

A Historical Survey of the Relations between the United States and Greece and their Future

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During the Second World War Greece was attacked in October 1940 by Italy. Mussolini, the then Dictator of Italy, wanted an easy target in order to match Germany's advances in Europe. The attack was unprovoked. Italy had amassed troops in friendly Albania, and planned to conquer Greece within days.

Greece showed unexpected resistance, pushed back the Italian forces and was on the verge of throwing them in the Adriatic and conquering at the same time Albania.

Hitler could not allow this humiliation and loss of morale to happen to his ally and directed troops to Greece. The result was the conquest of Greece and at the same time the delay by approximately six months of the attack on the Soviet Union. This delay forced the German Army to advance in Russia during heavy winter, and eventually to lose the war. The heroic resistance of the Greeks provoked the ugliest face of the Conqueror who not only forced Greece to make war compensations, but "borrowed" also the Greek fiscal reserves. Further, they forced Greece to pay the costs of maintenance of the occupying forces. As a result thousands died from reprisals and malnutrition.

At Potsdam the three leaders who divided the world, allocated Greece to the sphere of influence of Great Britain, a traditional ally since the independence of Greece. Greece had fought a civil war in 1944 between the communists and the nationalists but with the assistance of

Churchill the nationalists prevailed. When Britain, exhausted from the war could not maintain a dominant position in the world, it passed on Greece to the United States who with the Marshall Plan was assisting Europe at the time to recover from the ravages of the War.

In 1952 Greece became a member of NATO (together with Turkey) and an expeditionary Greek force fought at Korea in response to the U.N. appeal for assistance. Greece remained a full member of NATO and of the Western Alliance until 1974 when Turkey invaded Cyprus and NATO and the United States, through the manipulations of Henry Kissinger, allowed Turkey to conquer 38% of the island. At the time Greece withdrew from the NATO military command in protest because NATO refused to apply Article 5 to the dispute between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus. Greece re-integrated fully under Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis.

The United States and Greece have always been allies and Greece has always been part of the Western Alliance. Despite its preference for Turkey, the United States, recognising this tried to maintain a balance between the military assistance it gave to the two countries, in the ratio of Greece 7 and Turkey 10.

The relationship developed over the years, despite the traditional annual march on the anniversary of "Polytechneion", when the Greek junta attacked the students inside the Polytechnic. This was the reason for the fall of Papadopoulos and its replacement by Dimitrios Ioannides, who was the person who staged a coup in Cyprus against the President, Arch. Makarios, thus giving the excuse to Turkey to invade Cyprus.

Although a large proportion of Greeks are left wing, they do not question the fact that Greece is a member of NATO and of the Western Alliance.

The relationship has been developing since 1975, with the assistance of the Greek-American community. In fact, the American Hellenic Institute under the guidance of Eugene Rossides, succeeded in that year to impose an embargo on American weapons to Turkey which lasted until 1978. To-day Greek Americans under the guidance of their societies the most prominent of which is AHEPA, founded in 1922, fully participate in the American way of life and maintain the nexus with their country of origin.

Although the relationship between Greece and the United States under President Trump was good, especially with Mike Pompeo, the Foreign Secretary and senior members of the administration, it is expected that the relationship with President Biden, an old friend of Greece who has deep knowledge of Greek (and Cypriot) matters, will be more substantial and cordial.

The policy of United States in recent years is to expand its military bases in Suda Bay, Larissa, Volos, Alexandroupolis and Aktio.

This expansion, however, should be accompanied by analogous guarantees for the integrity and security of Greece.

It should not be forgotten that during the First World War Turkey fought against the Entente whereas Greece was their ally, yet, after the War Greece lost Asia Minor, Pontos and Eastern Thrace.

There is still a widespread perception that the United States mainly looks after its own interests in world affairs. In to-day's multipolarised world it is

imperative for allied countries to provide real assistance and concrete guarantees to the weaker partner.

Joe Biden's presidency brings high hopes for reinvigorating the transatlantic partnership. Agreeing on a strategy will not be easy. There are areas of concern, still vitally important, that will also require transatlantic consensus. Lowering tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean is one such challenge. The Eastern Mediterranean is a vital region for European security.

Greece in recent years has emerged as a key ally in that effort. The Biden administration will find in Greece a strong ally. Greece's constructive engagement within the EU, multilateral organisations and an increasing network of regional alliances makes it irreplaceable.

Within the framework of its strategic commitment to the EU and NATO, Greece has promoted Euro-atlantic institutions in the Western Balkans and strengthened regional co-operation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East in recent year has left a power vacuum. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the conflicts in Syria and Libya have turned into proxy wars and have exported mass migration and instability to the wider region and the shores of the European Union.

These geopolitical challenges warrant attention and require greater transatlantic co-ordination to ensure peace and promote prosperity. Turkey has been emboldened to undermine NATO through actions such as its acquisition of the S-400 missile system from Russia and its military

intervention and lack of co-ordination with NATO allies in north-eastern Syria and Libya. The balance of power in the region has been upset.

Setting boundaries on Turkey's expansionist agenda as part of improving relations with the EU, will calm tensions with EU members, principally Greece and Cyprus. The United States has important economic and military leverage on Turkey.

Greece has assumed a pro-active role in stabilising its neighbourhood and its relations with the United States have become increasingly independent of United States relations with Turkey. During the cold war Turkey was given strategic priority given its value in containing the Soviet Union. However, Turkey's challenge to the territorial status quo established by international treaties requires that a new approach will have to be tried.

President Biden is familiar with Greece and the broader region. He has done much to strengthen America's bilateral relations with Greece and its strategic partnership with Cyprus.

In recent years, United States - Greece relations have enjoyed consensus across the political spectrum in Greece, despite the fact of perceived United States support for the Greek junta and its stance on the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

With the support of the United States, Greece has promoted regional partnerships of american allies in order to foster co-operation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Israel-Cyprus-Greece partnership has been endorsed in Congress, which passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security

and Energy Partnership Act (EastMed Act). The United States has also taken part in the Eastern Mediterranean Gaz Forum.

Military cooperation between Greece and the United States has greatly expanded these last years.

The United States is using the facilities of Suda Bay, the biggest natural harbour in the Mediterranean, for its Mediterranean fleet. The Suda Bay can control the whole of Eastern Mediterranean and greatly diminishes the value of the Incirlik Base in Turkey. Bases in Larissa and Stefanovikeio are being used by U.S. forces and there are intentions to expand the MDCA (Mutual Defence co-operation agreement) and establish a longer-term commitment.

Greeks, like all immigrants from under developed countries, like Southern Italy and Ireland, have left their land in order to find a more prosperous life in the States. They worked very hard and became very successful, assisting their relatives back home. The second and third generations of Greek-Americans are said to provide most of the University professors after the Jews. Greek-Americans assist Greece politically but they consider themselves Americans first. And this is how it should be. It is a long awaited move that citizens of the world of Greek origin will acquire the right to vote in Greek elections in the future. It is a recognition of their interest in their homeland's affairs and future.

Greek-Americans have tried in recent years to do businesses in Greece. Some promotion has been made by the Greek authorities. Most of those who tried were disappointed because of the insuperable bureaucracy and they left without looking back.

An effort is being made with the Government of Mitsotakis promising to ease matters substantially. Let us hope that this time the government will be successful.