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**GREECE AND TURKEY IN THE ERDOGAN ERA
A NATO CONUNDRUM**

A.T. SYMEONIDES, PH.D.

**ACADEMIC ADVISOR
RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN & AMERICAN STUDIES
ATHENS, GREECE**

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**# 1, Kalavryton Street, Alimos, Athens, 17456, Greece
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INTRODUCTION

On February 18, 1952, two unlikely new members joined the North Atlantic Alliance upon the invitation of the North Atlantic Council. Greece and Turkey, uneasy neighbors at the tip of the Balkans, discovered themselves to be Western strategic partners in the emerging Cold War and the strategy of containing the USSR.

Greece, barely recovered from a disastrous communist insurgency that had been defeated only with massive American military help and at a frightful price in blood, was run by a staunch nationalist government with impeccable anti-communist credentials. Asiatic Turkey, also under an anti-communist government, and far bigger and more populous than Greece, claimed to be “Europe” because the post-WWI treaty settlement had allowed it to hold on to Constantinople / Istanbul, and its surrounding Eastern Thrace, the strategic sliver of European soil which made Turkey the controller of the Dardanelle Straits and delivered its (geographic) “European” identity.

Turkey had sat on the fence during WWII allowing both Allied and Nazi agents to operate inside its borders as long as they did not become too obvious. In contrast, Greece suffered through three years of brutal Axis occupation which destroyed over 1,000 villages, killed 400,000 people, starved thousands of city dwellers to death, and bled the Greek economy white.

Despite these vastly different histories, both countries—one the fighting ally and the other the rather hypocritical pro-Nazi “neutral” —were placed in the same basket by the Truman Doctrine which aimed at defeating presumed Soviet attempts to extend communist control in southern Europe.

Thanks to the pressures of this “Soviet threat,” both real and imagined, the incongruity of pulling two countries lying 2,000 miles to the east of the Atlantic Ocean into an “Atlantic” military pact was ignored. NATO leaders apparently felt that the bloody history of war and occupation, spanning more than four centuries, which separated modern Greece from Ottoman and, later, modern Turkey, could be set aside in view of “broader geostrategic imperatives.” But, in 1952, Greece’s memories of the Asia Minor Catastrophe were only thirty years old. More than 1.3 million Greek Asia Minor refugees, and their descendants, looked across the Aegean and saw their *Hamenes Patrides* (Lost Homelands) turned into an enemy country. To speak of “Greek-Turkish friendship” under the circumstances was figure of speech which only appeasing Greek “pragmatists” would adopt to satisfy those Western “broader geostrategic imperatives.”

With the passage of time, NATO membership, and the strategic pairing of Greece and Turkey that emerged from it, turned into an albatross around Greece's neck. Western diplomats and strategists, eager to make Turkey more acceptable to Western audiences, began to construct the myth of Turkey as the "bulwark of the West" on the Asiatic rim—and leave no doubt as to which of the two new members was more important in defending the West. Those determined to build Turkey into a key NATO ally never rested. They constructed myth upon myth to buttress the "bulwark" fiction, an undertaking that lasted well into the 2000s. Time and again Turkey was discovered to be the one "moderate" Moslem country and the one that could export "democracy" to other Moslem semi-totalitarian states in the Middle East and beyond. Turkey was lauded as the emerging economic "tiger" of the Moslem world. Turkey was praised for being the stout-hearted guardian of the Straits watching like a hawk the passage of Soviet warships to and from the Black Sea. And so much more.

None of Turkey's admirers bothered of course with the true quality of Turkey's "democracy." A parliamentary republic in name only, Turkey followed the blueprint set by her founder, Kemal Ataturk, a military man who placed the Turkish army at the pinnacle of political power and set it as the guardian of a secular regime enforced with an iron hand. The core of Turkey's secular reincarnation after 1923 was the suppression of the Ottoman past and the none-too-quiet sidelining of Islam as the guiding light of the ruling class. When Kemal died in 1938, Turkey was unrecognizable, but, as time and Recep Tayyip Erdogan would prove, Kemalist reforms, for all their forceful application, remained only skin-deep in a country with a Moslem heart.

In geostrategic terms, the "bulwark" theory established an unequal relationship between Greece and Turkey and one fatally unfair to Greece. In her heart and mind, Turkey had never accepted the 1923 Lausanne Treaty settlement, which established modern Turkey's borders. Ankara foamed at the mouth when in 1947 the Allies agreed to the incorporation of the Dodecanese Islands into the Greek state as reward for Greece's contributions to the Allied effort during World War Two. In Turkish eyes, the Allies, by giving the Dodecanese to Greece, had transformed the Aegean Sea into a "Greek sea" that blocked vital Turkish strategic interests and created the possible cause for the next Greco-Turkish war.

In time, this “Greek Aegean” gave birth to a relentless Turkish tactic of protest, interference, delay, and open strong arming in NATO councils aimed at Greece. But instead of objecting to Turkish intimidation and taking steps to nip it in the bud, the Alliance acted like Pontius Pilate. Emulating the Roman prefect of Judea, NATO washed its hands in regard to the Greek-Turkish “dispute.” Instead, it routinely counseled the two “allies” to resolve differences through bilateral negotiation; by doing that, NATO appeared to accept Turkish demands and protests as possibly justified.

This practice, religiously observed since Day One and in full bloom even today, constantly expanded the elbow room available to Turkey to complain, object, disagree, demand, and even block NATO decisions with the aim of diminishing Greece’s standing within the Alliance and, by extension, Greek defense capabilities in the Aegean.

2017: REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

It is commonly admitted by realist historians that modern Greece came into being in 1832 as an “independent” state that enjoyed only “controlled” self-rule.¹ During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, Greece was a de facto part of the Anglo-sphere, with France playing a secondary sponsorship role, mainly on issues of military organization and training. After WWII, Greece was bequeathed to the United States by an exhausted England eager to tend to her war wounds. Following the collapse of a military junta in 1974, and her tethering to the European Community and, eventually, to the European Union, Greece acquired new overlords based in Brussels and Berlin. Her economic collapse in 2010, and the EU intervention to save the euro currency by imposing permanent austerity on Greece, quickly transitioned the country to quasi protectorate status controlled from Berlin.²

At present, Greece’s defense and security policy is severely constricted by the strategic priorities of the major EU powers and the United States. Her immediate environment is unstable. To the east, she faces the unpredictable “ally” Turkey, as ever

¹There is a substantial bibliography on the history of “controlled” or “qualified” Greek independence. See, for example, David Brewer, *The Greek War of Independence* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2001) and James Edward Miller, *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece, 1950-1974* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

²Jan Zielonka, “Greece has become the EU’s third protectorate,” *openDemocracy*, August 14, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/jan-zielonka/greece-has-become-eu%E2%80%99s-third-protectorate>. Matthew Karnitschnig “Why Greece is Germany’s ‘de facto colony’,” *Politico.eu*, June 14, 2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/why-greece-is-germanys-de-facto-colony/>.

hostile, menacing and aggressive; and to the north, the only friendly country today is Bulgaria. Albania and FYR Macedonia are sources of constant worry that the type of violence which disintegrated Yugoslavia in the 1990s might be reignited. Greece's neighbors to the north are also sources of cross-border organized crime and human trafficking.

The debt crisis has weakened Greek defense capabilities through severe budget cuts. Only with difficulty have successive governments since 2010 continued to maintain the NATO guideline of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense. Arms procurement and modernization programs had to be postponed or scrapped altogether. This situation is not expected to improve any time soon and, if anything, may grow worse.

The core of Greece's strategic predicament is the Turkish threat. The 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and the occupation of 37 percent of her territory, shattered a precarious balance of forces in the Aegean. In protest of the invasion, Greece left the NATO military wing and did not return until 1980. This six-year NATO participation hiatus offered Turkey the opportunity to intensify her policy of undermining Greek interest within the alliance. When Greece began to refuse to join NATO maneuvers in the Aegean, because NATO kept excluding Greek islands from the training maneuver "threat areas" to satisfy Turkey's demands for chastising Greece, the Alliance saw nothing wrong with quietly playing along with Ankara.

Since the early 1980s, Turkey has also conducted a "no war, no peace" campaign by sending her warplanes and warships to violate the Athens Flight Information Region (FIR) airspace and Greek territorial waters in order to test Greek government reactions.³ This dangerous game causes almost daily mock dogfights over the Aegean, now further expanded as the Turkish air force acquired in-flight refueling capabilities.⁴ Since 1975, Turkey has also deployed along her Aegean coast the so-called "Army of the Aegean," the former Fourth Army, a force with strong amphibious capabilities. The Army of the Aegean has been kept outside the NATO command structure. Its training maneuvers glaringly focus on invading and holding island territory, viz. Greek Aegean islands.

³For a recent roundup of the Greek-Turkish Aegean air war see "Battle Over the Aegean: The Undeclared Greco-Turkish Air War," *Sputnik International*, February 18, 2016, <https://sputniknews.com/military/201602181034962176-turkey-greece-aegean-conflict/>.

⁴The intensity and frequency of Turkish air violations are such that even the usually dormant and disinterested EU was moved recently to issue a warning to Ankara; "EU Warns Turkey After 114 Greece's Air Space Violations on a Single Day," *Keep Talking Greece*, May 17, 2017, <http://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2017/05/17/eu-warns-turkey-114-greeces-air-space-violations/>.

In January 1996, Greek-Turkish tensions almost ignited a war when Turkish commandos landed on one of the two Greek uninhabited rocky islets of Imia which lie immediately outside Turkish coastal waters near the Greek island of Kalymnos. The landing was followed by rapid escalation and both countries deployed naval assets in the Imia vicinity. It was only with American intervention that the crisis was defused. NATO, however, remained conspicuously absent from efforts to avert a Greek-Turkish war claiming it was “itself at a loss to deal with Greek-Turkish differences.”⁵

Imia allowed the Turks to promote the theory of Gray Zones in the Aegean claiming that large swaths of the Archipelago are of undetermined sovereignty that could be claimed as “rightful” Turkish territory at any moment. Greece has never accepted these Turkish claims,⁶ but the shadow of doubt, generated by constant Turkish repetition of how “dozens” of mostly uninhabited Aegean islets are “Turkish,” has helped make an indecisive NATO even more averse to the thought of chastising Turkey for its open threats against a fellow alliance member.

Beyond Turkey, Greece faces the permanent Middle East crisis, now even more complicated because of Syria. Turkey’s grandiose schemes for the day after in that devastated country, the active involvement of both the US and Russia, and the emergence of Iran as a key strategic protagonist in the war are all facts that challenge Greece’s limited diplomatic capacities. Budding cooperation with Israel presents positive potential especially because Greece geographical position offers the only open strategic corridor to Israel out of a perennially hostile region. But Israel’s unique security needs, and a developing push to re-establish relations with Turkey after a decade of crises,⁷ could affect any Greek-Israeli cooperation.

Greek security relations with the US and Russia involve a constant balancing act. The US still remains the defining actor in Greek security policy but with several important caveats that evolved even before the Greek debt collapse. Russia, on the other hand, enjoys popularity in Greece for religious and historical reasons. The combination

⁵Henry Dinella, “Imia, NATO, and Alpha Centauri,” *Global Europe Program*, July 7, 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/imia-nato-and-alpha-centauri>. Dinella says: “One player conspicuous in its absence during the Imia crisis was NATO. The alliance, designed to protect its members from attack by non-member states rather than from each other, has, since 1974, often found itself at a loss to deal with Greek-Turkish differences. Moreover, the alliance, though keenly aware since 1974 that war could break out between Greece and Turkey, has done little to adapt itself to the possibility of war between the member states anchoring its southeastern flank.”

⁶See, for example, “Pavlopoulos rejects Turkish claims of ‘gray zones’,” *ekathimerini.com*, March 6, 2017, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/216673/article/ekathimerini/news/pavlopoulos-rejects-turkish-claims-of-gray-zones>.

⁷Hasan Kosebalaban “Towards a New Strategic Alliance between Turkey and Israel?” *Alsharq Forum*, August 10, 2016, <http://sharqforum.org/2016/08/10/towards-a-new-strategic-alliance-between-turkey-and-israel/>.

of often overt popular anti-Americanism and strong disapproval of NATO is juxtaposed to Russia as the preferable ally in a crisis.⁸ Post-1974 Greek governments bought Russian weapons and repeatedly tried to expand energy cooperation with Moscow, an effort that was frustrated by both EU and US dissatisfaction.

More recently, Greece began to develop significant investment ties with China.⁹ Greece's main seaport of Piraeus has become a Chinese commercial-transportation hub in the Eastern Mediterranean and Beijing plans more infrastructure investment in the near future. China's expressed objective of expanding her naval presence beyond Chinese waters, coupled with an ambitious naval building program, creates the potential of future Greek-Chinese defense cooperation, an unwelcome prospect to both the US and the EU.

Meantime, the discovery of rich hydrocarbon deposits in the Aegean sent Ankara into a frenzy over the delimitation of the continental shelf, territorial seas, and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs.) During the 1980s, Turkish provocations over drilling rights inside Greek territorial waters came close to conflict on several occasions. In March 1987, the Greek government threatened to sink a Turkish exploration vessel that was about to begin a survey in the Aegean. US intervention prevented the worst.¹⁰

To take her demands one step further, Ankara has refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice as the international judicial body to ultimately adjudicate, and rule upon, the Turkish claims in the Aegean. Furthermore, in June 1995, the Turkish national assembly passed a resolution calling an extension of Greek territorial waters in the Aegean to 12 miles, as it is allowed under the Law of the Seas convention, a *casus belli*. The resolution still stands despite repeated attempts at Greek-Turkish "rapprochement."

Between the invasion of Cyprus, the "no war, no peace" in the Aegean, and Ankara's paroxysm over hydrocarbons and EEZs, let alone a long historical past of

⁸"Poll Suggests Four NATO States Want Russia to Protect Them From Security Threats," *Sputnik International*, February 19, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201702181050828050-four-nato-countries-russia/>.

⁹See, for example, Chen Zhanjie, Liu Yongqiu "China, Greece to boost cooperation through Belt and Road Initiative," June 13, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/13/c_136362882.htm.

¹⁰Alan Cowell "Greece and Turkey alert forces as tensions builds on oil search," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/03/28/world/greece-and-turkey-alert-forces-as-tension-builds-on-oil-search.html?pagewanted=all>. Turkey has expressed maximal theories about the continental shelf claiming the Anatolian landmass extends well beyond the Aegean median line. The purpose of such declaratory extravagance is obvious: too many Greek islands dot the Aegean, each with its own continental shelf as per the Law of the Sea; see Article 121 "Regime of islands," United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Part VIII, http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part8.htm.

conflict, Greek policymakers and voting public find difficult to believe that “allied” Turkey does not have expansionist goals via a strategy of war and conquest. A succession of failed periods of detente and rapprochement fuels Greek suspicions and distrust even further. The routine NATO/EU/US response to all this has been to stress “common interests,” “goodwill,” and other simplistic notions which have little impact on deep-rooted ethnic conflict.

The immediate strategic future for Greece faces instability and includes threats of conflict in the Aegean that could be triggered at any time by a “hot episode” ala Imia. This bleak forecast becomes even bleaker when we consider Greece’s economic implosion and the promise of the lenders not to allow her to recover unless they are satisfied they can extract their pound of flesh in full. *Lender behavior is thus far more dangerous strategically than even the Turkish threat itself.* “Debt terrorism” promises debilitating economic hardship well into the future along with eventual and, almost certainly unavoidable, political and social chaos.

ERDOGAN AND GREECE

Recep Tayyip Erdogan first catapulted to Turkey’s premiership in 2003 on the back of his “moderate” Islamic Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or ‘AKP’.) Initially, Erdogan donned a common man’s garb, speaking about everyday problems and aspirations that enthused many in Europe and the US, but shifted gradually toward Islamism exploiting resurgent Moslem social trends developed in the 1980s and 90s. By 2008, Erdogan “the modernizer” was already looking like Erdogan the rising authoritarian.¹¹

Erdogan’s early conciliatory oratory nevertheless helped him establish his person as a model of a “modern” Moslem leader opposing religious and political fantasies. A significant uptick in economic growth, glowing reports on the Turkish economy by Western investment institutions, and quick expansion of exports, completed the picture of a “new” flourishing Turkey which had left behind her gray past of army coups and suppression of political opponents.

Greek politicians welcomed Erdogan’s arrival as Turkey’s leader with restrained hope. Conservative PM Costas Karamanlis, in power from 2004 to 2009, traveled to Turkey to be a witness at the wedding of Erdogan’s daughter in 2004. Erdogan saluted

¹¹ Daniel Steinworth “Erdogan Striking Nationalist Tones,” *Speigel Online*, December 8, 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/turkey-s-faltering-reform-drive-erdogan-striking-nationalist-tones-a-595430.html>.

the Karamanlis arrival as “the beginning of a new era in Greek-Turkish relations.” In 1999, severe earthquakes in Greece and Turkey inaugurated the “earthquake diplomacy” of cooperation to promote mutual help to the victims.

In May 2010, Erdogan descended upon Athens with a battalion of government ministers and businessmen in tow to crystallize the “new era” in Greek-Turkish relations. Much was discussed during the visit “in the spirit of mutual cooperation.” But Erdogan conspicuously failed to provide even token concessions during the talks.

Erdogan lectured Greek PM George Papandreou on a variety of Turkish demands and dined in the shadow of the Acropolis while the Turkish armed forces carried out live fire exercises in the narrows separating the Turkish coast from the Dodecanese islands. With Papandreou a willing, and largely silent, listener, Erdogan made clear that the “right” of Turkey to maintain military forces in Cyprus was non-negotiable and that the *casus belli* resolution against Greece could not be withdrawn for “domestic political reason.”

The period following the 2010 visit was relatively “stable” for Greek-Turkish relations, but by the time Erdogan climbed from prime minister to president in 2014, his image as the Turkish “renaissance man,” so idealized by the West, was already badly frayed. His was now the shrill voice of a Moslem zealot, who suppressed opponents and protesters with complete abandon.

Erdogan sidelined long-time AKP comrades President Abdullah Gul and PM Ahmet Davutoglu and assumed all executive powers himself. Simultaneously, he began a verbal assault on the EU, hurled insults at Germany, and delivered scathing remarks against other European countries. His *pièce de résistance* came in July 2016 when he apparently staged-managed an *ersatz* military coup against himself.¹² The hypothetical putschists were “defeated” in a few hours and were either killed or captured.

Erdogan announced the “outrage” was the handiwork of the Hizmet movement, controlled by his former political ally and mentor Fethullah Gulen, a Moslem cleric living in self-imposed exile in the US. He then launched a Stalinist purge of “Gulenists” which continues unabated to this day. In April 2017, Erdogan won a closely contested constitutional referendum and promoted himself to what amounts to president for life with practically unlimited powers.

¹²John R. Schindler, “Turkey’s Weekend of the Long Knives,” *Observer*, July 18, 2016, <http://observer.com/2016/07/turkeys-weekend-of-the-long-knives/>. Also, “A New Report In Sweden Reveals Erdoğan Orchestrated July 15 Coup In Turkey,” *Stockholm Center for Freedom*, July 5, 2017, <http://stockholmcf.org/a-new-report-in-sweden-reveals-erdogan-orchestrated-july-15-coup-in-turkey/>.

The coup led to a sharp increase in tensions with Athens when Erdogan's demand for the return of supposed putschists, who had fled to Greece, was rejected by the Greek courts on humanitarian grounds. To teach Greece a lesson, Erdogan sent his chief of the armed forces on a cruise very close to the Imia islets, triggering a red alert in the Greek defense ministry.¹³ Athens and Ankara exchanged strong words and the Greek government expressed "total readiness" to answer any Turkish attempt in the Aegean with the "proper level of force." Aggressive rhetoric is nothing new in Greek-Turkish relations, yet this time Erdogan's fury was such that many feared for the worst as the Turkish autocrat appeared desperate in his efforts to rally support at home even at the expense of a "hot incident" in the Aegean. The crisis though did abate, apparently because of the ambivalence of the Trump administration toward Turkish tactics.

Erdogan-generated tension in Greek-Turkish relations remains high. The unpredictability of the Turkish political situation, the obvious strain between Erdoganism and a broad-based domestic opposition, and the determination of Turkey's president to continue suppressing his opponents, combine to produce the constant instability which may translate into active Aegean trouble at any moment.

GREEK SECURITY POLICY IN THE ERDOGAN ERA

Erdogan is unlike any other Turkish leader Greece has had to face in the post-WWII era. Erdogan's overt religionism, his hyperbole, and his grandiose dreams of rising as a primary leader in the Moslem world make him different from his predecessors. Further complicating the situation is the vacillating and contradictory positions of major EU players regarding Turkey; the continuing confusion about the US approach to the Eastern Mediterranean, in general, and Turkey, in particular; and the tensions and threats generated by the war in Syria. Last but not least, the question of where exactly NATO stands in all of this remains unanswered. Under the circumstances, Greek options must be decided against rapidly shifting and confusing situations, both

¹³"Turkish gunboat with army chief sails into Greek waters; military on high alert," *ekathimerini.com*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/215701/article/ekathimerini/news/turkish-gunboat-with-army-chief-sails-into-greek-waters-military-on-high-alert>. Also, Cengiz Candar "Why Turkey-Greece islands confrontation is more than it seems," *Almonitor Turkey Pulse*, February 1, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/turkey-greece-european-union-island-crisis.html>.

diplomatic and military, an effort that appears beyond Greece's policy making capabilities.¹⁴

For the longest time, and in the absence of a convincing deterrence capability, the oft-repeated Greek position was that Turkey can be better "managed" inside rather than outside Europe. Greek governments spent considerable time supporting and promoting Turkey's bid to join the EU, repeating Greece's adherence to "international law," and inviting a tone-deaf Ankara to follow the same path. This friendship-and-legality language to prod Turkey in the direction of respecting "international treaties," and making changes required by the EU, has had no impact whatsoever. Greek policy makers are now at a loss watching Turkey moving away from Europe on its own accord. With the few brave "Casandras," who warned Turkey is not "designed" for European membership, going unheard, the friendship-and-legality approach emerges as a key Greek political-strategic analytical mistake which is still felt in Greek decision-making.

Greek defense capabilities have deteriorated because of the sovereign debt crisis and constant lender pressures to reduce military spending. However, the Greek government insists that the armed forces remain as well prepared as possible. Still, the severe budgetary constraints imposed on the country since 2010 have affected the daily operation of all branches of the armed forces, not to mention arms procurement plans.

On a more hopeful note, Turkey's ability to launch military aggression in the Aegean today is constrained for several reasons not least the deterioration of the Turkish armed forces due to Erdogan's maniacal purge. Turkey's involvement in Syria and Iraq has also been less than successful and has revealed the weaknesses of the post-coup Turkish army. Furthermore, Russian and American impatience with rogue and unpredictable Turkish moves in Syria is increasing. And Erdogan faces the political complications of distancing his country from the prospect of EU membership.

Turkey, nevertheless, continues pushing an ambitious self-sufficient armaments program,¹⁵ which Greece has no hope of matching as its economy continues to tank. An

¹⁴The incumbent Greek government is a coalition of the paleo-communist SYRIZA and the ultranationalist ANEL parties. These unlikely populist bedfellows have been pummeled into complete submission, after a brief disastrous 2015 attempt at insurrection against Berlin and the lenders, and are treading on thin ice both domestically and externally. With Greece at a perilous crossroads, the ability of this abysmally incompetent SYRIZA-ANEL administration to juggle critical security, defense, and foreign relations issues is seriously questioned. There are no real alternatives to SYRIZA-ANEL; the former so-called "mainstream" parties have been devastated by the economic collapse and the frontrunner among them, the New Democracy party, can only hope to win a plurality of the vote in the next election. But, ND's ability to address Greece's critical problems is seriously questioned.

added strategic constraint is Germany's policy of dismissing the Turkish threat and constantly pressing Greece to cut her defense budget. Yet, over the years, Germany did not hesitate to bribe Greek government ministers in order to win lucrative armaments contracts.¹⁶

Much depends on how the Syrian chaos plays out regarding long-standing Turkish territorial ambitions upon Syrian territory. So far, Turkey's attempt to strong-arm the Kurds and the Damascus regime has had poor results. The conflict with the Kurds has yet to be decided however—and much will depend on whether the US is prepared to support an independent Kurdistan once IS/ISIS/Daesh has been comprehensively defeated.¹⁷ If Turkey somehow wins part of the Syrian spoils, her vision of “correcting” the Lausanne Treaty “injustice” could be dangerously reinvigorated.

Greece's political instability, and the absence of national consensus, even at this dire time of lost sovereignty and mortgaging of the country's future beyond the end of the 21st century, is *the single most dangerous factor in trying to prepare the nation for a conflict in the Aegean*. Debtor's prison combines with dire demography, illegal immigration, brain drain, and an exhausted populace to paint a dark and uncertain future.

NATO AND TURKEY

NATO still maintains its ambivalence concerning the “Greek-Turkish dispute” despite a rapidly deteriorating Turkey as an “ally.” NATO, in the post-Soviet era, is in the process of refuting suggestions it is now an obsolete remnant of the Cold War. Accordingly, the alliance divides its attentions between “out-of-area action” and “humanitarian missions,” both of poor doctrinal and operational preparation. Fighting terrorism has been added as a 21st century strategic addendum, yet it remains unclear how NATO could effectively pivot in that direction since its organization, command structure, and military forces are still focused on battlefield conventional warfare.

¹⁵Burak Ege Bekdil “Going it alone: Turkey staunch in efforts for self-sufficient defense capabilities,” *DefenseNews*, April 23, 2017, <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2017/04/24/going-it-alone-turkey-staunch-in-efforts-for-self-sufficient-defense-capabilities/>.

¹⁶Helena Smith “German 'hypocrisy' over Greek military spending has critics up in arms,” *The Guardian*, April 19, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/19/greece-military-spending-debt-crisis>.

¹⁷Brig. Gen. Ernie Audino “5 reasons for U.S. to support an independent Kurdistan,” *The Washington Times*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jul/26/5-reasons-for-us-to-support-an-independent-kurdistan/>.

In the case of Turkey, NATO still refuses to do anything drastic regarding Erdogan's erratic and provocative behavior and his unstoppable slide toward Islamism.¹⁸ Turkey's established sympathies toward Islamic fundamentalist extremists fighting against the Damascus regime; her dangerous fiddling with IS/ISIS/Daesh; her constant attacks upon the Kurds, who have proved themselves the best fighters against the Islamist terrorists; and her threats to target US troops assisting the Kurds¹⁹ have left NATO unmoved. While voices calling for expelling Turkey from NATO are increasing,²⁰ the Alliance continues ignoring the piling evidence of Turkey demonstrating daily she is anything but the "bulwark" of Western interests in Asia.

Even more worrisome is NATO's apparent disregard of Turkey's potential to undermine NATO from the inside. Ankara still maintains full presence in all NATO committees, command installations, and planning bodies. Erdogan's Stalinist purge has reached deep into NATO structures to remove Turkish officers, deemed "untrustworthy," who man key positions; as one source put it: "These experienced, highly-trained Western-minded officials cannot easily be replaced, especially not when competence is no longer the selection criteria in Turkey but complete loyalty to an increasingly erratic and dangerous regime back home."²¹

Moscow sees an opening as Erdogan grows ever more vicious in his attacks on the West. An anti-West Turkey tied to Russia is a perfect strategic asset of destabilizing the alliance at minimum cost to Moscow. President Putin has already beaten down Erdogan over the shooting down of a Russian warplane in November 2015 and is in harmonious cooperation with Iran, Turkey's chosen "friend" in Syria. Moscow has also agreed to sell Turkey its S-400 Triumph long-range anti-aircraft missile system²² so that Erdogan may

¹⁸Eric Edelman and Merve Tahiroglu "It's Time for NATO to Call Turkey's Bluff," *The Weekly Standard*, May 25, 2017, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/its-time-for-nato-to-call-turkeys-bluff/article/2008198>; "Turkey's president had a bad NATO summit, too," *The Economist*, May 27, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21722730-recep-tayyip-erdogan-having-trouble-fixing-damage-he-has-done-relations>.

¹⁹Carlo Muñoz "NATO ally tests Trump: Turkey threatens to strike U.S. forces partnered with Kurds," May 3, 2017, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/may/3/turkey-threatens-strike-us-forces-partnered-kurdish/>.

²⁰See, for example, Doug Bandow "Toss Turkey Out Of NATO: U.S. Doesn't Need Civilian Dictatorship Or Military Junta," *Forbes*, July 27, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dougbandow/2016/07/27/toss-turkey-out-of-nato-u-s-doesnt-need-civilian-dictatorship-or-military-junta/#7da4d12afa54>; Stanley Weiss "It's Time to Kick Erdogan's Turkey Out of NATO," *TheWorldPost*, undated, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stanley-weiss/its-time-to-kick-erdogans_b_9300670.html.

²¹Max Hofmann "Opinion: NATO is betraying its principles," *Deutsche Welle German Radio*, December 6, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/opinion-nato-is-betraying-its-principles/a-36659492>.

²²"Russia ready to supply S-400 missile systems to Turkey – Putin," *RT (formerly Russia Today)*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/390462-russia-to-supply-s-400-turkey/>.

fill the gaps left by the withdrawal of NATO's Patriot systems from Turkey. Turkey thus becomes dependent on Russian weapons for a vital sector of her defense.

The situation in the Aegean defies NATO's hesitant search for "stability" and maintaining the status quo, which Turkey now challenges openly and without hesitation. A good example of NATO's "effectiveness" in dealing with Turkish provocations, and threats to flood Europe with illegal immigrants if her demands are not met, came after the summer of 2015. With German chancellor Merkel rushing to Ankara to strike a deal with Erdogan on stemming the illegal immigrant flood into Greece, NATO was charged with providing naval monitoring support against people traffickers operating from the Turkish coast.

The scheme, a lukewarm deployment of half a dozen ships, quickly turned into failure, just like the toothless "monitoring" of illegal immigration by the EU's FRONTEX border guard. NATO ships were not allowed to intervene in any way against smugglers' boats— and NATO instructed the patrol commanders not to pursue but, rather, send warnings to the Turkish coast guard, which was then responsible for action. The formula had obvious negative implications for Athens as it unabashedly ignored Greek sovereign interests. However, the government in Athens agreed to the formula without objections following a long tradition of acquiescence to NATO "solutions."

GREECE: DEALING WITH TURKEY

Greek governments after the 1996 Imia crisis adopted a fatalistic assessment which predicts Greek loss in any Greek-Turkish war. This suicidal view pushed Greek politicians to invest in Turkey's "Europeanization" as the only way to tame Ankara's aggression. "Europeanization" had also become the mantra in European capitals and Washington. Taking Turkish "democracy" to the next stage of adopting a slow progressive turn toward the secular—egalitarian European model was the "obvious" right path in the eyes of both Europe and the US. The one thing Western politicians failed to notice, however, was that "Europeanism" was, and is, *bitterly rejected* by Erdogan and his Islamists.

Now in 2017, with "Europeanization" out of the way, after the EU's prolonged appeasing efforts to flatter Ankara onto the "correct" path, any attempt to redefine Greek security policy in the Aegean is delimited by three key factors:

- Greece will be shackled with budgetary restrictions and severe austerity beyond the end of the current so-called third “bailout program” in 2018.²³ The Greek economy will thus continue to shrink, save an occasional “surplus” uptick, with deeply detrimental results upon the country’s longer term stability and security. Debtor’s prison will thus continue to undermine, and even cancel, Greek efforts to buttress national security, keep the armed forces properly supplied and supported, and maintain a level of readiness appropriate to the Turkish threat.
- American and Russian relations with Turkey directly influence Ankara’s behavior in the Aegean. Erdogan has been unsuccessful in trying to establish a personal rapport with President Trump; Erdogan’s recent visit to Washington was a thinly-veiled disaster.²⁴ Furthermore, neither the US nor Russia appear prepared to accept Turkey’s territorial schemes in Syria. At the same time, however, both Washington and Moscow wish to “stabilize” Turkey for their own purposes as part of their respective spheres of influence.²⁵ This “stabilization” could entail learning to tolerate an Erdoganist regime akin to the Iranian theocracy. But any such development will force Greece to live with an unpredictable and volatile Moslem theocrat next door that is committed on upending international treaties.

²³Eleni Chrepa and Sotiris Nikas “Greece’s Road to Bailout Exit: 140 Reforms Down, Many More to Go,” *Bloomberg*, July 30, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-07-31/greece-s-road-to-bailout-exit-140-reforms-down-many-more-to-go>; Helena Smith “Greek debt crisis: ‘People can’t see any light at the end of any tunnel,’” July 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/30/greek-debt-crisis-people-cant-see-any-light-at-the-end-of-any-tunnel>; see also Jason Manolopoulos, *Greece’s ‘Odious’ Debt: The Looting of the Hellenic Republic by the Euro, the Political Elite and the Investment Community*, Kindle Edition (London: Anthem Finance, 2011.)

²⁴Cengiz Çandar “Erdogan-Trump: The most unsuccessful Washington visit ever,” *Al-Monitor*, July 17, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/zh/originals/2017/05/turkey-united-states-the-most-unsuccessful-visit-ever.html>.

²⁵Russia and Iran recently included Turkey in a proposed scheme to end the Syrian war; Tim Hume “A new alliance: Russia, Iran, and Turkey are shutting the U.S. out of the Syrian peace process,” *Vice News*, December 21, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/story/russia-iran-and-turkey-are-shutting-the-u-s-out-of-the-syrian-peace-process>; the US continues to provide substantial support to Kurdish fighters battling ISIS/IS/Daesh despite hesitations to openly support Kurdish independence, an anathema to both Turkey and Iran; see Ekaterina Blinova “U.S. has no ‘boots on the ground’ in Syria except Kurds,” *E Kurd Daily*, August 3, 2017, <http://ekurd.net/us-boots-syria-kurds-2017-08-03>.

- The discovery of hydrocarbons in the Aegean, and the sea around Cyprus, further complicates Greek-Turkish relations and fuels Ankara's aggressive imperial demands in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean. The collapse of yet another round of talks to re-unite Cyprus in July 2017 prompted Erdogan to launch more threats against Cyprus and oil companies preparing to drill with licenses provided by the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus.²⁶ Here though Erdogan collides with powerful global economic interests not to mention Israel's energy strategy in the Aegean-Cyprus-Egypt triangle.²⁷

A pragmatic assessment of Turkey's real strategic confidence in the Aegean produces a mixed picture for the Erdoganists. On the one hand, the July 2016 "coup" gave Erdogan the opportunity to eliminate most of what he perceives as "opposition" inside the armed forces and the governments apparatus; on the other, however, the purge has weakened Turkey's overall posture by sending tens of thousands of capable military officers, administrators, teachers, university professors, businesspeople, and professionals to prison without any equivalent replacements. Starting a war in the Aegean under such circumstances could be a long shot even for a dangerous gambler like Turkey's rising *Padishah*.

The April 2017 constitutional referendum, which Erdogan hoped to win by a landslide, resulted in a narrow victory. Turkey is now effectively divided evenly between the Moslem conservatives hostile to the West and the secular Turks, mainly urbanites of the coastal regions, bitterly opposed to a potential Islamic dictatorship. This

²⁶Ece Toksabay and David Dolan "Turkey warns Greek Cypriots, oil companies against offshore energy grab," *Reuters*, July 10, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyprus-conflict-turkey-idUSKBN19V0WL>.

²⁷With a French company preparing to drill in Cypriot waters France sent two warships to the port of Larnaca to deter Turkish naval antics in the drilling area; see "Ignoring Erdogan, Energy Firms Will Drill Off Cyprus: France Sends Warships," *The National Herald*, July 13, 2017, <https://www.thenationalherald.com/169091/ignoring-erdogan-energy-firms-will-drill-off-cyprus-france-sends-warships/>.

is the key reason of Erdogan continuing his sweeping persecution of “enemies” and the cacophonies against Europe in an effort to buttress cohesion of his religious conservative supporters.

For all his bluster, and breathing fire and brimstone, Erdogan needs to be concerned about the loyalty of the armed forces having decimated their ranks following the “coup;” he may have justified visions of a *real* army coup brewing to unseat him. Given Erdogan’s dreams of sultanic grandeur, and his overwhelming fear of unseen enemies and opponents everywhere inside the system, his mounting attack on the armed forces could prove his undoing. AKP was never comfortable side by side with the Kemalist army and Erdogan’s successful efforts to defang what he saw as the main obstacle to his Islamist objectives has shaken many Turks, who continue to see the armed forces as Turkey’s indispensable backbone in an uncertain, and often hostile, world. Furthermore, Turkish restraint could be augmented by Erdogan’s failure to strike a personal rapport with President Trump—who easily chose allying the US with the Kurds in Syria, the same Kurds whom Erdogan considers deadly enemies of Turkey and wishes to see eliminated.

As for Russia, President Putin’s careful balancing act with Iran in Syria includes Turkey but only as a back-seat participant, a role Erdogan would loath to publicly admit. Moscow isn’t pleased with expressed Turkish goals of carving out slices of Syrian territory to create buffer zones against the Kurds and satisfy long-standing Turkish territorial claims. Neither is it prepared to accept a commanding Turkish role in any postwar agreement on the political future of the decimated country.

Decades of appeasing Ankara have established the belief among Turkish leaders that Greece could be subjugated with little effort. Greek politicians continue to feed this impression with their actions. Yet, crossing the divide between saber rattling and actually invading to snatch Greek island territory could produce a surprise for the attacker. With Erdogan’s convoluted relationship with both Washington and NATO, Turkey may discover that her actions could trigger, for the first time ever, a Western

reaction to clip her wings in a manner presently unimaginable among Erdoganist hawks. If, however, the US and NATO step back from determined intervention to stop a Turkish attack they must also accept *the real possibility of war escalation in the Balkans and the effective disintegration of NATO's southern wing*.

Against this backdrop, a golden opportunity (and, perhaps, the only opportunity) for Greek diplomacy would be a substantive expansion of strategic cooperation with the US as Washington's suspicions about the reliability of the Turkish "bulwark" multiply by the day.

The epicenter of this Greek effort already exists in the form of a strong defense link between the two countries. "Souda Bay: NATO's Military Gem in the Eastern Mediterranean"²⁸ is fully operational as host to US air and naval power and can be upgraded with ease to meet the particular strategic needs of US security policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Souda is home of U.S. Naval Support Activity (NSA,) Souda Bay, with the primary mission of supporting US fleet and airborne operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Souda's deep natural harbor can comfortably host a full aircraft carrier task force. Souda's Hellenic Navy and Air Force bases complement NSA's mission and augment its capabilities. Crete—Winston Churchill's "aircraft carrier in the Eastern Mediterranean"—provides a secure forward position to US and NATO forces and is the ideal fallback location for US forces that could be ejected from the Turkish base of Incirlik.

Greece must continue to rework her strategic relationship with the US in ways that create incentives for Washington to be more proactive, both verbally and politically, vis-a-vis Turkish provocations and military strong-arm tactics in the Aegean.

CONCLUSION: KONDYLIS AND GREEK STRATEGY

The late Panayotis Kondylis, Greece's most prominent postwar strategist of international standing, in his analysis of a potential Greek-Turkish conflict, was scathing in suggesting that "the demonstrable inability of the Greek state to defend the Greek nation—that is to say, to fulfill its most prominent mission—is the most disturbing omen for the future, because the Greek state is gradually exposed "as incapable of protecting the national community that is included inside its borders." Kondylis died in

²⁸Dr. Daniel Goure, *Souda Bay: NATO's Military Gem in the Eastern Mediterranean* (Lexington Institute: March 2016).

1998 but he had already and clearly predicted the political, social, and moral crisis that was to engulf Greece shortly after his death.

Kondylis compared and contrasted a “shrinking” Greece, of limited vision and poor connection to her own philosophical, civilizational, and political past, to a vibrant Turkey which, despite domestic tensions and persistent Ottoman elements, was focused on national objectives pursued with vigor. He emphasized the strategic significance of “internal contradictions,” and pressures like demographic explosion, as forces pushing a nation to expand. Kondylis noted that the only power capable of stopping Turkish expansionist tendencies is a “resurgent” Russia—a statement that anticipated the current pull-push Turkish struggle in Syria where Russia’s interests and strategic objectives, not to mention the resurgence of the historical Russia-Iran “axis,” dramatically limit Turkish ambitions.

Kondylis was openly pessimistic about the abilities of a mobilized Greece to challenge a Turkish thrust in the Aegean or across the eastern land frontier between the two countries. He emphasized the strategic importance of Cyprus as a potential battleground noting that the Greek Cypriot population must be prepared for total war against a Turkish attack with the aim of dealing unbearable losses on the enemy. He warned against any Greek tendency to develop a doctrine expecting “total defense” (‘anywhere and everywhere’) of the national space and, instead, counseled that Greece apply the classic maneuver of concentrating military power on a narrow front with the aim of destabilizing the enemy in ways that could decisively affect any postwar settlement.

Kondylis also stressed in detail the key strategic importance of a Greek surprise first strike (resembling Israel’s Six-Day War against the Arabs) to create a strategic *fait accompli*. In addition, he also pointed out that a surprise attack cannot be carried out “with a hunting gun” but, rather, with the total of Greek offensive power aiming to destroy key capabilities of the enemy disposition.

Kondylis, the ultimate pragmatist, warned that no sustained defense against the enemy can exist without a strong economy and political cohesion on national security and defense objectives. Again, anticipating the Greek collapse currently under way, he stressed that any losses to Turkey in case of war would be “irreversible and possibly fatal.” Greece, Kondylis brutally recognized, long before the Greece’s tethering to the EU “bailouts” suppressed her sovereignty, is a country “of limited sovereign rights whose bold implementation is dependent on the will and the reaction of third parties, while all the while her posture becomes more passive and contradictory.”

Finally, Kondylis was right on target when he identified Greek politicians as “mediocrities, sub-mediocrities, and junior mediocrities... who do not have the standing to solve historical problems of such depth and magnitude.” He concluded that Greece has “made her bed and now [needs to] lie in it.”

Unsurprisingly, Kondylis’s pitiless dismantling of convenient Greek myths has been relegated to the dustbin of history by an unduly offended Greek “intelligentsia” and by Greek politicians of no merit and with little “leadership” to offer. His analysis, however, is more relevant today than ever before. As Greece attempts to strengthen a constantly diminishing ability to control her own future, and defend against NATO “ally” Turkey, not to mention the crushing EU “bailouts,” Kondylis’s precepts could be decisive as the directing principles of a redefined national strategy.

Against this backdrop, and with US-NATO the only credible strategic framework presently available to Greek leaders, a must-do list of Greek actions, as Turkish hostility and aggression continue to increase, should be as follows:

1. Greece must strengthen cooperation with regional actors pursuing targets similar to Greece. Israel and Egypt are prime candidates. They both find Erdoganism inimical to their policies and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.
2. Re-defining the Greek-US security relationship is the critical objective. Greece has a long, if convoluted, tradition of hosting US military bases. Expanding this tradition could increase US willingness to take a more pro-active role in sustaining defense of the Greek strategic space.
3. Greece must ditch possible lingering sympathies toward “political Islam” and recognize Erdoganism as a malicious revisionist force little different from the Kemalist open hostility toward Greece.
4. The “Greek-Turkish dispute” is a construct Greek politicians learned to accept as the key analytical tool when Turkey’s disposition, even as early as the 1950s, was already not to “dispute” but to aggressively pursue the overthrow of the Aegean treaty regime, by force if necessary. The “dispute” idea, as the foundation of any “negotiation,” must be discarded.

5. *“Europe” and “Europeanization” are irrelevant concepts in the developing Islamist Turkish political culture.* Greece should learn to live with this irrelevance and adjust its relations with Brussels and US-NATO accordingly.
6. Although the strategic value of the Turkish landmass is permanent, Turkey’s current politics increasingly undermine any sophisticated exploitation of this advantage by the West. Greece and Cyprus must work in tandem to offer alternatives to the Western alliance which would fill the security gaps, created by a deteriorating Turkish state, to the greatest possible degree.

AFTERWORD

The Greek-Turkish “dispute” has all the hallmarks of permanent crisis without exit—quite similar in format to Israel’s struggle with the Palestinians. Greece must exist in perennial vigilance against an aggressive revisionist power whose appetite for aggrandizement could be decisively limited only in one of two ways: a devastating military defeat in the hands of a superior power or through disintegration from within, with the country splitting into warring “homelands” busy with slaughtering each other (neighboring Iraq and Syria provide a working blueprint.)

This latter scenario was the nightmare future for the now suppressed Kemalists which provided the backbone for the military’s primacy over the politicians. Erdogan, who re-ignited the civil war with the Kurds, and who treats the military as an opponent to his Islamist schemes, could face a similar predicament because of his quest to eliminate the Kurdish threat and carve anti-Kurd “security zones” out of Syria. And Kurdish aspirations of establishing an independent homeland could trigger a violent Turkish reaction with unforeseen consequences.

Given Turkey’s size, a Turkish collapse from within will create critical problems for Greece as well, a country undermined by political corruption, debt tyranny, and the German obsession with defending the euro by using Greece as a laboratory animal and imposing on her crippling austerity *pour encourager les autres*. The July 2016 “coup” gave Athens a foretaste of what could be in store if Turkey’s distress expands beyond control. Within hours of the defeat of the putschists, Turks seeking asylum were crossing the Greek-Turkish border. Full-scale troubles will send thousands of asylum seekers across the frontier increasing steeply the political tensions between the two countries—and

perhaps also giving Ankara the pretext for “corrective” military action to punish Greece for harboring “traitors.”

Greek leaders today and in the future must recognize Turkey as **the single most potent threat to Greece’s sovereignty and territorial integrity**. The Age of Erdogan provides them with lessons that refute *all wishful thinking about Chamberlain-esque “peace in our time,” not to mention flaccid “Europeanist” theories of harmony, friendship, and cooperation*. Greece must prepare for active defense with every means possible and clearly recognize Kondylis’s warnings as the critical kernel of her security. Any other choice, including overly optimistic dependence on others to ultimately guarantee Greek security, can, and will, lead to disaster.