AN OVERVIEW OF GREEK SECURITY CONCERNS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND THE BALCANS

by

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Extending from Gibraltar to the Dardanelles and the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean covers I.5 million square kilometers. It connects three members of the Southern Region of NATO which is the largest area in Allied Command Europe,4000 km from east to west and some I400 km from the Alps to the coast of Libya.[I.] About one tenth of the world's population resides in the states bordering the sea which is the junction of three continents,three major religious communities,two major military and ideological blocs,a number of non-aligned states and an important route of westbound middle east oil pumped to eastern Mediterranean pipeline terminals.[2]

Western Europe and the United States have in the past demonstrated their will to maintain the status quo in the Mediterranean and especially its more troubled eastern part. The priorities of the West in that region include protection of oil interests,prevention of a crisis which may endanger relations with Saudi Arabia and the containment of Soviet influence and incursion. The Sixth fleet and American bases in various littoral states constitute instruments of policy implementation and a deterence against the Soviet presence.

In Greece the major installations used by the United States include the Hellinikon Air Base in Athens,the Nea Makri Communications Station near Marathon,the Iraklion Air Station and the Souda Bay complex in Crete. Other US communications facilities and five NATO NADGE sites are spread throughout the country. Nuclear weapons storage locations constitute classified information.

The most important of the above mentioned facilities is the Souda Bay complex which houses fuel and ammunition used by US and NATO naval forces. The Bay provides port services and an anchorage which can almost accomodate the entire Sixth Fleet and an airfield

used for staging military reconnaisance operations by US units. The NATO missile firing range at nearby Namfi where training and testing exercises are conducted,is associated with the Souda complex. The Iraklion Air Station supports air reconnaisance flights and refueling operations of US forces. Also associated with Iraklion is an electronic surveillance station manned by the US Air Force Security Services(USAFSS).This listening post is charged with monitoring Soviet activities in the eastern Mediterranean. The Hellenikon Air Base serves as headquarters and support installation for other USAFE facilities in Greece. Electronic and photographic reconnaissance missions performed by US C-I30 are deployed from this base which is also the staging point for air transport operations of USAFE and provides support for the US Military Airlift Command(MAC). Five early -warning sites of NATO's NADGE system are dispersed at strategic points throughout northern continental Greece in order to monitor Soviet and Warsaw Pact military activities.[3] Nea Makri houses a major communication center which is part of the global US Defence Communication System(DCS). The center is tied into the Licola terminal at Naples and the Moron terminal in Spain. Kato Souli terminal near Nea Makri is linked with the Sixth Fleet and bases in Naples and Spain.Mt.Pateras located about 20 miles west of Athens is supposed to connect Greece with the Yarmanlar terminal near Izmir,Turkey and provides a link between Crete,the island of Lefkas in the Ionian Sea and a terminal located in southern Italy.[4]

The question of the future status of the American bases in

Greece,established under the terms of a bilateral agreement signed by the US and Greece in 1953,is one of the most sensitive issues faced by the Papandreou government. Having initially promised to dismantle the installations,the Greek Premier is now considering the practical aspects of such a decision. The bases, and particularly the ones in Crete,have been a subject of heated debate since the Cyprus crisis of 1974 because many Greeks believe that they played a role in Turkey's seizure of northern Cyprus. Furthermore an investigation published last fall,suggested that Iraklion and Hellenikon also carry out strategic missions by helping to determine the complex flight patterns followed by the fleet of strategic nuclear bombers the US Air Force keeps airborne at all times. The report also indicated that in the event of war,Iraklion can be used,in cooperation with other bases,to fix a target and direct nuclear missiles against it. These activities,the report claimed,could make the bases likely targets for nuclear retaliation. Papandreou however must face the cost of replacing through Greece's own means an infrastructure worth hundreds of millions of dollars. [5]

In strictly regional terms the Soviet Union appears to be more interested in diminishing the threats posed to its own security rather than competing with the US for supremacy. Through "carrot and cannon" tactics the soviets have secured passage by way of the Dardanelles into the Mediterranean. The Soviet Fifth Escadra based at Sebastopol on the Black Sea,is deployed in the Aegean , spending much of its time at deep anchorages near chokepoints of the Mediterranean and it also has use of port facilities at Tartous and Latakia(Syria) and limited repair facilities at Tirat(Yugoslavia). The rapid growth of the

Fifth Escadra during the past ten years has reflected a general Soviet projection of power at the sea.[6]

The Soviets have established anchorages and maintainance facilities ten to eleven miles from the low tides areas off the costs of Antikythira,St. Eustratios and Crete. An extension of Greek territorial waters would require Greco-Soviet consultations leading to one of two possible solutions: Either the Soviet facilities will remaine in operation within Greek territorial waters and thus will be regarded as foreign military installations,or these facilities will have to go. It is therefore logical to assume that the Soviets would take a dim view of such an extension,unless they were given guarantees of uninterrupted tenure. In case of such a development it would be expected of US and NATO to react to an official "coexistence" of their bases along with Soviet anchorages in Greek territory.[7]

During the past fifteen years the Soviet Union has avoided provocations against Greece and Turkey. The USSR has predictably followed an opportunistic policy in the dispute between the two NATO allies. Although championing Cypriot integrity throughout the sixties,the Soviets did not only remaine passive during the I974 invasion but also invited Turkish Foreign Minister Erkin in Moscow at the end of October I974. A year later,at the opening ceremony of the Soviet financed steel mill at Iskenderum,the two countries agreed to"draw up a political document on friendly relations and cooperation".[8] In I978 while the fate of the arms embargo on Turkey was being discussed in Congress,Turkish Premier Ecevit visited Moscow and an agreement between the two states was signed entitled "The Principles of good neighbourly and friendly relations"[9]. Today Turkey ranks as the largest Soviet aid recipient among developing countries.

Spurred by the Soviet-Turkish rapprochement and problems with

NATO,Greece has sought a way out of her more than half a century impasse with the Soviet Union. Contacts were initially established in such fields as industry,shipping,commerce,tourism and sports. Greek Foreign Minister Rallis' trip to Moscow in I978 was followed by the establshment of consulates in Thessaloniki and Odessa respe-ctively,designed to facilitate cooperation between the two countries in shipping. The Greco-Soviet thaw was highlighted by two events which caused considerable speculation in the west during the autumn of I979. Before the October I979 trip of Karamanlis to Moscow,an agreement was concluded between a private Greek firm and the Soviets offering the latter shipyard facilities for repairing ships in the Neorion docks at the Aegean island of Syros. In I98I,presumably under US pressure,the Greek government obliged the firm to alter the terms of the agreement. While the yards remained open for the repair of merchant ships,they were closed to auxiliary units of the Soviet Mediterranean fleet.[IO] After the advent of PASOK however, the firm was allowed to proceed with the original agreement. The new Greek government pointed out that the Soviet repair orders rejected by the Greek firm,were placed with French shipyards.

Whether their evaluation of Soviet intent is correct or not,the fact remains that both NATO allies of the Southern flank-Greece and Turkey-consider the Northern threat as one which is not of immediate concern. Turkey is currently preoccupied with her internal problems and the resurgence of separatist movements reinforced by the Iranian crisis. The Soviet Union has abstained from attempting to win political capital in Turkey either by encouraging left-wing activities or by condemning the military regime which took over in Sep-

tember 1980. [11]

Greece is mainly preoccupied with what is perceived as a threat from Turkey. Greeks of most political shades are convinced that although the Turkish regime is due to its present problems incapable of offensive action,it has neverthless staked its claims for future demands on Greek sovereign rights.

Greece's post-war defensive posture was primarily directed against an internal and external communist threat.Her northern borders with Albania,Yugoslavia and Bulgaria,attracted the exclusive attention of military planning and through her association with the US and NATO her security considerations were incorporated into the larger scheme of western collective security. The Greco-Turkish dispute over Cyprus however,compounded in 1974 by the Turkish invasion of the island, drastically altered Greece's defensive orientation. Besides the Cyprus issue three other critical questions constitute serious sources of tension between the two NATO allies: a)the continental shelf of Greek islands,b) Greece's ten mile air space,c)the reallocation of operational responsibilities in the Aegean sea and airspace within the NATO framework. At the center of Greek concern over Turkish claims in the Aegean is the security of islands formally ceded to Greece in 1923 and 1947. Turkey,while facing the Greek islands with the second largest fleet of landing craft in NATO and a Fourth(Aegean)army,accuses Greece of violating articles of the Launne and Paris treaties by militarising her islands off the coast of Asia Minor.

Be that as it may,both Athens and Ankara believe that NATO does not consider the Eastern Mediterranean theater as vital as that of central Europe. Most scenarios of conflict drafted by NATO and US sources place primary emphasis on the central European front and consider the flanks of secondary importance.[12]

In the event of war between the two blocs Soviet Backfire bombers and SS20 missiles will prove serious threats to the American fleet in the Mediterranean. Greek and Turkish aircraft would be expected to intercept Soviet planes and therefore airfields in both countries will get their share of Soviet attention. With or without Turkish approval, the Americans will mine the Dardanelle Straits to prevent further deployment of Soviet vessels into the Aegean and could deliver cripling nuclear blows from the sea against Southern Soviet bases. With nuclear warheads stockpiled in Italy, Greece and Turkey, these countries may expect to suffer Soviet counter strikes or even preemptive measures.

If Greece was incapacitated or neutralised, Turkey would be isolated from the nearest friendly land border by 700 straight-line miles of inaccessible terrain. Warsaw pact thrusts from Bulgaria could then assail the Straights without fear of a flank attack. NADGE sites signaling impending aerospace strikes on Italy, Turkey or the Sixth fleet would be silenced and sea communications between Western and Eastern Mediterranean would become impossible.[13] If Turkey was captured or chose to remain neutral, Greece's eastern flank would be exposed to Soviet naval and air attacks and Warsaw Pact forces would attempt to reach the Aegean through the narrow strip of Western Thrace unhindered from the east. The Soviet forces already in the Mediterranean would still be faced with a Greek archipelago of naval, air and missile bases and the costly task of incapacitating them.

Be that as it may the Eastern Mediterranean serves Soviet designs better in peace time. Turkey's loose interpretation of the Montreux treaty allows a steady flow of Soviet vessels into the Aegean, from where Soviet ships must follow a careful course through the Greek archipelago in order to reach Africa or the Middle East.

After the restoration of the parliamentary regime in I974 and the tensions over Cyprus and the Aegean,Greece pursued a comprehensive Balkan policy to secure its northern frontiers by improving relations with all its Communist neighbours. This rapprochement can also be viewed as a necessary and overdue adjustment to bring Greece into the era of detente and Eurocommunism. As it has been aptly put: "If we were to compare the growth of East-West trade and the volume of scientific and technological exchanges between the industrial West and the developing East with Greece's timid initiatives during the I960s, we would find that the country's foreign policy was in disharmony even with that of its NATO partners."[I4]

Besides providing with the most accessible land route to western Europe,Yugoslavia's influence among the non-aligned was considered useful in the Cyprus dispute. The two countries agreed to relieve their mutual borders from a concentration of troops and divert them on other areas vital for their national defence. Old problems such as the free zone at Thassaloniki have been settled and visits of good will were exchanged between notables of the two countries. The passing away of Tito has somewhat numbed the initiative of his successors but has not altered the trend of friendly relations among the two nations. Belgrade's backing of the Skopje claims over the alleged Macedonian minorities in Bulgaria bassically,but in Greece as well, continues to cause irritation in Athens. The difference however between the central government and Skopje is that the latter considers the recognition of a "Macedonian minority" a precondition for further improvement in Yugoslav-Greek relations,whereas the former believes that friendly relations will also promote the solution of the Macedonian problem. It is logical therefore to assume that any future conflict between Belgrade and the periphery will also reflect on such issues as the " Macedonian".[I5]

The Greek opening towards Bulgaria was to a large extent the product of Constantine Karamanlis'(then Prime Minister) own style of conducting foreign policy. After visiting an enthousiastic Nicolae Ceasescu in Romania in May I975 and Jugoslavia in June,he was received by Todor Zhivkov on 2-3 July. Following a Greek initiative an inter-Balkan conference of deputy ministers of planning took place in Athens in February I976. Although Bulgaria opposed Balkan multilateralism in principle,she attended the summit to avoid discouraging Greece and Turkey from their dialogue with the East. In his April I979,Corfu meeting with Karamanlis,Bulgarian President Zhivkov, seemed to have overcome previous inhibitions and agreed to multilateralism in specified fields.[I6]

Encouraging discontent among ethnic groups is the most dangerous option of a Soviet offensive policy in the Balkans, short of war. The Macedonian dispute,mainly between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria,may be exploited to serve such an end. Greece's willingness to act as an honest broker among Balkan states of different ideological orientation, has relieved her own northern bourders from a traditional source of tension and may yet act as a regional bridge of cooperation between East and West.

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