

Dynamics of Regional Security in the Mediterranean Basin

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Table 1 · Classification of Actors in the Eastern Mediterranean Conflict (2026)

Category	Actors
Direct Combatants	United States; Israel; Iran
States Directly Targeted (Missile/Drone)	Bahrain; Saudi Arabia; Kuwait; Qatar; UAE; Jordan; Oman
States Affected (Territory/Airspace)	Turkey; Iraq; Syria; Azerbaijan; Cyprus
States Providing Military Support	United Kingdom; France; Italy; Greece; Netherlands; Spain; Germany
Non-State Actors	Hezbollah (Lebanon); Houthi Movement (Yemen)

Table 2 · Typology of Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean Security Complex

Type of Power	Definition	Examples (2026 Conflict)
Regional Powers	Security involvement primarily confined to own region.	Israel; Iran; Türkiye; Saudi Arabia; UAE; Qatar; Bahrain; Kuwait; Oman; Cyprus; Iraq; Syria; Azerbaijan; Jordan; Hezbollah; Houthis
External Power	Actor outside the region — can influence but relatively weak or unwilling to intervene.	Germany; Norway; Netherlands; Spain; Italy; Russia; China; India
Hyper-Regional Power	External actor whose strategic concerns extend beyond immediate neighbours; maintains sustained military presence.	France; United Kingdom
Superpower / Monosuperpower	Actor with strategic interests spanning the entire world; only one such actor today.	United States

Table 3 · Wars and Armed Conflicts (2001–2026)

Key Points

- Conflicts involve both intra-regional actors (Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Syria) and external powers (USA, UK, France, Russia).
- The Syrian Civil War (2011) and the rise of ISIS (2014) represent turning points that destabilized multiple neighbouring states simultaneously.
- Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine had immediate spillover effects on Mediterranean energy markets and food supply chains — **a classic example of hyper-regional interdependence.**
- The 2026 US–Israel–Iran War is the most recent and acute escalation, directly involving Cyprus and European naval forces, illustrating how the Mediterranean is a theatre for global powers.
- The frequency of Gaza conflicts (2008, 2014, 2021, 2023, 2025) underlines a persistent cycle of violence with no durable resolution.

Table 4 · Political Crises (2005–2024)

Key Points

- The Arab Spring (2010–2011) produced highly divergent outcomes: Tunisia transitioned to democracy before relapsing into authoritarianism (2021 self-coup); Egypt moved from revolution to military coup; Libya descended into civil war.
- The Greek sovereign debt crisis (2009) was the first major test of EU cohesion and the eurozone's resilience. It reshaped economic policy across Southern Europe and set a precedent for austerity-based conditionality.
- Turkey's 2016 coup attempt and subsequent crackdown on civil society had far-reaching consequences for NATO cohesion and EU–Turkey relations.
- The 2019 Eastern Mediterranean gas rivalry (Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Libya) illustrates how energy resources create overlapping legal, diplomatic, and military disputes.
- The 2020 Beirut port explosion — one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history — exposed Lebanon's state collapse and the danger of institutional failure in the region.
- The Fall of Assad (2024) marked a dramatic and unexpected transition in Syria after over a decade of civil war.

Table 5 · Terrorism

Key Points

- Terrorism in the Mediterranean is not confined to any one country or ideology — attacks have struck Spain, France, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Libya, Algeria, Lebanon, and Israel.
- The 2004 Madrid train bombings and the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris are landmark events that reshaped European counterterrorism policy and public discourse.
- Tunisia experienced some of the worst attacks targeting Western tourists (Bardo Museum 2015; Sousse Beach 2015), devastating its tourism industry and political stability.
- The 2012 Benghazi attack highlighted the security vacuum created by state collapse in post-Gaddafi Libya.
- The 2023 Hamas attack on Israel triggered the most recent and ongoing cycle of mass violence, demonstrating how a single terrorist event can escalate into full-scale regional war.

Table 6 · Natural Disasters

Key Points

- The 2003 European heat wave killed an estimated 70,000 people across Southern Europe — one of the deadliest natural disasters in modern European history — and served as an early warning of climate change impacts.
- COVID-19 (2020) was the first truly simultaneous shock affecting all Mediterranean states at once, exposing weaknesses in health systems and cross-border coordination.
- The 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes in Turkey and Syria struck during an active conflict zone, compounding humanitarian suffering and making relief operations extremely difficult.
- Storm Daniel (2023) caused catastrophic flooding in Libya, Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, killing thousands — particularly in Derna, Libya, where dam failures wiped out entire neighbourhoods.
- The clustering of major disasters in 2023 alone (three separate events) is consistent with predictions of increasing climate-driven extreme weather events in the region.
- The Costa Concordia disaster (2012), while a maritime accident, illustrates systemic fragility extending to the transport sector.

Table 7 · Humanitarian Crises: Mediterranean Migration Deaths (2001–2013)

Key Points

- The peak death year was 2016 with 5,136 recorded deaths — yet IOM and UNHCR stress that actual figures are likely far higher, as many boats sink without trace.
- The April 2015 shipwreck (~800–900 dead) off Libya is the single deadliest incident in Mediterranean history. It triggered an emergency EU summit and temporary policy shifts.
- The 2013 Lampedusa disaster (366 dead) was a watershed moment that shocked European public opinion and briefly elevated migration to the top of the EU political agenda.
- The 2023 Pylos shipwreck off Greece — with hundreds feared dead — became one of the worst maritime disasters in Greek history and reignited debate over EU border and rescue policy.
- The Central Mediterranean route (Libya/Tunisia → Italy) consistently accounts for the majority of deaths, reflecting the dangers of the crossing and the role of smuggling networks.
- Deaths have continued unabated in 2024, 2025, and into 2026, illustrating that the crisis is structural, not episodic, and cannot be resolved without addressing root causes: conflict, poverty, and climate displacement.

Three Pillars of Mediterranean Interdependence

Political

Democratic trajectories shaped by cross-border influences. Democratic backsliding in one state creates ripple effects across the basin. The 2026 conflict has triggered internal security pressures in Gulf states and heightened geopolitical polarisation.

Energy

Mediterranean central to Europe's energy architecture via gas corridors & maritime routes. Disruptions to Hormuz chokepoint drove sharp oil price increases, destabilising global markets.

Military

Defence spending is a regional pattern shaped by shared security concerns and arms competition. Rapid escalation of the 2026 operations reshaped security calculations across multiple countries.

Epilogue

The Mediterranean has always been more than a sea; it is a mirror in which humanity contemplates its oldest tensions — between openness and closure, cooperation and conflict, memory and forgetting.

- Some civilizations were consumed by this mirror — Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Hittites — as Narcissus, gazing into the Mediterranean waters, was consumed by himself

- Others endured: Greeks, Jews, Egyptians remain living civilisations today.

- States today that admire their own power with the same fatal confidence of Narcissus are warned: the Mediterranean's waters are patient.

- Regional responses alone are structurally insufficient — the scale of the problem exceeds the scale of the remedy.

- Effective resolution requires hyper-regional or global intervention: coordinated, sustained, and grounded in recognition that no region's instability remains its own.