

WHILE WE SELF-INFLICT, TURKEY LURKS

By Special Correspondent

A major Athens daily recently claimed that Greek diplomats and military leaders fear that the next phase in the steadily deteriorating relations with Turkey will be a Turkish snap operation to occupy one of Greece's small inhabited islands in the eastern Aegean. Such Turkish action would bolster Turkey's claims that islands and islets not specifically named in treaties that essentially installed Greek sovereignty over almost the entire Aegean are of "undefined" status and, thus, up for grabs.

This modified Falklands/Malvinas scenario is not all that implausible. One look at the map and even the untrained eye can see the insurmountable problem Greece has in trying to defend island territories spread all over along the Asia Minor coast and within pistol shot of Turkish invasion forces deployed and waiting. Greek military planners juggle with various methods in their attempt to provide credible defense for the islands. No amount of planning though can resolve the untenable situation of simply not having the resources and manpower to effectively cover every island, islet, and rock that Turkey could potentially covet as its next trophy after Cyprus.

Greece's options in dealing with such prospect are limited. A surprise Turkish amphibious operation could be carried out with overwhelming odds in favor of the attackers. A small Greek garrison could be dealt with swiftly and the Greek population pushed out overnight in a "magnanimous" Turkish gesture toward civilians losing their homes to the invader. A Greek military response centered on the occupied island will be hampered by distance from bases, while the Turks enjoy the luxuries of steady reinforcements and saturation naval and air support from installations near the Turkish Aegean shore.

A generalized war against Turkey will almost immediately run into international and "allied" pressure on Greece to stop the conflict, not to mention the true costs of such a clash on a Hellas with a tottering economy and a shaky domestic front. Turkey will continue to enjoy overt and/or thinly-veiled support from our "partners" and "friends." Greece, the real victim of yet another Turkish invasion, will be quickly metamorphosed into the aggressor by "realist" diplomats, contemplating "geostrategic imperatives" and spreading derisive comments about an "insignificant island," not to mention an international media that won't care all that much, especially since the Aegean does not carry the sensationalist "communication potential" of, say, a Gaza or Darfur.

Those who doubt Turkey's aggressive intentions should think again. Ankara is redefining its status as a grand regional power with the help of both the United States and its friends in Europe. Turkish appetite for EU membership is waning. One way or another, the EU prospect *never operated as an incentive for the Turks to act "European," denounce the use of force, and become starched-collar, benign interlocutors.* Greece's non-stop, unconditional support for Turkey's "European future" sent all the wrong signals to Ankara. The Turks have, correctly, read the Greek political elite's embrace of an eventual EU member Turkey as the clearest evidence of this elite's rejection of anything that even remotely could highlight a Greek open option to respond militarily to Turkish provocations. And the Turkish generals have neither forgotten the Imia/Kardak crisis and Greek responses to it, nor the established Greek government practice of obsessively covering up Turkish challenges of Greek sovereignty in the Aegean and Turkish open agitation among western Thrace's Muslims, always of course in the interest of "peace."

Throughout history, effective deterrence was linked to the undying promise (and capability) of inflicting unbearable hurt on an enemy who chooses to attack first. This fundamental principle in nowhere to be found in the Greek discourse surrounding the Greek-Turkish confrontation calculus. The occasional "defiant" words of senior Greek leaders on independence day simply won't cut it as credible warnings against foes with nefarious, expansionist plans.

Assuming and promoting a posture with a hard, but brittle, shell and an inner core with the consistency of pizza dough offers the best beacon for opponents seeking the right opportunity to strike. The more Greek leaders sink in the morass of non-confrontational, politically correct illusions; and the more Greece deteriorates into political weakness and indecision, the more sandbox exercise scenarios, such as the above, will converge with real intentions.