

Greece, Threats and the “One Percent Factor”

Q&A

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What is the One Percent Factor in preparing to respond to threats and crises?

Planners attempt to create models that cover all bases. However, no model is ever 100 percent complete in its assumptions and proposed remedial actions—unpredictability is the bane of all planners irrespective of the subject at hand.

The One Percent Factor is a moniker to describe this unpredictable “dark part,” present in all estimates and plans, which policy makers assume is the *most unlikely possibility* they might have to face—and thus it could be assumed to rest on the very far improbable part of all possibilities.

For example, leaders in a poor Third World country have little, if any, reason to believe their domain is a possible target of a terrorist attack with a “dirty” nuclear device—there are other possibilities that are far closer to reality, from natural disasters to domestic violence and civil war.

The One Percent Factor is thus often overlooked by leaders or, simply, dismissed because it is the most likely “impossible.” Only developed states, with the utmost level of vigilance, and the technical capabilities for advanced analysis, include the One Percent Factor in their planning. In other words, *they integrate into their threat analysis probabilities beyond the proverbial visible edge of what analysts see as “actionable territory,”* which the majority of observers/policy makers/leaders can also perceive without specialized training and/or knowledge.

Coming to Greece, these are difficult times for national policy planners. Illegal immigration, generalized instability in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Turkish threat, Cyprus, Islamism, economic woes, unstable Balkans, cross-border crime, natural disasters, they all create justified anxiety. How prepared is Greece to meet these tests?

Generally speaking, Greece cannot be counted among the countries with a high degree of general/technical organization, preparedness, and timely response. Experience shows Greek authorities are often caught sleeping at the wheel and scrambling to react when the situation has already slipped out of control.

The “Greek action principle” has little to do with anticipation and readiness; the Greek system exists in generalized inertia and inattention that are nonetheless routinely marketed by governments as “vigilance.”

The results of this “vigilance” are often beyond disastrous. A recent example: in July 2018, wildfires destroyed the densely populated Mati seaside community a short distance from Athens, killing 102 people, injuring 172, and destroying or damaging one thousand buildings. The Mati fire was globally the second deadliest wildfire in the 21st century after [the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Australia](#) that killed 180.

The reaction of Greek authorities to this disaster was shocking, to say the least. General paralysis reigned supreme while people asphyxiated and burned to death, with the incumbent radical left SYRIZA government, instead of signaling general quarters and mobilizing all hands, expending its time in attempts to conceal its own ineptness and bewilderment via media subterfuge. Following the disaster, a number of officials were [charged by prosecutors](#) and are awaiting trial—but the terrible damage was of course done.

The Mati fire is the perfect traumatic example of how the Greek state does *not* act when the balloon goes up because, primarily, it lacks the *appropriate level of agility, vigilance, and readiness*, not to mention the proactive attitude that is necessary for immediate concerted action. And Mati isn’t alone. The list of similar, if lesser, disasters over the years is far too long.

This is deeply disturbing, to say the least. How could credible reform and vigilance be nurtured since the situation will most likely continue to deteriorate, with illegal immigration being the most prominent threat at this time?

Unfortunately, the Greek bureaucratic model is helplessly flawed. “Apathy” and “responsibility avoidance” are the terms most suitable in describing government bureaucracy. Attempts to rationalize and modernize bureaucratic structures fail consistently.

A recent study, issued by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki ([source in Greek](#)), for example, looked at the management of public spending and uncovered an Orwellian complex of various “steps” necessary for procuring the simplest of items. Thanks to labyrinthine rules and “transparency” statutes, the price of a lowly pen, costing 30 cents of the euro, jumped to €70 (in replication of the legendary \$100 US Defense Department ashtray).

These findings were hardly surprising: buying this lowly pen involved up to forty (40) bureaucratic “steps,” with a litany of officials examining, re-examining, approving, and initializing an endless paper trail, which eventually inflated the price of the pen beyond reason. The above study is one of the *thousands* issued over the years pointing at Greece’s *complete bureaucratic deadlock* and the system-paralyzing *polynomeia* (literally ‘plethora of laws’) producing it.

Are there any current proposals on how to reform the system and increase its effectiveness to include preparedness for the “unlikely” One Percent Factor?

Greek bureaucracy and politicians go through cycles of pronouncements on how reform is *ante portas*. In reality, genuine “reform” is not the objective. Rather, the political to-and-fro is a game of musical chairs seeking to choose the least damaging action in a range of *unacceptable alternatives*. The overriding concern of course is not to touch entrenched bureaucratic interests and the organized labor minorities controlling their levers. The permanent and non-negotiable addendum is the “job security” of the excessive surplus of government “workers.” This spirit of self-induced paralysis dominates every

aspect of government and quickly dispatches any proposal for even moderate *real* efficiency-enhancing reform.

In light of all of the above, “managing” the One Percent Factor is as a dangerous proposal for Greek bureaucracy. What can be done to ameliorate this serious gap in Greek readiness?

In view of the above, the “One Percent Factor” may be the most acute threat Greek policymakers have to face—since the *very spirit* of what the Greeks mistakenly call “preparedness” or “forethought” is ***incompatible*** with the intellectual and managerial characteristics necessary to address ***the possibility of the most unlikely threat bringing disaster.***

The best most recent demonstration of this dangerous refusal to recognize a major impending “One Percent Factor” was the perilous play, by the previous radical left-communist SYRIZA government, regarding the threat of Grexit. In 2015, the communists, in a game of chicken, went toe-to-toe with the EU (and particularly Germany) in the false hope of forcing Greece’s creditors to give Athens more money without a specific agreement or “memorandum” containing iron demands for reform.

When both Berlin and Brussels refused to budge, SYRIZA, whose top players were toying with reintroducing the drachma, was forced to eat crow and retreat in disarray. The catastrophic cost of this incomprehensible shenanigan, which resulted in a new draconian memorandum, was estimated at €120 billion, which emerged as the “preferred” final outcome to a disorderly exit from the Eurozone and the collapse of the Greek economy.

The Grexit example is demonstration of how critical decisions may be handled by the Greek political class even in the presence of the most extreme “One Percent Factor” promising disaster. The Grexit near calamity was the outcome of government being in the hands of an unscrupulous and uneducated group of people. There is little reason to believe this sequence of events cannot re-occur. Given the long negative record of Greek bureaucracy, and the politicians reigning over it, a similar extreme situation has high probabilities of re-emerging due to who knows what twists of history.

Looking at the current array of challenges facing Greece, what could it be such an extreme “One Percent Factor” situation presenting a threat to the country at this time?

Right now, the most pressing issue outside the economy is illegal immigration. The current onslaught from Turkey does not only bring in tens of thousands of uninvited undocumented aliens, it also promises infiltration by Islamic terrorists seeping out of Syria, with Turkey’s tacit approval, if not outright support.

Given that Greece has not taken the necessary step of closing its borders, which would significantly impede the human flow, a substantial presence of Islamic terrorists capable of causing deadly trouble cannot be ruled out. Indeed, experience teaches the presence of terrorists is directly linked to the possibility of an attack.

In the specific case of Islamic terrorism, Greece has been in a lull for the longest of times judging (wrongly) that “Greek-Arab friendship” is enough to preclude large-scale Islamist terror incidents on Greek soil. This impression is outdated for many reasons: times have changed radically, especially since the Arab Spring and the rapid rise of ISIS/Daesh; the steady flow of Moslems into Greece has come with increasing resentment of the newcomers toward the host country; Turkey’s subversive tactics and constant hostile probing of the Greek domain make this resentment a potent

“unconventional” weapon against Greece; and the possibility of “lone wolf” action is present and must not be overlooked.

There is little evidence of the Greek system trying to change to specifically face this highly probable threat. The open border alone invites those who may be planning to hit “infidel” Greece in a demonstration of Islamic might. Greece’s convergence with the USA and Israel provides additional political and ideological incentives to the potential terrorists.

How can preparedness be enhanced focusing on the specific above One Percent Factor threat?

Theoretically, there are many measures that could elevate Greece’s ability to defend against such threats. But there are obstacles *ingrained in the Greek system* that make this job difficult, if at all possible. Prominent among these is the absence of an explicitly trained class of intelligence and crisis response personnel; dedicated *functioning* organs “in place” providing analysis, prediction, and response to the threat; and the perennial bane of bureaucratic confusion and almost non-existent *operational interfacing* between relevant ministries and agencies.

A good case in point is the on-and-off saga of the “national security council.” Greece has no central coordinating and action structure regarding national security beyond the laboriously titled “foreign affairs and defense government council” or KYSEA. Populated by the PM, nine government ministers, and the chief of the defense staff, KYSEA is a cumbersome entity with practically no support analytical and planning structures or the agility, both intellectual and operational, to produce coherent and actionable strategy, especially during fast-paced and constantly changing emergencies.

As if KYSEA is not enough, a recent lengthy draft bill by the Foreign Ministry provides for the establishment of an additional “national security council.” In many respects, this NSC replicates what KYSEA is supposed to do with the purported emphasis on “long term planning.”

Judging from the longest experience of the Greek bureaucracy being an expert in creating committees, councils, and “dedicated organs,” which do little or nothing, the NSC is off to an inauspicious beginning. The NSC (just like KYSEA) has no dedicated support staff of trained national security experts and is headed by a national security advisor, who is presently a retired naval officer.

The KYSEA-NSC example is unfortunately typical of how the Greek political establishment perceives national security readiness: the current exercise will develop, almost certainly, into a project of creating bureaucratic positions awarded to persons hardly qualified to do analytical intelligence work but “expert” in being political appointees and collecting a good monthly salary.

And in conclusion?

Greece needs to grow serious about the critical issues of national security. The possibility of this happening any time soon, however, is small given the overriding traditional schema of Greek government bureaucracy.

The unsettling signs of the times are obviously incapable of motivating Greek politicians as they must. With Islamist radicals entering Greece in most likely increased numbers, the official response to the threat is to send out intelligence and police officers with lists of names and photos to “monitor” the crowds freely trudging into Greece. Even the most casual observer cannot but be amused at the “lists

and photos” approach to this key security threat requiring advanced monitoring and detection methods.

Thus, the One Percent Factor looms threateningly large, but unrecognized, above the heads of Greek policymakers. Greek politicians will scramble, if and when the disaster does occur, to launch anew the song-and-dance performance of how Greece “was on full alert” but was outmaneuvered by an enemy who has already defeated much better prepared states. In other words, excuses as “security.”