



Greece as a NATO Member in the Historical *Longue Durée*

Ioannis E. Kotoulas, PhD

ORCID: 0000-0002-8707-3530

e-mail: ioanniskotoulas@yahoo.gr

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), Greece

ABSTRACT:

Greece entered NATO in order to guarantee its existence against the revisionism of the Balkan communist states during the Cold War. The rise of Greek-Turkish rivalry during the 1950s and 1960s and its climax, the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus, caused Greece's withdrawal from NATO structure from 1974 to 1980. After the end of the Cold War Greece attempted to form a multilateral approach in its foreign policy and secure its interests in both the Balkan area and the Eastern Mediterranean. The new unstable environment of the early 21st century and Greece's economic crisis complicated Greece's position in NATO. Still the macro-historic parameters of Greece's identity as a sea power confirm its ties to the Atlantic world and predict a possible realignment of Greece in an increasingly unstable European framework that could well see the demise of the European Union.

KEYWORDS:

NATO, GTI Corridor, Rimland, containment, frontline state, massive retaliation, Greek-Turkish rivalry, economic crisis, migration crisis



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Introduction

Greece became a NATO member back in 1952 along with Turkey thus creating the Southeastern Flank of the Alliance. Greek membership in NATO was intricately linked to its precarious geostrategic position on the frontline of the Western world. Greece was the only Western country and only NATO member to share land borders with three socialist states, all of which had also in the recent past expressed aggressive stance against Greek sovereignty. Participation of Greece in NATO ensured the strategic interests of Greece, a state weakened by the Greek Civil War (1944–1949), initiated by Soviet-aligned forces and the Communist Eastern Bloc. Greece's participation underwent different periods and was also connected to the country's strategic aspiration in the Eastern Mediterranean. Currently, Greece is increasingly improving its membership prospects in the Alliance in the volatile Eastern Mediterranean.

Literature Overview and Methodology

The question of Greece's membership in NATO structures in the relevant bibliography has not been so far examined according to a macro-historical and geopolitical view that takes evidently into account both the historical framework of the early Cold War period and fundamental principles of Classical Geopolitics. Instead, Greek membership in NATO has been examined only in the context of the initial entry in 1952, or in the context of bilateral Greek-Turkish relations and periodical tensions, but not on a macro-historical and geopolitical context.¹

We present an analysis of Greece's membership in NATO as a result of its geographical position and historical trajectory. In this context, we use loci of Classical Geopolitics, such as the spatial unities of Heartland and Rimland in Eurasia. We aim to present a thorough introduction to the historical trajectory of Greece as a NATO member.

Our sources include primary documents from Greek archives, official US reports, memoirs and secondary Greek and international bibliography. These documents illustrate the historical trajectory of Greece's entry in NATO and the geostrategic considerations implicated in each historical period.

Entry of Greece in NATO

NATO was founded in 1949 under Anglo-Saxon hegemony so as to maintain the balance of power and to avert the expansion of Soviet influence and a possible Soviet hegemony over the states of Western Europe. NATO at its foundation was a security framework of *sea powers* as opposed to the continental bloc of *land powers* formed by the Soviet Union and its mainly Slavic allies.²

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- 1 Coufoudakis, V. and Valinakis, Y.G., "The Evolution of Greece's Defense Strategy in Relation to NATO Contingencies," *The International Spectator* 22:1 (1987), pp. 30-35; Smith, M., *NATO Enlargement during the Cold War: Strategy and System in the Western Alliance*, New York: Palgrave, 2000, 62-95; Chourchoulis, D. and Kourkouvelas, L., "Greek Perceptions of NATO during the Cold War," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 12:4 (2012), pp. 497-514; Binder, D., "Greece, Turkey and NATO," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 23:2 (Spring 2012), pp. 95-106.
 - 2 Gaddis, J.L., *Strategies of Containment*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 10. See also the seminal X [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25:4 (7/1947), pp. 575-576.

Initially the founding states of NATO were actually reluctant to accept Greece and Turkey as new members of the Alliance fearing that the rivalry of the two countries would undermine NATO cohesion or even considering the two states as not belonging to the cultural and geopolitical entity underlying NATO.³ In May 1951 during the Korean War (1950-1953) the US Department of State formally broached the subject of Greek and Turkish membership in NATO to other NATO members as a possible solution for the successful protection and expansion of the southern flank of the Western defense system against the Soviet Union and its allies. In September 1951 the North Atlantic Council formally extended an invitation to both Greece and Turkey to become members of the North Atlantic Pact, with both countries finally being admitted in February 1952.⁴

The entry of Greece into NATO signified membership in a powerful and extensive military alliance, substituting the former defensive frameworks, i.e. British official protection lasting from 1863 to 1923, the Entente alliance during 1917-1919 and the aid offered by the British Commonwealth during the 1940-1941 against the enemy states of Italy, Albania and Germany. In the early 1950s Greece became a member of the most powerful military alliance in Western history.

Greece as Part of the Rimland

Greece and Turkey belong to the geopolitical unity of *Rimland* and together with Iran they formed the so-called Northern Tier or GTI (Greece, Turkey, Iran) Corridor that effectively blocked the access of the Soviet Union to the warm seas, i.e. the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. *Rimland* is a term of Classical Geopolitics, especially used in the texts of the Anglo-Saxon Geopolitical School. Rimland as a term was coined by Nicholas J. Spykman (1893–1943), Sterling Professor of International Relations (1934–1943) at Yale University.⁵ Rimland was an elaboration on the initial theory of the Pivot Area or Heartland developed by the founder of Anglo-Saxon Geopolitical School, Sir Halford John Mackinder (1861–1947).⁶ Rimland includes the coastal areas of Eurasia that surround the Heartland, i.e. Europe, the Middle East, the Arab Peninsula, the Indian Peninsula and Southeast Asia.

It is interesting to note that during WWII the influential analyst Walter Lippmann (1889–1974) had already included Greece in the unity of sea powers and Atlantic states in a book examining a proposed post-war US foreign policy. Lippmann used the term *Ocean* for this perceived geostrategic bloc including sea powers and the Atlantic states. *Ocean* as a concept includes the sea powers that project power to the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean, i.e. the US, Great Britain and France. According to Lippmann Greece was the only Balkan state

3 Haass, R. and McDonald, R., "Alliance Problems in the Eastern Mediterranean-Greece, Turkey and Cyprus: Part I," in: O'Neill, R. (ed.), *Prospects for Security in the Mediterranean*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988, pp. 61-89.

4 For documentation on Greek and Turkish membership, see *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. III, Pt. 1, 460 ff.

5 Spykman, N.J., *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*, with a New Introduction by Francis P. Sempa, Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2007 [1942]; *Geography of the Peace*, New York: Wartime Books-Harcourt, 1944.

6 Mackinder, H.J., "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal* 23 (1904), pp. 421-437.

that could be included in the geopolitical unity of the Ocean due to its geographical location and characteristics. The other Balkan states due to their characteristics and especially because of their continental geographic location were attributed to the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, a land power.⁷

Greece as a Sea Power

According to Classical Geopolitics state actors are distinguished in sea powers and land powers. Historical cases of sea powers are Great Britain and the US, while Germany, the Russian and the Ottoman Empires are land powers. Greece, founded as an independent state in 1830, is a sea power due to its geophysical formation and its geostrategic orientation.

Classical Geopolitics, especially the Anglo-Saxon School of Geopolitics with the American admiral and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) used the fundamental principles of maritime and sea power.⁸ *Maritime power* concerns purely military power, i.e. the military navy and relative installations. *Sea power* has a broader meaning, including not only military maritime power, but also the merchant fleet and the parameters of trade and sea communication.⁹

Greece had remarkable sea power as a combination of its geographical location, the geophysical formation of its territory, the existence of a significant merchant fleet and finally of a respectable war fleet since the early decades of the 20th century. From a geopolitical point of view Greece, being a region with many ports, sea inlets and an extended coastline, is intrinsically linked to those hegemonic powers that are sea powers and able to project their power in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁰

From a macro-historical point of view Greece had joined the sea powers already in the 19th century, when in 1863 it came under British influence that was manifested both in military support and political influence. British influence over Greek policy would last well until after WWII, during the latter phase of the Greek Civil War. The image of Great Britain in Greece would be greatly weakened during the Cyprus crisis in the 1950s due to the British refusal to allow self-determination for the Greek population of Cyprus.

Soviet Undermining of the Rimland

Greece along with Turkey and Iran formed in US strategic considerations the so-called GTI (Greece-Turkey-Iran) Corridor, a part of the Northern Tier, the geophysical formation that according to the terminology of Classical Geopolitics belongs to the Rimland. During the initial phase of the Cold War the Soviet Union attempted to undermine the strategic cohesion of the GTI Corridor projecting its power in all three countries during the years 1946–1949: in Greece

7 Lippmann, W., *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*, Boston: Little & Brown, 1943.

8 Mahan, A.Th., *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1890.

9 Iliopoulos, I., "Strategy and Geopolitics of Sea Power throughout History," *Baltic Security and Defence Review* 11:2 (2009), pp. 5-20.

10 Kotoulas, I.E., "Greek Strategy in the Aegean Sea during the Ottoman Period and World War I," in: Çomak, H., Şeker, B.Ş. and Ioannidis, D. (eds), *Ege Jeopolitiği*, Vol. I, Ankara: Nobel, 2020, pp. 765-771.

the Eastern Bloc supported logistically and diplomatically the communist insurgents during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949); in Turkey the Soviets requested joint control of the Black Sea Straits and threatened to invade in 1946 and in Iran the Soviets backed the ethnic revolts of the Kurdish and Azeri populations against the central Iranian government in an attempt to draw Iran to their sphere of influence and obtain access to the strategically situated Persian Gulf.¹¹

Western Reevaluation of Greece's Strategic Importance

The Western perception of Soviet revisionism concerning the post-war world was greatly strengthened during the Korean War (1950–1953). The conflict in Korea was widely regarded to be a clear manifestation of Soviet revisionism along the whole stretch of the Rimland, from Eastern Asia to non-communist Europe. In this context Greece's strategic importance increased, thus preparing Greece's entry into the NATO structure.

NSC 103/1, a memorandum by the US National Security Council issued in February 1951 ('The Position of the United States with Respect to Greece') highlighted the strategic importance of Greece for US and Western interests: "1. It continues to be in the security interest of the United States that Greece not fall under communist domination. a. Greece occupies an important strategic position which, in the hands of an enemy, would be a threat to the Eastern Mediterranean, the Suez, Turkey and the Turkish Straits. Communist domination of Greece would serve as a springboard for communist penetration, political and military, into the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East area. b. Communist domination of Greece would damage U.S. prestige and weaken the will to resist in other countries threatened with communist domination. c. Communist domination of Greece could only be viewed as one in a series of military and political consequences which would gravely threaten the security of the United States."¹²

Declaration of the US Truman Doctrine

Joseph Marion Jones (1908–1990), a high-ranking official of the US Department of State and a member of an advisory committee of American President (1945–1953) Harry S. Truman (1884–1972) commented on the strategic value of Greece for American strategic planning during the post-war period. Jones emphasized the historic continuity between the expansionist policy of the Tsarist Russian Empire and the expansionism of the Soviet Union adopting a macro-historical pattern of *longue durée* concerning Russian/Soviet foreign policy objectives. He observed that the Soviet Union attempted to undermine the averted bloc of GTI and thereby aspired to project its power and increase its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean.¹³

11 Marantzides, N. and Tsivos, K., *O ellinikos emfylios kai to diethnes komounistiko systema* [=The Greek Civil War and the International Communist System], Athens: Alexandria, 2012; Knight, J., "American Statecraft and the 1946 Black Sea Straits Controversy," *Political Science Quarterly* 90:3 (1975), pp. 451-475.

12 *Foreign Relations of the United States 1951, The Near East and Africa, Vol. V, Document 212, NSC 103/1*, Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1982 [<https://goo.gl/vhsgdH>].

13 Jones, J.M., *The Fifteen Weeks: February 21-June 5, 1947*, New York: Viking Press, 1955, p. 11.

The Truman Doctrine, declared on 12th March 1947 during the most intense phase of the Greek Civil War, had already signified the substitution of British presence by the American one. The Truman Doctrine had also confirmed American commitment to provide financial and technical aid to Greece and Turkey, both countries of the Rimland, so as to effectively face the armed opposition of Communist militias.¹⁴ According to Truman the US would support Greece and Turkey with military and economic assistance, as these represented “free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures”.¹⁵ The Marshall Plan that followed that declaration led to the granting of 1 billion US dollars to Greece from 1948 till 1952 (in comparison Turkey received about 500 million US dollars).¹⁶

Greece as a NATO Frontline State

Greek commitment to its newly created alliance with the US and its willingness to intensify its ties with the hegemonic American factor manifested itself in contributing armed forces to the Korean War, in the approval of installation of US bases in Greece (1953) and in accepting the hosting of American nuclear missiles (1960).¹⁷ In the framework of the Cold War Greece actually did not favor détente, because Greek officials were afraid that US-Soviet rapprochement would reduce Greece’s strategic value as a frontline state. Thus, Greece would be pressed to compromise in the issues of Northern Epirus (claimed by Greece since 1946) –a dispute with a communist state- and Cyprus –a dispute with another NATO member, i.e. Turkey. On this matter Greece shared common views with Western Germany often invoking the latter as a similar case, as both countries were frontline states of the Western republican bloc and subject to military territorial revisionism by the Eastern Bloc communist countries.

The basic NATO doctrine during the early phase of the Cold War (1949–1962) was based on the concept of *massive retaliation*. Massive retaliation comprised the military use by a state or an alliance of states of a force disproportionate to the size of the initial attack from an external aggressor. In this way massive retaliation which had to be publicly acknowledged so as to have effect, would deter a possible external aggressor from initially attacking at all. The doctrine proved to be successful for a period, as the countries of the Eastern Bloc did not possess the ability to inflict a second strike during the 1950s. Considering Greece as a NATO member the doctrine meant that any attack on Greek borders would be considered as a *casus belli* for the NATO alliance.¹⁸

14 Wittner, L.S., “The Truman Doctrine and the Defense of Freedom,” *Diplomatic History* 4:2 (Spring 1980), pp. 161-187.

15 Truman, H.S., US President, “Address to Joint Session of Congress,” March 12, 1947, Truman Library, Independence, MO, avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp/.

16 Estimates vary on the size of the financial aid offered to Greece according to the relevant methodology applied. See Stefanidis, I., *Asymmetroi etairoi: Oi Inomenes Politeies kai i Ellada ston Psychro Polemo, 1953-1961* [=Asymmetrical Partners: The US and Greece during the Cold War, 1953-1961], Athens: Patakis, 2010, pp. 254-255.

17 GES/DIS (ed.), *To Ekstrateftikon Soma Ellados eis Korean 1950-1955* [=The Greek Expeditionary Force in Korea, 1950-1955], Athens 1977.

18 Wells, S.F., Jr., “The Origins of Massive Retaliation,” *Political Science Quarterly* 96:1 (Spring 1981), pp. 31-52.

Specifics of Greek Strategy inside NATO Structures

After the accession to NATO the Greek Army was placed under the jurisdiction of the Naples Headquarters, which caused some reaction by Greece given the fact that the memories of the 1940 war between Greece and invading Italy were still alive. The Greek Navy in turn came under the jurisdiction of the British Commander-in-Chief of the allied naval forces in the Mediterranean (1952–1955) Admiral Lord Mountbatten (1900–1979).¹⁹ Great Britain still attempted to maintain its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Greek strategy was influenced by the variables of geography, political unrest in Greece caused to some extent by the banned (since 1947) Communist Party and the inclusion in the NATO structure. Entry into NATO structure did not alter the fact that the Greek armed forces could not effectively fend off a possible attack by the main geopolitical rival of Greece until 1955, i.e. Bulgaria, in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.²⁰ According to the Greek Prime Minister (1952–1955) Alexandros Papagos (1883–1955), Bulgaria in 1953 enjoyed a considerable numerical advantage over Greece concerning the relevant size of their armed personnel. Bulgaria was estimated to have 235,000 men under arms in comparison to 143,000 men which comprised the overall strength of the Greek Army.²¹ Moreover the Greek Army was not appropriately equipped to confront a possible Bulgarian attack in terms of tanks and artillery and faced serious logistical problems due to spatial fragmentation in its northern borders.

Greece was still dependent on foreign military aid in order to present a reliable fighting force that could also act as both a containing and an averting factor considering its northern Communist neighbors.²² Greece was, as mentioned above, a frontline state and considered an immediate target of possible aggression by the Eastern Bloc. In the aftermath of the Korean War Greece feared that it would become a target of an attack by a Communist country, mainly Bulgaria, or in the worst-case scenario by a combination of Communist countries, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The geographical formation of the borders with Bulgaria and Yugoslavia offered no advantage to Greece as the latter lacked strategic depth so as to develop its defending forces or even plan a counter-attack (as was the case in the Greek-Albanian border where Greek forces had successfully counterattacked in 1940).

Rising Tensions due to Greek-Turkish Rivalry

Considering Greek-Turkish relations in the context of the early phase of the Cold War it should be noted that until 1954, when Greece actively sought to promote Enosis (Union) of Cyprus with Greece, Turkey was often viewed as a potential ally against an attack by the Eastern Bloc countries. Coordination of Greek and Turkish armed forces had appeared as

19 Hellenic Army General Staff/Army History Directorate (ed.), *A History of the Hellenic Army, 1821-1997*, Athens 1999.

20 Chourchoulis, D., "A Nominal Defence?: NATO Threat Perception and Responses in the Balkan Area, 1951-1967," *Cold War History* 12:4 (2012), pp. 637-657.

21 Considering the other neighboring states, Albania was estimated to have 45,000 men under arms, Yugoslavia 450,000 and Turkey, a theoretical ally of Greece, 350,000 men [Papagos, speech in Parliament, March 19, 1953, *Greek Parliamentary Records*, period C, synod A, pp. 593-594].

22 NAC memoranda, "Second Report on the Annual Review Part I," *NATO Archives*, CM (53) p. 35, April 15, 1954; Annual Review 1953: Country Chapter on Greece, CM (53) p. 150, Part III, November 24, 1953.

a prospect in the 1930s, especially after the two countries had signed the 1933 Treaty that guaranteed the common border on Thrace and in 1934 the Balkan Pact.²³ The prospect of Greek-Turkish cooperation in the form of a bilateral regional alliance that would also enjoy the potential support of the Western powers was raised in the early years of the Cold War, as the 1933 Treaty between Greece and Turkey was still valid. Relevant talks and the inclusion of Yugoslavia led to the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact of 1953 between Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia.²⁴

This rapprochement changed dramatically in 1955 with the drastic deterioration of Greek-Turkish relations due to the unionist movement in Cyprus and the pogrom inflicted by the Turkish government and mob against the Greeks of Constantinople in September. Greek strategic priorities shifted from the Balkans to the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece sought to guarantee the Greek population of Cyprus and fulfill the prospect of national unification which was seen as incomplete and pending; after the war Greece had received only the Dodecanese Islands from Italy as a compensation, while Northern Epirus remained under Albanian control. Greek-Turkish tension intensified even after the declaration of Cyprus independence in 1959, especially during the intercommunal clashes of 1963 and 1964 in Cyprus. Greece was evidently disappointed in NATO's neutrality in the dispute with Turkey and its apathy considering the Turkish pogrom of 1955 and subsequent administrative persecutions against the Greeks of Constantinople.²⁵ Still, Greek-Turkish cooperation was inevitable in the NATO security framework. Such cooperation was manifested in various military operations conducted in the NATO context, such as Exercise Longstep (November 1952) that involved a large-scale amphibious assault along Turkey's western coast and Operation Deep Water (September 1957), a simulation of NATO forces protecting the bottleneck of Dardanelles from a Soviet invasion thus averting the Soviet Black Sea Fleet from entering the Mediterranean Sea.²⁶

Greece's Foreign Policy in the 1970s

Greece's strategic value for NATO was increased after 1967 due to the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War (5–10 June 1967) and the increased presence of the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean during the early 1970s (in 1971 the Soviet Fleet counted 19,000 days of presence which rose to 20,300 in 1973). In August 1972 the American President (1969–1974) Richard Nixon (1913–1994) stated that there could not be an effective policy of aid to Israel without strategic help towards the adjacent countries of Greece and Turkey. In January 1973 Greece and the US signed a bilateral agreement which provided permanent port facilities in Elefsis for the Sixth US Fleet. In October 1973, during the Yom Kippur War between a coalition of Arab

23 Papagos, A., *O Polemos tis Hellados, 1940-1941* [The War of Greece, 1940-1941], Athens: Filoi tou Vivliou, 1945, pp. 26-42.

24 Stone, D.R., "The Balkan Pact and American Policy," *East European Quarterly* XXVIII:3 (9/1994), pp. 393-407.

25 Holland, R., "NATO and the Struggle for Cyprus," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 13:1 (5/1995), pp. 33-61; Chourchoulis, D. and Kourkouvelas, L., "Greek Perceptions of NATO during the Cold War," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 12:4 (2012), pp. 497-514.

26 "A Big Step Forward: Operation Longstep," *All Hands* 1/1953; "NATO Autumn N.A.T.O. Exercises," *Naval Review* XLVI: 2 (4/1958), p. 232. For a Soviet view see Filitshky, S., "NATO Autumn Manoeuvres," *International Affairs* 11:3 (1957), pp. 96-97.

states and Israel, Greece, as well as other NATO members, refused to allow the use of US or NATO military bases to aid Israel.²⁷

The growing autonomy of Greek foreign policy during 1973 and 1974 caused concern in both the US and NATO officials. Declassified talks between the US Ambassador (1969–1974) Henry Tasca (1912–1979) and Secretary of State (1973–1977) Henry Kissinger (b. 1923) show that in March 1974 the American side feared a possible strategic reorientation of Greece under the military regime towards France or even the Qaddafiist Libya. Greece enjoyed favorable relations with Libya, even military ones, as Greek military personnel had trained the Libyan air force and Libyan navy.²⁸

Withdrawal of Greece from the Military Wing of NATO (1974–1980)

After the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in July 1974 Greece under the conservative government (1974–1980) of Konstantinos Karamanlis (1907–1998) withdrew its forces from NATO's military command structure in August 1974. The inactivity of NATO in the matter of the Turkish invasion greatly undermined Greece's confidence in the Alliance.²⁹ Greece's intentions were to highlight the strategic importance of the country for the cohesion of the NATO alliance in the South-Eastern Mediterranean. Greece's withdrawal would soon prove to be a tactical error, as the political and military leadership had overestimated the strategic damage that would be inflicted on the South-Eastern flank of NATO from Greece's absence and the pressures that would be exerted over Turkey to withdraw its occupying forces from the northern part of Cyprus.³⁰

US officials themselves prepared an analytical study that attempted to assess the strategic significance of continued Greek and Turkish support of NATO and US military policy in the Eastern Mediterranean after the 1974 Turkish invasion in Cyprus. The study evaluated the relative benefits gained by mutual defense cooperation, including deterrence of undue Soviet influence in the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. The study concluded that continued Greek withdrawal from NATO structure would mean that the Sixth Fleet would face logistical problems, that Turkey would be isolated from Italy with a distance of 700 miles, that the Soviet Fleet would move easily into the Eastern Mediterranean and that the US would face problems

27 Still we should note that European US allies refused to allow re-supply aircraft to land in their territories or even overfly them; only the Netherlands and Portugal allowed the use of their territories. The US actually used the Lajes base in the Azores Islands during Operation Nickel Grass (14 October – 14 November 1973). See W.J. Boyne, W.J., "Nickel Grass," *Air Force Magazine*, 12/1998, pp. 54-59.

28 Minutes of Secretary of State Kissinger's Regional Staff Meeting, Washington, March 20, 1974, 3:18–3:54 p.m. [<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v30/d12>]. Such fears were not totally ungrounded. In July 1974 Libya repeatedly urged Greece to leave NATO and join a Mediterranean non-aligned security framework, a prospect supported by some younger officers surrounding the Brigadier General Dimitrios Ioannides (1923–2010). See the telegram dated July 21, 1974 from the US Embassy in London to US Secretary of State [http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1974LONDON09176_b.html].

29 Manousakis, G.M., "Der Aus- und Wiedereintritt Griechenlands in die militärische Integration der NATO," *Beiträge zur Konfliktforschung* 2/1981, pp. 19-32.

30 Rizas, S., "Managing a Conflict between Allies: United States Policy towards Greece and Turkey in Relation to the Aegean Dispute, 1974-76," *Cold War History* 9:3 (2009), pp. 367-387.

in supporting both Israel and pro-Western North African states. Still, according to the report Greece would imperil its own security being in an exposed frontier position without NATO support.³¹

During the period from 1974 till 1980 Greece retained its links with NATO; still it reoriented itself decisively towards the expanding European Community, finally achieving European Community membership in 1981.³² Greek military forces had already been readmitted in NATO command structure in October 1980, a period of great upheaval that followed the 1979 Islamist revolution in Iran. The Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in December 1979 and the elimination of Iran from the GTI Corridor increased the strategic importance of both Greece and Turkey, especially of the latter. Soviet and Islamist pressure on the Rimland was mounting. Greece failed to grasp this chance, as Greek officials succumbed to the dominant internal Anti-American political atmosphere. In 1978 and again in 1979 Greek authorities refused to consent to the installation of additional US military bases or even US personnel that would be relocated from collapsing Iran to Greece. Trapped in an ambivalent ideological and political milieu Greece failed to grasp the rising opportunities; Turkey instead succeeded in the 1980s in becoming an indispensable ally for US and NATO interests due to the crisis in Iran and Afghanistan.

Greek Ambivalent Stance during the 1980s

During the 1980s Greece under the socialist government (1981–1989) of Andreas Papandreou (1919–1996) was often viewed by some NATO members as a potentially destabilizing factor for the coherence of NATO; the Greek government was seen as an unpredictable and often unstable actor that undermined the coherence of the alliance. Greece distanced itself from NATO positions and repeatedly seemed to offer diplomatic support to the Soviet Union, for instance concerning the issue of the stationing of Warsaw Pact SS-20 medium range missiles in Eastern Europe, and also to its Arab state allies and non-state actors, especially the PLO.³³

Greece's Position in NATO after the Cold War

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the outbreak of the Yugoslav Civil War (1991–1995) and the subsequent upheaval in the Balkans provided Greece with a large strategic advantage. Greece's relative power – in comparison to its Balkan neighbors- grew exponentially, as Greece was both a NATO and an EU member featuring a stable environment and a respectable economic development. Still in the post-Cold War environment regional politics took on

31 *Greece and Turkey: Some Military Implications Related to NATO and the Middle East: Prepared for the Special Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975.

32 Rizas, S., "Atlantism and Europeanism in Greek Foreign and Security Policy in the 1970s," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 8:1 (2008), pp. 51-66.

33 Coufoudakis, V. and Valinakis, Y.G., "The Evolution of Greece's Defense Strategy in Relation to NATO Contingencies," *The International Spectator* 22:1 (1987), pp. 30-35; Couloumbis, Th.A., "PASOK's Foreign Policies, 1981-89: Continuity or Change?," in Clogg, R. (ed.) *Greece, 1981-89: The Populist Decade*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993, pp. 113-130.

far greater importance than before, as the international system moved decisively from a bipolar structure to a rising multi-polar form. The break-up of Yugoslavia further removed a powerful state actor from Greece's northern borders which continued to pose security challenges to Greece especially with its claims for the existence of a so-called Macedonian minority in Greece.

Dispute with FYROM

The Macedonian Question reemerged in the 1990s with the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the independence of FYROM (official name, 1991–2019, currently North Macedonia). FYROM used an expansionist agenda against Greece causing considerable tension between the two countries, which culminated in the 1994 trade embargo imposed by Greece. FYROM being a landlocked state largely dependent on the port of Salonica agreed to accept some of the terms proposed by the Greek side, for example changing its national symbols.³⁴

Bilateral relation between Greece and FYROM were normalized in 1995, still Greece continued to avert the entry of FYROM into NATO for a period. In 2008 at the 20th NATO Summit in Bucharest NATO decided not to invite FYROM to become a member after considerable pressure exerted by the Greek government. After the ratification of the Prespes Agreement by the Greek Parliament in January 2019, member-states of NATO signed the Accession Protocol for FYROM.³⁵ On the other hand, Greece had accepted Albania's entry in NATO in April 2009 in the hope of increasing its influence in a neighboring state which holds a considerable Greek minority and has developed economic ties with Greece.

Greek and Turkish Attitudes as NATO Members

Considering the obligations that arose from Greece's participation in NATO it is interesting to note that Greece's often autonomous role resembles the stance adopted by its main geopolitical rival and co-member in NATO, Turkey. Both countries successfully avoided engagement in the bombing attacks undertaken by NATO against Serbian armed forces in Bosnia in 1995 (Operation Deliberate Force), although for different reasons, and distanced themselves to a degree from NATO interventions in Iraq in 1990, in Afghanistan in 2001 and again in Libya in 2011.³⁶

Regarding Afghanistan Greece participated since 2002 in the international coalition against the Taliban regime dispatching 175 troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The Greek troops did not engage in combats with the Islamist Taliban forces but undertook mainly humanitarian duties. During the intervention in Libya in March 2011 Greece limited itself to allow use of its air space to NATO aircrafts, as well as free deployment of ships by the US Navy from its Souda Bay base in Crete. Still, in the general framework of NATO structure

34 Syrigos, A.M., "Landlocked States and Access to the Sea: The Greek Blockade of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," *Revue hellénique du droit international* 49 (1996), pp. 107-126.

35 "NATO Allies sign Accession Protocol for the future Republic of North Macedonia," https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_163078.htm/.

36 Binder, D., "Greece, Turkey and NATO," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 23:2 (Spring 2012), pp. 95-106.

the rivalry between Greece and Turkey often led to intra-alliance functional problems that required intervention by the Secretary General.³⁷

Greece as a NATO Member in the Early 21st Century

The first decade of the 21st century with its dramatic reemergence of Islamist terrorism, massive migration flows had, as a supra-systemic factor, led to significant modification of Greece's perception in international relations. Greece has adopted a more pragmatic foreign policy, attempting to normalize relations in the Balkan region, to maintain a strategic balance with Turkey and to regain influence in the Mediterranean Sea. The most notable development has been the strengthening of Greece's presence in the greater region of South-East Mediterranean, wherefrom Greece had retreated since 1974.

Strengthening of Greek-Israeli economic and diplomatic partnership was initiated in 2009 with the support of the US and carried on by later governments.³⁸ The aggressive stance of the Turkish state actor has led to a counter-balance coalition between the state actors of Greece, Cyprus and Egypt, which in November 2014 ratified a joint tripartite treaty advancing a mutually recognized definition of their relevant EEZs in the Eastern Mediterranean, with Turkey being received as the revisionist force.³⁹ Greece is the only NATO member in the region that can both contribute to security of Israel and prove to be a trustworthy interlocutor to Islamic countries, as Turkey's foreign overambitious foreign policy has led to deterioration of its relations with all neighboring and adjacent countries (Syria, Iraq, Iran and Egypt). Turkey has steadily supported Islamist actors in Syria, Iraq and Egypt, the most notable among themselves being the Islamic State and Muslim Brotherhood, thus undermining NATO objectives in the Middle East.

The Migration Crisis and Greece's Response

During the 2015 migration crisis Greece experienced massive migration flows, as 1.8 million detections of illegal entries associated with approximately one million individuals were manifested along the external borders of the European Union.⁴⁰ Considerable increases in migration flows resulted in massive waves of migrants entering Europe through the Greek territory, especially in the summer months.⁴¹ In February 2016, as the migration crisis had reached its climax, NATO decided to join international efforts, so as to deal with the ongoing crisis. After an official request submitted by Germany, Greece and Turkey, NATO deployed a maritime force (Standing NATO Maritime Group 2, SNMG2) led by a German flag-

37 "Rasmussen Tells Turkey, Greece to Resolve Differences," NATO Source, August 28, 2009, www.natosource.com/2009/08/rasmussen-tells-turkey-greece-to.html/.

38 Mazis, I.Th., *Dissertationes academicae geopoliticae (1983-2016)*, Athens: Papazissi, 2016, pp. 917-932.

39 Hellenic Republic/Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Egypt-Greece-Cyprus Trilateral Summit Cairo Declaration," <http://goo.gl/dmYxQc> [accessed: 30.7.2016].

40 Frontex (ed.), *Annual Risk Analysis 2016*, Warsaw 2016, p. 17 (Table 1).

41 Kotoulas, I.E., "Macro-historical Causes of Modern Mass Migration," *Civitas Gentium* 7:2 (12/2019), pp. 113-123.

ship in the Aegean Sea in a coordinated effort to stem illegal trafficking and illegal migration in the Aegean Sea through the use of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations.⁴² NATO presence in the Aegean Sea, in the territorial waters of Greece and Turkey, was fulfilled in cooperation with Frontex, the European Union's border management agency. NATO ships are larger and better equipped in comparison to Frontex vessels. Turkey attempted to avert deployment of NATO ships in the region of the Dodecanese Islands claiming that they should be totally demilitarized.

On an operational level NATO presence in the Aegean Sea was limited and did not accomplish its full potential regarding the containment of migration flows; the initial plans to examine asylum applications on board of the ships, combined with a direct return of incoming migrants to Turkey and their countries of origin were not fulfilled. Thus, NATO missed the chance to contribute substantially towards a framework of controlling migration flows towards mainland Greece and the rest of the European Union.

Prospects for Enhancement of Greece's Position in NATO

In the contexts of repeated migration flows NATO could employ its fleet in cooperation with Egypt and Israel, in order to create a stable environment in the whole area of the Eastern Mediterranean thereby securing the fundamental interests of its member-states. Crete, an island strategically situated close to the European mainland and in vicinity with North Africa could serve as enhanced base in the port of Suda in western Crete or even an additional airfield for NATO aircraft operating in the Eastern Mediterranean. US Suda Base could be further upgraded in the context of the new multiple challenges arising in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel region. Greece needs to upgrade its commitment to NATO with the possible acceptance of forces currently removed from their posts and missions in Germany and Norway. Greece could be an important hub for maritime operations of NATO and deployment of its marines, in the same way that Poland is actively proving to be a trustworthy forward land base of NATO forces in the Baltic Sea and the greater Eastern Europe strategic environment.

Conclusions

Greece as a NATO member has tried to balance between often competing geopolitical realities that emanate from its geographical location, its historical background and its geopolitical rivalries with other state actors in the region of the Balkan Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean, mainly Turkey. Greece's entry into NATO in 1952 marked its inclusion in a powerful military alliance thus guaranteeing the country's northern borders from any revisionist agendas of the Communist Balkan states, mainly Bulgaria which had occupied Greek territory twice in the first half of the 20th century. It also erased a long period of uncertainties concerning Greece's international relations that had begun in 1923 after the gradual disintegration of the power system in the interwar period. The end of the Cold War in 1991 marked a gradual reorientation of Greece's foreign policy to a multilateral approach that aimed to balance between Greece's

42 NATO, "Assistance for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the Aegean Sea," <http://goo.gl/3GCYAq> [accessed: 30.7.2016].

entanglement in the Balkan region –where considerable tensions with Albania and FYROM emerged- and the diachronic rivalry with Turkey.

The new geopolitical environment in the early 21st century, characterized by the rise of Islamist terrorism and a new unstable Middle East, as well as Greece's acute economic crisis, initially perplexed Greece's position in supra-national entities, as the EU, but not in NATO. Still, some patterns are clearly visible: Greece has maintained to keep its place in the Euro zone and the European Union, while it has reinforced its ties with other states of the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Egypt and Israel. Greece as a NATO member along with Egypt and Israel as external actors could form a network of cooperating states in the Eastern Mediterranean that could ensure stability and management of migration flows towards Europe.

In overall Greece's position is a delicate one but being a country with a considerable presence in the Mediterranean Sea Greece is connected from a geostrategic point of view to the sea powers of the Western world, i.e. Great Britain and the US. It is in this context that we should view a possible future realignment and repositioning of Greece in an increasingly fragile European Union, as a stable outpost of oceanic influence. ■

STRESZCZENIE:

Członkostwo Grecji w NATO miało zagwarantować istnienie tego państwa w sytuacji rewizjonizmu bałkańskich państw komunistycznych w okresie zimnej wojny. Grecko-turecka rywalizacja w latach pięćdziesiątych i sześćdziesiątych, której apogeum była turecka inwazja na Cypr w 1974 roku, doprowadziła jednak do wycofania się Grecji ze struktur NATO (1974–1980). Po zakończeniu zimnej wojny Grecy prowadzili politykę zagraniczną w taki sposób, by zabezpieczyć swoje interesy na wielu płaszczyznach, zarówno na Bałkanach, jak i we wschodnim rejonie Morza Śródziemnego.

Niestabilna sytuacja na początku XXI wieku oraz kryzys ekonomiczny w Grecji skomplikowały pozycję tego państwa w NATO. Ale makrohistoryczne cechy tożsamości Grecji jako potęgi morskiej nadal stanowią potwierdzenie jej związku z rejonem Oceanu Atlantyckiego. Dają też nadzieję na przywrócenie pozycji Grecji w Europie, która strukturalnie coraz bardziej się zmienia i która równie dobrze może doświadczyć upadku Unii Europejskiej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

NATO, GTI Corridor, Rimland, powstrzymywanie, państwo frontowe, odwet zmasowany, rywalizacja grecko-turecka, kryzys ekonomiczny, kryzys migracyjny

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Article history: Received: 24.07.2020; Reviewed: 31.08.2020; Accepted: 28.12.2020

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.6173

Corresponding author: Ioannis E. Kotoulas, PhD, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), Greece; ORCID: 0000-0002-8707-3530, e-mail: ioanniskotoulas@yahoo.gr

Cite this article as: Ioannis E. Kotoulas, PhD, "Greece as a NATO Member in the Historical Longue Durée". *bellona quart.* 2020(4): 83-98

Policy: The content of the journal is circulated on the basis of the Open Access which means free and limitless access to scientific data.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Table of content URL: <https://kwartalnikbellona.com/issue/12943>
