

## THINKING DEFENSE, THINKING SECURITY

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In times of dire economic straits, thinking and talking defense and security is an unpopular subject given the economic outlays and the implied sense of risk involved.

Greece is in such straits and voters are in foul mood. Hit by the world economic slump, and paying the price of years of mismanagement and corruption, Greece is on the receiving end of a huge double whammy: the cash box is empty, save the last usurious-interest foreign loan, and prospects of a genuine rebound, in the middle of an unprecedented global crunch, are extremely slim.

Nevertheless, Greece needs to, and must, think defense and security urgently. Here's why.

On the outside:

Turkey grows more menacing by the day. Turkish warplanes fly as if Aegean skies are theirs to enjoy and keep. Turkish sea-air exercises bracket Greek islands, large and small, and simulate various pre-invasion tactics. Turkish warships make "honest" navigation "mistakes" and appear near the shores of Athens -- unmolested. Turkish ground forces along the eastern frontier remain at battle strength.

The rest of the Balkans is in slow boil. Kosovar Albanians, emboldened by Kosovo's "independence" by Caesarian section courtesy of the US, haven't given up the dream of a "greater Albania." FYR Macedonia, for all of Skopje's macho-man antics in connection to the lingering name dispute with Athens, has little to celebrate over its "multicultural" synthesis comprising a strong Albanian minority permanently unhappy with the posture of the Slav majority. A splendid, little war is not entirely impossible right at Greece's northern doorstep as it nearly happened in 2001, when irregular "Macedonian" Albanians nearly tore the Slav-dominated Skopje government to pieces.

On the inside:

Illegal immigration has inundated the country with swarms of illegal immigrants, many of whom originating in countries where international terrorism has firm roots. The Greek government, overwhelmed as it is by the circumstances, has little grasp on these swelling throngs: illegal immigrants apprehended at the border cannot be possibly confined and are given a pass to the interior and a warning letter instructing them to leave the country in 30 days! The absurdity, and the security risks, of this "policy" need no elaborating. Greek security services, despite their honest efforts, are simply way behind the curve in the face of such an invasion.

Porous borders have also resulted in international crime blossoming inside Greece, often in collaboration with local confederates. Given international organized crime's intersection with terrorism, and Greece's proximity to major regional cores of instability, this is a serious threat. But Greek law enforcement, due to lack of funds and manpower, and under media and political indictment because of the recent riots, seems hard pressed in meeting the challenge.

Recent Turkish violations in the Aegean have led to renewed media interest in matters of defense. Prime minister Karamanlis even called a meeting of the government defense committee, an organ that rarely meets. Press reports spoke of the possible resurrection of several arms procurement programs, put on ice because of persistent economic shortages, including those for the purchasing of new frigates, an advanced fighter plane, and a new armored fighting vehicle.

But buying new guns hardly plugs the **“defense mentality gap”** that has grown persistently in the decades since the restoration of democracy in 1974. Greece, despite frightful arms procurement outlays that have sapped the country’s finances as no other single source save the all-pervasive corruption, feels perhaps less “secure” today than 30 years ago, when her armed forces run on mostly WWII and Korean war-vintage weapon systems. The example is telling. “Defense” and “security” cannot subsist on hardware alone, irrespective of how sophisticated this hardware is. It takes *hearts and minds to man the turrets, guard the borders, show hostiles that their challenges may soon attract a devastating response, and stand watch 24/7, 365 days a year.*

For more than 30 years, Greek politicians have been straining and sweating in every direction, especially during periods of tension with Turkey, to declare that Greece “demands nothing and seeks nothing.” Even those from among them who the media describe as “tough” and “determined” expend their breath in empty word smithing: Turkey “must put a full stop to its behavior in the Aegean;” Turkish violations “are not compatible with Turkey’s European future;” Turkey “must remember that its course to Europe passes through international law,” and so the well-worn out story goes. *None of these tough guys ever dared even alluding to a forceful response to Turkish low altitude harassment of inhabited Greek islands, including activating ground-to-air defenses to deal with these hostile acts.* Heaven forbid that such “provocative” and “war-like” words would jump out of realist, pragmatist Greek political mouths!

Making magnanimous “peace loving” statements, when your real assets are limited and your international stature small, is hardly “defense and security strategy.” Declaring that you “seek nothing” when the enemy demands *everything*, is the surest avenue to conflict. Rushing to international organizations with sheaves of paper when your **real ability and will to defend with the force of arms has been eroded** will serve no real purpose other than wetting the appetite of the adversaries even more. Peace was never “bought” by such gestures of spinster schoolmistress behavior.

In Stanley Kubrick’s memorable 1987 *Full Metal Jacket*, feared and loathed US Marines DI Gunnery Sergeant Hartman screams at Private Joker: **“Let me see your war face...!”** Joker, perspiring and trembling with fear, just hardly makes the grade.

In similar circumstances, “strong” Greece as raw boot recruit would have failed so miserably the DI’s brutal call that she would have been most likely cashiered on the spot. But while *any* Private Joker may fail the test without life-ending consequences, countries without a metaphoric “war face” fare far worse than that in the aptly named “international arena.”

This is something Greek “policy and opinion makers” should toss around in their minds much more vigorously than what they currently prefer. Thinking seriously about defense and security requires a lot more than counterfeit bravado word smithing.