

TURKISH AGGRESSION IN THE AEGEAN

Thinking About Greek Strategy

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Publication date: 30 August 2020

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Those who have spent years watching Turkey's attempts to create a *fete accompli* in the Aegean, and Greece's rather numb reactions stressing imaginary "red lines" that may be not crossed and other such figures of speech (not to forget appeals to the EU and NATO for 'solidarity' that never really materializes), have become skeptical of using the term "strategy." B.H. Liddell Hart, one of the most prolific and influential strategic theorists of the 20th Century, defined strategy as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy." Other significant students of strategy followed the same logic of intertwining political aims into an ultimate plan *to create military goals out of policy*. But, looking at what Greek politicians have presented us with over the years, as their "strategic plans" regarding the Aegean dispute with Turkey, carry very little, if any, military weight beyond vague academic references to the "national defense forces always ready to meet any challenge in the Archipelago."

This formula has changed little even now that Turkey openly threatens Greek sovereignty—with both Europe and the US mere spectators counseling "coolheadedness." As a Turkish exploration vessel blithely crisscrosses and violates Greek waters escorted by Turkish fleet warships, the Greek government is again ratcheting up the "diplomatic offensive" of words, promises, meetings with "friends," appeals to Brussels, and messages to a rather

sclerotic *napping* NATO watching from a distance as usual. The word “strategy” is again absent or mentioned casually during talks with reporters.

At first glance, those unfamiliar with regional policies, and the patterns of dancing to the tune of the Turkish--invented “no war, no peace” muffled aggression toward Greece in the Aegean, tend to be fearful of an (unintended?) clash between the two countries that can escalate quickly into full-scale war (remember [the Imia-Kardak crisis](#)). Yet, at closer scrutiny, day-to-day “stabilities” created since the Turkish piratical invasion of Cyprus in 1974—and the occupation of the northern part of the island by Turkish forces—have changed little. While the Turks send their warplanes to violate Greek airspace almost daily, and their Coast Guard fast craft harass Greek fishermen, when a [Greek warship collides with a Turkish one due to the Turkish captain’s poor seamanship](#), the incident is rapidly ended by the Turkish ship separating herself from the research vessel escort and heading for Turkish waters.

Yet, with each passing day, the Ankara neo-sultan constantly bloats his blatant warmongering rhetoric reaching back to Great Power treaties and arrangements agreed upon after the First World War that collapsed the Ottoman Empire –and demands the re-ordering of boundaries and maps according to Turkish “historical and just” claims emerging from the same blood-stained Ottoman and, later, Kemalist genocide of the Christian populations of Asia Minor. Can this be the long-feared trigger of a Greek-Turkish war?

History, they say, is usually written by surprises, and a surprise in the Aegean is not to be underestimated. Yet, at closer scrutiny, the current dangerous fracas is multifaceted and quite more complicated than what our neo-sultan wants us to believe. To boot:

- Turkey assumes a “superpower” status and claims the whole of the Aegean when her economy is tanking and the COVID-19 pandemic is imposing a severe toll on her population.
- The Turkish-Libyan agreement on oil exploration stands on shaky legal legs and persists only thanks to the traditional German sympathies to Ankara. On the other hand, challenging this monstrosity in the courts would consume enough time for the Earth to tilt, so it is not a “crisis resolution” option.

- Playing tough requires currency reserves Turkey does not have, and won't have unless Erdogan moves off the stage—his “Moslem economics” have damaged the Turkish economy below the waterline. On August 7 the lira was trading at 7.36 against the US dollar having lost 20 pc of its value. Foreign investors are exiting in force and could prove disastrous for Erdogan's AKP political party's future.
- COVID-19 has blasted even the giants of the global economic system; markets like Turkey's are ten times more vulnerable when trying to plug the holes opened by the massive need for importing medical supplies and other means for combating the virus.
- Turkey's expectations of capitalizing on gas extraction is ill-thought—any such venture requires major up-front investment (which Turkey cannot afford) and high gas prices to produce profits, a condition that does not exist at present thanks to the global economic pummeling delivered by COVID-19.
- Finally, Turkey, by continuing her sabre rattling in every direction, finds herself increasingly isolated in the Eastern Med where Greece, Israel, and Cyprus have already agreed to build a pipeline in order to sell natural gas to Europe, a project to which Turkey is not invited, and Greece and Egypt agreeing on joint exploration as well.

Against this backdrop, Greece needs to overhaul her entire *strategy* vis-a-vis Ankara by putting the emphasis on a more robust military strategy emerging from substantive negotiations with Israel and Egypt and any other EU partner, like France, who see Turkey's ugly antics in the Aegean as a preamble to serious conflict.

It is, therefore, imperative for the Greek government to reduce drastically its romantic announcements about “dialogue in good faith” with an unrepentant aggressor like Turkey, reminiscent of Adolf Hitler of the late 1930s, and put more gas into plans for countering possible Turkish war moves *with a combination of diplomatic and military means*. Greek diplomacy must abandon its usual status of hypnosis vis-a-vis NATO and **demand a substantive interpretation of NATO's Article 5** that states an attack on one member of NATO is an attack on all of its members *in view Turkish overt aggression in the Aegean and Ankara's constant threats of war against Greece*,

Such an approach will undoubtedly dissatisfy the distinct group of Greek “peaceniks” whose standard decades-long credo revolves around bringing the case of the Aegean before the International Court of Justice in the Hague—where foreign judges with no clue of the “hotter” details of the dispute, let alone Greek-Turkish history since the 19th century, will be called upon to render opinions that could easily amputate Greece’s island territories in the Aegean. This would be a strategic victory for “neo-Hitlerite” Turkey “by the book,” and set the stage for an *almost certain greater Turkish effort to cut off more Greek national space in an orgy of neo-Ottoman aggression that, almost certainly, will trigger a wider conflagration in the region.*

With the United States effectively withdrawn from the Aegean dispute thanks to the chaotic political situation back home, plus President Trump’s “special friendship” with the neo-sultan, it is *imperative* for Greek leaders to understand that **strategy**, as defined by the great military theorist of yore, must be their daily concern at times like this—with “good faith” and “negotiation” plus pats on the back, trips to Brussels wearing masks, and handshakes before the photographers taking the back seat.

Wars cannot be won before they are fought, but they can become a far less treacherous undertaking if strong alliances and mutual support agreements can be hammered into place at the proper time—and before the first shot is fired in anger just like the neo-sultan is dying to do, especially after his “victories” in Libya.