

Greece's Alliances of Realpolitik in the Eastern Mediterranean

By Dr Emmanuel Karagiannis

The Greek foreign policy has gradually shifted its focus from the Aegean Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean. One factor contributing to Greece's regional pivot is the discovery of significant gas reserves in the Levantine basin, that is an area located within the EEZ of Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Lebanon, and Syria. The newly discovered gas reserves have exacerbated tensions between Greece and Turkey. Like the ancient city-states, modern Greece has sought to preserve the existing balance of power through a complex system of alliances with Mediterranean countries. The paper will focus on Greece's alliance with France, Israel, and Egypt.

On 28 September 2021, Athens signed a defense pact with Paris which includes a mutual defense clause. More specifically, Article 2 states that 'the parties shall provide each other with assistance, with all appropriate means at their disposal, and if necessary, by the use of armed force, if they jointly find that an armed attack is taking place against the territory of one of the two, in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations'. The clause on mutual defense assistance would give a much-needed reassurance to Athens because it is clearly designed to have a deterrent effect on Turkey. The agreement provides for regular consultations between the two governments on security and defense issues in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Sahel region.

Greece has also built a particularly strong relationship with Israel. The flourishing relations between Athens and Jerusalem coincided with the deterioration of the Turkish-Israeli relations after the Gaza flotilla incident in May 2010. It was Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou who took advantage of the incident to rebuild the relationship with Israel. Despite their political and ideological differences, most Greek parties have accepted the strategic nature of Greek-Israeli relations. Jerusalem has shared Greek concerns about Turkish assertiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, the two countries have deepened their collaboration in the defense and security field. Greece plans to purchase advanced Israeli systems, while the two countries have conducted joint exercises.

Moreover, Athens has reached out to pro-Western Arab countries which share the same concerns about the rise of Turkey. From the Greek point of view, Egypt remains the most important Arab country in the region. The country's geographical location is both a blessing and a curse. For decades, Egypt has been the most pro-Western country in the region, apart from Israel. Cairo has benefited from its strategic location, portraying itself as a pillar for the region's security architecture. At the same time, Egypt has been vulnerable to external shocks; the civil war in Libya have created massive movements of people across national borders. The Greek diplomacy has taken advantage of the deteriorating Turkish-Egyptian relationship to build a partnership with Cairo. In August 2020, Greece and Egypt signed their own maritime boundary delimitation agreement to undermine the validity of the Turkish-Libyan deal. The navies of the two countries have also held several joint drills in recent years.

The paper will examine how Athens has formed new alliances with key countries in the Mediterranean to counterbalance Turkey's assertiveness. More specifically, it will examine motives and threat perceptions, as well as expectations and goals. Finally, the paper will try to

offer a new theoretical framework examining alliances which are conducive to maintaining regional security.