

DOES GREECE HAVE AN INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEM?

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On February 3, 2009, three terrorists walked casually by a police station in one of the boroughs of the port city of Pireaus and raked the building with automatic weapons fire. Two police sentries standing outside the building narrowly escaped injury. As the terrorists walked away, they tossed a hand grenade as well. Fortunately, it was a dud. A few days later, the "Sect of Revolutionaries," never previously heard of, claimed responsibility for the attack in a proclamation, published in Greece's largest circulation daily, threatening to kill policemen at random.

Since December 2008, terrorists have shot assault rifles and submachine guns and threw the occasional grenade at the police three times. One young policeman was grievously wounded and is still hospitalized. These back-to-back attacks came in the wake of the worst riots Greece has experienced since the end of the Second World War. Last December, Athens and other cities and towns were battered by unprecedented mob violence and suffered devastating damage and widespread looting, with the government assuming a strange hands-off attitude toward the rioters on the excuse that, unless "the village was let to burn," there was no real way to save it. This is a posture that has justifiably disturbed many, inside as well as outside the country, and has given rise to critical questions about what is going to happen next time -- because few believe there won't be a next time and, perhaps, sooner rather than later.

Aside from rifle-shooting terrorists, and for the longest time, *Greece has had a serious and debilitating anarchist problem that goes largely unnoticed abroad.* The word "anarchist" may not be the most appropriate though to describe a violent sub-culture of young urban thugs who have for years burned, destroyed, and rioted right under the noses of a poorly trained and motivated police hamstrung by political party electoral juggling and a generalized social acceptance of mob destruction as a legitimate, and indeed "healthy," expression of protest protected by "democratic principle."

It is this sub-culture that has fed a steady "low intensity" warfare mainly in the streets of Athens but, also, elsewhere in the country: arsonists routinely torch cars and bank ATMs and, from time to time, attempt more serious attacks against mainly foreign companies and government offices; groups of "angry youths" routinely riot around the Athens National Technical University, the old Polytechnic, whose campus has been, for as long as anyone can remember, the hub of violent law breakers, foreign to the student community, who have come to occupy its buildings at will to prepare Molotov cocktails and stockpile other missiles for clashing with police; and packs of "protesters" attack police stations with fire bombs as police officers scurry for cover. Remarkably, none of these events register as the crucial and highly dangerous breaches of internal security that they are.

With politicians limited to lofty pronouncements against violence "from whatever quarters it may come," the Greek internal security and law and order problem is growing in many different offshoots.

"Legitimate" grievances, for example, trigger an onslaught of mechanized farmers, who block major highways and, even, border crossing points, with tractor barricades without any attempt by the government *to restore communications and protect the truly legitimate rights of the majority, trampled as they are by a militant minority.* The latest such expression of farmer wrath last month, whipped up by demands for cash to replace lost income, threw the country into paralysis for nearly two weeks, causing serious damage to an already wobbly economy and a near diplomatic row with Bulgaria over

blocked borders, not to mention the sudden crossing into Bulgarian territory of marry farmers with their tractors eager to explain their demands to incredulous Bulgarian border guards.

Illegal immigration, and its many attendant problems, continues unmolested, with Greek governments having surrendered to the inevitability of this unstoppable invasion, mainly from the direction of “allied” Turkey. That the throngs of these undocumented aliens arrive from countries where fundamentalist terrorism thrives, and may include terrorists and sleeper cells, is conveniently set aside -- and, instead, plans for mass naturalizations are proposed as the “solution” to the problem. American suggestions that a DNA data bank be created to monitor illegal aliens -- which is a requirement under international agreements Greece is a part of -- go unheeded.

Greek political parties are increasingly identified by commentators as sunk in their own, isolated world of unreality, driven by the electoral calculus. Naturally, no one operating under such imperatives is prepared to address critical problems like those of internal security and preserving the rule of law, especially when the mere mention of such topics triggers widespread commotion over “the forces of state suppression” and the threat to “constitutional rights.”

In the years since the fall of the military junta, Greece has developed a remarkable repertoire of “revolutionary” language that any outside observer would associate with South American *guerrillos* rather than mature members of the European Union (Greece joined the then European Communities in 1979). This language, and the ritualized dramatics of parties on the left spectrum of Greek politics, have created enormous obstacles to any rational debate of what is to be done.

Greece claims the unenviable record of remaining the only country in Europe where gun-totting terrorists attack police stations with impunity and terrorist proclamations claim prominent space in the daily press as a matter of routine (it is perhaps significant that in none of the dozens of incidents pitting terrorists against the police in recent years, ***no police officer has ever returned fire or used his/her weapon to defend a police building against packs of attackers throwing fire bombs and torching police cars parked outside***).

The easiest thing of course is to keep dismissing these ominous signs as “occasional” glitches that Greek “democracy” can handle thanks to its claimed “robust institutions” and its “social cohesion.” This is a favorite game of not only politicians but, also, of the bevy of “opinion makers” populating Greek mass media and claiming to be carriers of “modernity” and “Europeanism.”

The real facts though grow increasingly distant from such fairy tales in a widening expression of mass denial. And denial breeds disaster.