish disputes constitute a dystopian landscape in the region. The discovery of significant hydrocarbon resources in Israel (Tamar and Leviathan), in Cyprus (Aphrodite, and Calypso natural gas fields), in Egypt (Zohr and Nour) and Greece (southwest of Crete) has reshaped regional alliances and prompted a notable shift in American foreign policy, moving the U.S. from a neutral mediator to a more active supporter of the Greece-Cyprus-Israel coalition. However, while energy resources exist under undelimited Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), new conflicts were created as Turkey challenged Cypriot, Greek and Egyptian sovereignty, prompting these countries to form an alliance to counter Turkish aggression (Proedrou, 2023). As the Russian-Ukrainian war deprived Europe of energy sources, the EU and certain member states (e.g. France, Italy), as well as major powers such as the United States, Russia and China, turned their attention to the region.

1.1 The topic and its importance

This paper examines the evolution of the United States (U.S.)-Cyprus relations after 2019, particularly following the enactment of a significant U.S. Act. The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019 was signed by President Trump and turned into law on 20 December 2019 (Senate Bill 1102), after receiving a strong bipartisan support, underscoring U.S. security interests in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The 2019 Act followed the 2018 Statement of Intent issued after the meeting between U.S. Secretary Pompeo and then Cypriot Foreign Minister Christodoulides, who was elected President of the Republic of Cyprus in February 2023. Since then, the security partnership has continued to deepen in several areas such as counterterrorism, nonproliferation, maritime security, search and rescue,

counter-trafficking, cybersecurity, disaster and emergency response, and non-combatant evacuation. The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act (2019) serves not only as a crucial element in the development of the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Cyprus, but also significantly affects regional stability and security, contributing to the embedment of the regional security complex among Greece, Cyprus, Israel, plus the US (3+1) and Egypt. The Act introduces energy diplomacy strengthening energy partnership between countries in the region that have recently discovered energy deposits and natural gas fields, by establishing the U.S.-Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center and ensuring U.S. participation in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum. Moreover, the Act has a security and defence dimension as it removes the prohibition on arms sales to the Republic of Cyprus and authorises Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Greece and international military education and training (IMET) for Greece and Cyprus. From a geopolitical perspective the Act attempts to minimise Russian influence in Cyprus but also in Turkey, as the latter purchases a S-400 air defense system.

Overall, after the 2019 Act the US-Cyprus relations have progressively evolved from peripheral diplomatic engagement to structured strategic partnership embedded in regional energy and security architectures.

1.2 The scope of the thesis

This paper aims to explore the factors that strengthened the relationship between the United States and Cyprus following the 2019 Act up to 2024, as well as to examine how this partnership impacts on regional stability and security. It also aims to highlight the contribution of various actors, internal and external, that play a crucial role in the US political scene during the formation of its foreign policy towards regions and third countries.

1.3 Literature review and the gap in the literature

The existing literature concerning the Eastern Mediterranean, U.S. foreign policy, and the strategic relationship with Cyprus is extensive but often not so comprehensive. The current literature of the evolution of the U.S.-Cyprus relations following the 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, can be divided into three interconnected thematic areas: the conceptualization of the Eastern Mediterranean as a distinct security complex, the role of energy as a geopolitical catalyst, and the evolution of Cyprus as a strategic actor. A major part of literature applies Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), originally developed by Buzan and Wæver (2003), to the Eastern Mediterranean. Scholars like Tziampiris

(2019) argue that the region has transitioned from a peripheral intersection of Europe and the Middle East into an autonomous regional subsystem characterized by shared security concerns and deep interdependence. Amable (2022) further expands on this by combining the Great Powers interaction with these nascent complexes through "penetration" rather than "overlay," reinforcing, in this way, local security dynamics. The consensus in this literature is that the Eastern Mediterranean is highly penetrated by external actors and mainly Great Powers—namely the U.S., Russia, and China—whose strategic choices deeply influence regional polarity (Shlykov & Koldunova, 2023; Tran & Zoubir, 2023). The second thematic area of literature focuses on the transformative impact of hydrocarbon discoveries in the Levantine Basin. Proedrou (2023) and Asderaki (2021) argue that energy reserves acted as a double-edged sword: fostering cooperation among Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Egypt, while simultaneously reviving Turkey's revisionism. This literature highlights how energy security shifted from a purely economic issue to a primary driver of geopolitical alignments, prompting the institutionalization of mechanisms like the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) and drawing renewed, pragmatic interest from the United States to counter Russian energy dominance in Europe. The thematic area of research explores the shifting foreign policy of the Republic of Cyprus and its engagement with the United States. Pedi and Kouskouvelis (2019) conceptualize Cyprus as a "small state seeking status," arguing that Nicosia has successfully leveraged its geography and EU membership to punch above its weight. Tziarras (2019) builds on that by analyzing Cyprus's proactive use of "quasi-alliances" (the trilateral and 3+1 mechanisms) to balance against Turkish aggression. Concurrently, literature on U.S. foreign policy emphasizes the role of the U.S. Congress as a critical architect of international relations. Scholars like Johnson (2013) and Lindsay (2018) illustrate how legislative bodies, driven by bipartisan consensus and lobbying efforts, can force a strategic pivot in the executive branch's regional approach, as evidenced by the passage of the 2019 Act.

While the existing literature robustly covers the theoretical emergence of the Eastern Mediterranean security complex and the immediate political implications of energy discoveries, there remains a gap regarding the empirical implementation and operational outcomes of U.S. policy shifts between 2020 and 2024. There is a scarcity of comprehensive academic analysis detailing how this legislative turning point translated into localized, institutionalized security architectures on the ground. Specifically, the literature lacks a dedicated examination of how localized milestones—such as the gradual lifting of the U.S. arms embargo, the implementation of the Acquisition & Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)

, the establishment of the CYCLOPS training center, and the State Partnership Program (SPP) with the New Jersey National Guard —have fundamentally redefined US-Cyprus relationship. This thesis aims to bridge this gap by transitioning the analysis from the legislative intent of 2019 to the practical, strategic reality, demonstrating how these specific operational developments solidify the U.S.–Cyprus partnership within the regional security complex.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology for studying the evolution of the U.S.-Cyprus relations after the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019 would involve the theoretical framework of Regional Security Complexes and the role of Great powers in them.

Since the research questions deal with the causal inference in the US-Cyprus relationship after the 2019 Act, a qualitative approach will be used to explore the motivations, strategic interests and complex dynamics driving this relationship. Rather than a simple narrative review in chronological order, the analysis will focus on specific legislative milestones, and specifically the 2019 Act which is perceived, in our research design, as a milestone and indicator of change in the US- Cyprus relationship.

Archival and document based research will be conducted, analyzing a data corpus consisting of primary and secondary data. Specifically, primary data derived from policy and legislative documents, like bilateral agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) and secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, academic books focusing on Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics, U.S. foreign policy, and energy security and Think Tank reports.

Archival research is suitable for the thesis' research question, since archives are considered helpful in giving a behind-the-curtain insight into foreign policy decisions (Larson, 2017). In addition, document analysis as a qualitative method allows to “examine and interpret” data “to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge”, (Bowen 2009: 30-31) and is, hence, particularly applicable to the research question. Finally, reputable news articles will complement the data corpus to capture real-time diplomatic shifts and regional reactions.

The content analysis helps to examine the motivations behind the US Cyprus relationship and highlights the complex dynamics between the states in the Eastern Mediterranean. This methodology would help understand how the Act has influenced the U.S. - Cyprus relations

and consequently the regional interstate relations, taking as starting point the 2018 Statement of Intent until the end of Biden's administration in January 2025.

In addition to secondary research, this study utilizes the author's direct professional experience to yield unique, primary empirical insights. Drawing on the author's tenure as a member of the Cyprus EU Council Presidency team in 2012, the research is informed by firsthand observations of a distinct shift in the diplomatic posture of EU allies toward Cyprus, as well as a changing European consensus regarding the underlying responsibilities for EU-NATO relational challenges. Furthermore, by leveraging the author's role as the first Co-Director of the CYCLOPS regional training hub, and his participation in Israeli and Cypriot negotiations on the Search and Rescue delimitation and coordination agreement will supplement the content analysis and ground the theoretical research in practical realities.

Research question and Hypothesis

RQ1: What is the significance of the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019 for shifting U.S. policy towards Cyprus and the enhancement of security and stability of the region?

RQ2: Which are the main drivers behind this shift?

In order to answer the above questions the U.S.–Cyprus relations between 2019-2024 will be explored

H1: Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019 marks a pivotal shift in the relationship between the United States and Cyprus.

H2: The U.S. sought to reduce Russian military and economic influence in Cyprus through the 2019 Act.

H3: The enhancement of U.S.–Cyprus ties between 2019 and 2024 was primarily driven by Washington's goal to keep the Eastern Mediterranean under its control.

H4: The 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act stabilized the regional security complex by aligning the interests of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel with the U.S.

Argument

The main argument of this study is that the 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act **signals a shift in U.S. policy** towards the regional dynamics, and the formation of new security architectures in the region such as the Greek-Cypriot-Israeli triangle. Important actors and several factors have led to the enhancement of U.S.-Cyprus ties following the 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act related to the interstate relations in the region and the internal political situation in Cyprus.

Specifically, the worsening of Turkey's relationships with both Israel and the United States, the strengthening of Israel-Cyprus relations, and regional instability caused by events in Lebanon, Syria, and Libya created a window of opportunity for improved US-Cyprus relations. The Cypriot government, demonstrating political willingness to strengthen ties with the U.S., capitalized on this opportunity. Additionally, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has contributed to Cyprus moving away from its previously foreign policy stance and the US started to seem as a more reliable ally since the change of their policy towards Turkey.

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis is organized into six logically sequential chapters, designed to guide the reader from the foundational theoretical frameworks to the empirical analysis of United States foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Following the introduction and methodological outline in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 establishes the study's theoretical grounding, utilizing Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) alongside the concepts of soft and limited hard balancing to frame Great Power competition in the region. Chapter 3 provides the necessary historical and geopolitical context, tracing the evolution of Cyprus's traditional strategic alignments, the transformative impact of Levantine Basin energy discoveries, and the critical Cyprus-Israel rapprochement that set the stage for broader Western cooperation.

The second half of the study shifts toward targeted empirical analysis and theoretical synthesis. Chapter 4 forms the analytical core of the research, systematically detailing the legislative intent and operational milestones catalyzed by the 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act—most notably the lifting of the U.S. arms embargo, the establishment of the CYCLOPS regional training hub, and the initiation of the 2024 Strategic Dialogue. Building upon this evidence, Chapter 5 engages in a comprehensive discussion of the findings, interpreting the institutionalized U.S.–Cyprus security architecture as a calculated mechanism

for strategic denial against Russian influence, while simultaneously navigating the complexities of Turkish regional divergence. Finally, Chapter 6 synthesizes the research, explicitly answering the core research questions, validating the working hypotheses, and offering forward-looking policy recommendations alongside avenues for future longitudinal research.

2. Theoretical Framework: Regional Security Complexes (RSC)

A notable characteristic of the contemporary international system is the diversity of security patterns observed in regional dynamics. Exploring the global regions reveals markedly diverse security landscapes. These variances signify more than only varied dyadic connections, which might be integrated within a broader systemic framework (Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier, 2012, p. 17). A burgeoning number of researchers conclude that these entities represent operational systems that exist beneath the global framework, a perspective often associated with the burgeoning literature on 'new regionalism.' This thesis, building on this framework, specifically expands upon the literature categorised as 'new regionalism' (Vayrynen, 2003; Kelly, 2007; Fawn, 2009), with a particular focus on regional sub-systems.

The idea of Regional Security Complexes (RSCs) originates from Barry Buzan's early work *People, States and Fear* (1983) and was refined in later publications (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Buzan's approach argues that international security dynamics become clearer when examined at the regional rather than the global level. In his initial definition, Buzan described a security complex as a cluster of states whose key security concerns are so interconnected that they cannot be meaningfully understood in isolation from one another (Adamides & Christou, 2016).

Buzan and Wæver (2003, p. 44) characterise the RSC "as a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another". We use their terminology here, as it underscores the significant security interdependence among states within these systems. The significance of the interaction among units within these complexes is a principal reason for the imperative to concentrate on the regional level. The significant degree of security interdependence and the inseparability of security factors indicate a viable system.

Certain authors emphasize the interplay between global and regional levels to delineate categories of regional order. Katzenstein's (2005) analysis posits that the variance in European and Asian orders is influenced by their respective positions within the American imperium and the divergent orientations of the regional core nations, Germany and Japan. He underscores the permeability of regions to globalization and American global hegemony, as well as the influence of varying perspectives on regional formalization, multilateralism, and supranational authority among these core states. Acharya (2007) adheres to this internal-external focus by

delineating six categories of regional reactions to power, which are not mutually exclusive, that influence regional order through the roles of external and regional powers. Although these studies offer a concrete classification method, they underscore that regional systems function within a broader context. There exists a considerable interplay between the regional and global levels, now shaped by the region's relationship with the United States.

Consequently, the regional level is profoundly affected by the engagement of external big powers. This influence may manifest in various forms, including direct or indirect involvement, as well as military or economic backing. The interplay between global and regional levels is a significant factor in comprehending international security. A comprehensive analysis of this relationship will be the focus of this study regarding the Eastern Mediterranean.

In Regional Security Complex Theory, **Great Powers** operate at the "higher-level" (system level) and interact with "lower-level" complexes (regional level) through mechanisms that define the region's autonomy. The primary form of interaction is penetration, where an external power makes security alignments with local states to balance against regional threats; crucially, penetration reinforces local security dynamics rather than suppressing them. This stands in contrast to overlay, a condition where the direct presence of a Great Power is so intense (e.g., through massive military stationing) that it obliterates local security dynamics, effectively turning the region into a theater for global power rivalries rather than an autonomous complex (Buzan, 2003:157-158).

Great Powers also play a constitutive role in the formation of "nascent" or "unstructured" security regions, because an adjacent Great Power may function as a "hybrid actor" (Amable, 2022:6) simultaneously an external operator and an internal participant—that organizes local states to manage transborder security externalities . In contrast, a distant Great Power may pay only intermittent attention .Drawing on the concept of "Great Power Management," these powers often assume special rights and responsibilities to maintain regional order or act as stabilizers where local interaction capacities are weak. Furthermore, the decline of Great Power leadership or the lifting of "overlay" is often the catalyst for the emergence of autonomous regional dynamics, as regions are left to sort out their own security affairs in a more multipolar order (ibid) .

The role of great powers within the framework of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is critical to shaping the security dynamics and order within regions. Great powers influence

regional security complexes not merely through their material capabilities but also through their behavior, strategic orientations, and interactions with regional powers and other international actors. These powers often define the parameters within which regional actors operate, thereby influencing the overall security environment of a region. For instance, regional organizations such as ASEAN display limited autonomy in managing regional security primarily because great powers shape the broader context and set the boundaries for regional security policies and frameworks (Narine, 1998). In this sense, great powers act as external nodes that intersect with regional security complexes, imposing constraints or providing opportunities based on their strategic interests and actions.

Moreover, great powers not only affect regional security through direct involvement or influence but also by establishing and enforcing international norms and governance mechanisms. Their roles may include coercive or persuasive strategies aimed at norm enforcement within and across regions, thus affecting regional order and security governance. The interaction between great powers and regional actors is complex and shaped by factors such as the relative power levels of states involved and their standing in the international system (Nevers, 2007). This dynamic creates a scenario where great powers contribute to practices that maintain or change security orders. For example, in overlapping regional mechanisms of security governance, great powers' influence may coexist with other forms of governance such as security communities, complicating the regional security landscape and leading to multi-layered and sometimes overlapping security practices (Adler and Greve, 2009). Thus, great powers are indispensable in RSCT analysis as their actions profoundly shape regional security configurations, stability, and the potential for cooperation or conflict

3. The regional system of Eastern Mediterranean and the role of United States of America

3.1 The regional system of Eastern Mediterranean

The Eastern Mediterranean has, over the past decade, emerged as one of the most dynamic and contested regional systems, shaped by the convergence of geopolitics, energy, unresolved conflicts, and the influence of external powers. This region—encompassing Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Libya, and the Palestinian Territories—has increasingly been recognized as a distinct sub-regional geopolitical entity (Tziampiris, 2019). Its transformation is driven by a combination of energy discoveries, shifting alliances, geopolitical antagonisms, and external power competition, all of which define the strategic environment in which Cyprus–U.S. relations have evolved. The systemic reconfiguration of the Eastern Mediterranean began in the early 2010s and was significantly accelerated by the Arab uprisings, regional conflicts, and the intensification of migration and security crises. These developments interconnected the Middle East with the Eastern Mediterranean in unprecedented ways, creating what scholars describe as a new regional security landscape (Tziarras, 2019). According to Asderaki (2021), these crises compelled the EU and other actors to reorient their foreign policy priorities toward stability, migration management, and geopolitical competition. Within this shifting environment, Cyprus, Israel, Greece, and Egypt emerged as central poles of cooperation, driven by aligned interests in maritime security, offshore energy development, and regional stability. Conversely, Turkey’s increasingly assertive foreign policy, coupled with disputes over maritime sovereignty and energy rights, acted as a centrifugal force reshaping patterns of enmity and amity across the region (Proedrou, 2023). Among the most transformative drivers of regional change has been the discovery of offshore hydrocarbons. New gas fields off the coasts of Cyprus, Israel, Greece and Egypt provided both economic opportunities and sources of tension. As Proedrou (2023) argues, these discoveries pushed states to redefine sovereignty claims and recalibrate their strategic orientations, effectively making the Eastern Mediterranean an emerging energy–security complex. Energy has served both as a catalyst for cooperation and as a trigger for confrontation. Cyprus, Greece, and Israel have coordinated their offshore exploration activities and pursued joint infrastructure projects, while Egypt emerged as a regional energy hub. In contrast, Turkey has challenged the delimitation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), intensified naval deployments, and conducted unauthorized drilling activities, escalating tensions and prompting responses from the EU and the United States (Proedrou, 2023). Thus, energy—far from being

a purely economic issue—has become a strategic determinant of regional alignments, shaping the polarity and balance of power within the regional system. A defining feature of the evolving regional architecture is the emergence of trilateral partnerships among Cyprus–Greece–Israel and Cyprus–Greece–Egypt. These groupings are not formal alliances but rather quasi-alliances that facilitate political coordination, energy cooperation, and security dialogue. Tziarras (2019) notes that Cyprus leveraged these partnerships to move from a traditionally reactive foreign policy to a more proactive regional posture, enhancing its regional standing and compensating for its structural vulnerabilities. The trilaterals function as: Platforms of political alignment, signaling shared interests and intentions. Mechanisms of external balancing, especially in response to Turkish revisionist policies. Vehicles for energy coordination, supporting joint exploration and the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). EMGF, which was introduced based on an initiative undertaken by Egypt in January 2019, has become an international organization based in Cairo, which consists of eight members, namely, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Palestinian Authority and Jordan and three observers, the U.S., the EU and the World Bank Group.

These formations contribute to a new regional order, where clusters of cooperation coexist with intense rivalries, reinforcing the notion of the Eastern Mediterranean as a complex, multi-layered security environment. Although shaped by regional actors, the Eastern Mediterranean is also a highly penetrated regional system where external powers—particularly the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union—play decisive roles. The U.S., in particular, has bolstered its engagement through energy diplomacy, naval presence, and institutionalized participation in trilateral summits. This culminated in the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019, which formalized U.S. support for cooperation among Cyprus, Greece, and Israel. As Asderaki (2021) highlights, EU involvement oscillates between regulatory approaches and attempts to act as a geopolitical actor. The EU’s growing concern with energy diversification, regional stability, and irregular migration further heightens external interest in the region. Meanwhile, Russia remains active in Syria and Libya, while China expands its economic influence through port investments. Collectively, these external engagements underscore the Eastern Mediterranean’s significance as a strategic arena of competitive multipolarity, where regional and global interests converge (Tziampiris, 2019). Based on the insights from the literature the Eastern Mediterranean regional system can be characterized by: high conflict potential due to unresolved sovereignty disputes and militarization; energy-driven cooperation and rivalry, with hydrocarbons acting as both a

unifying force and a fault line; shifting alignments, including trilaterals and counter-coalitions; penetration by external powers, linking regional dynamics to broader U.S.–Russia–EU competition; and institutional fluidity, evident in flexible partnership architectures rather than formal alliances. The Eastern Mediterranean has consolidated into a distinct regional system where geopolitical rivalries, energy competition, and external power involvement intersect. These transformations have elevated Cyprus’s regional importance and created the strategic conditions under which U.S.–Cyprus relations intensified, eventually culminating in the 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act. Understanding this regional system is therefore essential for analyzing the evolution of contemporary U.S. policy toward Cyprus.

3.2. The role of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean and the interaction with Great Powers

Cyprus has emerged as a key player in the evolving regional dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean. Traditionally seen as a small state with inherent vulnerabilities, recent advancements in energy, security, and regional diplomacy have allowed the Republic of Cyprus to elevate its strategic profile and wield influence beyond what its size might suggest. As noted by Pedi and Kouskouvelis (2019), Cyprus now functions as a “small state seeking status” within a volatile yet opportunity-rich regional environment (p. 151). Its role is defined by its geography, energy resources, diplomatic initiatives, and its unique position as an EU member state located in the Levantine basin.

Tziampiris (2019) contends that the Eastern Mediterranean operates as a distinct regional subsystem, characterized by geographical proximity, shared security challenges, and intricate patterns of interaction. Within this subsystem, Cyprus holds a pivotal geostrategic position, situated at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. This location enhances its significance in European Union external actions, maritime security, and energy transit routes. Following the systemic transformation of the region after the Arab uprisings and the discovery of hydrocarbons, Cyprus has gained increased relevance in regional stability and energy planning (Asderaki, 2021). The discovery of substantial offshore natural gas reserves, notably the Aphrodite field, represents a significant development in bolstering Cyprus's regional role. Proedrou (2023) asserts that these energy discoveries have elevated Cyprus from a peripheral security actor to a central energy stakeholder, while simultaneously exacerbating sovereignty disputes and competition over Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Consequently,

energy serves as both a strategic asset and a source of tension, particularly in light of Turkish challenges to Cypriot drilling activities and maritime delimitations. Cyprus's capacity to leverage its EEZ and align with regional partners has enabled it to establish itself as a crucial node in emerging energy architectures, such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) and proposed pipelines connecting the region to European markets. A defining feature of Cyprus's enhanced role is its participation in institutionalized trilateral partnerships involving Greece–Cyprus–Israel and Greece–Cyprus–Egypt. Tziarras (2019) describes these formations as quasi-alliances that enable Cyprus to balance regional threats, deepen cooperation, and enhance diplomatic visibility (pp. 53–60). These partnerships facilitate coordination in security, energy, and political dialogue, serving as mechanisms for external balancing against Turkish assertiveness. Through these partnerships, Cyprus has transitioned from a reactive foreign policy stance to a more proactive regional diplomacy, strengthening ties with Israel, Egypt, and Jordan while demonstrating reliability as a regional partner to the United States and the European Union.

Moreover, due to these developments, Cyprus concluded an agreement on Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) with Lebanon. In fact, the Cyprus-Lebanon EEZ agreement was initially signed in January 2007, but it was not ratified by Lebanon. Lebanon claimed a limitation in its maritime zone due to the EEZ between Cyprus and Israel concluded in 2010 (UN, 2020). Just after the resolution of the Lebanon-Israel dispute, through a historic, U.S. brokered agreement in October 2022, Cyprus and Lebanon concluded an updated agreement in October 2025.

3.2.1 Cyprus-Russia

Russia's longstanding presence in the Eastern Mediterranean has been revived in recent years through the projection of hard power in regional conflicts in Syria and Libya. Moreover, Russia has expanded its military-technical cooperation with regional countries such as Israel, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey, the latter of which acquired the S-400 missile system, fuelling controversy with Washington (Shlykov & Koldunova, 2023). Moreover, since 2010 Russian energy companies enhanced their positions joining consortia activated in Eastern Mediterranean along with European companies such as the French Total or the Italian ENI (ibid), while the state-owned Rosatom is building the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plan, the first nuclear power plant in Turkey.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union's primary strategic objective regarding Cyprus was to prevent the island from falling under NATO's complete control and to weaken Western influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Official Russia-Cyprus relations started in 1960's, when USSR started a number of mainly economic and tax relations with the new state of Cyprus (Stergiou, 2019) .

During the 1964 Crisis, the Soviet Union played a pivotal role in supporting Archbishop Makarios against Western pressure. Moscow sent arms to the Cypriot government and warned Turkey against a military invasion. In the UN Security Council, the USSR strongly opposed the *Acheson Plan*, which it viewed as a NATO attempt to dissolve the Cypriot state, and supported Resolution 186 (1964), which established the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and reaffirmed Cypriot sovereignty. Following the 1974 Invasion, the USSR condemned the action as a NATO-instigated conspiracy. However, due to improving relations with Ankara and a desire to deepen the rift within NATO's southeastern flank, the Soviet Union did not actively oppose the subsequent Turkish invasion. As the successor to the USSR, the Russian Federation has continued to utilize its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to influence the Cyprus issue, aiming to assert its status as a great power and ensure no settlement is imposed that harms its interests (Maslova, Zabelin & Muntyan, 2019).

A defining moment in Russia's UNSC role occurred in April 2004, when just days before the referendums on the Annan Plan, Russia vetoed a U.S.-UK proposed resolution that would have provided security guarantees for the plan's implementation. Russia argued that the resolution was an attempt to exert external pressure on the Cypriot voters and insisted that any settlement must be the result of the free will of the Cypriot people. This veto effectively supported the Greek Cypriot "No" vote and blocked what Moscow perceived as a purely Western-dictated solution. In the Security Council, Russia has consistently maintained that a settlement must be based on existing UN resolutions and international law, opposing artificial deadlines or external arbitration. This stance aligns with its broader policy of supporting the Republic of Cyprus and maintaining the island as a partner outside of NATO's direct military orbit (ibid).

The relations between Cyprus and Russia were steadily warm after the country's accession to the EU in 2004. During his visit in Moscow in October 24, 2017, President Anastasiades revealed that the two countries have a long record of agreements (sixty seven) in various sectors (trade, banking, energy, tourism, and culture), stressing the contribution of Russian tourists in Cypriot economy, as over than 700,000 visited the island in 2016, while major Russian banks

such as VTB, Promsvyazbank, and Gazprombank opened branches in Cyprus (Anastasiades 2017). At that period, Cyprus called for a pragmatic approach toward the normalization of relations between EU and Russia “for the common good” (ibid). As Pedi and Kouskouvelis (2019, p.155) conclude “in the case of Russia, Cyprus has tried to enhance its status by playing the card of the consistent and useful partner, as well as that of the affinities between the two people.”).

A significant agreement that legalised a previous practice allowing Russian military vessels to use Cypriot ports for "humanitarian" reasons was signed by Nicos Anastasiades and Vladimir Putin in February 2015, despite tensions between the EU and Russia due to the annexation of Crimea (BBC, 2015). However, after the Russian invasion in Ukraine in 2022, EU and U.S. pressures led to the ban on the use of ports by Russian warships as of March 2022 (Kathimerini Cyprus, 2022). The U.S. clearly warned that this agreement puts in danger the lifting of U.S. arms embargoes against Cyprus (ibid).

3.2.2 Cyprus - China

China does not perceive the Eastern Mediterranean as a coherent region, instead it focuses on sub regions such as North Africa, Southern Europe, or the Balkans (Tran and Zoubir, 2023). However, since 2013 when the Belt and Road Initiative was introduced by President Xi Jinping, it has gradually developed economic, political, security and cultural relations with countries of the region, such as Egypt, Turkey, Greece and Cyprus (Hokayem and Momtaz, 2024, Chapter Nineteen).

China’s presence in the Eastern Mediterranean is carefully designed following the Silk Road Diplomacy approach, emphasising economic benefits for all partners, refraining from military projections and avoiding interference in internal and regional political disputes (Kahveci-Özgür & Duan, 2023). China-Cyprus relations started in 1971, however, only after the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding which introduced Cyprus to the Belt and Road Initiative, and the 2021 strategic cooperation partnership economic and trade ties were intensified (ibid). In 2022 the two countries renewed the MoU on Cooperation in Higher Education and Scientific Research and in 2024 signed an MOU on civil Aviation. China’s main interest for investments focuses on real estate, technology (Huawei dominates in 5G), tourism, ports, shipping and energy (investCyprus, n.d). China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering led a consortium in 2019 to

build the Vasilikos LNG import terminal, however the plan collapsed in 2024 (Hadjicostis, 2024).

The two countries' views are converging as regards revisionist or separatist ideas. China's position is in favor of the Republic of Cyprus as it compares the Cyprus question with Taiwan's claim for independence (Hokayem and Momtaz, 2024) Similarly, the Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides adheres for "One China" policy (CyprusMail, 2024)

Scholars observe that there is a loose and not systematic and coordinated Russian-Chinese interaction in the Eastern Mediterranean. In some cases, as in the exploitation of the port of Thessaloniki, the two powers were competitors while in other cases such as the Syrian war, they coordinated their voting in the UN Security Council (Shlykov and Koldunova 2023). Both of them developed enhanced military and economic cooperation with Turkey despite the fact that the country is a NATO member (ibid).

3.2.3 Cyprus -EU

Cyprus accession to the EU, strongly supported by Greece, was conducted in 2004 starting a whole new chapter for the island. Asderaki (2021) notes that EU involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean—driven by concerns over energy diversification, migration, and stability—has increased Cyprus's diplomatic leverage. Cyprus acts as a gateway for EU engagement in the region, shaping EU positions on maritime security, sanctions, and cooperative initiatives. Furthermore, Cyprus's alignment with broader Western frameworks contributes to the external recognition of the Eastern Mediterranean as a coherent strategic space, reinforcing the regional subsystem logic. Cyprus's current role in the Eastern Mediterranean is the result of structural factors—geography, energy, and EU membership—combined with strategic diplomatic initiatives. While still operating within the constraints of a small state, Cyprus has effectively capitalized on the region's transformation to assert itself as a significant regional actor, through partnerships, energy diplomacy, and institutional embedding.

3.2.4 Cyprus' positions towards NATO

Upon gaining independence, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus adopted a policy of non-alignment and sought to establish friendly relations with Moscow. President Makarios frequently turned to Moscow for military and diplomatic support to counter Western pressure and American plans to address the conflict according to a Western agenda (Maslova, Zabelin and Muntyan, 2019). Following the coup d'état and the subsequent Turkish invasion of Cyprus in August 1974, a strong anti-American, anti-Western, and occasionally pro-Soviet sentiment emerged in the post-dictatorial era in Greece and Cyprus, promoting the unexamined belief that NATO was responsible for the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus (Stergiou, 2020). In response to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the international community imposed an arms embargo on the island, with the US maintaining restrictions to this day on the export of offensive materiel, including manufacturing licenses, technical assistance agreements, and technical and commercial military exports (Efstathiou 2019).

According to the 2019 ACT, despite maintaining robust economic and security relations with the United States, the Republic of Cyprus was subject to a U.S. prohibition on the export of defense articles and services beginning in 1987. This arms embargo was originally designed to restrict U.S. weapons transfers to both the Republic and the occupied northern part of the island, with the intention of encouraging peace and avoiding any hindrance to reunification efforts. In practice, however, this policy resulted in a strategic imbalance: while at least 40,000 Turkish troops stationed in the occupied territory remain equipped with some U.S.-procured weapons transferred through mainland Turkey, the Republic of Cyprus was denied similar access. Consequently, to meet its national defense needs, the Cypriot government was forced to seek military equipment from alternative suppliers, most notably Russia—a development that inherently challenged broader U.S. geopolitical interests around the world.

Since the Republic of Cyprus is not bound by any alliance restrictions (such as NATO) and given the US arms embargo on Cyprus, the first Russian-Cypriot agreement on military technical cooperation was signed in March 1996. Following this agreement, Nicosia began purchasing Russian weapons, including tanks, as well as surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems. During the 2000s, Cyprus acquired self-propelled multi-rocket launchers and combat helicopters. The Cypriot Government eventually succumbed to US pressure and retreated on the S-300 system, with the missiles being purchased but installed in Crete instead of Cyprus in September 1999, where they were first tested 14 years later (ibid). To this day, despite recent

initiatives, Cyprus remains the only EU member state that is neither part of NATO nor the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. Within the context of its relationship with Turkey and Cyprus, the consideration of joining NATO's PfP is highly controversial. Turkey has long publicly opposed Cyprus' accession to the PfP and, more specifically, Cypriot inclusion in the NATO decision-making process. Furthermore, there is a possibility that increased tensions between Cyprus and Turkey could spill over and become a matter of contention between Greece and Turkey. Beyond the obvious direct regional tensions, Cyprus' application to join the PfP could also hinder current collaboration between the EU and NATO, as one of the primary areas of collaboration between the EU and NATO is the sharing of intelligence and information, and Cyprus' potential participation in the PfP could impede these processes. Not only does Cyprus oppose the EU lending materials and supplies to NATO, but Turkey also opposes the future possibility of having to share sensitive intelligence information with Cyprus (Hatsikidis and Nikolaides 2010).

To counterbalance the aforementioned, Cyprus has sought to enhance its defense capabilities through the EU, fully supporting the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). By engaging in PeSCo, Cyprus aims to bolster its defense capabilities by participating in multinational procurement projects and involving its small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the defense sector. Developing military capabilities is crucial for the state, as it would help mitigate some of the impacts of the 1987 arms embargo on the country (Efstathiou, 2019). In this manner, Nicosia anticipates leveraging synergies and potential economies of scale. When selecting projects, Cyprus is not required to adhere to the NATO Defence Planning Process, as it is not a member of the Alliance. Nonetheless, to avoid duplication, Nicosia seems willing to consider it if it aligns with its requirements (Efstathiou, 2019). Cyprus participates in various projects within the framework, depending on its financial and operational capabilities. Beyond active participation in PeSCo, Cyprus contributes personnel to CSDP operations/missions and various EU institutions (EEAS, EDA, EUMS, ESDC) and maintains a standby Battle group within the HELBROC framework, alongside Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine, aiming to reinforce the CSDP. Cyprus has consistently demonstrated its commitment to promoting education, training, and a European defense culture by hosting major training events of the European Security and Defence College, such as the High-Level Course and CSDP Orientation Course, which support efforts to build and develop a European security and defense community, further advancing the CSDP (Efstathiou, 2019). In this direction, the recent establishment of the Cyprus Security and Defence Academy

(CSDA) aims to promote a common European understanding of the CSDP (Cypriot MoD, 2025). CSDA ranked first in the organization of international courses among 275 ESDC network members in 2022-2023 and 2023- 2024 academic years. Additionally the CSDA's Director and author elected as Chair of ESDC Executive Academic Board since October 2024.

3.3. The role of the U.S. in the Eastern Mediterranean

US interests and policies in the Eastern Mediterranean have a complex historically linked to US agendas in Europe and the broader Middle East. The bipolar international structure strongly influenced foreign policy perceptions and decisions in an inescapable manner. Since these two countries were clearly part of the Western world, the overall region was well embedded in the US sphere of influence.

The Truman Doctrine and US intervention in the Greek Civil War greatly aided the Greek government's victory over communist insurgents in 1949. This balancing act helped contain the potential spread of communism in Europe and the Middle East, perceived as synonymous with Soviet influence, despite US policymakers often having flawed and exaggerated views of the Soviet threat (Blum, 2004: 37-38)

On the other hand, Turkey's stability under Kemal's new republic, her military capabilities and geographic depth, as well as the control of the straits, made her a crucial ally in deterring a potential Soviet attack in Europe and the Middle East. Despite this difference, the USA viewed Greece and Turkey as a single unit in her balancing strategy. Just as Greece and Turkey were jointly assisted to resist Soviet infiltration during the Greek Civil War, they were treated similarly during the Korean War in the early 1950s. Three years after the end of the Greek Civil War, Greece and Turkey became NATO members and played active roles in the USA's strategy to contain communist expansion (Kontos, 2026:53-60).

The complex and evolving US strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean have been historically marked by the Greek-Turkish rivalry and tensions in Cyprus. The Cyprus question in the 1950s strained Greek-Turkish relations and involved the USA in a delicate balance of Cold War strategic priorities in Europe and the Middle East (Coufoudakis, 2026). The issue's complexity increased in 1956 due to a temporary US-British rift owing to the Suez Crisis and the Franco-British plan to stop Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser from nationalizing the Suez Canal²¹. The USA tried to manage the Greek-Turkish disputes, particularly the Cyprus conflict, through various mediating initiatives. US priority regarding the new, prolonged round of Greek-Turkish tension that was triggered in 1955 had been the prevention of a war between

two NATO allies. Given the NATO's crucial role in containing Soviet and communist expansion, especially near the Middle East, a serious incident of this kind could have severely weakened the Western alliance's southeastern flank and significantly set back US foreign and security policy.

After 1974, periods of bloodless crises and attempts at détente or resolving issues alternated in the Aegean and Cyprus, a pattern that persisted through the post-Cold War era. US interest in resolving Greek-Turkish disputes persisted post-Cold War, with NATO still central to US strategy despite the Soviet Union's collapse. However, later new trends stemming from the triumph of US-led global order and Western-style liberal democracy transformed some aspects of the Greek-Turkish disputes, as well as US priorities in emerging crises. Two such transformations, namely Turkey's enhanced geostrategic importance and Greece and Cyprus's increasing involvement in European integration, warrant special attention. Although regional tensions periodically escalated, the United States successfully recalibrated its strategies to navigate shifting geopolitical landscapes and advance American and Western objectives. This strategic flexibility was bolstered by sustained U.S. engagement in the region and the alignment of Greece and Turkey with American goals (Kontos, 2025:61).

Since 2010, the Eastern Mediterranean has gained renewed attention due to some pivotal developments that have significantly influenced regional relations like the Arab spring, the natural gas discoveries and Turkey's foreign policy change. In response to the changing power distribution and the retreat of post-1990 direct US engagement in the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean has garnered intensified focus. The systemic transition under way, has led the USA to recalibrate its strategy in the region. The new focus, promoted partnerships with Greece, the RoC, and Israel to counterbalance Russian influence, especially considering recent events like natural gas discoveries and the emergence of Russian revisionism in Ukraine (ibid:85).

4. U.S.- Cyprus relations

4.1. Historical background till 2019

During the Cold War era due mainly to Truman doctrine the United States maintained a permanent regional presence. In detail, the US sixth Fleet, including regularly two aircraft carriers, many support warships and an amphibious group constitutes the naval operational arm

of the US in the region. In addition, a NATO dedicated military command ensured the US strategic superiority in the Mediterranean. US presence in the Cypriot issue prevented the threats by a Turkish invasion during the sixties (see U.S. Department of State, 1964) but it did not thwart the 1974 one, which led to the occupation of thirty seven percent of the island (Güney, 2004).

In the Post-Cold War era Russia dissolved its Mediterranean fleet and U.S. gradually reduced their presence shifting their attendance elsewhere giving space to other actors i.e. Turkey. Through the 1990's, Turkey and Israel, both close and valuable strategic partners of the U.S., have built a close strategic relationship with the U.S. blessing. Israelis have sold military equipment and provided training to the Turks, and the Turks have allowed Israeli military planes to fly over Turkish airspace. To understand the level of the then Israel-Turkey relations, It is worth mentioning that before the Turkish Prime Minister visit to Israel in September of 1998, the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu in his enthusiasm announced that the relationship with Turkey constituted a "new axis" in the Middle East (Inbar, 2005).

That specific period Cyprus - Israel relations were at their worst level and Cyprus authorities arrested in the same year two Israeli men for spying in relation to a recent purchase of Russian S300PMU1 anti-aircraft missiles system (The Jewish News of Northern California, 1998) and also Cyprus was in the corner by the West for the same purchase.

A completely diverse situation is what we have been experiencing only a few years later and for already two decades. Israel – Turkey relations are at their worst level and Cyprus - Israel relations at their best and closer than ever. The main driving factor for this change was the increasingly nationalistic, expansionist and revisionist posture of Turkey which started to challenge and still does all the rest of the area States pushing them to take a defensive posture and to find ways to protect their interests thus creating opportunities for cooperation between them. One of Turkey's aspirations was to achieve a protagonistic role in the Muslim/Arab world and this brought Erdogan to change his rhetoric towards Israel, jeopardizing their long-standing close political and military cooperation. This close relation with Israel was for several decades one of the more serious inhibitor factors for any kind of Israel's bilateral relations with Greece, even more so Cyprus.

The 'Mavi Marmara' incident on the 31st May 2010 could be considered as a turning point which created political space and gave the opportunity for a step by step relation advancement between Israel, Cyprus and Greece. Turkey took an even more belligerent stance against

everyone else and transformed in short time from a reliable western aligned NATO partner into an interventionist, expansionist, revisionist and pro-Islamism force allowing no choice to the rest but to even come closer together.

The U.S. tried many times to bring Turkey and Israel together however the Neo Ottoman aspirations of Erdogan didn't give any chance for success.

The specific incident triggered a series of events which brought Cyprus and Israel closer creating gradually a trustful and win - win relation based mainly on common values, international law, seeking of security and stability which in turn would allow a co exploitation of the big hydrocarbon reserves in their neighboring EEZs. As a first however huge step the two governments started a negotiation on their EEZ delimitation and on the Coordination of Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue Services including the delimitation of the Cyprus- Israel Search and Rescue area before the end of 2010. The author experienced this very first rapprochement with Israel. From the very beginning Israel showed its will to respect international law and the ICAO rules. The EEZ delimitation agreement followed completely the UNCLOS and the agreement on the Search and Rescue allocated the respective areas according to the FIR limits and included all the necessary elements for close cooperation, common use of assets and common exercises. Cyprus gained a crucial and powerful ally who was able and willing to protect the common exploration for hydrocarbons in the area with its strong air force and determination. On the other hand, Israel gained vital air space in the relatively huge Cyprus FIR to exercise its Air Force.

The above events brought Cyprus indirectly closer to the U.S. via its closer ally in the area Israel and then by allocating the first hydrocarbon exploitation plots to an U.S. Company and the rest to France and Italy showed in practice the clear preference of Cyprus to the U.S. and the West.

Another important move of Cyprus towards the U.S. and NATO was the declaration of the newly elected President Anastasiades in his very first speech as President in February 2013 that he would apply for Cyprus PFP membership. A declaration that put an end to the anti-NATO rhetoric of the previous president.

Meanwhile Turkey with its increasingly unilateral and belligerent foreign policy and interventionist behavior made it clear to all who is the instability actor in the area. Its action to purchase the S400 Air Defense System triggered the congress reaction which finally excluded it from purchasing the F35 aircrafts and also gave more reasoning to the US to rely less on

Turkey and more on trustful allies and friends like Greece and Cyprus and to invest on relations based rather on common values than on clear opportunistic and transactional terms.

Cyprus and Greece broaden their cooperation with the so-called trilateral cooperation mechanisms with Israel, Egypt and Jordan with the first becoming 3+1 with the one being the U.S. in March 2019.

The trilateral Israel Greek and Cyprus summit was transformed to 3+1 on 20 March 2019 when joined by the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Jerusalem inaugurating the 3+ 1 Summit process. Their joint declaration is self-explanatory of the clear shift of the U.S policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region: “The governments of the United States, the State of Israel, the Hellenic Republic, and the Republic of Cyprus met yesterday in Jerusalem to affirm their shared commitment to promoting peace, stability, security, and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Secretary Pompeo underlined U.S. support for the trilateral mechanism established by Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, noting the importance of increased cooperation. The leaders agreed to increase regional cooperation; to support energy independence and security; and to defend against external malign influences in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East. They welcomed the recent natural gas finds in the Eastern Mediterranean and its potential to contribute to energy security and diversification”.

It is noteworthy that, within a very short period, Turkey’s behaviour, combined with clear, positive, and rational signals from Cyprus and Greece – both fully aligned with Israel – created momentum that brought the United States back into the region in favour of regional security and the promotion of international law and practice. The U.S. stance towards Turkey changed dramatically, and the U.S. reinforced its presence in Greece, including its naval bases in Souda and Alexandroupolis. A RAND study, commissioned by the U.S. Deputy Chief of Staff to examine the implications for the U.S. Army of Turkey’s nationalistic trajectory, recommended, among other things, that the U.S. should be prepared to withdraw from Incirlik (RAND, 2020).

The trilateral relations between Cyprus, Greece, and Israel were also supported by their respective diasporas in the U.S., with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Hellenic American Leadership Council (HALC) at the forefront, as well as individuals with strong, long-standing personal relationships with Senator Menendez, whose role was crucial and instrumental in the bipartisan Congressional approval on 19 December 2019 of a spending package that includes the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019.

4.2 The 2018 Statement of Intent

In November 2018 the United States and the Republic of Cyprus signed a Statement of Intent on bilateral security cooperation. The Statement was signed in Washington by the then minister of Foreign Affairs Nicos Christodoulides and the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Christodoulides had also meetings with the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell and Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Francis Fannon (Kathimerini, 2018). The Statement provided the political framework for bilateral relations identifying several areas of mutual interest such as counterterrorism, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, explosive ordnance stockpile, maritime security, cyber security and others.

The following year both the Senate and the House of Representatives adopted “The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act” and after the signing by President Trump on December 20, 2019, became a law.

The text forms the political framework of the cooperation under three axis: US-Cyprus relations, regional security and energy security .First the text underlines the importance of Cyprus *as a US key strategic partner* for security reasons (SEC. 2.point 4). It clearly states that a part of the island is occupied by the Turkish troops (*point 24: At least 40,000 Turkish troops are stationed in the occupied part of Cyprus with some weapons procured from the United States through mainland Turkey.*). It points out the US 1987 arms prohibition to the Republic of Cyprus.

Second, it highlights the significance of regional cooperation between Greece, Cyprus and Israel (points 1, 2,3,4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 20) and links *the security of partners and allies in the Eastern Mediterranean region* with the *security of the United States and Europe* (point 1). In addition, it declares the US opposition against revisionism or any violation of international law in the region (*The United States, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus oppose any action in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea that could challenge stability, violate international law, or undermine good neighborly relations, and in a joint declaration on March 21, 2019, agreed to “defend against external malign influences in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East”*).

Last but not least, it emphasises the importance of natural gas developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and in particular the discoveries of natural gas off the coast of Cyprus in

promoting energy security and diversification from natural gas supplied by the Russian Federation (points 12, 13, 15, 16).

4.3 The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019

In a nutshell The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019 predicted that:

- Ends the prohibition on arms sales to the Republic of Cyprus;
- Establishes a United States-Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center to facilitate energy cooperation among the U.S., Israel, Greece, and Cyprus;
- Authorizes Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance for Greece;
- Authorizes increased International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance for Greece and includes Cyprus in the program for the first time.
- Requires the Administration to submit to Congress a strategy on enhanced security and energy cooperation with countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as reports on malign activities by Russia and other countries in the region.

After 2019

All the above declarations and legal frameworks have immediately resulted in a series of concrete and tangible actions that would have been unimaginable a few years ago. For the first time, Cypriot military officers have received training in the United States, a Cypriot military attaché post has been established in Washington, and, on 13 September 2020, the State Department announced – following U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Cyprus – that the Republic of Cyprus and the United States have expanded their relations through the creation of a joint security training centre, abbreviated as CYCLOPS. The U.S. Department of State stated in a press release after the visit: “To expand this cooperation and to support capacity-building in nations where in-country training is impossible, our two countries have agreed to construct a regional border security training hub in the Republic of Cyprus — the Cyprus Center for Land, Open-seas, and Port Security (CYCLOPS). CYCLOPS will allow the United States and our partners to provide technical assistance in more areas related to security and safety, including customs and exports control, port and maritime security, and cybersecurity. The training facility will include a number of different hands-on training platforms, including a mock land border crossing, passenger screening area, and a mobile cyber security training lab, which will enable regional partners to learn best practices for securing critical infrastructure and to engage in cross border, counterproliferation cyber investigations,”

the statement continued, adding that “CYCLOPS will support our efforts to curb the proliferation risks posed by malign regional actors and violent extremist organizations.”

The US Department of State emphasized that Washington’s support for CYCLOPS “is a true partnership” with Cyprus.

“The United States will provide equipment, trainers, and other capacity-building support, while the Republic of Cyprus will contribute land, facilitate travel, and provide trainers. Construction of the training facility is expected to begin later this year,” the statement concluded (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

In less than four months, on 4 January 2021, the Groundbreaking Ceremony for CYCLOPS Training Center took place in Larnaka in the presence of the Minister of foreign Affairs of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides and the Act. DHS Secretary Wolf and a year later the CYCLOPS was already built, staffed and fully equipped, expressing the big determination of both sides. The author appointed since 1st of July 2021, as the Training Director of the Center. On April 6, 2022 the Center was officially inaugurated by the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Ioannis Kasoulides and the Under Secretary for Political Affairs of the U.S. State Department Victoria Nuland.

Within the framework of advancing the U.S. - Cyprus relations, the Cypriot Minister of Defense, Charalambos Petrides, was invited to Washington D.C. for an official visit to the Department of Defence, Pentagon and the National Defense University. This was the very first official visit of a CY MoD to the U.S. and has a great symbolic importance.

Based on the author's personal interactions with the U.S. officials and colleagues, it could be argued that there was great satisfaction with the immediate concrete results and the enthusiastic engagement of all the actors in Cyprus from the highest political level to the lowest. It is also obvious that sharing common values and vision for the world in general and more specifically for the Eastern Mediterranean region, based on the established rules of the international system is of utmost importance for the sustainability and further enhancement of this cooperation.

In these critical times as, the international norms are severely tested by an ongoing war, which is both illegal and unjustified, at a time when the international system is experiencing tectonic shifts with a rising China it is very important for Cyprus and Greece to be on the right side of history in words and in actions. Fortunately, the current governments in Cyprus and Greece

remain concretely committed to values-based policies giving the adequate space and reasoning to the U.S. to change its posture and policy and to increase their presence in the area.

4.4 Main drivers and actors behind the US-Cyprus approachment

4.4.1 The geopolitical drivers

The strategic rapprochement between Cyprus and Israel represents one of the most significant geopolitical shifts in the contemporary Eastern Mediterranean. Throughout the 1990s, Israel maintained a close strategic and military partnership with Turkey, which inherently inhibited the development of robust bilateral ties with Nicosia. During this period, Cyprus-Israel relations were notably strained, reaching a low point in 1998 when Cypriot authorities arrested Israeli nationals on espionage charges linked to Cyprus's procurement of Russian air defense systems. However, Turkey's increasingly revisionist and expansionist foreign policy in the 2000s fundamentally altered regional dynamics (Tanchum, 2015). The 2010 Mavi Marmara incident served as a definitive turning point, severely fracturing the Turkish-Israeli alliance and creating the necessary political space for a step-by-step advancement in diplomatic and security relations between Israel, Cyprus, and Greece (Tziampiris, 2014:11). This geopolitical realignment was rapidly accelerated by the discovery of substantial offshore hydrocarbon reserves in the Levantine Basin, which transformed energy from a purely economic asset into a primary catalyst for strategic cooperation. In 2010, seizing the momentum of shared security interests and an alignment on international law, Cyprus and Israel successfully negotiated an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) delimitation agreement based on UNCLOS, alongside a comprehensive pact coordinating aeronautical and maritime Search and Rescue services in 2012 (United Nations, 2020). This foundational bilateral trust subsequently evolved into broader institutional frameworks, notably the Cyprus-Greece-Israel trilateral partnership, which functions as a "quasi-alliance" for political coordination and external balancing. Ultimately, the deepening of the Cyprus-Israel axis paved the way for greater United States engagement in the region, culminating in the "3+1" diplomatic mechanism that formally embeds this partnership within the broader Eastern Mediterranean security architecture.

Throughout the 2000s and particularly in the 2010s, Turkey's divergence from Western democratic norms created significant obstacles for U.S. strategic interests in the broader Middle East. Within the changing landscape of the "New Eastern Mediterranean," Ankara's response to the Arab Spring—highlighted by fractured relationships with Israel and Egypt—further eroded its strategic partnership with Washington. A pivotal breaking point occurred in July 2019, when Turkey finalized the purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system, ignoring

explicit U.S. and NATO warnings. Because the S-400 posed a direct threat to Western defense networks and the stealth technology of the F-35 fighter jets, Washington immediately expelled Turkey from the F-35 development program (Zanotti & Thomas, 2025). This acquisition sparked broader concerns regarding Ankara's reliability as a NATO ally amidst the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, President Erdoğan temporarily vetoed the NATO accession of Sweden and Finland, citing grievances over their tolerance of Kurdish PKK members and Gülenists (Al Jazeera, 2022). Ultimately, Turkey's foreign policy during a period of acute U.S.-Russian hostility has obstructed American regional balancing efforts and its strategic security objectives.

As Ankara's reliability within NATO waned—largely due to its acquisition of the Russian S-400 system and its initial obstruction of NATO's Nordic expansion—Athens stepped forward to assume a central role in U.S. and allied operations, particularly following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. While Turkey exhibited reluctance to fully support U.S. efforts to counter Russian influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece embraced this responsibility. Consequently, Greece transformed into a pivotal anchor for Washington's trans-regional balancing strategy spanning both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea (Kontos, 2026:116-117). This geopolitical shift catalyzed a rapid deepening of U.S.–Greek defense ties after 2020. Following an initial extension in 2019, the bilateral Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) was substantially updated in October 2021. This revision expanded U.S. military access to strategic Greek facilities, including Souda Bay, the port of Alexandroupolis, and the airbases at Stefanovikio and Larissa. The agreement prioritized interoperability and operational readiness through shared infrastructure and joint military exercises (Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, 2025). Further cementing this upgraded alliance, the U.S. approved an \$8.6 billion sale of up to 40 F-35 fighter jets to Greece in January 2024 (Reuters, 2024), complete with comprehensive logistical and technical support. Ultimately, amidst rising global and regional friction, Washington recalibrated its traditional strategic posture, directly responding to the divergent paths Greece and Turkey took regarding their NATO obligations.

The Act directly addresses Russian interference in the region, emphasizing comprehensive regional security collaboration to counteract such influences. Section 11 mandates that the US Secretary of State provide a detailed report examining Russian malign influence in Cyprus, Greece, and Israel, assessing Russia's goals relating to security, politics, and energy. In terms of regional dynamics, US efforts benefited from Athens' robust cooperation in

counterbalancing Russia, most notably after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as exemplified by substantial utilization of the port of Alexandroupolis to provide support to Ukraine (Marghelis, 2024) . In Cyprus, the USA successfully contributed to a considerable downgrade of Russian influence, simultaneously expanding their own presence by leveraging the island's geo-strategic location in the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean, nearby warm conflict zones. Collectively, these developments reflect emerging alignments and revised patterns of amity and enmity, reinforcing the validity of the designation "new Eastern Mediterranean."

4.4.2 U.S. Internal Scene: The role of the Congress in shaping the US foreign policy

Due to its constitution -which has proved to be one of the most resilient constitutions in the democratic world-, the US politics has been characterized by a system of checks and balances, that is, that none of the three major political bodies –the Government, the Senate, and the House of Representatives- can act completely independently from each other. Thus, the fact that the Constitution has provided several deterrent nets from the political institutions, makes these political institutions to act more collaboratively by avoiding arbitrary decision-making. Although these deterrent nets do exist, this does not mean, however, that, on several occasions, the President cannot act unilaterally (Katsky, 2019). Generally, both the Government and the Congress -the latter of which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives- have a say in the decision-making. The same happens when it comes to US foreign policy, that is, the US Congress can significantly influence foreign policy shaping. It is true that the President has most of the powers in security and defense issues along with the foreign affairs ones, since it is characterized by the Constitution as "the commander-in-chief of the armed forces" (Johnson, 2013) and "the country's chief diplomat" (Katsky, 2019). However, the role of the Congress in shaping the US foreign policy is important too, as there are occasions that the US government cannot act without the Congress acquiescence (Pearlstein, 2019). Moreover, partisan rivalries affect the struggle for power between the executive and legislative institutions in foreign affairs. As Mann puts it "the Republicans have become the party of the White House, Democrats the party of the Congress" (Mann, 1990, p.2). The US Congress can play a significant role in international relations in three basic ways: a) by taking decisions on substantive legislation; b) by taking decisions on procedural legislation; and c) by influencing the public opinion in a way that can put at stake the internal legitimacy of the government (Lindsay, 2018, p.154). As far as the Congress decisions on substantive legislation are concerned, the Congress has the power to form the content of the US foreign policy, by mainly using appropriations. The government does not have the right to use appropriations if the

Congress does not approve it. Therefore, the Congress holds the economic power in its hands, since it is the only one that can decide which decisions will be funded and which will not. For instance, the Congress did not approve the funding of the US-Mexican border wall -a decision taken by Trump's administration which could not be materialized. Another Congress asset in forming the content of the US foreign policy is the foreign trade regulation (Lindsay, 2018, p. 155) An example of this is when the Congress decided to harden the Russian sanctions imposed in 2017. Finally, it can also form the content of the US foreign policy by approving -e.g., the START treaty- , rejecting -e.g., the CTBT-, or ignoring -e.g., the UNCLOS- treaties (Johnson, 2013). Concerning the procedural legislation, the Congress can play a significant role in policy-shaping by passing or refusing to pass laws if the government has not been consulted by the Congress or if it is not willing to negotiate with the Congress. The Constitution, although authorizes the President to initiate a law proposal, this law, on several occasions, must be approved by the Congress either with the majority vote (50%+1) or with the two-thirds of the vote -it depends on the issue discussed (Lindsay, 2018, p. 155). In the case of Greek Turkish relations the Senate Foreign Relations Committee legislated the U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021 not only to boost Greek-U.S affairs and enhance the Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and the United States relations, but also to balance the role of Turkey in the region (Hellas Journal, 2021). Thirdly, the Congress can have an important role in foreign policy by altering the public opinion. This is a policy tool used to pressure the government to change its policy by putting the internal legitimacy of the government at stake. The internal legitimacy for a government is its cornerstone in a democratic state, and therefore it is very usual for the government to change its policy if the public opinion has been turned against it. A successful example of such a method was when Trump's administration failed to affirm its commitment to the NATO Article 5 at the NATO summit that took place in May 2017. This was not the case, though, when several Congressmen tried to block the Iranian nuclear agreement in 2014-5. Consequently, although the Congress is equipped by the Constitution with several policy tools, these are not always enough to affect substantively the US foreign policy (Lindsay, 2018, p. 155) Congress Core Powers Areas The areas where the Congress has indicated a more influential role in foreign policy are the following: a) Foreign Aid, b) Treaties and Trade, c) Human Rights, and d) Declaring War (Johnson, 2013). There are many times when the Congress blocks the funding for foreign aid, since there is no domestic constituency that could accept the funding for it, as the majority of the US citizens prefer to use money to deal with domestic problems first. For this reason, the Congress has significantly limited the budget for foreign aid (Johnson, 2013). As it has already been mentioned, the Congress has a

powerful say when it comes to treaties and trade, as it can determine them significantly. The most important role for the Congress is played by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Menendez) and to a lesser extent by the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee (Porter, 2006). The Congress' role in issues related to human rights has also been great since the 1970s, and especially after congressional assertiveness institutionalized human rights in the US foreign policy (Johnson, 2013). Finally, the Congress has a role of vital importance in declaring war. The Constitution gives the power to the Congress to declare war. The Congress has used this power four times - the last being in WWII. Besides being able to declare war, the Congress has also authorized fighting on several occasions, like the Vietnam War, the first Gulf War, and the invasion in Iraq (Porter, 2006).

Having analysed the role of the Congress in shaping the US foreign policy one can conclude that the political system in the US is characterized by a degree of equilibrium (Katsky, 2019). Although the President concentrates most of the powers, these powers are, on several occasions, useless without the consultation and the approval of the Congress (U.S. Senate: International Relations, n.d.). Of course, there are cases when the president has acted unilaterally, or against the will of the Congress, however, this does not mean that the Congress does not have a very influential role in the US foreign policy shaping. Contrariwise, the Congress has several important powers that give it the ability to specify the content of the foreign policy and determine foreign policy outcomes.

4.4.3 U.S. Internal Scene: The role of Lobbies

AJC and HALC have championed the Eastern Mediterranean Act from its inception as a fundamental next step in creating strong, democratic partnerships in the region. The aim is to promote vital security, economic, and energy cooperation. In addition to the spending measure, the National Defense Authorization Act also includes provisions that will lift the outdated arms embargo on Cyprus and restrict the sale of F-35s to Turkey in light of Ankara's acquisition of S-400 missiles from Russia.

AJC CEO David Harris hailing the decision said: "This is an historic, truly transformational development in United States foreign policy," said, who has been a leader in advancing U.S., Cyprus, Greece, and Israel ties for more than three decades. "Both Democrats and Republicans realize we can't rely today on Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. America's frontline in this strategically and economically vital region comprises Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, as well as several Arab countries, beginning with Egypt and Jordan." The HALC Executive Director

Endy Zemenides said: “The last decade’s multilateral diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean has led to new policy options to promote stability and prosperity in southeast Europe and the Middle East,” “Thanks to the leadership of Senators Menendez and Rubio, and Representatives Bilirakis, Cicilline and Deutch, the U.S. can be a more active participant in these multilateral initiatives. The East Med Act puts substance behind the ‘stronger together’ mantra.” Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) also hailed the passage of the Act: “I have said for a while now that I felt that we were in a moment in which the stars were aligned. I think there is a growing recognition of the importance of Greece and Cyprus along with Israel as a new strategy for the Eastern Mediterranean. It speaks volumes of the importance of Greece and Cyprus along with Israel in the new strategy that we can include the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Partnership Act of 2019 by agreement in the appropriations bill that will become law.”

5. Findings- Discussion

Findings of this thesis confirm the theoretical concept of penetration in a RSC , where an external power makes security alignments with local states to balance against regional threats. In navigating the "new Eastern Mediterranean," U.S. foreign policy relies on a mixed approach of soft and limited hard balancing to constrain Russian regional projection. Washington has operationalized this strategy by simultaneously bolstering the defense capabilities of reliable regional partners and deepening diplomatic engagement. Crucially, this involves the meticulous strategic management of established alignments: the U.S. strategically rewards compliance and democratic alignment with enhanced military cooperation (limited hard balancing) with Cyprus, while using institutional prerequisites and economic incentives to sever legacy ties with Moscow (soft balancing). This multifaceted approach allows the U.S. to adapt to regional instability without committing to a rigid, conventional containment posture.

The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act , passed in 2019, marked a key shift in the relationship between the United States and Cyprus. The ACT is connected to the broader changes in U.S. policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and contributed in strengthening the ties with Cyprus in various levels beyond the initial scope of the energy security.

The Act sped up the creation of formal dialogue and practical cooperation between the two countries. While the 2018 Statement of Intent set the stage, changes after 2019 show a clear move toward more organized and layered coordination. Making the Security and Defence

Dialogue an annual event improved how the two sides work together, share expertise, and align on security issues. These steps point to Cyprus gradually becoming part of the U.S. regional security system, especially in maritime security, managing hybrid threats, and crisis response (US Department of State, 2025).

Within the defence sector, the most notable outcome of the ACT was the progressive removal of restrictions on defence cooperation (Cypriot MFA, 2023). The arms embargo was partly eased in 2020 and fully lifted in 2022, under a system that is reviewed each year. This change expanded opportunities for defence purchases and cooperation, and also showed greater trust and recognition of Cyprus as a reliable security partner. At the same time, access to programs like Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Excess Defence Articles (EDA) helped modernize the Cypriot National Guard and made cooperation more solid and structured. Additionally, involvement in the State Partnership Program (SPP) with the New Jersey National Guard (US Embassy in Cyprus, 2023) , together with the implementation of the Military Cooperation Program (MCP), expanded cooperation in areas such as cyber defence, military medicine, communications, special operations, and search and rescue. These projects enhanced both operational functions as well as political-strategic alignment of the two countries.

In regional security, the ACT strengthened Cyprus's role as a source of stability and support. Building new infrastructure like the CYCLOPS Centre (Cypriot MFA, 2024) and upgrading facilities for Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) and humanitarian missions highlighted Cyprus's value in the region. The usage of these Cypriot facilities for crisis management showed how Cyprus's location has become a real geopolitical advantage enhancing operational capacity concerning NEO operations in which similar transportation hubs, like Cyprus, are considered critical.

Following the legislative shift catalyzed by the 2019 Act, the U.S.–Cyprus defense partnership rapidly materialized through a series of unprecedented operational and logistical milestones. A critical foundation for this interoperability was the signing of the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which facilitated bilateral logistical support, supply sharing, and streamlined military coordination. This growing strategic trust was further evidenced by Washington's phased dismantling of the 1987 arms prohibition. The U.S. initially eased the embargo for non-lethal defense articles in 2020, before authorizing a full lift on lethal weapons in 2022. This historic reversal effectively ended a decades-long policy of forced neutrality and opened vital pathways for the modernization of the Cypriot National Guard. Finally, the institutionalization of this alliance was cemented through Cyprus's inclusion in the State Partnership Program (SPP) with the New Jersey National Guard. This military-to-military

cooperation program has driven consistent, long-term engagements in areas ranging from cyber defense to special operations and search-and-rescue, definitively anchoring Cyprus within the broader U.S. security architecture.

President Nikos Christodoulides' October 2024 visit to the White House, meeting with President Joe Biden, marked a historic milestone in Cyprus–U.S. relations, the first such meeting since 1996. This visit highlighted a strategic, deepening partnership, focusing on regional security, energy, and humanitarian initiatives, while cementing Cyprus as a key, stable ally for the United States in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The institutionalization of U.S.–Cyprus bilateral relations reached unprecedented levels in late 2024, underscored by two landmark diplomatic and military agreements. In September 2024, the U.S. Department of Defense and the Cypriot Ministry of Defence signed the Defense Cooperation Roadmap for 2024–2029. This foundational framework explicitly outlines a shared commitment to building military interoperability, countering malign regional influence, and enhancing joint operations for humanitarian crises in the Eastern Mediterranean. Building upon this defense-centric momentum, the two nations launched their First Strategic Dialogue in Nicosia in October 2024. This high-level dialogue formally elevated their partnership across a comprehensive spectrum of shared priorities, cementing Cyprus's role as a vital, stabilizing geopolitical anchor for the United States amidst ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

The outcomes of the October 2024 Strategic Dialogue highlight a multi-dimensional expansion of this cooperation far beyond traditional security paradigms. In the realm of regional stability, the United States officially commended Cyprus's leadership in facilitating humanitarian aid to Gaza through the Amalthea Plan and its critical function as a safe evacuation hub (the Estia plan) for civilians fleeing regional conflict. The dialogue also fortified institutional and law enforcement ties, notably through expanded U.S. FBI and Department of Justice support to help Cyprus combat illicit finance, money laundering, and sanctions evasion. Furthermore, the joint statement emphasized deep geo-economic and technological integration, featuring commitments to end Cyprus's energy isolation via the Great Sea Interconnector, continued backing of the 3+1 regional format, tangible progress toward Cyprus's inclusion in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, and the Republic's formal signing of the Artemis Accords.

The profound transformation of U.S.–Cyprus relations, catalyzed by the 2019 Act and the subsequent lifting of the U.S. arms embargo, demonstrates a blend of limited hard balancing and soft balancing strategies. On one hand, emerging defense partnerships—such as intelligence sharing and the establishment of the CYCLOPS regional security hub, constitute

the hard balancing part. However, despite general policy aims to curb Russian influence, these defense initiatives are not explicitly framed as direct military balancing against Moscow. On the other hand, Washington clearly employs soft balancing by attaching strict institutional and economic prerequisites to the embargo lift, namely anti-money laundering reforms and the prohibition of Russian naval port access. By imposing these conditions, the U.S. strategically incentivizes Nicosia to sever its historical military and logistical ties with Russia, thereby degrading the geo-economic landscape that previously facilitated Moscow's regional presence.

6. Conclusions

United States relationship with Cyprus has changed significantly in recent years, largely driven by the 2019 Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act. As this thesis demonstrates, the Act was more than just a diplomatic pivot but an indication of strategic recalibration. It elevated the Republic of Cyprus from a constrained, embargoed state into an essential security partner for the US. By moving past decades of forced neutrality, Washington capitalized on shifting regional dynamics—including its growing friction with Turkey—to rebuild the Eastern Mediterranean's security architecture. Milestones like the 3+1 framework, the definitive end of the U.S. arms embargo, and the launch of the CYCLOPS regional training hub prove that this partnership has matured.

The evidence gathered in this study firmly supports the primary hypothesis (H1): the 2019 Act was a milestone for U.S.–Cyprus relations. In answering the first research question, this study concludes that the Act transformed Cyprus into an institutionalized security partner. Before 2019, the 1987 arms embargo severely limited U.S. engagement, inadvertently pushing Nicosia toward alternative providers like Russia. The Act reversed this dynamic, through practical steps like the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), integration into the State Partnership Program (SPP), and the 2024 Strategic Dialogue.

Addressing the second research question, this realignment was driven by Great Power competition, shifting alliances, and proactive diplomacy from Cyprus. This ties directly into the study's secondary hypotheses. The U.S. intentionally used the 2019 Act to shrink Russian military and economic influence on the island (H2). By lifting the arms embargo and establishing the CYCLOPS center, Washington sought to break the Cypriot National Guard's historical reliance on Russian hardware and disrupt illicit financial networks. Furthermore,

enhanced defense ties between 2019 and 2024 were driven by a strategy of "strategic denial" (H3)—securing the Eastern Mediterranean for the West and preventing adversaries from gaining a foothold. Finally, by backing the 3+1 framework, the Act stabilized the broader regional security complex (H4), aligning the economic and security interests of Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and the U.S. against regional revisionism.

Looking at this through the lens of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), the U.S.–Cyprus rapprochement is a textbook example of soft and limited hard balancing. Instead of relying on a massive, direct military footprint, Washington used diplomatic conditionality, energy diplomacy, and targeted defense cooperation to push back against Russian and Chinese influence. Crucially, this was not a one-sided dynamic dictated solely by Washington. The Republic of Cyprus exercised significant strategic agency, leveraging the friction between the U.S. and Turkey to elevate its own geopolitical standing.

As all the academic research pieces, this study has limitations. The most notable is that it cannot predict the long-term resilience of the newly established relationship between US and Cyprus. Additionally, because this research relied primarily on English and Greek sources, it inherently views these external motivations through a Western and Cypriot perspective. Going forward, further study will be needed to evaluate how resilient quasi-alliances like the 3+1 framework actually are against the pressures of U.S. political transitions. Future research should also take a closer look at the evolving roles of the European Union and China interaction in the region its impact on the U.S.–Cyprus relationship.

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