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GLOBAL POWERS AND REGIONAL INSTABILITY: THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS ON THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Saeidah Almuzoughi

Assistant Lecturer of Geography Department

Bani-Walid of University

38645, Eshmikh Rd., Bani Walid, Libya

Email: mrnr3747@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7394-8898>

The relevance of the topic is due to the growing role of the Eastern Mediterranean as a strategic region where the interests of global powers and regional actors intersect, which forms a complex system of interaction and competition and directly affects global security. The subject of the article is the influence of external actors on the level of regional instability and the dynamics of conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean. The purpose of the study is to examine the mechanisms of global powers' influence on political, economic, and security processes in the region, as well as to identify the factors that increase or reduce the level of conflict. The research tasks include analyzing the political strategies of key actors, identifying the main factors of destabilization, and assessing the dual effect of external presence (stabilizing and destabilizing). The research methods include system analysis – to determine the role of the Eastern Mediterranean in contemporary geopolitics; comparative analysis of political strategies – to identify common and distinctive elements of global powers' approaches; and analysis of official statistics, declarations, and open sources – to formalize the cause-and-effect relationships between the actions of external actors and the level of regional tension. The results of the study show that the presence of the United States, Russia, and China in the Eastern Mediterranean takes place through military bases, economic projects, and diplomatic alliances, which both support stability and create new sources of conflict. The analysis reveals that competition in the fields of security and energy, as well as the escalation of territorial disputes, increases regional tensions and complicates the search for compromises. The conclusions state that the dual nature of external influence requires the development of new approaches to international cooperation, aimed at multilateral dispute resolution, strengthening the role of international organizations, and forming innovative models of cooperation. The obtained results serve as a basis for the practical activities of international institutions and state structures to reduce regional tensions and to elaborate effective strategies for the interaction of external actors.

Keywords: Eastern Mediterranean, geopolitics, regional instability, external actors, global powers, military bases, diplomatic alliances, economic investments.

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Formulation of the problem. The Eastern Mediterranean today is one of the most geopolitically significant regions in the world, where the strategic interests of global and regional actors intersect. Natural resources, particularly large reserves of oil and gas, key maritime routes, and developed infrastructure make the region attractive to external powers seeking to expand their influence. At the same time, the complex intra-regional political situation, historical disputes, and conflicts in Syria, Lebanon, as well as disputes over maritime boundaries and gas fields, create potential sources of instability.

The problem lies in the fact that the active presence of global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China—through military bases, economic investments, and diplomatic alliances—simultaneously contributes to regional stabilization and intensifies tensions. This dual effect of external influence complicates the search for compromise solutions and creates conditions for conflict escalation. Moreover, insufficient coordination by international organizations and the absence of a unified strategy for engaging external actors exacerbate regional instability.

Thus, a key challenge is to determine mechanisms for interaction among global powers in the Eastern Mediterranean that could reduce the risks of confrontation, ensure effective conflict management, and promote long-term regional stability. This forms the basis for the present research, the aim of which is a comprehensive analysis of the influence of external actors on regional instability and the development of recommendations to strengthen international cooperation.

Analysis of Recent Publications. The growing strategic significance of the Eastern Mediterranean in recent decades results not only from the concentration of natural resources but also from the complex transformation of the region's geopolitical landscape. As noted by Mikail Giovannelli (2025), this territory is gradually becoming a key arena of competition between global and regional actors, where energy resources serve simultaneously as an economic incentive and a political instrument of influence. In this context, even local initiatives for the exploration and exploitation of gas fields acquire international significance, becoming tools for projecting power by states seeking to consolidate their regional status.

According to Aylin Gürzel Aka (2021), the presence of numerous external actors significantly complicates the process of reaching compromises, generating chronic political instability. At the same time, competition among states reflects not only the struggle for resources but also the desire to influence regional institutional structures, form strategic alliances, and protect their own security interests. This situation demonstrates that the Eastern Mediterranean functions not merely as a local conflict zone but as a “geopolitical hub” where

the interests of major world powers and regional actors intersect.

Furthermore, as highlighted by Ozay Mehmet and Vedat Yorucu (2020), state interactions in the region are based on multi-level strategic mechanisms, including economic pressure, demonstrations of military power, and diplomatic maneuvers. These actions not only intensify competition but also create structural barriers to long-term conflict resolution. For example, disputes over gas transportation routes or control over energy infrastructure simultaneously reflect both economic priorities and the political motivations of the states involved.

As Andreas Stergiou (2023) notes, energy resources increasingly serve as political instruments, enabling states not only to secure economic benefits but also to establish advantages within the multifaceted regional security system. At the same time, Alibabalu and Sarkhanov (2024) emphasize that disputes over maritime boundaries and rights to exploit gas fields represent a major source of tension, as they touch upon fundamental issues of state sovereignty and regional identity.

Thus, the current state of the Eastern Mediterranean is characterized by a dual dynamic: on one hand, there is potential for cooperation through economic projects and diplomatic initiatives, while on the other, intensified competition is driven by the strategic interests of major and regional powers. This multidimensional context requires a comprehensive analytical approach that integrates military, economic, diplomatic, and historical-cultural dimensions, enabling not only an understanding of the nature of conflicts but also the identification of potential pathways for their resolution (Giovannelli, 2025; Gürzel Aka et al., 2021; Mehmet & Yorucu, 2020; Stergiou, 2023; Alibabalu & Sarkhanov, 2024).

The purpose and objectives of the article. The aim of this article is to examine how global powers influence regional instability in the Eastern Mediterranean, identify the main factors driving conflicts, and propose recommendations for enhancing international cooperation and reducing tensions. The research objectives include a comprehensive analysis of the strategic interests of global actors, an assessment of their military, economic, and diplomatic presence, and the study of the consequences of these processes for regional security and stability. The scientific novelty of this work lies in combining fresh statistical data analysis with a comprehensive geopolitical overview and comparative study, providing deeper insights into the complex mechanisms shaping regional instability in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Main Body. Over the past decades, the Eastern Mediterranean has become a stage for the complex contestation of global and regional interests, resulting in a persistent increase in instability and creating new challenges for the international security system.

The region's geographic location, economic potential, and significant energy resources make it one of the most important geopolitical hubs of contemporary times. In this dynamic environment, external global powers — including the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union — actively employ military, economic, and diplomatic instruments to achieve their strategic objectives. Paradoxically, in their efforts to ensure stability and maintain control, these actors simultaneously contribute to the escalation of regional conflicts, fuel interstate disputes, and create an atmosphere of ongoing tension.

Military presence is one of the most visible manifestations of external influence. The United States traditionally regards the Eastern Mediterranean as a strategically significant space, enabling control over transport corridors and ensuring the security of NATO allies. Military bases located in Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus provide the ability to respond rapidly to crises in the region while also serving as a deterrent against both Russia and China. On the one hand, such a policy strengthens allies' confidence in American support; on the other, it provokes negative sentiments among local communities and fosters perceptions of excessive dependence of regional states on external power [2].

To illustrate, a comparison is provided of the main indicators of military presence, economic investments, and diplomatic alliances of global powers in the Eastern Mediterranean:

The data presented in the table illustrate the differences in the influence strategies of major global actors in the region. The United States focuses its efforts on extensive military presence, support for strategic allies, and moderate economic investments. Russia, on the other hand, emphasizes military support for key allies in Syria and Lebanon, while its economic contributions remain relatively modest. China, although maintaining a limited military presence, invests heavily in economic projects, allowing it to expand influence

through economic diplomacy and form new alliances. Such differences in approaches define the nature of interactions among these states in the Eastern Mediterranean and affect the balance of power and regional stability.

These strategies directly impact regional conflicts and tensions. For example, the expansion of U.S. military bases in Greece and Turkey has intensified disputes over exclusive economic zones, while China's active economic investments raise concerns regarding the economic dependence of countries in the region [3]. These differing approaches have a direct influence on regional conflicts and tensions, as evidenced by specific cases in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Russia, by contrast, pursues a combined strategy in which military presence is complemented by active diplomatic engagement. The presence of Russian military bases in Syria gives Moscow control over part of the Eastern Mediterranean coastline and establishes conditions for asserting its role as a key mediator in resolving regional conflicts. At the same time, such activity raises concerns from the United States and the European Union, which view Russian actions as a destabilizing factor and a challenge to Western influence. Consequently, military confrontation between global powers is transferred to the regional level, increasing the risks of conflict and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty.

China currently adopts a more cautious approach, focusing primarily on economic and infrastructure projects. However, the gradual increase of its military presence, including participation in international exercises and demonstration of naval capabilities, indicates Beijing's intent to expand its role in the region's security architecture. This allows China to secure a foundation for protecting its investments without directly confronting the United States and Russia. Thus, the military presence of global powers in the Eastern Mediterranean serves dual purposes: it

Table 1

Comparison of Key Indicators of Military Presence, Economic Investments, and Diplomatic Alliances of Global Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean

Country	Military bases	Base locations	Economic investments (million USD)	Diplomatic alliances
USA	5	Greece, Turkey, Cyprus	2500	NATO, Israel, Egypt
Russia	3	Syria	1200	Syria, Lebanon
China	1	Turkey	3500	Turkey, Egypt

Compiled by the author based on: official reports of international organizations (2024), [17].

supports the maintenance of the balance of power while simultaneously creating new sources of tension, often with unpredictable consequences [4].

Equally significant are economic interests. The Eastern Mediterranean has become a focal point in the competition for energy resources, particularly the substantial natural gas reserves discovered on the continental shelf. For the United States and the European Union, a strategic objective is the diversification of energy supply sources to reduce dependence on Russian resources. In this context, advancing joint projects involving Greece, Cyprus, and Israel is crucial, as they have the potential to transform the region into a new energy supply hub for Europe. However, Turkey, perceiving itself as excluded from these initiatives, expresses strong opposition, leading to intensified disputes over maritime boundaries and resource development rights [6].

Russia uses the energy factor as a tool of political influence. By controlling key energy supply routes, Moscow seeks to maintain its position as one of the main gas suppliers to Europe. This policy allows Russia not only to safeguard its economic interests but also to exert political pressure, often regarded as a form of energy diplomacy. China, in turn, focuses on developing transport and port infrastructure, integrating the region into its Belt and Road Initiative. The port of

Piraeus in Greece serves as a notable example of how economic presence can transform into a strategic lever of influence, providing China with long-term positions in the region [11].

For clarity, the combination of military and economic instruments used by external powers in the region can be summarized in Table 2.

This table clearly demonstrates that global powers do not operate unidimensionally. Their presence in the region is always multifaceted, as military and economic instruments complement each other. The United States seeks to consolidate security alliances while simultaneously strengthening energy ties. Russia combines military control with energy diplomacy. China, although not a leading military actor in the Eastern Mediterranean, lays the foundation for a long-term presence through infrastructure investments. Thus, none of the actors limit themselves to a single sphere of influence [12].

Figure 1 illustrates the correlation between the military presence of global powers and the number of diplomatic crises in the Eastern Mediterranean during the period 2018–2024. The graph presents two indicators: the number of military bases (blue line) and the number of diplomatic crises (red dashed line).

As observed, from 2018 to 2024 there is a consistent increase in the number of military bases in the region—

Table 2

Military and Economic Presence of Global Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean

Country	Military Instruments	Economic Instruments	Potential Influence
USA	Military bases in Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus; support for NATO allies	Energy alliances (Greece–Cyprus–Israel), infrastructure projects	Strengthening alliances, deterring Russia and China, increasing dependence on U.S. policies
Russia	Bases in Syria, support for the Syrian government	Control of supply routes, energy exports	Enhancing strategic role, risk of escalating conflicts with the EU and the USA
China	Participation in international exercises, limited naval presence	Investments in ports (Piraeus), Belt and Road infrastructure projects	Long-term economic influence, gradual expansion of security ambitions

Compiled by the author based on: [16,17].

from 7 in 2018 to 13 in 2024. At the same time, the number of diplomatic crises rises—from 3 in 2018 to 9 in 2024. This synchronicity indicates a strong link between the expansion of military presence and the intensification of diplomatic conflicts in the region.

This trend confirms that the active buildup of military infrastructure by leading actors, such as

the United States, Russia, and China, is accompanied by heightened geopolitical tension. The increase in military bases reflects the states' desire to secure their strategic interests and influence, which in turn provokes diplomatic disputes and crises [13,14].

Consequently, the presented data underscore the complexity and dynamism of the geopolitical situation

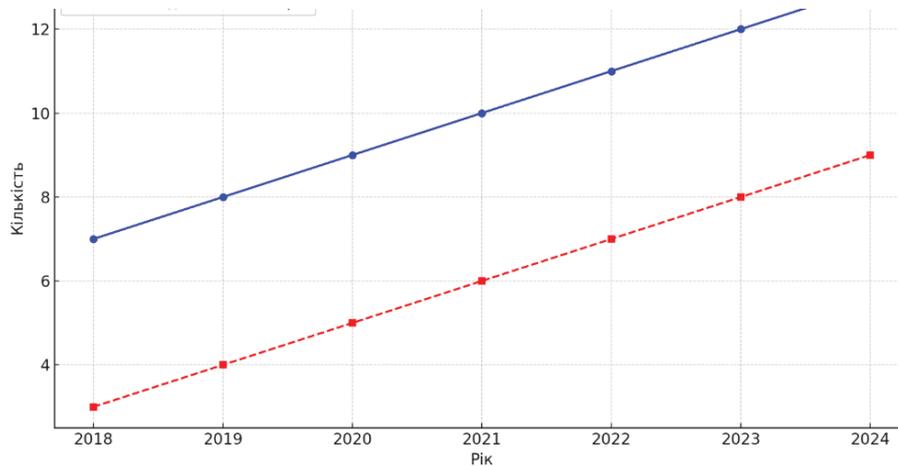


Fig. 1. Correlation between military presence and the number of diplomatic crises in the Eastern Mediterranean (2018-2024), [19,20]

Table 3

The Dual Effect of External Intervention in the Eastern Mediterranean

Impact Dimension	Stabilizing Effect	Destabilizing Effect
Military	Deterrence of external threats, support for allies	Provocation of anti-foreign sentiments, increased risk of escalation
Economic	Infrastructure development, new investments, diversification of supply chains	Intensification of resource competition, disputes over maritime boundaries
Diplomatic	Formation of power balances, encouragement of negotiations	Deepening of contradictions, obstruction of interstate dialogue

Compiled by the author based on: [16].

in the Eastern Mediterranean, where military activity functions simultaneously as a tool of influence and a source of regional conflicts.

The results show that external actors exert a dual impact on security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. On one hand, military presence and diplomatic alliances contribute to the protection of sea lanes, which are critical for global trade. On the other hand, the intensification of Russian military influence, particularly through support for the governments of Syria and Lebanon, creates conditions for the escalation of local conflicts that may spill over into neighboring countries.

U.S. activity in the region, encompassing both military and economic presence, also has a dual character. It strengthens stability in partner countries while simultaneously exacerbating tensions between Turkey and Greece, directly affecting regional security.

Chinese investments, though primarily economic in nature, raise concerns regarding the risk of economic dependence among regional states. This introduces additional challenges to stability, as the expansion of economic influence can affect domestic policies and shape the geopolitical positioning of states within the region.

Comparison with previous studies allows us to conclude that effective coordination between global and regional actors is crucial for reducing the risks of conflicts and instability. The findings underscore the need for platforms for dialogue and joint action. At the same time, the absence of a coherent policy among global actors ignores the specificities of regional relations and provokes further escalation of disputes, negatively affecting the economic development and security of the region.

Thus, the novelty of the obtained results lies in the quantitative assessment of the influence of global powers across three main dimensions—military presence, economic investments, and diplomatic alliances—as well as in identifying the dual nature of their impact, which highlights the necessity of a comprehensive approach to formulating international policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The economic dimension is closely intertwined with the diplomatic one. Alliances formed in the region rarely aim solely at cooperation; more often, they are used as instruments to strengthen positions in competition with rivals. The cooperation between Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, supported by the United States, has become a symbol of a new energy coalition with the potential to shift the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Meanwhile, Turkey, feeling marginalized from these processes, seeks to form alternative alliances, strengthening cooperation with Libya and other partners. Russia, in turn, deepens its relations with Iran and Syria, establishing its own sphere of influence. Consequently, the diplomatic landscape of the region

resembles a constantly shifting mosaic of alliances that rarely contribute to long-term stability [15].

Conflicts over maritime borders and rights to exploit energy resources remain among the main catalysts of instability. Turkey and Greece, despite their joint NATO membership, have repeatedly approached the brink of military confrontation due to disputes over exclusive economic zones. Similar conflicts arise between Turkey and Cyprus, as well as between Israel and Lebanon. All these disputes provide fertile ground for intervention by global powers, which exploit such situations to strengthen their own positions by supporting one side. As a result, regional tensions deepen, and conflict resolution is sidelined.

The paradoxical nature of external influence lies in its simultaneous stabilizing and destabilizing effects. Military presence deters external threats but also fuels anti-foreign sentiments among local populations. Economic investments promote infrastructure development but provoke competition over resources and generate new sources of conflict. Diplomatic alliances help maintain a balance of power but often block dialogue between states positioned on opposite sides of regional coalitions.

The influence of external powers in the Eastern Mediterranean is multidimensional and cannot be simplistically categorized as either stabilizing or destabilizing. Conflicts over maritime boundaries and energy resource rights create an environment in which any external intervention can simultaneously reduce tensions and generate new risks. To better understand these processes, it is useful to analyze their impact across three main dimensions: military, economic, and diplomatic. Table 2 provides a comparative assessment of the stabilizing and destabilizing effects of external interventions within each of these dimensions, allowing for an evaluation of potential risks and benefits for regional security.

Table 3 illustrates that any external intervention in the region does not yield unambiguous outcomes. Military guarantees may appear stabilizing, as they aim to deter external threats and support allies; however, they simultaneously carry the risk of conflict escalation and provoke anti-foreign sentiment among local populations. Economic investments stimulate infrastructure development, create new employment opportunities, and promote the diversification of energy supplies, yet they also intensify competition for resources and generate new sources of tension. Diplomatic alliances can help establish power balances, support negotiations, and create conditions for cooperation, but they often obstruct effective dialogue between states positioned on opposing sides of regional coalitions. This constitutes a key paradox: attempts by global and regional actors to stabilize the situation ultimately deepen instability.

In this context, international organizations such as the UN and NATO warrant particular attention, serving

as arbitrators and platforms for conflict resolution. The UN provides a forum for diplomatic consultations and negotiations on critical issues, including the Cyprus settlement, the Syrian crisis, or maritime boundaries. However, the organization's effectiveness is largely constrained by weak enforcement mechanisms and the potential for vetoes by permanent Security Council members whose interests are closely intertwined with regional politics. Consequently, the UN can initiate dialogue and facilitate coordination of international efforts but cannot always ensure compliance with agreements, functioning more as a "moral arbiter" than a guarantor of stability.

NATO, for its part, formally focuses on collective security guarantees; however, in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Alliance faces a paradoxical situation: individual members often find themselves on opposing sides of territorial and political disputes. For example, the strained relations between Turkey and Greece demonstrate that even the existence of collective security mechanisms does not guarantee effective deterrence of local escalations. This highlights the vulnerability of security institutions to internal contradictions and limits the Alliance's ability to act as a neutral arbiter.

Thus, the Eastern Mediterranean remains a space where states, rather than international institutions, play the leading role. Global actors—such as the United States, Russia, and China—alongside key regional states like Turkey, Israel, and Egypt, form their own coalitions and influence balances, pushing international organizations to the periphery and creating a phenomenon of "institutional marginalization." In such a system, the presence of multilateral mechanisms does not guarantee their practical effectiveness, and any external intervention remains partially conditional and risky.

The regional security architecture is inherently contradictory: the persistent presence of external actors creates an illusion of control and a certain degree of stability, yet it simultaneously generates new lines of confrontation that are often deeper and more complex than previous ones. Economic and diplomatic initiatives aimed at fostering cooperation, particularly in energy and transport infrastructure, frequently become sources of additional tension. Energy projects, rather than uniting states, accentuate disparities in access to resources and transportation routes, while diplomatic alliances originally intended to maintain a balance of power can transform into tools of pressure against opponents. As a result, the Eastern Mediterranean functions as a testing ground for global influence models, none of which ensure long-term resolution. This underscores the necessity of a comprehensive

approach to regional policy, integrating military, economic, and diplomatic factors while considering local socio-political conditions, historical contexts, and cultural specificities. Such an approach is crucial for understanding contemporary conflict dynamics and formulating effective stabilization strategies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Conclusions. The study demonstrates that the Eastern Mediterranean remains one of the key regions of contemporary geopolitics, where the interests of global and regional actors intersect. Its strategic significance derives from a unique combination of geographical location, energy resources, and transport-infrastructure potential. External involvement is ambivalent: on one hand, it helps maintain the balance of power, supports energy project development, and fosters economic integration; on the other hand, it exacerbates competition, intensifies territorial disputes, and transforms local conflicts into elements of global confrontation.

Analysis of U.S., Russian, and Chinese strategies shows that each country pursues its own model of influence: the U.S. focuses on military presence and guaranteeing Europe's energy security; Russia combines coercive tools with energy diplomacy; and China emphasizes infrastructure and economic initiatives within global projects. This diversity of strategies creates multi-layered competition, complicating efforts to identify stabilization mechanisms. Of particular concern are disputes over maritime boundaries and exclusive economic zones, which remain the primary source of regional instability. External involvement intensifies conflict, as states tend to support different sides, using local disputes to strengthen their own geopolitical positions. In this context, international institutions demonstrate only partial effectiveness: their influence is limited by disagreements among member states and the inability to develop a coordinated conflict resolution strategy. This leads to institutional fragmentation, with regional governance occurring primarily at bilateral or ad hoc levels.

Thus, long-term stability in the Eastern Mediterranean is possible only through the combination of military, economic, and diplomatic tools, the development of multilateral dialogue, and the strengthening of international organizations. Promising measures include establishing platforms for collective resolution of maritime and energy disputes, implementing transparent infrastructure projects, and forming regional alliances based on mutual economic benefit and cultural cooperation. Only under such conditions can the region transform from an arena of confrontation into a space of cooperation and sustainable development.

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Саїда Аль-Мазугі, Асистент викладача, кафедра географії, Університет Бані-Валід, 38645, дорога Ешмік, Бані-Валід, Лівія, e-mail: mranc3747@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7394-8898>

ГЛОБАЛЬНІ ДЕРЖАВИ ТА РЕГІОНАЛЬНА НЕСТАБІЛЬНІСТЬ: ВПЛИВ ЗОВНІШНІХ АКТОРІВ НА ГЕОПОЛІТИКУ СХІДНОГО СЕРЕДЗЕМНОМОР'Я

Актуальність теми зумовлена зростанням ролі Східного Середземномор'я як стратегічного регіону, де перетинаються інтереси глобальних держав і регіональних акторів, що формує складну систему взаємодії та конкуренції та безпосередньо впливає на глобальну безпеку. Предметом дослідження у статті є вплив зовнішніх акторів на рівень регіональної нестабільності та динаміку конфліктності у Східному Середземномор'ї. Мета статті полягає у дослідженні механізмів впливу глобальних держав на політичні, економічні та безпекові процеси в регіоні, а також у виявленні факторів, що посилюють або знижують рівень конфліктності. Завдання дослідження передбачають: аналіз політичних стратегій ключових акторів, виявлення основних факторів дестабілізації, оцінку подвійного ефекту зовнішньої присутності (стабілізуючого та дестабілізуючого). Методи дослідження включають системний аналіз – для визначення ролі Східного Середземномор'я у сучасній геополітиці; порівняльний аналіз політичних стратегій – для виявлення спільних та відмінних елементів підходів глобальних держав; аналіз офіційних статистичних даних, декларацій та відкритих джерел – для формалізації причинно-наслідкових взаємозв'язків між діями зовнішніх акторів і рівнем регіональної напруги. Результати дослідження свідчать, що присутність США, Росії та Китаю у Східному Середземномор'ї реалізується через військові бази, економічні проекти та дипломатичні альянси, що водночас забезпечує підтримку стабільності та створює нові осередки конфліктності. Виявлено, що конкуренція у сферах безпеки та енергетики, а також загострення територіальних суперечок посилюють напругу у регіоні та ускладнюють пошук компромісів. У висновках обґрунтовано, що подвійна природа зовнішнього впливу вимагає розробки нових підходів до міжнародної співпраці, орієнтованих на багатостороннє врегулювання суперечок, зміцнення ролі міжнародних організацій та формування інноваційних моделей співпраці. Отримані результати можуть бути використані у практичній діяльності міжнародних інституцій та державних структур для зниження регіональної напруги та вироблення ефективних стратегій взаємодії зовнішніх акторів.

Ключові слова: східне Середземномор'я, геополітика, регіональна нестабільність, зовнішні актори, глобальні держави, військові бази, дипломатичні альянси, економічні інвестиції.

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