

# The Rise of the Republic of Cyprus' Defence Diplomacy in Its Neighbourhood

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## Abstract

*Despite the fact that Cyprus is a small state in the international system, with all that this entails in the exercise of diplomatic practice, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), particularly in the last ten years, has taken several initiatives for activities that fall in the realm of defence diplomacy. The overall objective of this article is to examine the bilateral defence diplomacy initiatives of the RoC with its neighbouring states in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon in the period 2010 - 2017.*

**Keywords:** defence diplomacy, Republic of Cyprus, Eastern Mediterranean, bilateral relations

## Introduction

There is a widespread perception that defence diplomacy, which in general terms means the use of defence actors for diplomatic purposes, is a practice that is exercised almost exclusively by large and powerful states, since they are the nations with the wherewithal to achieve that. Winger<sup>2</sup> indicatively notes that 'every major global power, such as the United States, France, China, and the United Kingdom, has adopted defence diplomacy'. At the same time, Muthanna has stressed that 'the United States, Britain, France, China, Australia, India and the NATO countries could be considered as leaders in defense diplomacy'.<sup>3</sup> However, in recent years, there has been an increasing trend by small states to deploy defence diplomacy initiatives in a more consistent and organised manner in order to impact and interact in the international system for their benefit.

This paper investigates the rise of the bilateral defence diplomacy efforts of a small state, that of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), between 2010 and 2017 in its near neighbourhood.<sup>4</sup> In the last decade, the RoC has embarked on several defence

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2 G. Winger, 'The Velvet Gauntlet: A Theory of Defence Diplomacy', in *What do I do?*, eds Lisiak A. and Smolenski N., Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 33 (2014), 2.

3 Brig. K. A. Muthanna, 'Military Diplomacy', *Perspectives*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2011), 8

4 The RoC has also initiated some multilateral (and particularly trilateral) defence diplomacy initiatives and its neighbouring states (Cyprus - Greece - Israel, Cyprus - Greece - Egypt), however, the analysis of these initiatives falls outside the scope of this paper.

diplomacy endeavours within this framework in order to develop defence relations with neighbouring states, such as Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. Of course, these defence diplomacy initiatives of the Republic have been urged by a series of different dynamics and regional changes that have led to the gradual development of the RoC's defence diplomacy from 2004. This article is separated into three main sections. The first section describes briefly the basic theoretical tenets of the main concept of the paper – that of defence diplomacy. The second part illustrates, in a nutshell, some basic elements regarding the rise of RoC defence diplomacy in the last decade. The third section analyses in detail the basic bilateral defence diplomacy initiatives of the RoC in the Eastern Mediterranean as they have been deployed in approximately the last decade.

### **Defence Diplomacy: Basic Theoretical Tenets**

The end of the Cold War marked many fundamental changes in the field of security in several ways. One was the gradual expansion of the tasks of defence/military actors, from fighting and preparing to fight other countries to undertaking a new set of completely different tasks.<sup>5</sup> These new functions have included, among others, the involvement of defence/military actors in diplomatic related activities, a role that was first pioneered in Europe. The United Kingdom (UK) Strategic Defence Review, by way of describing this augmented duty of its military personnel and operational units in backing their government's diplomatic efforts, decided to christen this practice *Defence Diplomacy*.<sup>6</sup> UK proponents described this defence diplomacy as 'the varied activities undertaken by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to dispel hostility, build and maintain trust, and assist in the development of democratically accountable armed forces, thereby making a significant contribution to conflict prevention and resolution'.<sup>7</sup>

The world of academia has taken a keen interest in the British Ministry of Defence's acknowledgement of the potential of defence diplomacy.<sup>8</sup> A number of

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5 F. Vrejš, and N. Michelle, 'Employing armed forces: the rise of more constructive and ethical secondary roles', *Politika*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2009), 24.

6 Defence diplomacy activities and practices can be identified before the 1990s, in a different context. However in the contemporary era, defence diplomacy is situated within a much more intricate framework that is arranged and synchronized in a much more complex way.

7 Ministry of Defence (UK) *Strategic Defence Review Modern Forces For The Modern World*, (Whitehall, London, 1998), 22.

8 Regarding Defence Diplomacy, see: R. Bitzinger, 'US Defence Diplomacy towards Southeast Asia', in *From 'Boots' to 'Brogues': The Rise of Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia*, eds S. Bhubhinder and T. Seng (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2011); J. E. Cheyre, 'Defence Diplomacy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, eds A. Cooper, J. Heine, and R. Thakur, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed

academics have involved themselves with research into defence diplomacy since 1998, and have proffered a wealth of definitions of the practice.<sup>9</sup> While a variety of explanations of the term 'defence diplomacy' have been suggested, for the purposes of this paper, which has a state-centric approach to defence diplomacy (since it examines a state's defence diplomacy), the definition provided by Winger is employed, according to which defence diplomacy is: 'the peaceful use of the defense institutions of one country to co-opt the government institutions of another country in order to achieve a preferred outcome'.<sup>10</sup>

Defence diplomacy can be said to be an overarching expression that illustrates a breadth of initiatives and actions which are diplomatic in purposes and are conducted by military and defence actors. Cottey and Forster's<sup>11</sup> seminal research identified and summarized the activities of defence diplomacy as follows: bilateral and multilateral contacts between senior and military defence officials; the appointment of defence attachés to foreign countries; bilateral defence cooperation agreements; training of foreign military and civilian defence personnel; provision of expertise and advice on the democratic control of armed forces, defence management and technical areas; contacts and exchanges between military personnel and units, and ship visits; placement of military or civilian personnel in partner countries' defence ministries or armed forces; deployment of training teams; provision of military equipment and other material aid; bilateral or multilateral military exercises for training purposes. The above list is not exhaustive, since there are a lot of studies that identify and analyse specific activities of defence diplomacy, adding to or ignoring some of the above. It is also stressed that in order to claim that a state exercises defence diplomacy, it does not mean that it has to exercise all of the above activities.

## Defence Diplomacy by the Republic of Cyprus

Before examining the RoC's defence diplomacy initiatives in its neighbourhood, it is

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Forces (DECAF) Defence Attaches, DECAF Backgrounder (2007); E. P. Heather, 'Defence Diplomacy in the Arctic: the search and rescue agreement as a confidence builder', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 2, (2012); Ministry of Defence (UK) Defence Diplomacy Paper, (London: Ministry of Defence, 2000); A. Cottey and A. Forster, *Reshaping defence diplomacy: New roles for military cooperation and assistance*. Adelphi Paper 365, (London: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ministerio De Defensa Espana (Spain), *Defence Diplomacy Plan*, (Ministerio De Defensa Espana, 2012); Muthanna, 'Military Diplomacy'; Ministry of Defence (UK) *Strategic Defence Review Modern Forces For The Modern World*, (London: Ministry of Defence); Winger, 'The Velvet Gauntlet'.

9 There is also the term 'military diplomacy'; however, in this paper, only the term 'defence diplomacy' is used, since it is more inclusive.

10 Winger, 'The Velvet Gauntlet', 14.

11 Cottey and Forster, *Reshaping defence diplomacy*, 7.

considered necessary to discuss some basic elements of the overall defence diplomacy efforts of the Republic. Because of political considerations and economic realities, in recent times, the budget for the defence of the Republic has contracted significantly: from €345.4 m. in 2010 to €318.9 m. in 2015 (a reduction of 7.7%).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, beyond the limitations and constraints, there have been a number of defence diplomacy initiatives that the RoC has instigated, on both bilateral and multilateral bases. The previous decades, the RoC was not been overly keen on the idea of defence diplomacy, particularly as its long-standing conflict with Turkey was the prime focus of the defence establishment of the country. This approach, however, was gradually changed approximately over the last decade, since the advantages of defence diplomacy from both military and political points of view began to be viewed more favourably.

The defence diplomacy policy of the RoC was enhanced by a series of regional circumstances, dynamics and events. The 2004 entry of Cyprus into the European Union was, without doubt, a new beginning for its defence relations, and this formed a foundation for Cyprus' evolving policy of defence diplomacy, as for the first time, the defence establishment of the RoC was able to make itself heard on the international stage. The platform that the EU has provided has enabled the RoC to cultivate a momentum towards more extroversion and internationalism in its defence establishment. Additionally, belonging to the EU has encouraged Cyprus to bolster relations with its European associates, on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis.

One of the main reasons that Cyprus developed its defence diplomacy was the discovery of hydrocarbons in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This fact has resulted in common bonds and synergies being forged with their immediate neighbours in the areas of energy, and subsequently in defence. Another dimension resulting from the discovery of hydrocarbons has been the rise of challenges in security for all the neighboring states concerned. To confront these issues, most of the Eastern Mediterranean states have initiated defence partnerships – bilateral or multilateral – between each other. It could be said, in reality, that defence diplomacy between nation-state neighbours resulted from cooperation in the area of energy.

An additional, important impetus to the boost of the RoC's defence relations was Turkey's fragile relationships with regional states (2010-2017). The policy of Davutoğlu of 'zero problems' with Turkey's neighbours' was not so successful mainly after 2010, as events and Turkey's policies began to adversely affect the relations with nearly all of its adjacent nations. The strained relations between the Turkish leadership and its neighbours had the opposite effect on Cypriot foreign policy, particularly defence

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12 A. Aristotelous, *The Military Forces in Cyprus 2017*, Cyprus Centre for Strategic Studies, (2017). Available at <http://strategy-cy.com/ccss/index.php/el/surveys-gr/item/331-oi-stratiotikes-dynameis-stin-kypro-2017-the-military-forces-in-cyprus-2017>.

diplomacy, which began to thrive as the RoC took advantage of Turkey's problems and bolstered its links with its neighbouring states.

### **The RoC's Bilateral Defence Diplomacy Initiatives in Its Neighbourhood**

This section will feature an examination of the RoC's bilateral initiatives in defence diplomacy with its Eastern Mediterranean neighbours during the period 2010 through 2017. This policy is best described by the volume of bilateral cooperation relations with Israel, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Israel**

Israel and the RoC are enjoying a new and flourishing partnership in recent years, despite the fact that relations have not always been good. During the latter decades of the twentieth century, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, the RoC had voiced misgivings over Israel's close defence alliance with Turkey, while Nicosia prioritized its relationships with the Arab states of the region. However, from 2009, those relations between the two countries were set on a different basis. One of the main reasons for this turn was the disintegration of Israel's relationship with Turkey, because of various events,<sup>14</sup> together with the turmoil thrown up by the Arab Spring. Having cooperated strategically with Turkey in previous times, Israel had to face major issues as their relationship with Turkey deteriorated. Tensions between the two nations led to Israel looking to make new friends in the area in order to avoid regional isolation, and this became the foundation for a new accord between Cyprus and Israel. As Cyprus was the single non-hostile nation with which it shared air and sea boundaries, the case for cooperation with Cyprus was attractive to Israel.

Without a doubt, the discovery of hydrocarbons in both states was another reason that enhanced the rapprochement of Israel and Cyprus. The possibility of mutually beneficial official cooperation between Cyprus and Israel became apparent for the first time in December 2010, when the two countries signed a delimitation agreement on their EEZs. Cyprus President Dimitris Christofias visited Israel in March 2011 for the first-ever official visit by a Cypriot head of state.<sup>15</sup> In November of the same year, Israeli President Shimon Peres paid an official visit to Cyprus, where four agreements

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13 It must be stressed that the RoC traditionally maintained extremely close defence relations with Greece since the establishment of the Republic, however, as this is a special case it will be analysed in a different paper.

14 About the Turkish - Israel Relations see: O. Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

15 Embassy of the Republic of Cyprus in Tel Aviv, available at [http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/embassies/embassy\\_telaviv.nsf/DMLbilateral\\_gr/DMLbilateral\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/embassies/embassy_telaviv.nsf/DMLbilateral_gr/DMLbilateral_gr?OpenDocument).

were signed between the two countries on research and development, renewable energy, archeology and telecommunications.<sup>16</sup> During the visit, the Israeli President stated that the RoC is ‘an important strategic partner for Israel’, and expressed his hopes that ‘the strategic relations between our countries will strengthen and the cooperation deepen’.<sup>17</sup> In February 2012, Netanyahu visited Cyprus, the first visit of an Israeli Prime Minister in history.<sup>18</sup>

The field of defence had not seen any particular collaboration in recent times between the two states. The RoC had bought a small amount of Israeli military hardware in the mid-1990s, but generally, the two sides were unwilling to cooperate much more. However, the rapprochement between Cyprus and Israel at the political level has led to the gradual expansion of initiatives and contacts in the defence sector, mainly after 2009, where the two defence ministries explored the possibility of working together. In January 2012, the official kick-start of their defence relations was initiated, as the RoC Minister of Defense, Demetris Eliades, visited Israel, the first defence minister from Cyprus to do so. In February 2012, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Cyprus for the first time, whereupon it was agreed that Israel could use Cyprus’ airspace and territorial waters if it needed to conduct search and rescue operations.<sup>19</sup> In December 2012, a bilateral cooperation programme for 2013 was signed. Within the frame of this programme, in April 2013, a joint exercise was conducted within and outside the territorial waters of the RoC.<sup>20</sup>

In May 2013, RoC Minister of Defence Photis Photiou paid an official visit to Israel. During the visit, Israeli Minister of Defence Moshe Ya’alon stressed the importance of the strategic relationship between Israel and the RoC, and explained ‘Israel’s intention to improve the preparedness of its navy in the Mediterranean to protect the gas facilities.’<sup>21</sup> In February 2014, for the first time a joint military exercise was conducted between the RoC and Israel, called *Onisilos-Gideon*, off the RoC’s

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16 F. Toli, ‘Israel’s Peres to Visit Cyprus’, *Greek Reporter.com*, 2 November 2011, available at <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2011/11/02/israels-peres-to-visit-cyprus/>.

17 Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘President Peres Meets with Cypriot President Anastasiades’, [Press Release], May 7, 2013, available at <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2013/Pages/Peres-meets-Cypriot-President-Anastasiades.aspx>.

18 The Economist, ‘Israel and Cyprus - Getting Friendly’, *The Economist* (2012, February 18), available at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2012/02/israel-and-cyprus..>

19 A. Stergiou, ‘Greece, Cyprus and Israel Change the Military Balance in the Mediterranean’, Geopolitical Intelligence Service (2013, December 4), available at <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/greece-cyprus-and-israel-change-the-military-balance-in-the-mediterranean.politics,644.html>.

20 E. Benari, ‘Israel and Cyprus to Hold Joint Military Exercise’, *Israeli Frontline* (10 April 2013 ), available at <http://www.israelifrontline.com/2013/04/israel-and-cyprus-to-hold-join.html>.

21 Arutz Shevi, ‘Israel and Cyprus to Improve Military Cooperation’, *Israel International News* (n.d.), available at <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/Flash.aspx/267521#.VQ6hgY7kfTN>.

southern coast, involving the Israeli air force.<sup>22</sup> Photiou declared in a press conference: "The relations between Cyprus and Israel are entering a new phase. I am confident that the strategic dialogue that began several months ago will benefit both countries and will continue in all areas, including energy security".<sup>23</sup> In May 2014, five Israeli navy ships visited and participated in the multinational exercise *Argonaut 2014*.<sup>24</sup> In August of the same year, the new Cypriot Minister of Defence Christoforos Fokaides paid an official visit to Israel. Fokaides agreed at his conference with Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon to create a joint committee to assist in implementing an upgrade of defensive collaboration between the two countries.<sup>25</sup> In February 2016, Moshe Ya'alon made the first official visit to Cyprus, during which he and Fokaides signed a Status of Forces agreement (SOFA).<sup>26</sup> Speaking after the meeting, the Israeli Minister said: "The relationships between our defence establishments, as well as between our armed forces and intelligence agencies, are long-standing, productive and important. My visit here today demonstrates a strong relationship."<sup>27</sup>

During 2017, the Cypriot Minister of Defence visited Israel three times, where the appointment of a Cypriot defence attaché to Israel was announced.<sup>28</sup> The attaché took his office in September of that year. Moreover, during 2017, many joint military exercises were conducted. In March the military exercise *Onisilos-Gideon*<sup>29</sup> was held, and in June the military exercises of *Iason 1* for training in air force activities and *Kinyras – Saoul* for the training of ground forces were conducted.<sup>30</sup> In December, the joint

22 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'The Armed Forces of the Republic of Cyprus and the State of Israel hold a joint exercise named "Onisilos-Gideon"', [Press Release] (2014, February 11), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/FF3E4C24E329CBC9C2257D9E002A91F6?OpenDocument>.

23 K. Turner, 'Cyprus and Israel Mount Joint Military Exercise', *Cyprus Mail*, (2014, November 1), available at <http://cyprus-mail.com/2014/01/11/cyprus-israel-mount-joint-military-exercise>.

24 Ministry of Defence (RoC) Joint Rescue Coordination Center, 'Multinational Exercise "ARGONAUT 2014"', [Press Release] (2014, May 19), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/CJRCC.nsf/All/CA73F1C8296FCDE0C2257CDD00457921?OpenDocument>.

25 J. Christou, 'Defence Minister Concludes Israel Visit', *Cyprus Mail* (2015, August 5), available at <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/08/04/defence-minister-concludes-israel-visit/>.

26 The agreement defines the rights and obligations of each country's military personnel during joint activities.

27 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'First official visit by the Israeli Minister of Defense to Cyprus. An Agreement on the Status of Forces was signed' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2016, February 24), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/FDA813524FCCE376C2257F630041F07E?OpenDocument>.

28 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Visit by the Minister of Defense to Israel as part of a series of visits to the Eastern Mediterranean [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, May 14), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/9D90086B1F0F11BC2258121002313F8?OpenDocument>.

29 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'The "Onisilos-Gideon" exercise was successfully completed' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, March 22) available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/C7DB2740F52D0C3C22580EC00227304?OpenDocument>.

30 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'The exercises "IASON 1/2017" and "KINYRAS-SAUL 2017"' were

military exercises *Iason 2*, *Nikoklis-David* and *Onisilos-Gideon* were held with the ground and airborne units and personnel of the Cypriot and Israeli armed forces.<sup>31</sup>

Broadly translated, our findings indicate that from 2010, the bilateral relations between the RoC and Israel have entered a new and flourishing period at the defence level. In particular, from 2012 to 2017, many high-level visits have taken place, such as between the ministers of defence, high ranking officials and delegations of the two ministries. Also, many defence agreements have been signed in which Cyprus and Israel have conducted several joint military and search and rescue exercises. All the above confirm that in five years, the RoC, via gradual defence diplomacy efforts, established high-level relations with Israel.

### **Arab Republic of Egypt**

The diplomatic political relations between the RoC and Egypt were very good since the establishment of the Republic, mainly due to the two states' participation in the Non-Aligned Movement.<sup>32</sup> A serious incident in the late 1970s resulted in a break in their diplomatic relations for several years,<sup>33</sup> however, diplomatic relations of the two states has been restored gradually. Initially, a significant event was the two states' agreement on the delimitation of their EEZ in 2003.<sup>34</sup> The discovery of hydrocarbons in the Cyprus EEZ was an additional event which opened up new opportunities for the two states to cooperate in the energy sector. More specifically, Nicosia and Cairo signed an agreement for the construction of an underwater pipeline to export natural gas to Egypt. The pipeline will transport natural gas from the 'Aphrodite' field to a liquefaction plant in the town of Encu in Egypt. The aim of the agreement is to ensure the timely and safe development, construction and operation of the underwater

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successfully completed [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, June 14), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/D0788D0CE04FEC14C2258141001BF52E?OpenDocument..>

31 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Military Exercises *Iason*, *Nikoklis-David* and *Onisilos-Gideon*' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, December 3-14), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/D0788D0CE04FEC14C2258141001BF52E?OpenDocument>.

32 The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is a group of states that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. As of 2012, the movement has 120 members. See Non-Aligned Movement: <http://csstc.org/>.

33 Egyptian Special Forces invaded Larnaca International Airport on February 10, 1978 to try to end a hijacking. Prior to that, two terrorists had murdered well-known Egyptian editor Youssef Sehai, and then took a number of Arabs hostages who had been at a Nicosia conference. While Cypriot military were attempting to negotiate, the Egyptian forces made an unauthorised assault, which resulted in a gun battle between Egyptian and Cypriot soldiers, ending with the death or injury of over 20 Egyptian soldiers.

34 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (RoC), 'Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf', [Press Release] (2016, October 19), available at: [http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/mfa86\\_en/mfa86\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/mfa86_en/mfa86_en?OpenDocument).



pipeline, said the Cypriot Minister of Energy Yiorgos Lakkotrypis. He also said, 'It constitutes one more critical step for our country towards the effective exploitation of undersea wealth in the Cypriot EEZ to benefit all Cypriots,' the Cypriot minister said. 'Ultimately, through re-exporting gas from Aphrodite in the form of LNG, the pipeline will enable the transport of the first quantities of natural gas from the eastern Mediterranean to the EU.'<sup>35</sup>

An additional event which seems important for the rapprochement between Cyprus and Egypt was that Egypt severed its diplomatic relations with Turkey in 2013. Turkey's and Egypt's worsening relations since Mohammad Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood leader, was deposed in 2013 was illustrated by the fact that each country recalled their ambassadors from the other's capitals in November of that year. These diplomatic casualties occurred following Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan's announcement that he 'will never respect those who come to power through military coups.' Erdoğan's regime was sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and made efforts to reinstate Morsi as president, but the military regime that took over in Egypt stated that Erdoğan was guilty of 'attempting to influence public opinion against Egyptian interests, and supporting meetings of organizations that seek to create instability in the country.'<sup>36</sup> The divergence of Turkish and the new military-backed government in Egypt undoubtedly was one of the main factors that brought Cairo closer to Nicosia.

The establishment of excellent political relations between the two states has led to the gradual development of relations in the defence field. The primary motivations behind this cooperation have been on the one hand the common perceptions in energy-related interests and on the other hand the shared insights regarding Turkey as a security threat. The two states' defence relations have gradually developed since 2014. Initially, they cooperated in search and rescue matters, such as a joint exercise that was held off the coast of Larnaca in May 2015, and was attended by staff of the Egyptian Naval Academy of Alexandria. From 2015, defence relations intensified between the two countries, with the two defence ministers making regular visits and signing several agreements on defence-related issues. On November 2015, Egyptian Minister of Defense General Sedki Sobhi paid an official visit to Cyprus, which was the first visit by a defence minister of Egypt. During the visit, he and Cypriot Defence Minister Fokaides signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Defense and Military Cooperation between the two countries.<sup>37</sup> In response, Minister Fokaides also visited

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35 G. Psyllides, 'Cyprus, Egypt sign gas pipeline agreement'. *Cyprus Mail* (2018, September 19), available at <https://cyprus-mail.com/2018/09/19/cyprus-egypt-sign-gas-pipeline-agreement/>.

36 U.S. Policy and the Strategic Relationship of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel: Power Shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean.

37 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'First official visit by the Egyptian Minister of Defense to Cyprus - A Memorandum of Military and Defense Cooperation signed' [in Greek],

Cairo on February 2016, the first visit by a Cypriot Defence Minister to Egypt. During the visit, a bilateral military cooperation programme for 2016 was signed.<sup>38</sup>

In October 2016, Egypt participated for the first time with observers in the multinational exercise *Nemesis*,<sup>39</sup> while in April 2017, Fokaides officially visited Egypt for the third time. During the meeting, the RoC announced that they would post a defence attaché at the embassy in Cairo from October 2017.<sup>40</sup> In August 2017, a military delegation from Egypt's Ministry of Defence paid a three-day visit to Cyprus and signed with Nicosia a bilateral programme for the implementation of military and maritime cooperation in search and rescue missions for 2017-2018.<sup>41</sup> In December 2017 a Memorandum of Cooperation on Aeronautical Search and Rescue was signed during Defence Minister Sobhy's official visit to Cyprus.<sup>42</sup> Beyond signing defence/military agreements and exchanging official visits between the two ministries of defence, cooperation is identified in other cases, such as exchanges in military personnel for educational purposes.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, through the Memorandum of Understanding between the RoC and Egypt, the two states have held many joint exercises in search and rescue.<sup>44</sup>

The new regional conditions, as were described above, favoured the gradual development of closer defence relations between Nicosia and Cairo, since the two

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[Press Release] (2015, November 3), available at: <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/4A122751EA7BC502C2257EF2004AD506?OpenDocument>.

38 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'First official visit by the Cypriot Minister of Defense to Egypt' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2016, February 28) available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/9F18BE51CF1750E9C2257F670057625F?OpenDocument>.

39 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Multinational Exercise Nemesis- 2016' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2016, October 12), available at: <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/0C3AE7527544D3F8C225804A004F877B?OpenDocument>.

40 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Minister of Defence meets with President El Sisi in Egypt to establish Permanent Co-ordinating Committee on Defense Issues' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, April 12), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/F9546D3081EE3471C225810000570A92?OpenDocument>.

41 Gold News, 'Cyprus and Egypt Sign Program for Implementing Their Military Cooperation', Gold News (2017, August 25), available at <http://www.goldnews.com.cy/en/energy/cyprus-and-egypt-sign-program-for-implementing-their-military-cooperation>.

42 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Egyptian Defense Minister's Official Visit - Signing of Memorandum on Aeronautical Research-Rescue' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, December 12), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/A50D0190A151E393C22581F400456D5F?OpenDocument>.

43 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Delegation from the Egyptian training ship "SHALATIN" visits the JRCC Larnaca, [Press Release] (2017, December 21), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/CJRCC.nsf/All/DF992A2DE7B5E347C22581FD004717ED?OpenDocument>.

44 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'International Exercise Search and Rescue CYPEGYP - 02/17' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, December 22), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/C1F7F8ED0F953E02C2258204001FB48F?OpenDocument>.

states had major motivations to develop these relations. On the one hand, for Cyprus, the development of defence relations with a state which has over a million square kilometres of territory, 2450 kilometres of coastline of which roughly 900 kilometres are on the Mediterranean Sea, and a population of 84 million, was a great achievement.<sup>45</sup> In addition, Egypt is recognised as a major power in the Arab world, countering Turkish ambitions to be a dominant force in the worldwide Muslim fraternity. It is also recognised that Egyptian armed forces are highly respected within Egypt, and many senior soldiers enter politics when they leave the armed forces. On the other hand, it was important for Egypt to establish relations with Cyprus because, beyond the fact that the latter supports Egypt's positions in various international forums, and mainly in the European Parliament, Cyprus was regarded as a non-hostile, non-competitive state and the safest choice as a hub for the exportation of Egyptian gas to Europe.

### **Lebanon**

The RoC has traditionally maintained very good diplomatic relations with Lebanon; however, beyond their close relations, they have not cooperated much on matters of defence. Only in the last decade have the two states initiated closer defence relations, brought on by two major events. In 2006, during the military conflict in Lebanon between Hezbollah paramilitary forces and the Israel Defence Forces, the RoC contributed to the evacuation of Lebanese refugees. The Government of the RoC granted access to its resources and infrastructure in order to facilitate safe passage from Lebanon. Cyprus also became the hub for delivering humanitarian aid to Lebanon. A second turning point was the 2007 agreement that the two countries signed regarding the maritime delimitation of their EEZs.

Following these landmark events, cooperation developed between the countries, thereby improving relations in the field of defence. Initially, in January 2008, the RoC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs negotiated an agreement between Cyprus and Lebanon on aeronautical and maritime search and rescue.<sup>46</sup> The two ministries of defence then made initial contacts in 2011. In September 2012, the Minister of Defence of the RoC, Dimitris Eliades, paid an official visit to Lebanon, which was the first visit by a Cypriot Minister of Defence.<sup>47</sup> The next year, another visit was paid by the Cypriot Minister

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45 CIA World Factbook, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>.

46 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (RoC), 'Cyprus and Lebanon sign an agreement on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue', [Press Release] (2008, January 16), available at <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/412081E0FA216C46C2257FA000458A4D?OpenDocument>.

47 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Official Visit by the Minister of Defense to Lebanon and Talks with the Leadership of the Country' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2012, September 21), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/13D67786ACEEF55C2257D9E002A90CD?OpenDocument..>

of Defence, whereby a Memorandum of Understanding on Defence and Military Cooperation was signed.<sup>48</sup> Official visits of the Ministers of Defence and other high ranking officials continued and intensified in the following years, mainly during 2016 and 2017. During a visit by the Cypriot Minister of Defence to Lebanon in October 2017, a decision was made on the formation of a joint committee for the development of defence relations between the two countries.<sup>49</sup>

The RoC MoD offered several search and rescue training exercises to Lebanese armed forces. The RoC also promised to help Lebanon build a search-and-rescue center to respond to emergencies off its coastline.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the Lebanese army participated in the annual multinational exercise *Argonaut* in 2013 with ships, and from 2014 until 2017 with observers. The RoC also provided military materials to the Lebanese Government. From 2015 until 2017, Cyprus provided ammunition worth over €20 million, the last tranche of which was delivered in October 2016.<sup>51</sup>

### **Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**

Bilateral relations commenced between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the RoC in early 1962. Cyprus' first embassy was opened in Amman in December 2009, while the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's embassy opened in Nicosia in August 2016. In the interests of bilateral cooperation, many reciprocal official visits have taken place.

The two defence ministries had no contact in the period 2014-2017. Following a series of negotiations between the two ministries, Cyprus and Jordan signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defence and Military issues during an official visit by Defence Minister Fokaidis in Jordan in May 2017.<sup>52</sup> The RoC Ministry of Defence also provided equipment, in the framework of Jordan's international initiative, known

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48 Cyprus Investment Counsel, 'Lebanon - Cyprus', Cynvestco.com (2016, August), available at <http://cynvestco.com/wp/2016/08/21/lebanon-cyprus/>.

49 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Official visit by the Minister of Defense Christoforos Fokaidis in Lebanon' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, October 30), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/933BB90296A53CA5C22581C9005548B8?OpenDocument>.

50 Cyprus Mail, 'Beirut and Nicosia to deepen cooperation, new ambassador says', *Cyprus Mail* (2017, December 30), available at: <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/12/30/beirut-nicosia-deepen-cooperation-new-ambassador-says/>; The Associated Press, 'Cyprus to help Lebanon build Mediterranean Sea rescue center', *Defence News* (2017, November 30), available at <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2017/11/30/cyprus-to-help-lebanon-build-mediterranean-sea-rescue-center/>.

51 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Know-how and ... "Zastava" from Cyprus to Lebanon' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, October 30), available at: <http://www.philenews.com/eidiseis/politiki/article/447991/technogiosia-kai-zastaba-apo-kypro-pros-libano>.

52 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Cyprus-Jordan had signed a Military Memorandum of Understanding' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, May 23), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/17D60BDAACF36E9BC2258129003FA5C4?OpenDocument>.

as *Aqaba Process*,<sup>53</sup> to counter terrorism.<sup>54</sup> In November 2017, Jordanian Lieutenant General Mahmoud Fraihat paid an official visit to Cyprus for the signing of a Bilateral Military Cooperation Programme.<sup>55</sup> The Minister of Defence of the RoC pointed out that: 'The signature of a Bilateral Military Cooperation Programme puts in practice practical actions, so that this cooperation can become even more fruitful to the mutual benefit of our countries in various areas, such as joint exercises, training and other joint programmes dealing with common threats'.<sup>56</sup> The RoC has also accredited a defence attaché at its diplomatic mission in Jordan, who is stationed in Cairo.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that Cyprus is a small state in the international system, with all this entails in the exercise of its diplomatic practice, a series of different dynamics and regional changes led the Cypriot governments, independently of their political orientation, to aggressively pursue defence collaborations during the last decade. This policy was even more obvious in the RoC's bilateral defence diplomacy initiatives with its neighbouring states, such as Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. In view of the volume and the quality of different parameters (e.g., signatures of agreements, regular high-level visits, common military drills, etc.), the RoC, via a gradual and systematic defence diplomacy policy has developed close defence relations and partnerships with its neighbouring states. It is noted, however, that the quality and quantity of the defence relations the RoC has formed with its neighbouring states differ in each case. There is no doubt that the deepening of defence relations with Israel and Egypt is a priority for Cyprus' defence diplomacy for obvious reasons. In addition, beyond the fact that the RoC has developed close relations with its neighbouring states in the defence field, it must be stressed that these defence partnerships should not be confused with military

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53 The Aqaba Meetings are part of a series of international meetings launched by Jordan in 2015 to bolster security and military cooperation, coordination and exchange of expertise among regional and international partners to counter terrorism and its threat to global peace and security within a holistic approach.

54 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Official visit by the Head of Jordanian Armed Forces' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, November 30), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/45A7A94086E45DACC22581E90020F8A8?OpenDocument>.

55 Ministry of Defence (RoC), 'Official visit by the Jordanian Lieutenant General Mahmoud A. Fraihat to Cyprus' [in Greek], [Press Release] (2017, December 1), available at <http://www.mod.gov.cy/mod/mod.nsf/All/3CDE6B2E65DAAE88C22581E9004659C7?OpenDocument>.

56 Cyprus Daily, 'Cyprus and Jordan sign bilateral military cooperation programme', *Cyprus Times* (2017, December 1), available at <http://english.cyprustimes.com/2017/12/03/cyprus-jordan-sign-bilateral-military-cooperation-programme/>.

57 Cyprus News Agency, 'Cyprus Defence Minister meets Egyptian President', *CNA.org.cy* (2017, April 12), available at <http://www.cna.org.cy/webnews-en.aspx?a=b202944eba10483aaff99bf04b54609>.

alliances, which, of course, are something very different.

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