The Lebanon-Cyprus East Med deal is a new test for Turkey, one it is likely to fail

Every time two Mediterranean countries meet to discuss oil and gas in the eastern basin of the sea, Turkey feels boxed in. Doubly so if Cyprus, which falls under the patronage of its historical opponent Greece, is involved in the negotiations. Keeping an eye on such activities is simply not enough. Ankara wants to know more and, if necessary, retaliate in one way or another.

Last week, Lebanon's caretaker Foreign Minister Zeina Akar visited Nicosia and held a meeting with the island's top officials. The most important announcement was the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the two states regarding oil and gas. Though little has been announced regarding the details of the MOU, the mere fact that the two countries have adopted a rapprochement policy signals their mutual willingness to coordinate in the future. Lebanon had previously commenced maritime demarcation negotiations with Israel under American auspices in an attempt to exploit its hidden treasures that could help it gradually depart from its accumulating economic and social crises. The indirect tripartite negotiations reached a deadlock because of varying explanations of maps by the two countries. The Americans did not exert further pressure as the outgoing Trump administration had reached its final days.

Countries and territories in the East Mediterranean include Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Libya. The highest degrees of tension are between Greece and Turkey – Ankara has previously not hesitated to send military vessels and warships into the basin as a signal that it will not tolerate any potential violations of its resources in the Mediterranean.

Though both are NATO members, Turkey and Greece have been at odds for decades. They have their differences on almost everything: From maritime resources to the Cyprus issue, to the European Union membership, to turbulent bilateral relations.

Therefore, when Cyprus signs a MOU with Lebanon, or any other country in the Mediterranean, Ankara simply cannot turn a blind eye. The failing two-state solution in Cyprus has now gained an additional problem, from the Turkish point of view, which is the MOU of oil and gas. Turkey considers the northern part of the island, which it has occupied since 1974, as also having rights in the basin via its territorial waters. Of course, the fact that not a single country in the whole world has recognized the northern "Republic" in the past 30 years fails to discourage Ankara from this interpretation.

Turkey's antagonism with Greece, and consequently Cyprus, has witnessed its ups and downs. Rarely has Turkey cared for the position of European countries – which normally have sided with Greece as a member state of the European Union (EU). The continued calls by the EU to resolve the accumulating disputes through dialog have actually been to Turkey's benefit. Now Ankara knows that its European opponent is not to be feared. Differences among European states on how to tackle relations with Ankara have been varying for a long period of time. They still are. This is a point Turkey knows exactly how to exploit.

Turkey has felt excluded from all the rapprochement policies in the oil and gas sector that the Eastern Mediterranean area had witnessed. In September 2020, Greece, Italy, Israel, Cyprus, Jordan, and Egypt all signed onto a joint organization to promote regional cooperation in the development of natural gas. With Syria undergoing bloody civil strife for more than 10 years, and Lebanon falling apart amid an unprecedented economic crisis, only Turkey was left out in the cold.

Ankara needs to revisit its regional policies, not only from the perspective of oil and gas, but also from other policies that have placed it in confrontation with several regional and international players. Its relations with Europe have been traditionally complicated as Ankara considers Europe's continued refusal to allow Turkey entry into the EU as a personal affront to the country's national pride. Its relations with Washington have also seen a remarkable deterioration which has affected, in one way or another, its local currency. On the other front, relations with Russia and China are also failing to flourish – although Ankara has been using the threat of upping relations with Moscow as a thinly veiled attempt to court the US. The Lebanese-Cypriot MOU is a new test for Ankara. It will fail it unless a drastic policy revision takes place. Recent history suggests that this is unlikely.

Everything you need to know about the Lambda COVID-19 variant

Over the course of the pandemic, several COVID-19 strains have emerged, but a new and potentially more deadly version has now been spotted – the Lambda variant.

Each time the COVID-19 virus mutates it has the potential to become more vaccine-resistant, more transmissible, and harder to stop. Recently, the coronavirus Delta strain, a highly-contagious variant of COVID-19 first identified in India, has caused governments around the world to begin reimposing lockdown and social distancing procedures.

The new Lambda COVID-19 variant, first identified in Peru in August 2020, has the potential to be even worse, however, with experts suspecting that it might be the most dangerous one yet.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that around 29 countries have logged cases of the Lambda strain, including Chile, Ecuador and Argentina.

Lambda: 'Variant of Interest'

The WHO categorizes variants based on their severity, and classifies them with letters from the Greek alphabet. The current variants of concern include Alpha (first identified in the UK), Beta (discovered in South Africa), Gamma (first discovered in Brazil) and Delta (identified in India) while variants of interest are Eta (identified in multiple countries), Iota (first identified in the US), Kappa (identified in India), and Lambda.

The global health agency categorizes strains as variants of concern if it increases transmissibility, is a detrimental change in COVID-19 epidemiology, increases in virulence, changes in clinical disease presentation, or if it decreases effectiveness of public health and social measures, and currently available diagnostic, vaccine and therapeutic methods.

The WHO categorized Lambda as a "variant of interest" in June, cautioning that it might have some mutations that could make it resistant to COVID-19 vaccines, and could be more infectious. But, it has not yet been identified as a "variant of concern".

"Authorities in Peru reported that 81 percent of COVID-19 cases sequenced since April 2021 were associated with Lambda. Argentina reported increasing prevalence of Lambda since the third week of February 2021, and between 2 April and 19 May 2021, the variant accounted for 37 percent of the COVID-19 cases sequenced," the WHO noted.

After conducting genomic sequencing in Chile, the WHO found that the Lambda variant made up 31 percent of samples taken. It was also found in 37 percent of the sequenced samples in Argentina, indicating an increase in its prevalence since February 2021.

Some cases of the Lambda variant have made their way to the United States, according to online news media The Hill, accounting for a total of 700 diagnosed cases so far.

Political leaders drum up support for ANDSF...

From P1

KABUL: President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani attended a consultative meeting with prominent Afghan political and jihadi leaders, religious scholars, women, and civil society and youth representatives on Saturday, the Presidential Palace said.

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani said that in this meeting, the participants "unanimously declared their unwavering support for Afghanistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"These leaders also declared their full support for Afghan Security and Defense Forces in the presence of the country's security leadership. While stressing the urgency for peace, all agreed that defending Afghanistan is our fundamental right," President Ghani said.

A statement by the Presidential Palace reads that they agreed on efforts to an end to violence and achieve peace, defend the country, national sovereignty, national institutions, shared values, women's rights and all other freedoms mentioned in the Constitution. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, head of the High Council for National Reconciliation, former jihadi leader Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, former vice president Mohammad Karim Khalili, heads of security agencies and other officials had attended the meeting.

They also agreed to further strengthen people's uprisings in defending the country.

This comes as violence remains high in the country in the last two months. And meanwhile, the peace process has made no progress during this time.

The Kabul Times

RSF asks international community...

From P3

Freedom of expression and media have been considered as the most significant achievements of Afghanistan government in the past two decades. Currently, dozens of print and audiovisual media organizations operating in the country.

Although media development in Afghanistan is challenging, there is still commitment from Afghanistan government and media supporting organizations to freedom of expression and media in the country. For the past two decades, the most significant player of the freedom of expression's ground has been journalists who have been struggling, writing and reporting for freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression and media can be considered as result of teamwork of citizens, media and government of Afghanistan. Freedom of expression won't be achieved without commitment of the government and media supporting organizations and support of the people. **Lailuma Noori**

Afghanistan: Mounting Taliban...

From P3

Retaliatory attacks are a form of collective punishment and are also prohibited.

The International Criminal Court is currently investigating allegations of war crimes and serious human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan, including the Taliban.

Taliban commanders who knew or should have known about abuses by forces under their control and took no action to prevent or stop them are culpable as a matter of command responsibility.

"Advancing Taliban forces have no blank check to brutally target their critics," Gossman said. "The Taliban leadership usually denies the abuses, but it's their fighters carrying out these attacks and their responsibility to stop the killings."

Afghan Advertisement

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Invitation For Bids (IFB)
ICB

Procurement Entities	Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT)
Funded By	World Bank
Item Description	Procurement of 2 Gbps Internet for the usage of NIXA
Ref. No	NPA/MoCIT/1400/NCS-3361/ICB
Bid Security	The Bids must be accompanied with Bid Security in the form of a Bank Guarantee provided in the Bidding Documents at the amount of **USD 25,000**
Deadline for Bid Submission	**11 Sep 2021, 10:00 (AM) hrs. (Kabul Local Time),** Electronic submission of Bid is not allowed. Late bid will be reject.
Address for Bid Submission	Attention: **Mr. Abdul Saboor Safi** Address Tendering Facilitation Secretariat, National Procurement Authority, Administrative Office of the President (AOP), Pashtunistan Watt, Kabul, Afghanistan | Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Phone: +93 (0) 202926290 Email: saboor.safi@npa.gov.af
Website	A complete set of Bidding Documents in English may be obtained by interested bidders free of cost by downloading from the NPA website www.ageops.net Or may be obtained in a flash memory from the NPA office (Address given above). In case of any difficulty in downloading from website, interested bidders may contact at e-mail address: pfd_d_05@npa.gov.af , copied to hikmatullah.asad@npa.gov.af and sayed.mousavi@digitalcasa.gov.af, aslam.sherzad@mcit.gov.af