

DEALING WITH A BULLY

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Political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.

George Orwell

The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy's not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him.

SunTzu

The latest spat with Turkey over “gray zones” in the Aegean comes at a most inopportune time for Greece. With Turkey saber rattling again we’ve entered a dangerous phase yet again. What is going on?

There is nothing new in this latest episode of “Greek-Turkish friendship.” Turkey is on a collision course with European “values” and run by an increasingly random, unpredictable, authoritarian, neo-Islamist leader. Such is the confusion generated by the Turkish autocrat that even Mrs. Merkel was brusquely [rebuked](#) by Recep Erdogan over her use of the term “Islamist terrorism” and dared say nothing in response.

Erdogan’s effort to subjugate the opposition and push Turkey down the Islamic path will continue to cause outbursts of “righteous indignation” from Ankara because of both real and imagined provocations from all azimuths. In the aftermath of the failed July 2016 coup (which many believe was a staged theatrical performance to provide a convenient pretext,) Erdogan has launched a Stalinist-style purge of his political opponents and anyone deemed a potential “enemy of the state.” Prisons are overflowing, arrests continue, and oppression of “non-conformists” expands.

Greece, on the other hand, is at her weakest in living memory. Devastated by her lenders, led by Germany, and a sovereign state only in theory, she has been left to fend for herself in the illegal immigrant invasion crisis. Cut off from the rest of Europe, and struggling to survive hat in hand, she has little real defense against Turkish taunts and aggressions.

Mr. Erdogan is mad because the Greek supreme court turned down the extradition of the eight Turkish military officers who fled to Greece after the failed coup last July. Was this an avoidable “accident?”

It was, if we believe the Greek PM promised Erdogan to return the eight “within 10-15 days” after the failed coup. The Turkish president insists Tsipras said exactly that during a personal call immediately after the coup. If indeed this is true, the flop lies at the doorstep of the Greek government.

The extradition was destined to arouse yet again the purist Greek “humanist” community whose members are immune to the determinants of broader “policy imperatives.” Indeed, an energetic [public campaign](#) of meditated indignation by the opponents of the extradition must have aroused political concerns inside Tsipras’s cabinet at a time of poll nosedive for the government.

A good guess then would be that Greece’s “independent” judiciary was allowed enough wiggle to adjudicate the case of the 8 according to European “values.” Greece, however, is the *only* (nominal) member of “united” Europe who cannot afford to be by-the-European-book when her brittle security is at stake. As much as this sounds abhorrent to Greek “humanitarians,” and their NGO assorted “activists,” the 8 should have been treated differently.

But could Greece have broken ranks with Europe on such a sensitive subject? Greek media insist no other EU member returned Turkish officers, who took part in the coup and then escaped to Europe, back to Turkey.

From a strictly legal and international treaty standpoint, Turkey has no leg to stand on when demanding the extradition of July 2016 alleged putschists. Turkey is a signatory to the [European Treaty on Extradition](#), which forbids extradition for political or military crimes. Greece, on the other hand, has the theoretical obligation to observe EU humanitarian conventions which deem the 8 legitimate refugees at risk of being tortured and killed if they are sent back to Turkey.

This is the theory. The current *practice* though is dictated by Ankara’s aggressive militaristic authoritarianism and its saber-rattling unpredictability in the Aegean at a time when Turkey is squeezed by her repeated failures in Syria and Iraq.

Those Greek “Europeanists” who support an uncompromising humanitarian posture on such a dangerous bilateral issue, however, should also consider the Greek patent inability to put teeth to any “robust” counteraction to Turkish threats beyond ill-advised macho talk by some members of the Greek cabinet. They should also accept the harsh reality that Europe *won't lift a finger* in defense of Greece in case of either a “hot incident” in the Aegean or an “accident” along the Greek-Turkish border.

How likely is Turkey to escalate beyond military “visits” to Imia?

Turkey is unpredictable especially as the domestic crackdown expands and Erdogan keeps discovering more “Gülenist conspiracies,” real or imagined, by the day. The spat over the extradition must have riled the Padishah keenly since bankrupt Greece dared establish a judicial precedent that would be difficult for other European “union” countries to ignore. If Greece has the strength of conviction to decide on the basis of lofty humanitarian law principles how can Germany, for example, react “diplomatically” when she claims European, and now increasingly, global moral leadership? Mrs. Merkel’s Germany hosts numerous Turkish officers previously assigned to NATO who are seeking protection from extradition. Their asylum cases are pending before courts that normally do not heed government “advice.”

The Imia “visit” was an obvious shot across the Greek bow embellished with the deployment of Turkish special forces fast attack boats. Turkey’s bullying tactics are well established and, until now at least, have been limited to chest thumping, scowling stares, and threatening words not to mention the intrusion and violations antics of the Turkish Air Force.

Reason says Turkey would be ill advised to ignite the Aegean when she is faced with her inability to prevail in Syria and its unceremonious expulsion from Iraq. But reason is in short supply in Ankara at the moment. We are dealing with an authoritarian, possessed by visions of lost Ottoman grandeur, seeking to strengthen his imperial powers and surrounded by yes-men of the shallowest capacity. His fuse is burning. “Accidents” can happen.

President Trump spoke with Erdogan on the telephone. News stories claim Trump reassured Erdogan of U.S. commitment to Turkey as an “ally” in NATO and the fight against Islamic terrorism. Doesn't this call enhance Ankara's position?

It certainly does. It would have been too much to expect the new U.S. president to abruptly pivot away from American tradition in treating Turkey as a key “valuable” ally. For the time being, Turkey’s slide toward an Islamic regime, the dismantling of Turkish “democracy,” and the decapitation of the Turkish armed forces shall remain unaddressed by the White House.

Any continuing Turkish cooperation with U.S. forces in Syria though will, sooner or later, collide with America's support of the Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG,) who remain the most battle worthy among the disparate groups fighting ISIS. Furthermore, Russia's "proposal" for [autonomous Kurdish regions](#) within a future re-modeled Syria was the worst possible surprise for Erdogan, who continues to accuse the Kurds for his country's severe domestic security crisis. Ankara, however, absorbed the Russian bad news with a whimper rather than a bang since this is hardly the time to go toe-to-toe with President Putin for *any reason whatsoever*. These are complicated times for the Padishah, who needs to juggle his (diminishing) options much more carefully than in the recent past.

Might we read in all of this that Greece has a slim edge in the present Aegean imbroglio?

Under different circumstances such an estimate could have been true. However, Greece's political situation is in shambles and her overseer creditors are ratcheting up their blackmail beyond anything we have seen so far. Berlin's Greek death dance with the IMF [precludes any viable solution](#) which could allow Greece to get her wits together. With elections looming in the Netherlands and Germany, and with Northern European "union" leaders out for their pounds of Greek flesh, a "strategic" solution is impossible. Unless there is a little "bailout" miracle soon, and a sea change in American attitudes toward Turkey, Greece, already weakened to the point of collapse by her European vivisection, will be easy prey for any "unexpected" episode in the Aegean.

That brings us back to the old key question of whether the U.S. would allow NATO's southeastern flank destabilization, especially now with the Middle East in flames.

Trump's reassurances to the Turks could go both ways: Erdogan could interpret them as a muffled "advice" not to rock the boat or, in the worst case scenario, as the green light to ratchet up Turkey's Aegean no-war-no-peace tactics up to the level of a calculated military provocation, i.e. a denial operation to interfere with access to the Greek islands. The former theory buys some time for Greek politicians wallowing in their usual indecision, pusillanimity, and division. The latter theory spells trouble that Greece won't be able to face alone.

So, the bully wins again?

The bully will *always* win as long as Greece continues to decline in economic, political, and diplomatic terms. The illegal immigrant crisis has exposed Greece's unredeemable position within the European "union." And the glaring disinterest of her European "partners," concerning the domestic humanitarian crisis caused by the "bailout" austerity demands, offers the best proof of how Europe perceives "solidarity" with the Greeks.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since the [1987 CIA recently declassified report](#) on the Greek-Turkish balance of power, which found Greece in relatively stable position vis-a-vis the Turkish threat.

Most of the arguments in that report have either become obsolete or changed in favor of Turkey. Greek “leaders” loathe to recognize the damage dealt upon the country’s defense capabilities thanks to Greece being locked up in a debtor’s prison; operating with a coil of opaque tape around one’s mind though does not change the realities surrounding us. Meantime, the bully is gaining further confidence by [dovetailing with Britain](#), now the Brexiter marching away from “united” Europe, and the announcement of the recently appointed new CIA director’s coming [visit](#) to Ankara to discuss “mutual security concerns.”

The ultimate irony for Greece, in light of these gloomy developments, would be for the Tsipras government to join in the European anti-Trump hysteria now [billowing under German direction](#). Any such move would *eliminate* any hopes of reasonable dialogue with the Trump administration--and, given the new president’s blunt manner, any such breach could cost Greece for the next four years, to say the least, and allow the bully to run amok. Could prudence and *necessity* outstrip leftist “progressivism” and self-inflicted wounds? That remains to be seen.