

Pandemic Entanglement: COVID-19 and Hybrid Threats in the Republic of Cyprus

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Abstract

How have modern threats and challenges manifesting during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Republic of Cyprus at state and societal levels? What are the links between new security challenges and existing conventional conflicts? COVID-19 has spread anxiety, fear, and misleading information, and it has brought forth new challenges and concepts in how we understand security. This paper examines how these challenges are rooted in a security struggle of hybrid-threat entanglement in the Republic of Cyprus during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in the first two waves from March to October 2020. Specifically, the paper views COVID-19 itself as a hybrid threat that has bred a range of security issues of the Republic of Cyprus. Hybrid threats are of a multitudinous nature. When hybrid threats like a pandemic virus disrupts the wider security and routinised processes in everyday life, states and societies become trapped in a process of security entanglement: one type of threat becomes interlinked with other processes. When this process of security entanglement is neglected or overlooked (thereby avoiding disentangling), policy at large is affected, be it a State's foreign, economic, or security policy. As a result, society itself is affected.

Keywords: conflict, COVID-19, Cyprus, hybrid threats, insecurity, security entanglement, society, state, pandemic

Introduction

In an unprecedented move due to the rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2², the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) decided to shut down the checkpoints connecting it with the unrecognised breakaway regime of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' for the first

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² See the World Health Organisation (WHO), 'WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19' (11 March 2020) available at <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020> (last accessed 11 August 2020).

time since 2003.³ A wave of reactions from activists condemning the move followed, with the majority of people protesting and clashing with the police near the Ledra Street checkpoint.⁴ Oftentimes, people misinterpret a given crisis and may react negatively to changes in their lifestyle and routine. The closing of checkpoints in late February 2020 was reported by a number of reputable media like Reuters as something that was ultimately rushed, as RoC had reported ‘no cases’ of the virus. It also overwhelmingly presented the activist point of view.⁵ With hindsight, nonetheless, as cases are nearing 1,500 at the time of writing, restrictions had indeed to be upheld as a method of public health management.⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic is not a mere crisis that has generated only health security concerns. It is important to take a step back and see how this pandemic has managed to affect the Cyprus conflict, as well as the state and society of RoC in various ways. Traditionally, International Relations literature has focused on the more imminent, conventional threats that conflict cases like Cyprus have experienced: that of mass military upheaval, arms races, pre-emptive security measures, and crude balance of power. However, COVID-19 has moved beyond that, incorporating both conventional and unconventional, military and non-military means, through which political actors can achieve a political end. The use of the social dimension of the pandemic, therefore, has acted as a hybrid threat catalyst through which political actors have been able to utilise the crisis to achieve political objectives that pose considerable risk to human security in the process.⁷ Within the first few days of the pandemic, the RoC authorities responded with restrictive measures on society, airports, and general transportation and movement, to tackle, prevent, and delay the spread of COVID-19. The measures, which had been introduced as early as early March, eventually became stricter and stricter. They came out in the form of Ministerial Decrees, although they were also initially announced by the President of the Republic in live

³ Michelle Kambas, ‘Cyprus to Shut Checkpoints for the First Time Since 2003 Over Coronavirus’ *Reuters* (28 February 2020), available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-cyprus-checkpoints/cyprus-to-shut-checkpoints-for-first-time-since-2003-over-coronavirus-idUSKCN20M1T6> (last accessed 10 August 2020).

⁴ DW, ‘Cyprus: Protesters, Police Clash at Closed Checkpoint’ *Deutsche Welle* (7 March 2020), available at <https://www.dw.com/en/cyprus-protesters-police-clash-at-closed-checkpoint/a-52678119>.

⁵ *Ibid.* See also Kambas (no 2).

⁶ See the up-to-date infographic map for the COVID-19 spread in Cyprus at <https://covid19.ucy.ac.cy/>.

⁷ Maria Mälksoo ‘Countering Hybrid Warfare as Ontological Security Management: The Emerging Practices of the EU and NATO’ (2018) 27(3) *European Security* 377

televised speeches.⁸ By mid-March, the measures included a full lockdown with curfews, except for businesses and workers with special permits. Non-essential business operations were also suspended, whereas others began adopting a remote-working business model. Public events were suspended too, whereas gatherings in indoor spaces, which were first limited, were eventually also banned, as households had to be restricted in the confines of their own residences.⁹

However, one begs to ask the question: what is the link between the pandemic and new security challenges in conflict cases? The background through which this study makes a case of new security challenges for both states and societies alike in ongoing conflict scenarios is linked to the concept of entanglement. ‘Security entanglement’ as a conceptual framework offers a more holistic analysis of identified hybrid threats in an interdisciplinary field. The process through which security threats become blurred with the political life and other safety concerns is the point at where the entanglement takes place. A constant theme that presents itself as rather challenging during entanglement is to identify the presence of modern security threats at a time when the affected actor (be it the state or society) might be unaware that it is under threat. It is important to identify how and why the entanglement of security concerns is a policy and societal concern.

This paper critically evaluates current practices when assessing hybrid threats and their associations to pandemics and the creation of new security challenges for conflict cases in the surge of COVID-19. The main contribution is theoretical and addresses the gap in Security Studies and the world of policymaking via a critical security approach. Empirically, the findings also attempt to portray the security vulnerabilities presented during pandemics. Furthermore, the paper focuses mostly on the case of RoC during and after the lockdown for the period between March and October 2020. The paper is a preliminary project that first attempts to utilise the concept of entanglement as a security framework, and to subsequently establish

⁸ On the Ministerial Decrees, see Press and Information Office, ‘COVID-19: Decrees’ (2020), available at <https://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus/eng/categories/decrees> (last accessed 23 June 2021). See also examples of how the President issued announcements at the Press and Information Office, ‘Press Releases: The President of the Republic Addresses the Cyprus People on the Issue of Coronavirus’ (13 March 2020), available at <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=12649#flat> (last accessed 10 August 2020) and Staff Reporter, ‘Coronavirus: President to Announce New Measures at 8:30pm’ *Cyprus Mail* (29 April 2020), available at <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/04/29/coronavirus-president-to-announce-new-measures-at-8-30pm/> (last accessed 10 August 2020).

⁹ Christiana Cleridou, ‘COVID-19 and Labour Law: Cyprus’ (2020) Special Issue (‘COVID-19 and Labour Law: A Global Review’) 13(1) *Italian Labour Law e-Journal* 1-2.

clearer links between new security challenges and existing conventional conflicts like that of Cyprus. As such, comparisons to other countries and how their agendas and policies are shaped due to security entanglement may be drawn in future research.

The first section of this paper builds the preliminary connection between the pandemics in conflict cases and hybrid threats. To be more precise, it lays out the hypothesis and the driving factor of this analysis: COVID-19, as a global health crisis, breeds a spill-over of security threats that are hybrid in essence *and* have the potential of bringing new security challenges to ongoing conflict cases. The second section deals in greater detail with the theoretical framework of security entanglement that establishes the foundation of the argument. The next section provides an elaborate application of the framework on the case of RoC (its state and society) and paints a clearer picture on how modern (hybrid) threats affect not just Cyprus, but also other cases today. This is an empirical testimony that should prove useful for the wider field of Security Studies today. The last part includes recommendations and offers preliminary suggestions that can be utilised for further study in this field.

Pandemics and Conflict in Cyprus

The COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a blessing in disguise. It has helped speed up wide accessibility and use of online digital technologies throughout RoC. Moreover, businesses have made adaptations to their models to accommodate new practices in remote working. The state itself responded relatively fast by developing business aid packages and investing heavily into services like healthcare. On the other hand, the pandemic has generated numerous insecurities. It has slowed down economic progress, while also endangering the economy itself. The financial impact is expected be rather severe in the months to come. The issue with the novel coronavirus as an international threat is highlighted in the global gaps in the healthcare system. Healthcare budgets vary from country to country, so it is safely assumed that the response level would also vary from country to country. Researchers and decision-makers recognise that this is an important limitation which may prevent effective public-health management.¹⁰ More striking, however, is the statement of the October 2019 Global Health Security Index (GHS) that highlights how no country is really prepared for

¹⁰ Erwin J. Khoo and John D. Lantos, 'Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic' (2020) 109(7) *Acta Paediatrica* 1323.

epidemics or pandemics of any sort.¹¹ Therefore, despite the level of spending, no country is actually at the desired level when dealing with pandemics.

Why are these developments important to note? The case of RoC is of interest due to a plethora of security issues of a non-conventional nature that have been left unaddressed. Nonetheless, this ‘frozen’ conflict is not particularly unique when compared to other territorial disputes, such as those between Greece and Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, or India and Pakistan over Kashmir. These conflicts also are highly diverse, with different security challenges and needs. However, the entangled security nature of the pandemic has the potential of bringing forth some change in cases like Cyprus. For one thing, the Cyprus conflict has seen no real change in decades. The conflict itself remains at the top of the RoC security agenda and is equally the primary political discussion item across the public. Therefore, other security issues may easily go unnoticed.

In practice, however, there is a serious challenge for policymakers. The relationship between security referent objects and the situation through which they arise and are framed through hybrid threats becomes blurred primarily because of its own ontological setting being radically perplexed and mixed with other security issues. Simply put, there is no independence and not just mere interdependence across these security issues: they stop being separate phenomena and are thought of as one single entity.¹² What is particularly problematic is that such security threats are often ignored in the presence of larger *perceived* threats that may take up much of a state’s security agenda and are treated as one, single event.¹³ Cyprus as a conflict case is often examined primarily through a rationalist lens that focuses on the rule of law, state sovereignty, and issues of power and balance in the international system.¹⁴ These accounts include, inevitably, those within the school of

¹¹ Global Health Security (GHS) Index, ‘Inaugural Global Health Security Index Finds No Country Is Prepared for Epidemics or Pandemics’ (24 October 2019), available at <https://www.ghsindex.org/news/inaugural-global-health-security-index-finds-no-country-is-prepared-for-epidemics-or-pandemics/> (last accessed 10 August 2020).

¹² Stefan Elbe and Gemma Buckland-Merrett, ‘Entangled Security: Science, Co-Production, and Intra-Active Insecurity’ (2019), 4(2) *European Journal of International Security* 126.

¹³ For further analysis on how States may prioritise such security objectives over others, see Constantinos Adamides, ‘The Challenges of Formulating National Security Strategies (NSS) in the Presence of Overarching Existential Threats’ 30(1) *The Cyprus Review* 71, 73-74.

¹⁴ For a detailed account, see James D Fearon, Alexander Wendt, ‘Rationalism v. Constructivism: A Sceptical View’ in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, Beth A. Simmons (eds.) *Handbook of International Relations* (London: SAGE Publications) 54-55.

Realist thought or political scientists studying the conflict from a narrow, domestic, in-Cyprus scope and not necessarily a systemic view. Such views equally include manifestations of a balance of power, alliance-building, and the geopolitics of Eastern Mediterranean,¹⁵ a ‘security imbalance’ between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities of Cyprus,¹⁶ as well as traditionally-perceived threats like Turkey.¹⁷ Nevertheless, COVID-19 has also shown other security vulnerabilities that must be drawn out to the spotlight. In studying the interplay of security structures and the impact anxiety and uncertainty have on societal and state-level identity, and in borrowing the phrase ‘chaos is a ladder’¹⁸, it becomes easier to understand how COVID-19 has moulded new security challenges for frozen conflict cases like Cyprus. As this study will demonstrate, security and threats today go further beyond the conventional understanding of the past.

The study uses the relatively new concept of *security entanglement* as an analytical tool that explains how security threats become interlinked. This is particularly important, for reasons including but not being limited to:

- (a) helping policymakers and researchers identify how health-related threats like COVID-19 can be linked to other modern threats;
- (b) *disentangling*, and therefore, clearing up the blur between policy and *hybrid threats*;
- (c) taking protective and/or pre-emptive measures against such threats; and
- (d) understanding how pervasive misperception leading to miscalculation because of mis/disinformation practices pose a serious security challenge.

¹⁵ See Charalambos Tsardanidis and Yannis Nicolau, ‘Cyprus Foreign and Security Policy: Options and Challenges’ in Stelios Stavridis et al. (eds.) *The Foreign Policies of the European Union’s Mediterranean States and Applicant Countries in the 1990s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999) 171. See also Zenonas Tziarras, ‘Israel-Cyprus-Greece: A “Comfortable” Quasi-Alliance’ (2016)21(3) *Mediterranean Politics* 411.

¹⁶ James Ker-Lindsay, ‘The Security Dimensions of a Cyprus Solution’ *Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe, GreeSE Paper No 19* (The Hellenic Observatory, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2008) p. 4.

¹⁷ For a traditional Realist IR understanding of how the Cyprus problem becomes, at large, the core perceived security threat, see Giorgos I. Kentas, ‘A Realist Evaluation of Cyprus’ Survival Dilemma as Result of the Annan Plan’(2003) 15(2) *The Cyprus Review* 13-63.

¹⁸ See a theoretical and fictional application of ‘chaos is a ladder’ in the security and political sense in Ronnie Olesker, ‘Chaos is a Ladder: A Study of Identity, Norms, and Power Transition in the Game of Thrones Universe’ (2020), 22(1) *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 47, 59-60

The Entanglement of People, States, and (In)Security

How do we witness the manifestation of new security norms? More pragmatically, how do new security issues become intertwined with conventional security issues and what does this mean for conflict dynamics? Security has grown into a complex, ontological issue. For one thing, it is not merely about direct existential threats that actively deal with the issue of survival. For the sake of debate, traditional security studies would dictate that if Country A, a small state, was threatened by Country B, an advanced and militarily superior state, and the former's own survival depended on external forces beyond its control, it would not be odd to assume that Country A could eventually be experiencing a constant, ecstatic state of terror and of the fear of losing everything. Such fear would even be considered a drive of reaction in traditional notions of security and survival, simply because Country A would be forced to uphold its own interests and attempt to adopt new strategies, form strong alliances for protection, and so on.¹⁹ In this simplified scenario, Country A faces one single existential threat (Country B). As it becomes evident that the sole security interest is to uphold the state and its territorial sovereignty, it is mandatory for Country A to do its best in ensuring its survival. Even so, the way we discuss security today includes a richer bunch of twists.

The starting point of this understanding is rooted in *People, States and Fear* by Barry Buzan, which has paved the way for an innovative security framework, aligned with the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. In the original work of 1983, Buzan acknowledges that the concept of security has been underdeveloped due to the clash and polarisation of the mainstream International Relations theories that have focused on the issue of security. The literature, according to Buzan, has mainly focused on the dichotomy of power and peace.²⁰ Buzan's work is important for at least four main reasons. Firstly, for the first time, both state and society view and understand existential security concerns as an obstacle to their own growth and freedom, let alone survival. Secondly, the landscape is not only painted with military and political insecurities, but with economic and environmental ones as well.

Thirdly, Buzan not only looks at security as a whole, but he also attempts to break down potential vulnerabilities that are exhibited through security issues at state-level.

¹⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz 'The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory' (1988) 18(4) *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. 621.

²⁰ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd, 1983) 2-3.

el. In later work, Buzan, Waeber, and de Wilde identify security as having more than just one face. Security is split up into the military, the environmental, the economic, the societal, and the political sectors.²¹ Vulnerabilities, then, are not simply a matter of defence and the military realm, as conventional approaches indicate, but are also manifest in other areas.²² Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Buzan et al.'s work is a foundation for modern Security Studies scholars in how we interpret and understand security. Their work has inspired new security methods, albeit critical, which has broadened our scope far beyond conventional security practices.²³ This also means that the concept of security and its *perceived* existential threats are not often easily understood. States and societies also perceive security concerns in the *ontological* sense. This means they may have to deal with threats that mostly concern their own image and identity, as well as the narrative that justifies how they function in day-to-day life. In this sense, states and societies desire to preserve their self-perceived image and prefer to uphold and protect such identities by maintaining consistency. When the process is disrupted, an *insecurity* emerges, forcing both the state and the society to normalise new identities and incorporate them into their own narrative. Consequently, acting against these insecurities serves as a correcting mechanism that justifies the introduction of new norms.²⁴

In answering the question of how we observe and understand new entangled security issues for conflict cases, it is important to understand the given context and structure. The absence of reliable means of communication, basic services, health amenities, and so on, generates insecurity that the state and society need to address. According to Aradau, '[m]aterial objects appear to support the provision of services, societal cohesion, and the reproduction of national identity'.²⁵ In Cyprus, for example, the way in which the European identity has manifested itself is through the

²¹ See Barry Buzan et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

²² This paper touches upon these sectors in the empirical section by providing relevant examples in how hybrid threats manifest in Cyprus during the examined period (March-August 2020). The emphasis here, nonetheless, is on the societal sector, which shapes the political sector, *inter alia*.

²³ Examples include the evolution of concepts like 'securitisation' and 'Regional Security Complexes Theory' (RSCT). See also Barry Buzan et al. (no 21) and Barry Buzan and Ole Waeber, *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁴ Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2018) 2-3, 12-13.

²⁵ See Claudia Aradau, 'Security That Matters: Critical Infrastructure and Objects of Protection' (2010) 41(5) *Security Dialogue* 491-492.

European market that has embraced Cyprus through EU membership. In sustaining such an identity, the material world normalises these relationships formed to understand foreign relations, as well as to politicise security concerns over critical infrastructure that includes communications, hospitals, transportation, and so on.²⁶ A disruption in these crucial services triggers a response in which the state needs to, in order to prioritise and accommodate new needs and maintain its own existence. In the case of COVID-19, the health crisis accumulated and catalysed new challenges, such as accommodating the sick, seeking new economy stimulus packages to overcome a potential slump, and to engage with the wider society in campaigns over the newly introduced restrictions of the pandemic. As a result, a new identity is formed under this pretext. This new identity is a response to the new security challenges that are not solely conventional in nature.

However, understanding the concerns of the state differs from understanding those of society in some respects. Some security concerns are politicised due to upward mobilisation starting at the societal level. In line with the Copenhagen School, the societal level of security has often been unaddressed due to the focus on the state as the unit of analysis.²⁷ Societies have their own identity, as a collective, as individuals, and as communities. Despite this, to best understand how society operates with what norms it identifies, and consequently, what its societal insecurities are, we need to consider the workings of society as a collection of these groups. *Fear* (and more accurately, *the prospect of fear* generated by anxiety), is a complementary tool that enhances this process in groups. Fear, on the one hand, is capable of generating vulnerabilities. By creating insecurities, fear as such creates a ‘deep, incapacitating state of not knowing which dangers to confront and which to ignore, i.e. how to get by in the world’²⁸. This adds to the notion of *anxiety*, which is crucial for understanding entanglement. It cannot be quantified, nor does it always encompass a fixed, predetermined, and defined object. In fact, anxiety embraces ‘*multifinality*, admitting to a range of emotions, including excitement and anticipation, and a variety of behaviors, from compulsive repetition, to acting out, to paralysis, to entrepreneurship’.²⁹ Distinguishing between the two is important in understanding

²⁶ Ibid., p. 501.

²⁷ Buzan et al. (no 21) 119.

²⁸ Jeniffer Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma’ (2006) 12(3) *European Journal of International Relations* 345.

²⁹ Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, ‘Anxiety, Fear, and Ontological Security in World Politics: Thinking with and Beyond Giddens’ (2020) 12(2) *International Theory* 241 (emphasis added).

meaningful action when dealing with existential threats: if we are talking about a generated fear, this often involves a response of ‘fight or flight’; if we are talking about anxiety, we should be looking at breaking down the concept further.³⁰

On the other hand, fear and anxiety, though separate concepts, can both be weaponised in the same fashion. The distribution of fear from and within the state and society can be achieved by drawing attention to an already-politicised matter and shaping it into an existential threat. Consequently, and to paraphrase Freud, distrust and insecurities in society are generated through a morbid process of anxiety.³¹ Things like migration, for instance, have often been regarded with hostility because of such processes.³² The presence of fear and anxiety intertwined makes these issues difficult to disentangle, as there are no guarantees for steady protection against the possibility of such threats.

Even so, these are merely the foundations of the theoretical framework employed. As it has already been mentioned, security and modern threats are conceptualised in an even more complicated way. As Alexander Wendt puts it, ‘by virtue of our entanglement from birth in social structures, human minds are not fully separable’³³. By expanding on this notion, we begin to equally understand how societies and states, in their quest of self-identification and establishing norms and rules, choose to interpret information from within a blurred blend in the confines of the social structures surrounding us³⁴. Taking this further, international politics and the need to establish security and order does not fall far from the same concept. Hybrid threats, then, blur the line between politics and warfare and transcend into multiple areas that affect one another, hence disturbing the norms of social relations and the organisation of life and communities³⁵.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ in James Stratchey (tr.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1919) 252.

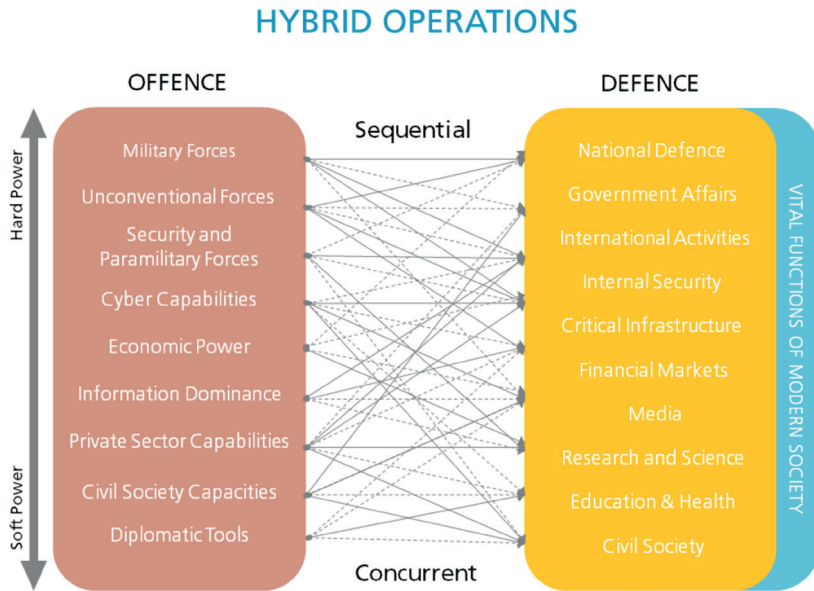
³² Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006) 47.

³³ Alexander Wendt, *Quantum Mind and Social Science: Unifying Physical and Social Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 33.

³⁴ See Figure 1. Notice how the sequential and concurrent relationships blend.

³⁵ For additional explanations on how these social relations are disturbed due to fear and security concerns, see Jef Huysmans, ‘Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier’ (1998) 4(2) *European Journal of International Relations* 226-255.

Figure 1: Visualisation of hybrid threats from a state and societal perspective.³⁶



Up to this point, a connection has been established in how modern-security issues do not solely revolve around questions of military force, power, and quantitative approaches in resolving a crisis by employing a large military force. Entanglement, then, does not always involve the quantitative aspects of security threats, but a collection of these security concepts. This section first began by drawing in arguments of new security frameworks by Buzan. Then, it moved on to more critical approaches, demonstrating how complex security can be. When examining threat entanglement, we observe a plethora of tools and security issues mixing with politics. Simultaneously, each type of threat³⁷ has a different impact; it serves a different purpose and acts in a different way. As such, *security entanglement* can be understood as an attempt to secure the state and society from themselves. In the cyber realm, security entanglement also has a positive impact: it effectively blurs the decision-making process, thereby delaying cyber-attacks as well as other hybrid attacks, by altering perceptions and behaviours in relation to our surroundings.³⁸ Of course,

³⁶ Aapo Cederberg, Pasi Eronen, 'How can Societies be Defended against Hybrid Threats?' (September 2015) 9 *Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)* 5.

³⁷ The threats this paper examines can be found in the next (empirical) section on the case of Cyprus.

³⁸ Aaron F. Brantly, 'Entanglement in Cyberspace: Minding the Deterrence Gap' (2020) 16(3) *Democracy and Security* 211, 218.

this layer of defence can also backfire, as it becomes harder to break down how the perceived threat itself could manifest or how the actor responsible for causing vulnerabilities would choose to move next.

Entanglement, then, takes place because of growing insecurities and vulnerabilities in the hybrid sense. By going beyond mere physical security concerns, which has been the purpose of this theoretical framework, we come upon this very realisation: our own physical insecurities, which might have been at some point rooted in *physical* threats, have created new existential insecurities in the *ontological* sense.³⁹ When one force entangles another's ontological security, then the affected target is vulnerable. Security Studies as a whole, and as a subdiscipline of International Relations, has grown both methodologically and epistemologically, as well as ontologically, in understanding how the world works by establishing ethical responsibility.⁴⁰ The entanglement and disentanglement process highlights an extension of this ontological element at large: it allows for anticipation and speculation of the perceived existential threat, by breaking down and simplifying the complex, blurred process of security.⁴¹

Therefore, if we are no longer dealing with merely conventional threats, whatever happens to states and societies upon realising that there are more than one security concerns can be problematic. Traditional security concerns are normally left to the state itself to handle. In this case, however, the response from society also matters. In reaching the conclusion that security threats and concepts become entangled through our own doing, one begs to ask when and whether we should consider *disentangling* such processes. As Hamilton argues, the disentanglement of security creates 'an openness towards *multiple* (yet differentiated) beings that are affected by our *political* choices or actions'.⁴² Identifying all the different possible threats to the state and society breaks new paths and could help address the gap in the policymaking process when it comes to non-traditional and non-conventional threats. Consequently, disentangling is a process of breaking down the nexus of blurred, intertwined security processes and threats into simpler information that can be interpreted better, so that decisive action against threats can take place more easily.

³⁹ Scott Hamilton, 'Securing Ourselves from Ourselves? The Paradox of "Entanglement" in the Anthropocene' (2017) 68(5) *Crime, Law and Social Change* 580.

⁴⁰ Iver B. Neumann, 'International Relations as a Social Science' (2014) 43(1) *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 337.

⁴¹ See Mitzen (no 29). See also Hamilton (no 38) 593-594.

⁴² See Hamilton (no 38) 592 (emphasis added).

There are dangers, nonetheless, when disentangling hybrid threats. What happens if we disentangle too much? *Can* we disentangle too much, if at all, in some cases? Disentanglement, as mentioned, helps experiment with additional options in the security and decision-making processes. This is achieved by placing distance between the security referent entity and the intended audience. The distance between these two is achieved by breaking up the security elements in question and clearing the blur. In other words, the process allows us to distinguish between multiple threats by distancing ourselves (the audience) from the threatened object (that is security-referent in nature). The less we relate to it, the easier it is to identify other threats. Despite this, there is a need for balance. If we completely disassociate ourselves from the threatened object, we might be unable to step in the moment a crisis is imminent, thus failing to ensure safety and security. Most interestingly, our ontological sense of security may also change in the process. Upon distancing ourselves, we are no longer able to perceive the same security threats and issues as before. An example of failed disentanglement takes us back to traditional security approaches and the State. More specifically, when we break down security too much, we might also be doing so at the expense of State and national sovereignty.⁴³

To go back to the fictional example given at the very beginning of this section, Country A is threatened by Country B. Country A in this scenario, however, is unaware that Country B is ready to directly launch its assault. Country A has effectively distanced itself from the reality of the situation and has ignored the imminent threat, that is, its sworn enemy, Country B, which is militarily superior in every way. If a threat has been left unchallenged and ignored for a prolonged period disentangling from such concerns can be fatal. A similar hypothesis is exerted in Schweller's *Unanswered Threats*, through the concept of 'underbalancing', which refers to states failing to understand or to react to the dangers they are exposed to⁴⁴. When states fail to disentangle, however, is not the same as having a clear threat and failing to respond or react to as such. The problem with hybrid threats is that they appear 'as an intensely relational and ontologically entangled phenomenon that does not exist prior to, nor independently of, its intra-action with other phenomena and agencies'.⁴⁵ Failing to disentangle is a real policy-oriented problem that emerges

⁴³ Didier Bigo, 'Internal and External Aspects of Security' (2006) 15(4) *European Security* 389 & 391.

⁴⁴ Randall L. Schweller, 'Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing' (2004), 29(2) *International Security* 159-160.

⁴⁵ Stefan Elbe and Gemma Buckland-Merrett, 'Entangled Security: Science, Co-Production, and Intra-Active Insecurity' (2019), 4(2) *European Journal of International Security* 123.

when the real danger itself is masked due to the blurred nature of security concerns. The existence of hybrid threats is what blurs the process, thus it should be emphasised that at least conceptually, not only states and societies cannot anticipate the extent to which action must be taken against a potential threat, but the threat itself is not clear either to other observers.

Cyprus and the Multifaceted Security Gaps

In addressing the challenges brought about by the lack of security disentanglement, the case study of Cyprus as a conflict and specifically the RoC comes into question. Traditionally, RoC has dealt with its own conflict as a security puzzle for the survival and the continuation of the state. As mentioned earlier, scholars and analysts have often focused primarily on the Cyprus conflict, disregarding other security issues in the process. Without downplaying the importance of the conflict in the political life, it is important to acknowledge other security issues and vulnerabilities that have been left unattended. This became particularly evident during the very first lockdown period in March-May 2020, where other threats and vulnerabilities started making a stronger appearance. Surely, the conflict itself plays a role in the security gaps in Cyprus, though it is not the sole vulnerability that should be addressed.

As the framework suggests, security does not merely follow a linear path, nor does it have a fixed position or universal understanding of policy. Even so, if security is then so complicated and multivariate when observed through a hybrid lens, why should we be considering COVID-19 as a hybrid threat, when in fact, it could simply be an issue of the international health system, and is, therefore, best left to other disciplines to deal with? Additionally, can we always disentangle these security concepts, and is it always beneficial to do so? In the case of Cyprus, it could be beneficial. The main issue, nonetheless, comes down to balance. Methodologically speaking, the process by which we begin breaking down these security issues for Cyprus is captured by (a) identifying how COVID-19 itself presents a considerable threat that changes the political life; (b) further identifying other threats that have run parallel to the pandemic and how these have exploited any vulnerabilities generated during the lockdown period; and (c) visualising these threats in an attempt to disentangle them and to put forward coherent solutions to overcome them.

Firstly, COVID-19 is a major health concern in itself and the reason is twofold. The most obvious impact it has is how infectious and lethal the disease is, alongside other serious health implications. As there is no consensus regarding the mortality rate just yet, the uncertainty this virus poses grows. Research is still underway, al-

though the political narrative on the virus has effectively been weaponised through disinformation and diplomatic tactics, both online and offline, to serve political interests. The United States (US), Russia, as well as China have all reacted differently to the pandemic. The US and particularly under former President Trump had, on the one hand, downplayed the severity of the crisis, as it originally dismissed the looming health dangers and their implications, whilst also being accused of using financial leverage to buy large volumes of medical equipment at the expense of other countries.⁴⁶ Simultaneously, according to EU documents shared with international press agencies, Russia has exploited the coronavirus crisis to launch targeted disinformation campaigns on the West, in order to stir up chaos.⁴⁷ Interestingly, we have also seen China actively using Western social media platforms at a time when everyone has conveniently decided to stay home as a pandemic safeguard. Targeted disinformation from China against Western audiences has also focused on boosting the Chinese image abroad via its diplomats and embassies, as well as through international English-speaking platforms, in an attempt to ‘counter Western narratives’.⁴⁸

Not only that, but this disinformation has also had a major effect on critical infrastructure. Characteristically, in March, there were only 126 intensive care beds available in RoC⁴⁹, which means that in the event these units reached maximum capacity, patients with serious symptoms or even other serious health complications would not have the adequate support they would require on time. At the same time, when doctors, nurses, and other medical staff get infected in the process, it becomes increasingly difficult to support other staff and to effectively monitor and contain the spread, as the availability of medical staff trained to deal with the symp-

⁴⁶ Scott L. Greer et al., ‘The Comparative Politics of COVID-19: The Need to Understand Government Responses’ (2020) 15(9) *Global Public Health* 1414. See also Klauss Dodds et al., ‘The COVID-19 Pandemic: Territorial, Political and Governance Dimensions of the Crisis’ (2020) 8(3) *Territory, Politics, Governance* 294.

⁴⁷ Robin Emmott, ‘Russia Deploying Coronavirus Disinformation to Sow Panic in the West, EU Document Says’ *Reuters* (18 March 2020), available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-disinformation/russia-deploying-coronavirus-disinformation-to-sow-panic-in-west-eu-document-says-idUSKBN21518F> (11 August 2020).

⁴⁸ Mark Scott, ‘Chinese Diplomacy Ramps up Social Media Offensive in COVID-19 Info War’ *Politico* (29 April 2020), available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/china-disinformation-covid19-coronavirus/> (last accessed 11 August 2020).

⁴⁹ In-Cyprus, ‘Coronavirus: Seven Patients in Intensive Care’ *in-cyprus* (23 March 2020), available at <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/coronavirus-seven-patients-in-intensive-care/> (last accessed 10 August 2020).

toms and the patients in intensive care decreases. As a result, this gravely pushes up the mortality rate, as already observed in other European countries like Italy and Spain, due to overwhelming numbers of patients reaching the hospitals and the system being unable to support them.⁵⁰

Secondly, as a pandemic, COVID-19 has been *rightly* shaped as a security concern. Without the appropriate awareness over the protective measures citizens can take, societies would be left in an even more vulnerable position. Securitising a pandemic at a European level as a matter of regional health governance requires the development of a strong institutional health regime to boost efficiency in tracking, monitoring, and preventing further spread of pandemics through a ‘subtle’ form of political health authority.⁵¹ The problem, perhaps in this case, is that such a measure was inefficient and inadequate. When securitising a pandemic, additional politicisation policies must be drawn to justify the need to exercise additional powers and to take a precautionary stance against such a threat. The problem with the European Union (EU) is that it first generated a rather slow response, which affected all EU member-states, proving that none of them (including Cyprus) were fully prepared to tackle the pandemic from its outset.⁵² Therefore, not only is COVID-19 a hybrid threat on its own, but it has also contributed towards the entanglement of other threats that have targeted both the state and society. By studying the pattern according to which Cyprus has been more prone to hybrid threats between March and October 2020, it becomes easier to begin to disentangle different tools, mostly external in nature, that have exploited vulnerabilities in the state and society.

Furthermore, October 2020 brought forth three important events. Firstly, on 8th October, the Varosha Beach in the Famagusta ghost town reopened by the Turkish military for the first time, following 46 years of abandonment due to the con-

⁵⁰ See Ben Sills and Laura M. Lombrana, ‘Spanish Doctors are Forced to Choose Who to Let Die’ *Bloomberg* (26 March 2020), available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-25/spanish-doctors-forced-to-choose-who-to-let-die-from-coronavirus> (last accessed 17 August 2020). See also Lidia Sirna, Hernan M. Ratto Yuliya Talmazan, ‘Medical Workers in Spain and Italy “Overloaded” as More of Them Catch Coronavirus’ *NBC News* (30 March 2020), available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/medical-workers-spain-italy-overloaded-more-them-catch-coronavirus-n1170721> (last accessed 17 August 2020).

⁵¹ Louise Bengtsson, Mark Rhinard, ‘Securitisation Across Borders: The Case of “Health Security” Cooperation in the European Union’ (2019) 42(2) *West European Politics* 347.

⁵² Dionyssis Dimitrakopoulos, Georgette Lalis, ‘COVID-19: A Preliminary Assessment of the European Union’s Reaction’ (*LSE BBP*, 1 April 2020), available at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/covid-19-a-preliminary-assessment-of-european-unions-reaction/> (last accessed 10 August 2020).

flict.⁵³ Soon after on 18th October, Ersin Tatar, former ‘Prime Minister’ of the unrecognised breakaway ‘TRNC’ was elected its leader.⁵⁴ This change in leadership, together with the firmer stance of Turkey overall has enabled Turkey to utilise this pandemic in order to bring about changes in the status quo vis-à-vis the frozen conflict in Cyprus. The importance of this is easier understood by looking at Turkish wider security and foreign policy needs in the region. Such policy is at best revisionist, as it seeks to challenge the existing geopolitical structures and to introduce a new system in place. This is achieved by pushing for a change in existing norms and material resources strategically, in ways that Turkish policy itself is concerned with ‘contesting, disrupting, altering, or destroying’ the status quo.⁵⁵ Turkey saw an opening in upsetting the then political situation and Varosha’s status, which worked for its own benefit, amidst a second pandemic wave that began affecting the Republic of Cyprus. The same goes for Turkish drilling explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is an attempt to legitimise and solidify its presence and security interests in the wider geopolitical game and not necessarily to satisfy its own economic needs.⁵⁶

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, on 15th October, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic, Mr Demetris Syllouris, resigned due to overwhelming evidence and allegations of corruption, following an investigation conducted by the Al Jazeera Investigative Unit, highlighting misuse of the Citizenship by Investment Programme.⁵⁷ The misuse granted illegally passports to indi-

⁵³ BBC News, ‘Varosha: Turkey Reopens Deserted Cyprus Resort but Tourists Will Wait’, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54465684> (last accessed 24 June 2021)

⁵⁴ Al Jazeera, ‘Ersin Tatar Elected New Turkish Cypriot Leader’, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/18/incumbent-wins-turkish-cypriot-presidential-runoff-exit-polls> (last accessed 24 June 2021)

⁵⁵ For the full breakdown of the concept of Revisionism in International Relations, see Jonathan M. DiCicco and Victor M. Sanchez, ‘Revisionism in International Relations’, *Oxford Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2021), available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.607> (last accessed 24 June 2021)

⁵⁶ See Zenonas Tziarras and Jalel Harchaoul, ‘What Erdogan Really Wants in the Eastern Mediterranean’ (2021), available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/19/turkey-greece-what-erdogan-wants-eastern-mediterranean-sovereignty-natural-gas/> (last accessed 24 June 2021). See also Aydin Calik, ‘Turkey’s East Med Drilling Campaign: Politics By Other Means’ (2020) available at <https://www.mees.com/2020/10/9/geopolitical-risk/turkeys-east-med-drilling-campaign-politics-by-other-means/84520f80-0a31-11eb-9a09-b975a207aca4> (last accessed 24 June 2021)

⁵⁷ Al Jazeera Investigative Unit, ‘Cypriot Parliament Speaker Quits After Passport Scheme Scandal’ (2020), available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/15/cyprus-house-speaker-resigns-following-al-jazeera-investigation> (last accessed 24 June 2021)

viduals with questionable, often criminal background, who could simply buy their way in to the European Union through the Republic of Cyprus. The leak and the result of the investigation led to serious political distrust, at a time when RoC was hit with the second wave of the pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic is not responsible for corruption nor for the investigation into the passport scheme. Nonetheless, the pandemic did offer a rather strained, insecure environment, through which emerging crises were able to inflict real damage to both state and society. Although it is without a question that corruption is ultimately negative, the time through which this scheme was uncovered and leaked to the press had serious security implications for RoC.

The above examples are certainly not direct outcomes of the pandemic. However, the pandemic itself has provided fertile ground through which a wide range of political spill-over effects and security issues have plagued both the state and society alike. What was originally mistaken for resilience at the face of the Republic of Cyprus’ existential threats was in fact blurred by COVID-19, generating additional anxiety, social and political distrust, as well as uncertainty within the security realm. Table 1 shows a visualisation of how Cyprus has faced different hybrid threats during the COVID-19 pandemic. This table has been created based on different factors, further analysed below. Firstly, the type of threat or the tool employed shows the range of hybrid threats Cyprus has experienced from March to October 2020. The section under ‘areas affected’ signifies whether this is predominantly a state or societal concern. As it becomes more evident, it seems that security concerns have been increasingly penetrating into the social fabric and thus the generated insecurities have been affecting society more and more. The table also includes a description for each event. Finally, the ‘outcome’ portrays the impact these threats have had. This preliminary part is useful for strategists and policymakers when attempting to disentangle such threats and to address appropriate countermeasures.

Table 1: Hybrid Threats in Cyprus during the COVID-19 Pandemic
(Data for March – October 2020)

Type of threat/tool	Areas Affected	Event(s) Description	Outcome
Misleading Information, Social Media	State, Society (critical infrastructure; response to health issues)	Global disinformation campaigns on the origins of the virus; Anti-maskers, conspiracy theories	Distrust in institutions, scientific data, and experts; conspiracy theories – public health danger increases

Hostile Action, Fear, Anxiety (Turkey)	Society (major anticipation, fear); State (pre-emptive and defensive stance)	Turkey violating Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), undermining the sovereignty of the RoC. No real hot episode from the Republic of Turkey. However, the opening of Varosha was unanticipated and caught the RoC off guard	Twofold for society: normalisation of conflict (routinised) and constant anxiety and anticipation. For the State: foreign policy shift towards maintaining a pre-emptive and defensive stance
Diplomacy	State and Society	Diplomatic strategies to normalise relations, and push specific agendas online and on TV (e.g. digital diplomacy & social media)	To change the narrative and sympathise with the user
Cyber Tools (Espionage, Attacks)	State and Society	New threats; business vulnerability (financial); State vulnerability due to past attacks ⁵⁸	For the first time, the RoC's cyber entity, launches a step-by-step guide for businesses to ensure additional cybersecurity protection
Information Leaks	State and Society	The debate on the 'Cyprus Papers'; ⁵⁹ Politics of identity	Loss of trust in institutions; state undermined; reactionary society
Economic/Financial	State (aggregate economy) and Society (individuals, employees, businesses)	Lack of secure jobs; unemployment: rising of annual registered unemployment in August at 69% in the RoC	Rising unemployment brings instability, speculative fears of economic downgrade, social anxiety
Party Politics	State and Society	Politics of identity; debates of narrative within the political establishment, to and from the sitting government and the opposition	Status quo; exploitation of other threats to further political agendas
Migration	State and Society (also framed as a societal threat)	Borders shut due to COVID-19; refugee camps conditions worsening	Fear, suspicion, anxiety targeted against migrants, refugees, asylum seekers; the state gets carte blanche to deal with migration freely (aided by society)

⁵⁸ Past attacks involve the hacking of diplomatic cables by Chinese hackers by obtaining access via diplomatic credentials (passports) to official EU policy on foreign affairs, security, enlargement, and migration. Another attack involved the infiltration of defence ministries (including the Cypriot one) by 'Sea Turtle', a hacker group, with a focus on Europe and the Middle East. This creates insecurities for both Cyprus and the EU. See David E. Sanger, Steven Erlanger, 'Hacked European Cables Reveal a World of Anxiety about Trump, Russia, and Iran' *The New York Times* (18 December 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/18/us/politics/european-diplomats-cables-hacked.html> (last accessed 11 August 2020). See also Andy Greenberg, 'Cyberspies Hijacked the Internet Domains of Entire Countries' *Wired* (17 April 2019), available at <https://www.wired.com/story/sea-turtle-dns-hijacking/>.

⁵⁹ This involves a set of leaked papers, targeting the RoC and undermining its legitimacy. Society is equally affected in the process, losing faith towards the state. A subsequent documentary release also led to the resignation of key politicians. Refer to the Investigative Unit of Al Jazeera, 'The Cyprus Papers' *Al Jazeera* (23 August 2020), available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/cypruspapers/>.

To begin with, there has been a heavy campaign of misleading information regarding the pandemic. *Misinformation* and *disinformation* tactics have managed to spread a lot of uncertainty during and after lockdown. Misleading information in general damages all political life. Whereas misinformation involves people holding incorrect information as factual evidence that is being spread without them being aware that it is in fact, incorrect, disinformation is the *deliberate* spread of such information with the ultimate objective of causing harm, jeopardising an intended target or recipient, and, in other cases, causing people to lose faith in the political establishment.⁶⁰

Misinformation can begin from targeted disinformation strategies as hybrid threats, exhibiting various political challenges and insecurity. The growing distrust towards public institutions from society is a serious problem that feeds into this. This exact point is shown in recent conspiracy theories, fuelled by distrust and state-directed anger, that 5G networks, for example, are supposedly a cause of COVID-19.⁶¹ Characteristically, the use of social media enables users to quickly spread such information with limited or untimely fact checking. In other cases, where fact-checking is readily available, as it has already become a crucial tool in providing more reliable information by independent fact-checkers on social media platforms, it could also backfire and reinforce conspiracy theorists' ideas that these platforms work against their best interests.⁶² This became evident in April, when individuals in Cyprus vandalised and burned equipment that they considered to be 5G network antennas. Evidently, those were not even 5G equipment to begin with, though this vulnerability posed through misleading information demonstrates the extremes people are willing to go to and the damage this can have on society and on critical communications infrastructure.⁶³ Apart from these being very pervasive examples during COVID-19, their security implications are what really matter the most. The lack of trust in experts and state stakeholders in mitigating the risks of the pandemic, as well as the lack of faith in overall political institutions endanger,

⁶⁰ W. Lance Bennet and Steven Livingston, 'The Disinformation Order: Disruptive Communication and the Decline of Democratic Institutions' (2018) 33(2) *European Journal of Communication* 124.

⁶¹ Daniel Jolley and Jenny L. Paterson, 'Pylons Ablaze: Examining the Role of 5G COVID-19 Conspiracy Beliefs and Support for Violence' (2020) 59(3) *British Journal of Social Psychology* 628.

⁶² Alex Bruns, Stephen Harrington, Edward Hurcombe, "'Corona? 5G? Or Both?': The Dynamics of COVID-19/5G Conspiracy Theories on Facebook' (2020) 177(1) *Media International Australia*.

⁶³ *Ibid.* See also AP, 'Opponents of 5G Networks Set Fire to Cyprus' Mobile Antennas' *Associated Press* (2020), available at <https://apnews.com/4e7cdfbfeca9ed47d3d283e2cba4ba43> (last accessed 10 August 2020).

once again, endanger both state and society. Destruction to property, not upholding the necessary health protocol during the pandemic, and absenteeism during elections was projected to give rise to extreme right-wingers, as seen in the 2021 elections, where the National Popular Front (ELAM) was able to increase both its seats, as well as its percentage and overall political power.⁶⁴ Not only that, but the distrust generated left health experts as part of the advisory epistemological committee of the state exposed, with lawsuits looming over them.⁶⁵ This is particularly problematic, as the state itself fails to protect its own advisors and has not addressed the issue adequately at the time of writing.

Moreover, the prospect of Turkish hostile action is another variable to be taken into consideration. For one thing, Turkey has not exercised significant physical force, nor has it employed additional troops against the RoC since the invasion and occupation of the northern part in 1974. Nevertheless, the prospect of fear, as well as the anxiety and anticipation that come with such hostile action taking place pose a large vulnerability in and of themselves. Fear is perhaps one of the most important factors that need to be seriously assessed by policymakers. In the case of Cyprus, fear been a strong foreign policy drive for the State, whereas anxiety largely spreads within a society that wishes to avoid or pre-emptively guard itself against the outbreak of war.

In disentangling this specific issue, we discover that the threat itself gradually becomes *normalised*. This means that a new established identity is created. With the ongoing energy, refugee, and geopolitical crises in the Eastern Mediterranean, such challenges become more frequent. The provocations of the Turkish presence in the EEZ, for instance, trace back to the first explorations of the Turkish vessel *Barbaros*⁶⁶, yet nowadays, these incidents are essentially part of the day-to-day rou-

⁶⁴ Helena Smith, 'Cyprus Election: Far-Right Party Linked to Greek Neo-Nazis Doubles Vote Share' (2021) *The Guardian*, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/30/far-right-cyprus-election-parliament> (last accessed 24 June 2021).

⁶⁵ See Nick Theodoulou, 'Coronavirus: Advisory Team Named in Lawsuits Will Have Legal Fees Covered by the State' (2021) *Cyprus Mail*, available at <https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/06/10/coronavirus-advisory-team-named-in-lawsuits-will-have-legal-fees-covered-by-the-state/> (accessed 24 June 2021).

⁶⁶ Michelle Kambas, 'Cyprus Says Turkish Vessel Encroaching on its Offshore Gas Areas' *Reuters* (20 October 2014), available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/cyprus-turkey-gas/cyprus-says-turkish-vessel-encroaching-on-its-offshore-gas-areas-idUSL6NOSF32C20141020> (last accessed 18 August 2020). See also Petros Petrikkos, 'Energy and Security in the Eastern Mediterranean' *Global Risk Insights* (26 March 2019), available at <https://globalriskinsights.com/2019/03/energy-and-security-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/> (last accessed 18 August 2020).

tine in the region.⁶⁷ It is then normal for the state to overemphasise the Turkish threat in the Eastern Mediterranean, because a sense of consistency and continuity has been established, and, therefore, one actor (in this case Cyprus) can anticipate another's (Turkey's) actions.⁶⁸ The real threat, then, is when this pattern breaks and Turkish movements in the region become unpredictable. For one thing, we are not simply dealing with the idea that Turkey, as opposed to Cyprus, has larger armies and better military gear, but also with the actual anticipation of a potential, unpredictable attack being a threat on its own.

Other suggested indicators, such as diplomacy and party politics, present themselves to control the rhetoric. These are often linked to misinformation and disinformation techniques, whilst in the case of diplomacy alone, the examples of the targeted campaigns by China showcase a good example of how states can politicise and weaponise a pandemic for diplomatic exposure. Not only that, but as these issues take place in the cyber realm, such an outcome becomes increasingly hard to predict. In defending businesses and states against cyber threats, the national Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) of Cyprus issued a set of helpful guidelines for additional protection online, in an effort to mitigate risks.⁶⁹ As mentioned in the table, Cyprus has had a history of vulnerabilities in the cyber realm, as it has been prone to attacks by cyber criminals.⁷⁰

What is more, a rather serious threat is posed indirectly by the 'side-effect' of the lockdown and the strain this has had on businesses and the wider public. The state had originally intervened in the economy with aid packages until August. The future economic and financial implications are both a state and societal concern. By the end of August, a sharp increase of 69.2% in registered unemployment was recorded.⁷¹ Simultaneously, Cyprus as an island normally depends on tourism

⁶⁷ See C. Adamides (no 10) 75.

⁶⁸ See J. Mitzen (no 29) 342.

⁶⁹ See In-Cyprus, 'Coronavirus: Cyprus' Cyber-Security Entity Shares Guidelines for Working Remotely (Infographics)' *in-cyprus* (20 March 2020), available at <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/coronavirus-cyprus-cyber-security-entity-shares-guidelines-for-working-remotely-infographics/> (20 August 2020).

⁷⁰ See Table 1 and the relevant description in the references. See also Petros Petrikos, 'Building Infrastructures: Reviewing Cypriot Cybersecurity Practices' *Global Risk Insights* (8 April 2019), available at <https://globalriskinsights.com/2019/04/building-infrastructures-reviewing-cypriot-cybersecurity-practices/> (last accessed 18 August 2020).

⁷¹ fm, 'Registered Unemployment Shoots up 69%' *Financial Mirror* (3 September 2020), available at <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/09/03/registered-unemployed-shoots-up-69/> (last accessed 3 September 2020).

to a large extent during the summer period. By March, tourism had dropped by 73.5% as compared to the year before, having an unprecedented impact on the hotel-and-services industry.. Compared with 2019, which was a record year welcoming 3.9 million tourists, 2020 has been particularly awful.⁷² This is problematic, not just for the tourism industry, but for the economy as a whole, given how tourism usually helps generate a lot of revenue that circulates around.

Last but not least, migration has often been addressed as a security concern. During the lockdown period, State authorities prevented a boat with 175 Syrian refugees to make it to land under the jurisdiction of the RoC. On 15 March, Cyprus shut its borders to non-Cypriots, non-European workers, and to those who had no special permits. The boat was instead sent off to the northern part, to the breakaway regime.⁷³ The ongoing refugee crisis in the area has often seen migrants, asylum seekers and refugees trying to stop by Cyprus while fleeing conflict or migrating for other reasons. The debate has often focused both on regulating migration as well as tackling it head on.⁷⁴ Migration has been a persisting issue of debate, both due to ontological fears of the ‘Other’, or the ‘alien’, as well as due to the lack of an appropriate information framework that best helps citizens and society as a whole to fully understand migration and the different kinds of migrants that a country can have, let alone the overall positive implications on the aggregate economy.

Hybrid Threats Under COVID-19: A Pandemic (Dis)Entanglement

There is no linear path to understanding modern security challenges. Even in the case of small states and societies with a history of conflict and struggle against larger existential threats, the more we dig in the bigger the insecurities we seem to discover. By touching upon a relatively new concept in recent scholarship, the

⁷² The National Herald, ‘COVID-19 Choking Cypriot Economy, March Tourism Falls 73.5%’ *The National Herald* (22 May 2020), available at https://www.thenationalherald.com/cyprus_economy/arthro/covid_19_choking_cypriot_economy_march_tourism_falls_73_5-335713/ (last accessed 18 August 2020). See also Natalie Leonidou, ‘COVID-19: Cyprus Tourism Will Carry Scars of Pandemic into 2021’ *Financial Mirror* (18 July 2020), available at <https://www.financialmirror.com/2020/07/18/covid19-cyprus-tourism-will-carry-scars-of-pandemic-into-2021/> (last accessed 18 August 2020).

⁷³ Andrew Connelly, ‘Cyprus Pushes Syrian Refugees Back at Sea due to Coronavirus’ *Al Jazeera* (30 March 2020), available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/cyprus-pushes-syrian-refugees-sea-due-coronavirus-200330091614066.html> (last accessed 11 August 2020).

⁷⁴ An interesting account of the various migration debates in Europe through a critical lens is Nicos Trimikliniotis, *Migration and the Refugee Dissensus in Europe: Borders, Security and Austerity* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2020). See also J. Huysmans (no 33) for the deliberate spread of fear and insecurity over migration debates.

framework of security entanglement can help us understand that security is a collection of different processes and concepts. When, how, and why we disentangle the already-entangled security processes impacts the State and society differently. At the same time, the wider puzzle of security is re-examined through a more critical, albeit helpful, lens that focuses on positive paradigms that, upon careful examination, we can begin using to predict patterns in future research and enhance the decision-making process, be it for foreign, defence, economic, or health policy. COVID-19, in this sense, has both helped and intimidated the state and society with the opportunities and problems it has brought along.

This paper is by no means without its limitations. The contribution offered here is helpful for those who wish to combine issues like ontological security, securitisation, and critical approaches in theorising appropriate security frameworks for pandemic scenarios and hybrid threats in conflict cases like Cyprus. Yet, security entanglement is relatively new as a concept. It still requires additional study to best employ these security angles together. The key is the interdisciplinary nature of Security Studies that must be emphasised.

The case of Cyprus has been interesting for several reasons. First, as a small state, it has experienced security challenges differently compared to bigger powers. As a result, there is a strong need to adapt to changing external conditions that may even impact frozen conflicts. Moreover, Cyprus has been experiencing frozen conflict which often absorbs most of the security agenda. The danger here, as already mentioned, is over-focusing on the conflict whilst disregarding other threats. In the realm of hybrid threats, focusing on only one type of security issue is a dangerous game. Just like in cyberspace, no country can ever be fully prepared to combat new and fresh security issues. This is why adaptability matters so much. By understanding the appropriateness of entanglement in conflict and beyond, cases like RoC and their respective societies can benefit from adopting appropriate policy responses to security crises.

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