The geopolitical importance of the Eastern Mediterranean airspace

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The article examines the geopolitical importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region through the lens of a number of classical and neo-classical geopolitical models and describes Cyprus’ predominant geostrategic post regarding the effective control of this region. As airspace constitutes an inextricable part of every territory, its mastery is imperative for the effective control of the area in question. Peace and stability in this volatile and complex region could not be achieved without the effective control of its airspace. The location of Cyprus that occupies a central position in the Levantine basin seems to be ideal for the conduct of all sorts of air operations. Cyprus’ important location was realised by the British in the late 19th Century, long before the advent of the aeroplane. The UK still maintains several strategic surveillance facilities along with an airbase of critical importance, however the island has been the cat’s paw for many regional or international actors. The article explains the pivotal role of the airspace concerning the control of the Eastern Mediterranean in combination with Cyprus’ significant position in this region.

The Eastern Mediterranean region is located at the cross-roads of three continents – Europe, Africa and Asia – whilst it also comprises a large part of the Middle East – one of the tensest and war-torn zones in the human history; most of the empires that played a prominent role throughout the history of the western world were born and thrived there; it is the cradle of three worldwide monotheistic creeds.\(^1\) The island of Cyprus, apart from being an inextricable

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part of this region, occupies a predominant geostrategic position able to serve any regional or world power that has aspirations for controlling the area. Undoubtedly, the legal government of the island has the only and paramount say on any potential strategic cooperation with these global or regional powers, aiming to protect its raison d'État.

Land and sea comprise two major components of a territory that every ambitious power has to command effectively in order to hold sway and be the absolute master of a particular area. However, the importance of the third dimension – the airspace – was only recognized in the early years of the 20th century along with the invention of the aeroplane, whilst it was only during World War II when the Great Powers comprehended its strategic value. The technological evolution in aviation, along with continuous developments in the field of utilization of the aeroplane as a war platform have rendered the airspace a seamless element of the whole space that could not be ignored; in fact it has to be taken into serious consideration as its control determines to a large degree whether a power shall gain regional predominance.

Geopolitical models and the Eastern Mediterranean Region

A number of geopolitical models were introduced in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries in order to explain how international politics were influenced or even determined by geography. The Westphalian model rendered the state the most important unit of social organisation in world politics. The sovereign states became pivotal actors whose unilateral acts and interactions with their counterparts form the global political landscape. Hence the territory of each state has become its political terrain, the space where it exercises its sovereign power over a society delimited by its frontiers.

Based on the aforementioned, various intellectuals have articulated world models in an attempt to bring the geographical factor into political discourse and the formation and implementation of foreign policy. Notwithstanding a number of considerable criticisms, that have been aired mainly during the last two decades of the 20th Century, these world models and their geopolitical perceptions –

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although heterogeneous – still influence and in some cases dominate the *modus vivendi* and the *modus operandi* of a number of powerful states.  

The vast majority of those models define the Eastern Mediterranean as a region of major importance, where the fermented political developments occurring there may have a global impact – that is, all the major world or regional powers are entangled in regional affairs in order to protect their perceived *raison d’État*. This is not, in the least, an exaggeration since the world model proposed by Halford Mackinder and then further elaborated by Nicholas Spykman situates the specific region in the “Inner or Marginal Crescent” or the “Rimland.” The control of this area determines the dominant power of Eurasia thereby governing the whole world. Mackinder himself corroborates the aforementioned statement by making a special reference to Greece as a state “bounded by water and therefore accessible to sea power” and arguing that the “possession of Greece by a great Heartland power would probably carry it with the control of the World-Island.” Needless to say, Greece constitutes an inextricable part of the Eastern Mediterranean region, or vice versa, the region cannot be delineated without the incorporation of Greece. Alfred Mahan’s prominent premise regarding the unquestionable importance of the sea power in comparison with that of land power adds more value to this specific region. In addition to Mahan’s renowned suppositions, French political theorist Charles Maurras has also championed the great value of a

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Every world power that espouses Mahan’s thesis cannot turn a blind eye to this region. The Eastern Mediterranean Sea constitutes a critical hub for the world economy where large quantities of crude oil and natural gas are transferred from the Middle East via the Suez Canal or pipes either to Europe or to America. The Suez Canal itself constitutes a world transit corridor; 20% of total oil transport and 30% of world trade of goods are conducted via this waterway. Furthermore, in the northwest, the Dardanelles Strait is Russia’s only sea-passage to warm waters, rendering it a point of paramount strategic importance.

These Western geopolitical theories have diachronically impacted on the foreign policy of the British Empire and, later on, the United States of America. The latter remained the only global power, a world hegemom after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Many eminent policy makers have in large adopted the aforementioned geopolitical models, thereby embracing the respective geopolitical posture regarding the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Like Mackinder who referred particularly to Greece, Brzezinski has recently classified Turkey as a geopolitical pivot – being one out of six countries – namely a state “whose importance is derived not from its power and motivation but rather from its sensitive location.” Thus, the two countries – Greece and Turkey – that are evidently part of the Eastern Mediterranean region are considered to be of crucial importance to global geopolitical affairs. In addition to that, Brzezinski echoes Mackinder’s and those of the old British colonial imperialist bureaucrats’ ideas, who considered the Eastern Mediterranean as a stronghold for securing particular areas in the Middle East that are rich in energy resources.

11 Parisis, Kath Imas Thalassa; Benhida and Slaoui, Géopolitique de la Méditerranée, 77-81.
13 Cohen, Geopolitics, 25.
14 Cohen, Geopolitics, 85.
17 Kearns, Geopolitics and Empire, 226-227.
Furthermore, new world models have been propounded based on the same premises as the old ones; the postulate of the panoramic view, a *tour d’horizon* of the world and the presupposition that the globe “has become a system of closed space where events in one part inevitably have their consequences in all other parts” constitute the grounds of these models. Huntington’s well-known thesis concerning “the clash of civilisations”, again stresses the great significance of the Eastern Mediterranean region, a junction of various different cultures where the tense political environment inevitably generates confrontation and turmoil. Huntington’s comprehensive elaboration of fault lines, characterising them as zones where intra- or interstate war could escalate and erupt into a global one, renders the region – the cradle of three civilisations – one of the most volatile areas of the world. The French geopolitical school, even though more local and detailed in its analysis, is fundamentally based on historical, cultural and regional factors and aspects of view, thus adopting the same principles regarding the role of civilisation with Huntington’s world model. Another theory vastly founded on the classical Cartesian world view is that of the “Shatterbelt.” In accordance with this, “great powers compete in those regions because they perceive an interest in doing so and because they have opportunities in gaining alliance footholds with states in the region. Rival footholds of major powers are present here.” Again, Middle East (of which the Eastern Mediterranean region constitutes an inseparable part) figures prominently on the list.

Against the *Pax Britanica* and the *Pax Americana*, the Russian Empire and later its successor, the USSR, strived to expand its sphere of direct influence and control even though the communists had long rejected the orthodox theories of geopolitics due to their connection with the Nazi regime. However, the lordly spirit, the *animus dominandi* as Luther called it, impelled the foreign policy of the Eastern camp as well, as expansionism and support of surrogate states were always in its agenda. Post-USSR Russia has embraced

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20 Huntington, *Clash of Civilisations*, 312.
classical geopolitical views mainly drawing on those of the German School led by Haushofer, whilst Mackinder’s views still retain their honoured position as well. Notwithstanding the grand changes in ideologies and regimes occurred in Russia during the past century, Middle East and more particularly Eastern Mediterranean have been always in the epicentre of the Russian foreign policy. Thus the region has long been the field where world and regional powers constantly antagonise for control and supremacy.

All these classical and neo-classical geopolitical models and theories are assuredly not flawless; they are castigated by a number of renowned opponents for merely being over-simplified world views that are oblivious of the particularities of the space qua historical and geographical. However they still consist a substantial tool for the formulation of the foreign policy of the regional and world powers. Hence, the Eastern Mediterranean remains one of the most important geopolitical regions on the globe, regardless of any world-model or kind of analysis. According to Vamvakas, the competition for the control of this geostrategic crossroads has been reignited for three main reasons: the perception of a weakened America, the increased interest for commercial activity of traditional and new antagonists and the domestic political unrest throughout the region.

Cyprus – an island of great geostrategic importance
Throughout the centuries the island of Cyprus has repeatedly been the apple of discord between opposing regional or even world powers. Its history is fraught with invasions, occupations, conquests and battles of control and domination. Evidently, this fate of history has not occurred by chance.

27 Gérard Claude, La Méditerranée, Géopolitique et Relations Internationales [The Mediterranean, geopolitics and international relations], (Paris: Ellipses, 2007), 100-112; William Mallinson, Cyprus, Diplomatic History and the Clash of Theory in International Relations (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 31; Benhida and Slaoui, Géopolitique de la Méditerranée, 35-36; Evagoras L. Evagorou, Oi Ellinotourkikes Scheseis apo to 1923 eos simera, Theoria Dietnon Scheseon kai Strategikes [The Greco-Turkish Relations since 1923, Theory of International Relations and Strategy], (Vari Attikis: Poiotita Editions, 2010), 109, 111.
29 Vamvakas, “Global Stability,” 125.
31 Mallinson, Cyprus, 10-20; Mallinson, Cyprus: A Modern History, 2-6, 90.
Cyprus is considered to be a central geostrategic location in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Several powers that envision playing a significant role in the region, espoused the foregoing premise. A reference made by the Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, former diplomat and prominent academic, in his book *Strategic depth*, is distinctive of and utterly highlights the geostrategic value of the island. Davutoglu bluntly admits that:

> [A]ny state that ignores Cyprus cannot play a resolute role in the politics of the region or globally. It would not be effective in the world politics because this small island is situated in such a geographical position that can impact directly on the strategic junctions between Asia and Africa, Europe and Africa and Europe and Asia. Moreover, it [the ignorant state] would not be effective in regional politics, because Cyprus with its east tip likens an arrow headed to the Middle East, whilst with its west tip constitutes the cornerstone of the strategic balances of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans and the North Africa.

The British Empire that realised these important particularities of the island before any other power, and leased it from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, aiming – to use it as a bastion in the Eastern Mediterranean – a “place d’armes” according to Taylor – in support of its imperialist objectives in the region, and in order to safeguard the passage to India.\(^3\) Moreover, Western nations’ foreign policy in the region has also been stimulated by the Russian threat, especially during the Cold War.\(^3\)

Cyprus’ geopolitical value *vis-à-vis* the western powers increased enormously after the Suez debacle.\(^3\) Mainly due to the decolonisation trend that followed World War II, new independent states emerged forcing the western colonial powers to retreat. Thus, Cyprus constituted Britain’s last stronghold in the region. Despite its eventual independence, Cyprus has essentially remained under British and Western control, in accordance with the related clauses of its


\(^{34}\) William Mallinson, *Cyprus, Diplomatic History and the Clash of Theory in International Relations*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 34.

\(^{35}\) Claude, *La Méditerranée, Géopolitique et Relations Internationales*, 100-112; Mallinson, *Cyprus, A Modern History*, 12-15; Mallinson, *Cyprus, Diplomatic History and the Clash of Theory in the International Relations*, 53.

constitution (which was in fact imposed on it) that provides for two sovereign military bases on the island and a number of other facilities for the United Kingdom. The geostrategic importance of these two bases – one of which has been converted to a modern military airbase – is encapsulated in the following words of Henry Kissinger – then US Secretary of State – on 16 November 1974, in a letter to the British Prime Minister James Callaghan. At the time, the UK was considering relinquishing its bases on the island.

I do want you to know of my very strong belief that the elimination of the SBA’s [SovereignBritishArea] in Cyprus could have a destabilising effect in the region as a whole, encouraging the Soviet Union and others to believe that the strategic position of the West has been weakened in the area, and damage Western flexibility to react in unpredictable situations. I hope, therefore that whatever decision you feel obliged to make can be flexible enough not undermine our overall position in the Mediterranean.37

Being in the middle of the Levantine basin and situated at an exceptionally important geostrategic point of the Eastern Mediterranean, the island’s position could contribute to the control not only of two of the most significant world marine arteries (those of the Atlantic Ocean-Mediterranean Sea-Indian Ocean and the Black Sea-Mediterranean Sea-Indian Ocean) but also of all the oil and gas pipes that ends to the shores of the Near East.38 Furthermore, the recent explorations of natural gas in the Exclusive Economic Zones of Israel and Cyprus, along with the officially confirmed intentions of the Greek government to proceed to seismic surveys in search for hydrocarbons, augments the geopolitical prominence of the region whilst at the same time transform the existing dynamics.39

The airspace aspect

The evolution of technology has rendered airspace at least as important as the other components of a territory; land and sea. Nowadays, a state in order to be de facto sovereign has to control effectively not only its land and territorial waters but also the relevant airspace above them.40

38 Parisis, Kath Imas Thalassa, 217-218.
In a similar vein, a global or regional power has to be in the position to assert itself in all these three elements of a specific area, in order to be the indisputable master. Thus, a mighty air force presence is imperative for fulfilling the above goal. Even though, the military value of the aeroplane was recognised soon after its invention, it was only a century after, at the dawn of the 21st Century and more specifically during the US-led war against Iraq that the strategic importance of the air force as a distinct branch, but at the same time seamlessly operating in concert with the other two, was fully comprehended. Air superiority and power projection is impossible without the existence of a strong, capable and adequately equipped air force.

In addition, the civil and commercial facet of the aviation is also of great importance for the global economy. In our epoch, a large part of human transportation is conducted by aviation means as it has become much more convenient in terms of time reduction and overcoming “impermeable” geographical obstacles. However, the security of commercial aviation is vastly threatened due to the emergence of terrorism. The 9/11 tragic events in the heart of the American territory, along with the manifested failure of the US-led coalition in Iraq, have reduced the credibility of Western powers whilst in parallel a perception of an Islamist victory has been created especially in the Arab world. Hence, the threat of terrorist attacks by using commercial aeroplanes remains high.

The Eastern Mediterranean region, described above as a global geopolitical hub, has also been designated by Renner as one out of the six most important strategic zones that serve as corridors for the military and commercial aviation. It is more than evident that the area is vastly affected by evolutions in the aviation sector. Even though each state is exclusively responsible for the control of its national airspace, as an inextricable part of its sovereign rights, the Eastern Mediterranean mainly consists of international airspace. The Nicosia, Athens and Cairo Flight Information Regions (FIRs) constitute the largest part of the

international airspace of the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece and Egypt, though both beset by different internal and external issues, are in a position to control effectively their part of the international airspace, due to the existence of strong, capable and well-equipped air forces. Cyprus however – a small state with very limited air force capabilities – is not in the position to effectively control its own part. It is noted that effective control of the airspace is not confined to the provision of air traffic information; issues of border control, terrorism and the protection of sovereignty rights and jurisdictions all fall also into its scope. Yet, Cyprus as argued above, is still very essential for the whole regional security system.

Bearing this in mind, the Nicosia FIR remains a critical element of the region’s security (Figure 1). It is situated at the centre of the region’s airspace covering almost the whole Levantine basin, whilst the puzzle is completed by all the other littoral states FIR’s. The telling size of the Nicosia FIR is likened

![Figure 1: The Nicosia Flight Information Region in the Eastern Mediterranean.](source: author)

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46 The Nicosia FIR was officially delimited during the 3rd (Paris 1952) and the 4th (Geneva 1958) European Regional Aviation Conferences: Panayioitis Hadjipavlilis and Demetris Petrou, “Cyprus’ Airspace: Legal and Political Issues,” (dissertation, Hellenic Air Force Academy, Athens, 1996.)
to that of Malta, both being British colonies at the time of the FIR European regional arrangements\textsuperscript{47} (Figure 2). This fact constitutes convincing evidence of how the British assessed the importance of the airspace element regarding the overall control of an area. At this point, it is important to stress that the state which is responsible for providing air traffic control and search and rescue services within the limits of its FIR, has sovereign rights only in that part that coincides with its national airspace.\textsuperscript{48}

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\caption{The Nicosia Flight Information Region in relation to other Mediterranean FIRs. © 2015 PS}
\end{figure}

Despite the close cooperation that has recently developed in the field of search and rescue among a number of states – Cyprus has been admittedly the coordinator of this effort – a vacuum still remains regarding all the other matters of airspace security, including the anticipation and effective resolution of terrorist air incidents. In addition, the complete absence of communication between Nicosia and Ankara FIRs due to the continuous denial of the Turkish

\textsuperscript{47} Hadjipavlis and Petrou, “Cyprus’ Airspace,” Annex, 43, Chart 15.

side to recognise – and contact with – the Cyprus civil aviation authorities, along with the creation of the “ERCAN airspace” over the illegal entity of the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” ("TRNC")49, has augmented the insecurity in the civil aviation sector whilst several safety incidents have already been reported.50

The air force, despite the fact of being a special corps for the airspace, cannot operate without the utilisation of adequately equipped air bases on the ground; hence the paradox of an air-force largely dependent on ground facilities and operations. Maintenance, refuelling and logistics support are essential ground operations for the effective conduct of any kind of air operations. Furthermore, timely additional instructions and situation appraisals are transmitted from ground radar installations – specialised for these kind of tasks – to the aircraft in order to assist the pilots for accomplishing their mission. The aircraft as war platforms can only operate for few hours without ground support in contrast to warships that can conduct operations for days or even months without the need of anchorage. To mention Mackinder once again, he insightfully claimed that “today armies [...] have, too, the aeroplane, which is of a boomerang nature, a weapon of land-power as against sea power.”51 Even though, during recent military campaigns – in Iraq, Libya, or Mali – air tankers and the procedure of air refuelling were used and applied to a large extent, aircraft capabilities still remain reliant on the existence of ground airbases close to the battlefield.52 When the air operation is conducted from a close base the number of sorties is increased – due to the short flight time – whilst the fighters’ weapons are more specified to fit their exact missions, as situation on the ground constantly changes. Moreover, the role of the human factor is also crucial for the mission’s accomplishment. Human fatigue constitutes a critical factor that might determine the mission’s outcome – an advantage of short range missions over the long range ones. Thus, the existence of air bases close to the area of operations is considered to be a critical factor for the conduct of effective air operations. This conclusion is not only fully aligned but at the same time strengthens “sustainability”, a principle of war according to the UK Defence Doctrine.53

49 Resolution 541 (1983) of the UN Security Council considers the declaration of the TRNC as “legally invalid and calls for its withdrawal.”
50 Hadjipavlisi and Petrou, “Cyprus’ Airspace”; Letter of the President of the ICAO’s council Mr. Kotaite (19-3-1977), Doc 4.
52 Lacoste, “Aviation et Géopolitique,” 5-16.
spectrum, the air force allows a power to conduct parallel attacks since, according to Warden, airpower transcends geography. This premise stresses the great importance of the air force, as an independent branch, for military campaigns despite its innate flaws.

Cyprus, being an important vantage point in the Eastern Mediterranean, could be effectively exploited for the patrol of the region’s vast airspace. Even though it can afford only meagre means by itself, its military air base, situated at Paphos, could be used by a joint force comprised of European and other states, aiming to guarantee the region’s aviation security. This could be extended towards securing peace and stability in this volatile area taking into account the recent developments related to the civil war in Syria and the emergence of the “Islamic State”. The direct threat of terrorist attacks in European soil along with a possible wave of refugees coming from the Near and the Middle East war-torn countries, have to be tackled proactively and effectively by the Western states. The European Union’s role has to be prominent and determinant as its member states are directly affected. Paphos air base is used by a number of European air forces in the context of UNIFIL and for other logistical purposes, yet not in a coordinated and combined fashion. The European Union has to be resolute in anticipating all the foregoing threats and risks by taking advantage of Cyprus’ geostrategic position. The scenario of a permanent European force comprising of an air fleet – capable of patrolling and surveying the area – has to be seriously elaborated by the Republic of Cyprus and the European institutions, since stability and peace of the Eastern Mediterranean region affects directly Europe’s security and prosperity.

Cyprus’ geostrategic value has been once more confirmed as the Royal Air Force has been conducting air strikes against the “Islamic State” from Akrotiri, a British sovereign base in the island’s south. Moreover, American U-2 spy planes operate frequently from the British airbase at Akrotiri for conducting

surveillance operations over the Middle East. This occurs with the implicit consent of the Cyprus Government, as the bases have to be used only for the security interests of the UK, in accordance with the Treaty of Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus.\(^{58}\) According to Kissinger, the USA considers Cyprus – and especially the British Sovereign Bases on the island – a seamless part of its security strategy in the region.\(^{59}\) In addition to Akrotiri, strategic surveillance is also conducted by the over-the-horizon radar installations, “with a range of thirty seven hundred miles”, which are considered “among the most important Western intelligence posts in the Eastern Mediterranean”.\(^{60}\)

Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has created new realities in the region. In accordance with UNCLOS III, coastal states have the right to establish Exclusive Economic Zones of a maximum width of 200 nautical miles “from the baselines from which the territorial sea is measured”.\(^{61}\) Therefore, the Eastern Mediterranean states have acquired significant sovereign rights and jurisdictions far beyond their territorial waters.\(^{62}\) Yet, the question is; how capable are these states to protect and preserve their sovereign rights and jurisdictions from external aggressive aspirations and other direct threats? Even though the aforementioned sovereign rights and jurisdictions refer to the sea, it has become evident that strong naval forces are not enough by themselves. Instead, they have to be combined with a capable and technologically modern air force in order to be able to safeguard the sovereign rights and jurisdictions provided by the convention.

Despite the fact that when it comes to regional cooperation, as far as the demarcation and the eventual exploitation of the hydrocarbons reserves is concerned, substantial improvement has been achieved, a loud cacophony still exists. Turkey, a regional power itself, has not yet signed UNCLOS.\(^{63}\) In addition, it claims an enormous continental shelf, by not recognising the agreements Cyprus has already signed with its neighbouring states – Lebanon, Israel and Egypt – whilst it applies a gunboat diplomacy against Cyprus and

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\(^{60}\) Sitilides, “The Modern Geopolitics,” 86.


Greece. This Turkish attitude adds to the insecurity in the region, whilst it hinders further progress.

The Eastern Mediterranean states are compelled to maintain modern capable military forces in order to preserve their independence and protect their territorial integrity and sovereign rights provided by international law due to aggressiveness, hostility and expansionist ambitions of some states or regional non-state actors and the volatile environment of the region. However, a modern capable military force cannot exist without the incorporation of a mighty air force. This fact has been completely understood by Israel that from the very beginning immediately after its creation captured the strategic value of the air force. Deprived of hinterland, and be limited by the sea, Israel’s only obvious solution was the formation of a potent air force.

The Greek and Cypriot effort to establish a strategic alliance – under a joint defence space doctrine – during the last decade of the 20th Century was purely intended to counter Turkish aggressiveness. At the time, both countries invested significantly in strengthening their air force and air defence capabilities, understanding their critical importance. The frequent Hellenic Air Force exercises between Crete and Cyprus along with Cyprus’ official intent to purchase the Russian long range surface-to-air missile system S-300PMU1 have induced vehement reactions from all the affected powers. The Russian system’s impressive capabilities, concerning both surveillance and interception, along with the intent of Russian officers to be permanently

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65 Frédéric Encel et François Thual, “Israel: le Salut par les Aîrs” [Israel: the salute from the air], Aviation et Géopolitique 114, (2004), 52-55.

66 Aristos Aristotelous, O Eniaios Amyntikos Horos Elladas-Kyprou [The unified defence space between Greece and Cyprus], (Nicosia: Cyprus Centre of Strategic Studies, 1998), 71-73; Aristos Aristotelous, To Dogma tou Enieou Amyntiku Chorou Elladas - Kyprou [The Doctrine of the unified defence space between Greece and Cyprus], (Nicosia: Cyprus Centre of Strategic Studies, 1998), 76-82; Stavros Lygeros, Kypriako i airetiki lysi [The Cyprus problem – The heretical solution], (Athens: Patakis Editions, 2014), 86-90.

67 Aristotelous, Eniaios Amyntikos Horos, 77; Aristotelous, To Dogma tou Enieou Amyntiku Chorou Elladas - Kyprou , 147-149.


69 The maximum range of the surveillance radar is 300Km, whilst the maximum range for interception is 150Km.
stationed on the island, have worried the Western allies who loudly expressed their discontent. The Greek-Cypriot strategic alliance itself, along with a robust navy and air force presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, would have changed the region’s balance of power. Apart from Turkey, neither the British, nor the Americans and their allies, the Israelis, could consent to this new order the Greek-Cypriot coalition would have imposed.\textsuperscript{70} What irritated them the most was the perspective of significant airspace control that could be achieved as a result of the introduction of a variety of air defence means. Eventually, the so-called “Doctrine of the unified defence space” (as the coalition between Greece and Cyprus was called) faded away in the following years. Since then, the geopolitical map of the region has changed. As mentioned above, the explorations of hydrocarbons reserves, the emergence of new terrorist threats such as the “Islamic State”, the civil war in Syria, the deterioration in Turco-Israeli relations, and the potential rapprochement between the USA and Iran are but a few of the new realities. Therefore, a new wind is now blowing in the region calling for close cooperation between states with converging interests. The air force qua a distinct branch of every nation’s forces is again at the forefront showing the way forward. Being the extended arm of Greece and Israel, the air force has contributed to the formation of a new strategic cooperation through the conduct of joint exercises.\textsuperscript{71} Cyprus participates as well, since its geostrategic role cannot be ignored.\textsuperscript{72}

**Conclusion**

The Eastern Mediterranean region constitutes one of the world’s most crucial geostrategic pivots. Its importance is confirmed by all the well-known geopolitical world models. Thus, any disturbance, disorder or aberration occurring in the region could have a global impact. Being situated at the centre of the Levantine basin, Cyprus occupies a prominent position. Hence, any power that aspires to play a critical regional or global role has to take into account this island.

\textsuperscript{70} Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History Cyprus*, 101.


Territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states in the Eastern Mediterranean along with the exercise of their sovereign rights and jurisdictions provided by the international law are critical factors for progress and prosperity in a region that impacts on the global affairs. The airspace constitutes an indivisible element of every territory whilst its geopolitical importance has been only recently apprehended in its full extent, almost a century after the invention of the aeroplane. The effective control of the third dimension is considered to be critical for the Eastern Mediterranean’s stability and peace. However, the effective control of the vast space cannot be achieved only by a strong naval presence; the contribution of the air force is also vital since without air superiority this control is unattainable. Each state, either tiny or powerful, aiming for different strategic objectives has to bear in mind the strategic importance of airspace.