



Greece-US relations: Capitalizing on a generational high

SECURITY & FOREIGN POLICY

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Summary

- The deepening cooperation between Greece and the United States is based on shared values and, importantly, aligned interests. Having shed the remaining legacies of their Cold-War dependency, bilateral relations now suggest a new paradigm: that of a voluntary, and mutually beneficial, strategic partnership that enjoys wide political support in both countries.
- With the Greek debt crisis at an end, Greece has reclaimed its regional role. In the context of Russia’s war in Ukraine, Greece has gained in geopolitical relevance as it supports NATO’s Eastern Flank, contributes to energy security in Southeast Europe, and builds partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Having emerged as both a reliable ally in its region and an indispensable strategic partner for the United States, Greece is claiming a more ambitious role in the new global security architecture.
- Greece and the United States share a similar analysis of the global challenges, and how they affect Greece’s neighborhood, in the era of great power competition. As the US administration seeks to work with its partners to address the revisionism of authoritarian governments, Greece has the opportunity to safeguard its national interest in a rules-based international system that neutralizes Turkey’s revisionism while standing with Ukraine.
- Building on joint institutions and policy tools will be key to maintaining the momentum and deepening cooperation between Greece and the United States in strategic areas such as regional cooperation initiatives, defense, and security. Leveraging their strong people-to-people ties will also help expand business ties, technology transfer, energy cooperation and educational exchanges, among other priorities.
- Safeguarding their strategic partnership from political discord and external threats will also be key. The current political consensus on the value of the bilateral partnership could still be undermined by American isolationism and Greek nationalism.
- As Greek foreign policy has become more ambitious so have Greece-US relations. To be sure, the question of the future direction of Turkey is central to Greek national security considerations. Transactional or not, any US relationship with

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Turkey that ignores Turkish revisionism could weigh on Greece-US relations. However, as the NATO Summit in Vilnius showed, Turkey's reengagement with the West passes through its relations with Greece, giving Athens the opportunity to include its terms and sensitivities to the process.

Greece-US Relations: From dependence to partnership

Congratulating the people of Greece on Greek Independence Day this year, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken noted that “the partnership between the United States and Greece and the ties between our peoples have never been stronger. The United States views Greece as an indispensable partner and NATO ally at a time of unparalleled global challenges.”¹ This sentiment is widespread: “Over the past decade, there has been a growing alignment of interests which American and Greek officials routinely characterize as unprecedented, noting that bilateral relations are the best they have experienced.

Still, in the long history of Greece-US relations, there was a time when Greece was even more strategically important for the United States: after World War II. As President Harry Truman put it in his efforts to persuade a hesitant Congress of the merits of the more interventionist US foreign policy in Europe that would lead to the doctrine named after him: should Greece and Turkey fall to communist and totalitarian forces, it would “undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States.”

Over the past decade, there has been a growing alignment of interests which American and Greek officials routinely characterize as unprecedented, noting that bilateral relations are the best they have experienced.

US engagement in Greece during the Cold War followed on a long pattern of Greece’s dependence on foreign powers. As Professor Theodore Couloumbis framed it: “In the area of Greek-Great Power relations, political scientists classified Greece among those states with penetrated (dependent) political systems.”² Being geopolitically important in the context of the Cold War did not mean that Greece interacted with the United States on equal terms, but rather that Greece was a client state to America’s controlling power. America’s protective shadow drove the Greek economic miracle and exerted its influence on Greek politics throughout the post-war period.

This dependency became even stronger during the Greek dictatorship and was only disrupted when Turkey invaded Cyprus, which led to the implosion of military rule and the reconstitution of Greek democracy. As a result, despite their close ties, post-1974 Greece-US relations were strained due to US support for the Greek military junta and tolerance of Turkey’s invasion in Cyprus, which led to Greece temporarily withdrawing from NATO’s military arm.

The Cyprus debacle also led to a reshaping of Greece’s strategic posture. As a result of Turkey’s invasion, Greece reassessed its strategic dogma to take account of the fact that the imminent security threat no longer came from the Communist North but from its NATO ally Turkey. At the same time, Prime Minister Constantine Karamanlis decided to pursue European Union membership for Greece. This decision kickstarted a process that would gradually replace Greece’s historic dependence on foreign powers with the European modernization project, through the implementation of the Acquis Communautaire and Greece’s participation in the European institutions.

The United States supported Greece’s EU membership and remained the “firefighter” every time tensions flared between Greece and Turkey. Yet after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, Greece was no longer as geopolitically important for the superpower, which shifted its attention to other priorities such as promoting EU enlargement and fighting terrorism in the Middle East. Meanwhile in Greece, Anti-American rhetoric remained widespread and public opinion was critical of NATO and US

¹ US Embassy in Greece, Greece Independence Day Statement by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, 25.03.2023, available at: <https://gr.usembassy.gov/greece-independence-day-press-statement-by-secretary-of-state-antony-j-blinken/>

² Theodore Couloumbis, Fotini Bellou and Theodore C. Kariotis (eds.), *Greece in the Twentieth Century*, London, 2003

interventions, limiting the potential for a more active engagement in the North Atlantic alliance.

The Greek debt crisis functioned as a catalyst for closer bilateral relations. Geopolitical considerations made the United States turn its attention to Greece again in 2010, when the Greek debt crisis threatened to break up the Eurozone, prompting the United States to support what was at the time the biggest IMF bailout in the history of the international organization. And in 2015, when the crisis reached its peak as the regional challenges amassed, the stabilization of Greece became a priority for the US administration, as the country was seen to lie at the epicenter of a “triangle of turbulence”, from Ukraine in the North to Libya in the South to Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean in the East.³

Successive Greek governments counted on the United States to mediate with Greece’s creditors to ease both the prescribed austerity and the Greek debt burden. As the economic, social, and political costs of the devastating financial crisis rose, the US interventions were aimed at keeping Greece firmly anchored to the West. In fact, it was the leftist government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras that relied most heavily on the US administration to help it avert a Greek exit from the Euro in the summer of 2015. The Obama administration played a critical role in avoiding Grexit, in the belief that it would have jeopardized the country’s strategic direction.

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As a largely unintended consequence, the constructive US stance during the Greek financial crisis helped improve perceptions of the United States among the Greek public, as shown in public opinion surveys.⁴ And following the support the US administration provided the Tsipras government in 2015, the alliance with the United States stopped being politically controversial as all mainstream parties, including the governing Syriza party, appreciated its value. Indeed, 2015 proved an important milestone for bilateral relations, as it helped marginalize anti-Americanism in Greek politics, preparing the way for wider and deeper bilateral cooperation. And by ruling out Grexit, Greece was also able to regain reliability, as the country’s domestic stability and strategic direction were no longer in question.

It was in this climate of goodwill and US encouragement that the Tsipras government would go on to negotiate the Prespa agreement with North Macedonia, which resolved the Macedonian name dispute and opened the way for that country’s accession to NATO. His government also agreed to expand the US military presence in Greece, paving the way for closer defense cooperation with the United States. Both developments helped raise Greece’s strategic value in Washington, as the country was seen as an important potential partner in bringing stability to the Balkans.

Two amendments to the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) under the Kyriakos Mitsotakis government extended the agreement’s validity indefinitely to allow, as Secretary Blinken put it, “Greece and the US to advance security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond”.⁵ Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Mitsotakis’ New Democracy government has consistently demonstrated its unequivocal support to Ukraine in diplomatic, humanitarian, and military terms. The port of Alexandroupolis has also emerged as a key strategic port for the transport of military equipment to NATO’s

³ US Embassy in Greece, Ambassador Pyatt Addresses the Hellenic National Defense College, 02.04.2018, available at: <https://gr.usembassy.gov/ambassador-pyatts-remarks-hellenic-national-defense-college/>

⁴ Kapa Research on Greece and the United States, November 2016, available at: https://kaparesearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Greece-USA_Poll_2016_EN.pdf

⁵ Humeyra Pamuk, Blinken says renewed US-Greece defense deal to advance stability in Eastern Mediterranean, Reuters, 14.10.2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-says-renewed-defence-deal-with-us-protect-sovereignty-both-2021-10-14/>

Eastern Flank, adding to Greece's geostrategic importance for the United States, NATO, and Eastern Europe.

Coupled with a more dynamic role in the European Union, the return of Greek foreign policy to Southeastern Europe and its participation in a series of partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf promote regional cooperation and energy security at a time when Russia has weaponized Europe's energy dependency, creating volatility and uncertainty in the global energy market. In fact, Greece has emerged as one of the countries with a crucial role to play in Europe accomplishing its strategic goal of energy security, both by helping bring new sources of energy and by connecting some of the less integrated parts of Europe with pipelines and infrastructure that significantly decrease dependence on Russia.⁶

Contrary to its dependence on the United States during the Cold War, Greece is now proactively engaged in the Western alliance and its efforts to stabilize the wider region as a matter of national security. Indeed, the alignment of interests with the United States in promoting peace and prosperity in Greece's neighborhood has led to a closer strategic partnership. Consequently, Greece-US relations have shifted to a new paradigm of interdependence—an eventuality Professor Couloumbis envisioned in his work when he noted that in the future, "Greek American relations need to be governed by a spirit of partnership, not hierarchy. They need to be based on the principle of common interest and not one-sided interest, to be fostered in a spirit of free speech and voluntary partnership, without the fear or myth of retribution".⁷

Common values, aligned strategic interests

Over the past decade, closer bilateral ties were supported by successive governments in Greece and administrations in the US, creating a wide political consensus in both countries about their strategic value that builds on a historic relationship. Officials from both countries routinely underline the common values of democracy and freedom. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, they have also shared a renewed focus on a rules-based international order—a goal that guides their international engagement, albeit to different degrees and for different purposes. However, the closer ties are mostly driven by an alignment of interests, as Greece and the United States share a similar analysis of the global geopolitical challenges and assessment of how these influence Greece's neighborhood.

This is evident when comparing the national security strategies of the two countries. Even though their strategic priorities and scope are different by virtue of the United States' status as a superpower, they find common ground in their commitment to the transatlantic alliance and the values through which they approach international relations: a stated commitment to a rules-based international order and to building partnerships to promote peace and prosperity.

Under President Joe Biden, the United States views the world at an inflection point, noting that its future direction will be determined by how it responds to the key strategic challenge of our time, which his National Security Strategy defines as "the big power

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⁶ Katerina Sokou, Squaring the Energy Transition Circle in Southeast Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, Atlantic Council, May 2022, available at: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Squaring_the_energy_transition_circle.pdf

⁷ Theodore Couloumbis, *Greek American Relations: A Critical Review*, 1980, p. 97

competition that is underway and will define a new era” in international relations.⁸ It views China and Russia both seeking in their own ways to remake the international order, in order to create a world conducive to their “highly personalized and repressive type of autocracy”.

His administration notes that this competition is a challenge for international peace and stability, but that it can be won as long as the United States works with its allies and partners. The White House singles out the powers that combine authoritarian governance with a revisionist foreign policy—and especially those “waging or preparing for wars of aggression, actively undermining the democratic political processes of other countries, leveraging technology and supply chains for coercion and repression, and exporting an illiberal model of international order”. Indeed, just as President Biden subscribes to the democracies versus autocracies narrative, so his National Security Strategy is pragmatic enough to seek to work with anyone who ascribes to the basic principles of international relations.

Thus, despite the United States’ spotty record when it comes to adhering to international law, Greece has the chance to use the Biden administration’s emphasis on the rules-based international order to promote a resolution of Greek-Turkish differences based on international law. Importantly, even though the United States has not ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, it has recognized Greece’s sovereign rights and jurisdiction in accordance with the international law of the sea, including in a letter that Secretary Blinken sent to Prime Minister Mitsotakis in 2021.⁹

At a time when the US government puts the need to work with its allies to promote peace and prosperity at the core of its National Security Strategy, Greece is a NATO country that shares the same focus on international cooperation with its allies and other partners in the region and beyond. To deter revisionist policies, it also aims to make the best use of all factors of national power, including an external rebalancing of threats through the EU, NATO and other partnerships bilateral and otherwise.

Indeed, in its strategic priorities for Greek national security as laid out by Greek National Security Advisor Thanos Dokos, the top priority remains the protection of its national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and sovereign rights.¹⁰ Vis-à-vis that goal, Greece is committed to international law and any effort to support an international system based on international law and respect for the rules-based international order. Greece is also focused on strengthening its defensive power and deterrence. Its partnership with the United States is valuable in that regard, as Greece also aims to develop and maintain a strong defensive, technological, and industrial base and promote research and innovation in new technologies that seek to boost its deterrence.

In the context of great power competition, Greece is a reliable US ally: It has unequivocally sided with Ukraine against Russia’s war of aggression and has sought to avoid any strategic economic dependence on China. Yet Greece also faces the threat of a revisionist and increasingly authoritarian NATO ally in Turkey, which the US administration seeks to engage as a matter of national security, “to reinforce its strategic, political, economic, and

⁸ The White House, National Security Strategy, October 2022, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

⁹ George Gilson, Blinken underlines respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity in letter to Mitsotakis, Ta Nea, 15.10.2021, available at: <https://www.tanea.gr/2021/10/15/english-edition/blinken-underlines-us-respect-for-sovereignty-and-territorial-integrity-in-letter-to-mitsotakis/>

¹⁰ Thanos Dokos, Extroversion, deterrence, and resilience (in Greek), Kathimerini, 02.01.2023, available at: <https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/foreign-policy/562208218/poio-prepei-na-einai-to-dogma-ethnikis-asfaleias/>

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institutional ties to the West". US diplomats note that keeping Turkey aligned with the West may help lower tensions in the Aegean. In their meeting on the sidelines of the Vilnius NATO Summit on July 12, Prime Minister Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan agreed to promote a positive agenda that could restore trust and create the conditions for the meaningful political dialog they decided to resume.

A resolution of their dispute remains elusive, however. The Greek Prime Minister said that he is open to a road map that could lead "to the resolution of the one sole difference we have with Turkey, namely the delimitation of the continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone".¹¹ Greece's guiding principle on any delimitation is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and if negotiations fail to produce an agreement, it is open to resolving the dispute in an international court.

The Biden administration wants to avoid conflict between two NATO allies, and while it avoids taking a position on the specifics of the dispute, it shares with Greece a commitment to respecting sovereignty, sovereign rights, and international law, including the law of the sea, as well as to resolving maritime disputes and other disagreements peacefully through diplomatic channels.¹² But while the United States supports a dialog and confidence-building measures between Greece and Turkey, given the differences between the two the bar of expectations is low: US diplomats would be content if the road map succeeded in reducing tensions, and if the dialog ever leads to a compromise they will certainly welcome that, too.

As Cyprus is deepening its own security partnership with the United States, a political dialog between Greece and Turkey may also help create the conditions for restarting negotiations on Cyprus, too. It is perhaps time to revisit a proposition made by the former US Ambassador to Greece, Monteagle Stearns, who argued that resolving the Greek-Turkish dispute could also untangle the Cyprus issue.¹³

Beyond its high foreign policy prioritizing of the Cyprus issue, Greece places high value on the stability and security of all its geopolitical surroundings in the Balkans, the Black Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean. To that end, it aims to continue working with its allies and partners and pursuing a proactive, multi-dimensional foreign policy in the region as a high priority. The consistent Greek support for the EU accession of the Western Balkans fits well with the US goal of helping its partners in the region strengthen their democratic institutions, the rule of law, and economic development.

The United States also encouraged Greece to join a series of trilateral and other partnerships, partly as an alternative security partner to Turkey given the tensions in the latter's relations with the United States following the 2016 coup. As the Assistant Secretary for Europe and Eurasian affairs at the time, Wess Mitchell, put it in his testimony to Congress in July 2018: "We are constructing a long-term strategy to bolster the US presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. We are cultivating Greece as an anchor of stability in the Mediterranean and Western Balkans and working to systematically strengthen security and energy cooperation with Cyprus."¹⁴ With the notable exception of withdrawing its support from the East Med pipeline in a non-paper, the Biden

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¹¹ Athens Press Agency, Mitsotakis: We can agree on a road map to resolve the one and sole difference with Türkiye, 10.7.2023, available at: <https://www.amna.gr/mobile/articleen/745100/Mitsotakis-We-can-agree-on-a-road-map-to-resolve-the-one-and-sole-difference-with-Turkiye>

¹² US Department of State, Joint Statement on the US-Greece Strategic Dialogue, 21.02.2023, available at: <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-u-s-greece-strategic-dialogue/>

¹³ Monteagle Stearns, Entangled Allies: US Policy Toward Greece, Turkey and Cyprus, Council on Foreign Relations, 1992

¹⁴ Hearing before the Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate, 26.01.2018, available at: <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/06%2026%2018%20US%20Policy%20in%20Europe.pdf>

administration has continued this policy. The United States participates in the working groups of the 3+1 partnership format between Cyprus, Greece, and Israel, including their parliamentary exchanges; nonetheless, Greek diplomats would like to see it take on a more active role.

In any case, Greece has become a key regional partner in US efforts to implement a new framework for US policy in the Middle East and North Africa, one that is based on building partnerships, coalitions, and alliances to strengthen deterrence and help its regional partners achieve greater stability. As one Greek diplomat put it, what Greece offers, beyond strategic stability in its region, is access to the Arab world and strategic depth to Israel. The strategic nature of their partnership also means that for the United States, relations with Greece are becoming increasingly independent of US-Turkey relations, which is a development the Greek foreign policy leadership also welcomes.

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The new American policy framework for the Middle East is based on five principles that Greece is also keen to promote in its region: 1. Support and strengthen partnerships with countries that subscribe to the rules-based international order; 2. Do not allow foreign or regional powers to jeopardize freedom of navigation through the Middle East's waterways, nor tolerate efforts by any country to dominate another—or the region—through military buildups, incursions, or threats; 3. Work to deter threats to regional stability, while also using diplomacy wherever possible to reduce tensions, de-escalate, and end conflicts; 4. Promote regional integration by building political, economic, and security connections between and among US partners, including through integrated air and maritime defense structures; 5. Promote human rights and the values enshrined in the UN Charter.

Hence, in its principles and directions, US policy is aligned with a key Greek national security priority as Greece regains its footing following its financial crisis: promoting Greece as a security provider and bastion of stability in the region, through *inter alia* participation in international missions of the UN, the EU, and NATO to bolster the international experience of its armed forces.

At the same time, Greece is seeking to develop into an international hub for energy and for the transport of goods and services. Greece has already completed projects that enhance regional energy security in Southeast Europe, such as the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria, and is already planning the North Macedonia-Greece Interconnector, while also working to ensure that the Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Alexandroupolis is operational by the end of the year. Together with a second FSRU which is in development, they will bring new supplies of energy to Southeast Europe, including Eastern Mediterranean natural gas and LNG from the US. These projects have turned Alexandroupolis into a critical hub for energy security in a region which potentially extends all the way to Ukraine, improving the energy security of Europe.

As Greece is trying to shed the remaining legacies of its debt crisis, the United States is a key target for boosting the trade and investment which will put the Greek economy on a sustainable track. In his second term, Prime Minister Mitsotakis is focused on regaining Greece's investment grade credit rating and promoting reforms that will attract more foreign direct investment and improve Greek competitiveness. For the United States, Greece's participation in the European Union gives it a role in transatlantic efforts to strengthen trade, investment, and technological cooperation, including the US priority of protecting its critical infrastructure and supply chains. As per the US National Security Strategy, such cooperation "promotes an open and inclusive global economy, setting high standards for trade, ensuring fair competition, supporting labor rights, driving

decarbonization, fighting corruption, and protecting our innovations from uses that run counter to our interests and values”.

Finally, as maritime nations, Greece and the United States both support freedom of navigation. This is a key alignment of interests that stems from Greece’s geography, as well as its significant maritime power. The size of the Greek-owned merchant fleet makes Greece a global player in the evolution of the shipping industry in terms of safety and decarbonization. It could also drive the effort to de-risk Western economies and their supply chains by providing a major reliable alternative to China’s increasing share of the global transport volume.

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Building institutions and policy tools to capitalize on closer ties

Having reached a peak in their bilateral relations, the next step for Greece and the United States is to capitalize on the progress made to reap long-term benefits and leverage bilateral ties for the benefit of the wider region. Building joint institutions, partnerships and policy tools will be key to maintaining the momentum and deepening the relationship between the United States and Greece in strategic areas such as regional initiatives, defense, and security cooperation, while also expanding business ties, technology transfer, energy cooperation and educational exchanges. On all these priorities, US and Greek experts agree that “the sky is the limit” on what closer cooperation can achieve.

The Greece-US Strategic Dialog is a joint commitment at the highest diplomatic level which provides the framework for deeper bilateral cooperation.

To begin with, the two countries should continue to engage in their Strategic Dialog. The Greece-US Strategic Dialog is a joint commitment at the highest diplomatic level which showcases the strategic value of the relationship and provides the framework for deeper bilateral cooperation. Beyond highlighting their common strategic interests, the Strategic Dialog has also contributed to an expanding bilateral agenda and helped maintain excellent working relations even at times when US interactions with its transatlantic partners were challenging.

Already in its fourth year, the annual meeting (except for 2020, when the pandemic upended plans) provides an opportunity to exchange and streamline views on subjects of common interest in the wider region. The meetings also serve as an exercise in bilateral cooperation, identifying areas of priority and promoting joint initiatives and policies. They cover a wide range of topics, from those of strategic importance such as security, defense, and energy to those of economic and social value, such as trade and investment, technology transfer, academic exchanges and cooperation, and supporting cultural initiatives and people-to-people ties, including the valuable bond with the Hellenic diaspora in America. Finally, the Strategic Dialog defines joint priorities globally and regionally, from climate change and disaster responses to regional partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean and the economic integration of Southeastern Europe.

The top agenda issue is defense cooperation, where the two countries share their “firm determination to mutually uphold regional security by safeguarding the principles of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity” – a statement that has special weight, as it reflects the US interest in avoiding conflict in the Aegean and on Cyprus. In recent years, Greece has significantly increased its military-to-military cooperation with the United States. As noted, the amended MDCA provides a long-term horizon for US bases, raising Greece’s strategic value by expanding basing rights for US forces in Greece in Larissa, Stefanovikio in Central Greece, and elsewhere. Further north, the port of Alexandroupolis has been transformed into a vital logistical hub, providing a new and

...the port of Alexandroupolis has been transformed into a vital logistical hub, providing a new and critical line of logistical support to NATO's Eastern Flank and to Ukraine.

critical line of logistical support to NATO's Eastern Flank and to Ukraine, and highlighting the strategic value of nearby Greek islands such as Lemnos and Skyros.

According to the joint statement issued after their fourth Strategic Dialog, the MDCA "reflects a long-term, deepening and expanding strategic partnership at a critical time in Europe."¹⁵ It also increases opportunities for joint training and military exercises in the region, while expanding interoperability within NATO. The two countries would benefit from expanding military-to-military cooperation beyond their regular senior-level meetings to include all levels of command, while increasing military financing to Greece in Congress would expand the opportunities for international military education and training in the United States. Finally, the ongoing upgrade of Greece's F-16 fighter jets and the projected purchase of F-35s will further raise its national defense capabilities, along with the prospect of other US arm sales that present opportunities for co-production.

On security cooperation and intelligence sharing, Greece has made strides since 2016, when it became the first European country to take advantage of the US Secure Real Time Platform at its borders to share biometric and biographic data, expanding the reach of its Preventing and Combating Serious Crime Agreement with the US Department of Homeland Security in response to the security challenges presented by the migration crisis.

The Strategic Dialog identifies new opportunities for cooperation between the Hellenic Police Force and the FBI, which are already working closely together to combat terrorism and trafficking, in joint law enforcement training to combat cybercrime, complex financial crimes, and organized crime. The United States has also pledged to support the long-term implementation of a joint security program at Athens International Airport to strengthen aviation security and counterterrorism goals. Given its strategic location and a level of bilateral intelligence-sharing close to that of the Five Eyes, Greece would provide an ideal potential base for NATO's intelligence center.

As regards economic ties, Greece is firmly back on the radar of US investors, but more should be done to increase bilateral trade and investment. Future US investments could include key infrastructure projects that are eligible for financial support from the US International Development Finance Corporation due to their strategic nature, especially on energy. There are also high expectations of the new US-Greece Science and Technology Agreement, and a commitment made at the latest Strategic Dialog to expand bilateral cooperation to facilitate the export of Greek agricultural food products to the United States. On tourism, the 2022 Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries has created opportunities beyond investment, in tourism promotion, education, and information exchanges.

Still, the two countries should encourage business organizations and industry associations to focus on proposals and initiatives that facilitate bilateral trade and investment, technology sharing and joint research in partnership with US and Greek research centers, including on the framework of the US-EU Trade and Technology Council. They should also focus on engaging US and Greek companies in efforts to promote policies that improve competitiveness and inclusion, endorsing initiatives that help dismantle systemic barriers to women's economic participation.

¹⁵ US Department of State, Joint Statement on the US-Greece Strategic Dialogue, 21.02.2023, available at: <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-u-s-greece-strategic-dialogue/>

... energy features high on the agenda as Greece and the United States agree on the urgency of their continued cooperation in energy security and diversification following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In the sphere of energy, the creation of the US-East Med Energy Center in the United States, as envisaged in the Eastern Mediterranean Energy and Security Partnership Act, would further support Greece's role as an energy hub that also aims to develop its own national energy resources, with a focus on renewables. Such a center would help realize the opportunity that the US administration sees for the Eastern Mediterranean to leverage its renewable energy sources to answer the call for diversifying routes and sources and "a faster energy transition for climate, economic and energy security reasons".¹⁶

In their Strategic Dialog, energy features high on the agenda as Greece and the United States agree on the urgency of their continued cooperation in energy security and diversification following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. One such prospect would entail the support of USAID to further integrate the electricity markets of Greece and its neighbors. The upgrade and interconnectedness of the region's electricity grids are prerequisites for energy integration and capitalizing on the benefits of the energy transition. Greater integration in Southeastern Europe would also help make the argument for the construction of the various proposed electrical interconnectors that would connect Europe to Africa and Asia to bring cleaner energy to Greece, from where it could be exported to the rest of Europe.

In education, Greece is already the ninth most popular destination for American study abroad programs and the number of American students could explode were the supply side to grow, which would include developing the necessary infrastructure. The effort to internationalize the Greek public universities is already underway, with the prospect of a 2022 delegation of 30 US university representatives that explored educational cooperation with their Greek counterparts being continued. Going forward, Greece should consider allowing investors and private business partners to fund academic institutes and centers of excellence, as this may also attract significant interest from the United States.

Furthermore, a proposed bilateral agreement with the United States on education would open the door to recognizing US universities operating in Greece and vice versa, while amending the Greek constitution to allow for private universities would boost competition and draw more American students to Greece. Both would contribute to the growth of the international education business between the two countries. Raising the funding for programs to study in the United States such as those of the Fulbright Foundation would also provide more opportunities for Greek students to experience the US academic system and return to Greece to use their education to benefit Greek society, as would building on existing exchanges in STEM education, such as the TechGirls program and the BridgeUSA. Beyond academic exchanges, bilateral cooperation could also multiply the opportunities and funding for joint academic projects focused inter alia on technology and knowledge transfer, as well as on raising the bar on inclusivity in the Greek educational system.

Building on the two countries' strong people-to-people ties, there is increased interest in public events, exhibitions, and conferences that foster bilateral ties and facilitate exchanges. Earmarking funds for that purpose and mobilizing private and public funds to support such programs could also include think tanks and other institutions that work on joint projects. Such investments would pay dividends in the long term. After all, it was the decision to host the United States as the honored country at the 2019 Thessaloniki International Fair that gave new impetus to business ties and drove the growth the two countries are currently experiencing in bilateral trade and investment.

¹⁶ US Assistant Secretary of State Geoffrey Pyatt comments at the Eastern Mediterranean Business Summit, 10.07.2023, available at: <https://www.state.gov/eastern-mediterranean-business-summit/>

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Importantly, the Greek diaspora in the United States is a bridge connecting the two countries that should be encouraged to renew its ties with Greece and cultivate new ones. Generations of diasporic Greeks have supported Greece, since even before its independence. Over the past decade, their contribution to their homeland has been most noticeable through their work with philanthropic foundations, networks that support Greek startups, institutes and think tanks. As Greece hopes to use its competitive advantages in culture, shipping, tourism, and human capital to tackle the demographic challenge it faces and try to reverse the brain-drain, the younger generation of the diaspora would be a prime target audience in its efforts to attract students, expats, investors, and digital nomads. The Greek government should make the process of relocating to Greece easier for the diaspora through the creation of a digital one-stop-shop for all their interactions with the Greek state.

A global challenge which Greece also views as a national security issue is climate change, which, like the Biden administration, it strives to consider in its strategic planning on all aspects of government action. This includes its foreign policy, as the climate crisis poses a systemic threat for the region with imminent economic, demographic and security implications for Greece. Consequently, Greece needs to work with its partners on a climate action plan for the Mediterranean with specific policies to help mitigate the effects of climate change.¹⁷ Potential resources extend beyond the EU and include developing security-related climate response capabilities at NATO, trade and investment to strengthen the hardest-hit Mediterranean societies, and support from the United States to strengthen its response to the climate crisis. Faced with disastrous wildfires and the need to upgrade its disaster preparedness, Greece seeks to expand its technical cooperation with the US to include joint training, emergency equipment procurement, and the modernization of its civil protection protocols. It also wants to update the Protocol of Intention of Cooperation in Prevention and Response to Natural and Technological Disasters, and to enhance cooperation between Greek authorities and US entities such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Finally, as a maritime power, Greece has a stake in the freedom of navigation, the security of maritime transport, and the decarbonization of shipping. The United States welcomed Greece's participation in the Green Shipping Challenge at COP and its hosting of the Our Ocean conference in 2024. As the host, Greece will have the opportunity to help guide international efforts to address ocean health and security, climate goals, and the blue economy, as well as efforts to create a shipping sector aligned with the goal of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. In the past, the Greek shipping industry has been well served by its proactive adaptability to changes in regulation and technological advances, an agility that could now serve the common goal of a swift transition to green shipping to slow climate change while protecting its international competitiveness in view of China.

Addressing political change and strategic challenges

Greece and the United States have a strategic relationship that enjoys wide political support. As their long history suggests, however, domestic and international political developments may sometimes lead to their having different priorities. For as long as their interests are aligned, and in the context of great power competition, it is important to

¹⁷ Katerina Sokou, The rising national security threats of climate change in the Mediterranean region, Atlantic Council, April 2022, available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Climate-Change-IB-2022.pdf>

shield the Greece-US strategic partnership from domestic populism, political discord, or disinformation campaigns that may seek to undermine it.

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Greek foreign affairs experts view the prospect of Donald Trump's return to the White House as the biggest challenge for transatlantic, as well as bilateral, relations. They note the transactional and disruptive character of his foreign policy, especially in engaging with authoritarian leaders, including Turkey's Erdoğan.¹⁸ Still, it should be noted the under his presidency, Greece-US relations continued to flourish, thanks to a number of agenda-setting diplomats in both countries.¹⁹ Furthermore, bilateral relations enjoy a level of bipartisan support in Congress that has been hard to ignore, given the tripartite nature of the US government.

That said, the possibility of a Trump re-election cannot be discounted, and a second Trump presidency would severely test US relations with the European Union. Even as American diplomats and military leaders were able to withstand his pressure to pull out of NATO, there is a real danger that Trump, or another isolationist President, could withdraw US military support to Ukraine, leading to a strategic defeat for the West that would leave Eastern Europe exposed to a revisionist Russia, embolden authoritarian regimes globally, and create more space for them to meddle in the Global South.²⁰ Similarly, the rise of far-right populism in key European countries may also test transatlantic unity over Ukraine. In the case of Greece, populism may also complicate efforts to improve relations with Turkey and challenge U.S-Greece relations.

In Turkey, after being re-elected President Erdoğan has taken steps to rebuild ties with the West. However, given his multiple points of contention with the United States, the terms of this engagement are purely transactional. As Aaron Stein has argued: "In such a nakedly transactional relationship there is room for positive incentives and limited cooperation, but also room for hard-line bargaining". But as the two sides do not share a common worldview or have overlapping regional interests, there is little to lose by using coercion to try and shape Turkish policymaking in areas like Syria, Ukraine, and the Mediterranean.²¹

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For its part, Greece is concerned about what US engagement with Turkey could mean for its national security interests. As former Greek National Security Advisor Alexandros Diakopoulos notes of Turkish transactionalism: "The higher the value of Ankara's cooperation, the higher the price the West will have to pay for it".²² If Greece's national security interests appear to be undermined in the effort to keep Turkey bound to the West, this will give rise to nationalism in Greece that may undercut its relations with the US.

Greek security experts worry about what a US deal with Turkey on the sale of F-16 fighter jets could mean for the balance of power in the Aegean. Reportedly, the US administration tried to persuade Congress to allow the sale in exchange for Turkey's green light for Sweden's NATO membership. President Biden linked the two--and Greece--himself when he spoke to journalist Fareed Zacharia before the Vilnius Summit about "trying to put together a consortium, where we're strengthening NATO in terms of the military capacity

¹⁸ Based on the discussions at a closed ELIAMEP roundtable on Greek-American relations held in Athens in April 2023

¹⁹ Endy Zemenides, Be Like Mike, *Kathimerini*, 26.02.2023, available at: <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/1205547/be-like-mike/amp/>

²⁰ John Bolton, *The Room Where it Happened: A White House Memoir*, New York, 2023

²¹ Aaron Stein, Turkey's zero-sum foreign policy, 20.12.2023, available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2022/12/turkeys-zero-sum-foreign-policy/>

²² Alexandros Diakopoulos and Nikos Stournaras, Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy, June 2022, available at: <https://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Policy-paper-102-Diakopoulos-final-1.pdf>

To avoid falling behind in the balance of power with Turkey, Greece will need to maintain a qualitative advantage in its defense capabilities while avoiding an arms race

of both Greece and Turkey, and allow Sweden to come in”.²³ To avoid falling behind in the balance of power with Turkey, Greece will need to maintain a qualitative advantage in its defense capabilities while avoiding an arms race that, rather than acting as a deterrent, may escalate tensions and undermine peace and prosperity. Beyond the sale of F-35 fighter jets, which is already in the works, this could include Artificial Intelligence technology or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.

The sale should also bind Turkey to de-escalatory steps in the Eastern Mediterranean. The meeting between Prime Minister Mitsotakis and President Erdoğan in Vilnius is a first step in the direction of de-escalation, but tangible results are also needed, such as securing the continuation of the overflights moratorium in the Aegean. Given the absence of a Turkish undertaking to that effect, the US Congress could help set this important condition. As Congressional members of the Hellenic Caucus put it in a letter to Secretary Blinken on July 8: “Given Turkey’s history of using F-16s for overflights in the Aegean and to challenge Greek sovereignty, we request mechanisms that provide for the pause, delay, or snapback of the transfer of American weapons to Turkey if it resumes its destabilizing actions in the Eastern Mediterranean that threaten or undermine US national security interests or NATO security architecture”²⁴.

More widely, Turkey’s engagement with the West, including with the European Union, should also include burying the revisionism of its Blue Homeland doctrine, which expands Turkey’s maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean, totally ignoring Greek and Cypriot sovereign rights and giving it sole control of the sea routes linking Europe to the Indian Ocean, from the Black Sea and the Suez Canal to the Central Mediterranean.

Yet Greece may also be adversely affected if Turkey moves further away from the West while their maritime differences remain unresolved. US diplomats note that in such a scenario, the United States may have less leverage over Ankara. This may end up undermining Greek national security, as the United States has historically played the role of fire-fighter in the Greek-Turkish dispute. As Professor Gingeras notes, the fact that Turkey no longer welcomes US involvement calls into question the success of its future mediation. Another implication of an antagonistic Turkey, he argues, is that the United States would need new defense commitments and security ties to Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt, turning Greece into a frontier state for the West.²⁵ This may create an opportunity for Greece to strengthen its defenses, though it will also demand a higher level of security commitment, similar to that of Israel, which will require a new social contract and is bound to test the political system.

The stakes are also high on migration, where cooperation with Turkey would literally save lives. In light of Turkey’s instigating role in the Evros migration crisis in 2020, Greece now considers migration and refugee flows as a national security issue and is expected to continue to enforce the EU policy of tight border controls. If anything, the Evros border crisis showed that migration can be used as a destabilizing hybrid threat. However, the tragic shipwreck off the coast of Pylos also exposed the human cost of the increasingly perilous irregular migration routes and highlighted the gray lines of international and European law. It has also raised questions about the role of the Hellenic Coastguard, which

²³ Kylie Atwood, Inside the Biden administration’s push to get Sweden into NATO and F16s to Turkey, CNN, 11.07.2023, available at: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/inside-the-biden-administration-s-push-to-get-sweden-into-nato-and-f-16s-to-turkey/ar-AA1dJpDG?ocid=socialshare>

²⁴ The letter to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken is available at: <https://hellenicleaders.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/07.08.23-Letter-to-Secretary-Blinken-on-Turkey-F-16-Sale-Snapback-Mechanisms.pdf>

²⁵ Ryan Gingeras, An honest broker no longer: The United States Between Turkey and Greece, War on the Rocks, 03.01.2023, available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/an-honest-broker-no-longer-the-united-states-between-turkey-and-greece/>

the Greek government is still investigating while also noting the need to combat the international trafficking networks. How the Greek government deals with the challenge will affect its image in the United States and internationally.

Conclusion

The nature of these political, hybrid and strategic challenges point to the need for Greece to be proactive and continue to follow an extroverted foreign policy that increases its strategic value and contributes to stability in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. Since the end of the Greek financial crisis, the United States has been Greece's key ally and enabling partner in this strategy.

Greece continues to look to the United States to help stabilize the Eastern Mediterranean and as the main security provider in its relations with Turkey.

Looking ahead, there is an opportunity for Greece to move beyond the traditional reach of its foreign policy. As the geopolitical center of gravity moves eastwards, Greece can deepen its cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, on which the United States is also focusing its attention. The port of Alexandroupolis is a natural geographic fit for the Three Seas Initiative, as it completes the North-South corridor by providing access to the Aegean Sea. Greece's participation will facilitate investments in projects that help integrate the region and promote Eastern Europe's economic progress and energy security. Given its historic ethnic and cultural ties to Ukraine, Greece can also play a distinct role in its reconstruction, once the war is over.

Greece has also increased its strategic ambition in its relations with the Arab world, seeking to become a bridge with Europe by *inter alia* forging stronger security ties and economic relations. This would expand on its strategy of building partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean to help secure one of the most important trade routes in the world, from India and the Straits of Hormuz to Europe through the Suez Canal. To that end, Greece may also play a key part in the Mideast-India Rail and Shipping Corridor that the US and the EU agreed on at the last G20.

Greece continues to look to the United States to help stabilize the Eastern Mediterranean and as the main security provider in its relations with Turkey. Like the United States, Greece has a national security interest in engaging Turkey in a constructive dialog that avoids tensions. That said, the diplomatic effort to engage Turkey should also safeguard Greece from Turkish revisionism. The recent NATO Summit in Vilnius showed that Turkey's relations with the West pass through Athens. As a result of its more active foreign policy, EU membership and strategic partnership with the United States, Greece can now include its terms on this engagement.

Breaking out of the "troubled triangle" that Professor Coulombis first described in his work is not entirely possible while Greece's differences with Turkey remain unresolved. Whether Turkey remains tied to the West or not, Greece's role in the Western alliance has increased in strategic importance, in line with its own foreign policy ambitions. At a time of systemic change in the global security architecture, Greece is no longer the client state of a hegemonic power, but a reliable ally and partner moored in the Western alliance. This provides Greece with the opportunity to further strengthen, and capitalize on, its bilateral relations with the United States, in line with its national security interests, its international commitments, and its values.