



Hermes Institute of
International Affairs,
Security & Geoeconomy

“HERMES” Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

SHORT COMMENTS

The French – Greek Security Pact: Some Considerations

By As. Professor Konstantinos Travlos

Athens, December 2021

“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE

“HERMES” Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy (“HERMES” I.I.A.S.GE) is an independent, non – governmental, non – profit organization, consisting of scholars dedicated in the research and analysis of international affairs in regional and global level. The Institute aims at providing objective, scientific, and reliable research analysis through a variety of studies contributing effectively and constructively in the public dialogue and the evolution of scientific knowledge.

Copyright © 2021

“HERMES” Institute for Foreign Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy

All rights reserved

“HERMES” Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy offers a forum for researchers and scholars to express their views freely, thoroughly and well-documented. The views expressed in this occasional paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the “HERMES” Institute. Short comments aim to contribute constructively in public debate in a wide range of international politics, defense, security and geoeconomy topics.

The French - Greek Security Pact: Some Considerations

By Konstantinos Travlos, Assistant Professor at Özyeğin University*

It is proper for those of us who work in the study of politics to recognize when our predictions on probable events are off. In a piece published in the Greek Huffington Post blog in February 2021, I made the assumption that a French – Greek alliance was unlikely¹. I was proven wrong. On the other hand, the stipulations of the France - Greece Security Pact are more or less along the lines of what I thought France would be willing to provide to Greece. Despite discussions of the opposite, the term “*territory*” in international legal terms is clear, and excludes regions in which Greece has administrative rights [Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)], as well as regions over which Greece has no declared sovereign control (the region between 6 and 12 nm). The recent clear statement by the French Government should lay to rest this discussion².

Already many have called on the Greek Government to expand Greek territorial waters to 12 nm, and unilaterally declare an EEZ zone, as well as sign an agreement for one with the Republic of Cyprus³. All of the above are well within the legal rights of Greece. Nobody should question that, although we need to remember that unilateral declarations of EEZ zone are meaningless under UNCLOS, and the Turkish casus belli against an execution of the sovereign rights of Greece is illegal under the UN Charter. However, politics is the art of the possible, as Otto von Bismarck noted. Right now, as things stand I do not believe such expansions are possible.

Let us begin with a consideration largely ignored by the supporters of expansion: Could it be that both the French security guarantee, as well as the recent USA one, were given on the undeclared promise of the Greek Government not to attempt an expansion of the

¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.gr/entry/semmachies-kai-ameso-mellon-tes-ellenotoerkikes-diokratikes-antipalotetas_gr_602ff348c5b673b19b680e97 .

² <https://www.tanea.gr/2021/10/16/politics/gallia-ektos-ellinogallikis-symfonias-i-aoz-dieykrinizei-to-parisi/> .

³ https://www.huffingtonpost.gr/entry/tria-erotemata-kai-oi-apanteseis-toes-schetika-me-tis-elletokikes-scheseis_gr_616418bee4b0fc312c9960e5 and <https://hellasjournal.com/2021/10/o-tourkikos-epektatismos-apoteli-apili-gia-tin-pagkosmia-irini-apikiokratis-tou-21ou-eona-i-tourkia/> .

territorial waters or unilateral declaration of an EEZ? The character of the French security guarantee and the rhetoric coming from the US seem to point to such a possibility. But it has been ignored by those who see the French - Greek security pact and the five-year extension of the MDCA agreement with the US as some kind of game-changer in the Greece - Turkey interstate rivalry.

I am not persuaded that the rest of my February analysis is off the mark on this. France gave us the security guarantee, but it gave it in the limited form. The reasons why France gave that guarantee can be debated. My own sources seem to indicate that it was driven more by the lack of an intermediate solution as part of the French offer for new ships rather than the grandiose reasons given by many, including respected Professor of International Relations Dr. Panayiotis Ifestos⁴. It may very well be that different sections of the vast French Government see the role of the guarantee in different ways, and give different signals to different sections of the Greek Government. In other words we should be scientifically and philosophically humble in what we read in it until things become clearer. Yes, we can argue that this move is part of Macron's attempt to renegotiate the balance of power in the EU between France and Germany. But there is no reason to believe that he is willing to break with Germany, which would be the result of a promise given to Greece to support an extension of territorial waters.

Does this mean the Pact is meaningless? Not at all. It was the right decision by the Greek Government, and sends a potentially powerful deterrent message to Turkey, by placing some potential limits to what it could do in reaction to Greek moves. The renewal of the aging Greek Naval Fleet is a positive move in a dyadic Greece - Turkey system still characterized by anarchy, revisionist politics, and an interstate rivalry. Security cooperation with France is worthwhile for the enhancement of Greek defense capabilities. But beyond that, things are more difficult to parse out. And this is partly due to two misconceptions promoted by many in Greece. Firstly, the Greece - Turkey interstate rivalry is not just a matter of deterrence. In the question of EEZ it is question of compellence. Both Greece and Turkey are trying to compel

⁴ https://www.huffingtonpost.gr/entry/yallia-ellada-epo-to-prisma-ton-strateyikon-kai-semmachikon-anakatataxeon_gr_6152e911e4b01dff4b724cb0 .

the other side to a solution along their preferable outcomes. Turkey by coercive force, Greece by compellence via proxy⁵.

For Greece the goal is full implementation of UNCLOS, with the possible exception of the Megisti complex (Castellorizo) were many rhetorically seem to oppose a possible diminution of the extent of its EEZ rights, a probable result of a court case as dictated by UNCLOS. For Turkey the goal is to impose a limited implementation of UNCLOS restricted by its view of the primacy of other legal principles. Unlike the case of 12 nm where we have a clear case of deterrence vs. coercion, in the EEZ both states are engaged in compellence since there is a lack of a commonly accepted basis for negotiations. The security pact as of present does not seem to enhance Greek compellence vs. Turkey on this matter.

What about deterrence in the issue of the Aegean? As noted in the Huffington Post publication cited above, the extension of Greek territorial waters to 12 nm, while legal, is a major political tool in the hands of Greek Governments. The act guarantees a militarized interstate dispute between Greece and Turkey, and a major political crisis for any Turkish Government in power when it happens. The French and USA Governments are aware of this and probably would prefer that any such extension happen in a mode that maximizes their interests, irrespective of the interests of Greece. Is this the case now? With Recep Tayyip Erdogan losing in polling numbers and the election just two years away (if not earlier), the US especially, and France probably, might be loath to use this tool to destabilize a Turkish Government already on the road to possible collapse. While I agree with Greek scholars of international relations that a change in Government in Turkey may not lead to change of expansionist policies, the point is that the USA might be willing to give a rhetorically “*pro-Western*” Government a chance⁶. Greece of course is a sovereign country and can attempt to do this without the support of the USA and France, but history shows that such attempts at

⁵ On the concept of compellence by proxy see Travlos, Konstantinos. “Mobilization follies in international relations: A multimethod exploration of why some decision makers fail to avoid war when public mobilization as a bargaining tool fails”, *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 8, no. 2 (2019): 359-385 .

⁶ <https://www.pontosnews.gr/658819/gnomes/troylis-i-diethnis-thesi-tis-toyrkias/> .

strategic independence tend to lead to foreign policy failure (1878, 1897). Success usually happens when Greece acts as the proxy of those major powers (1881, 1919)⁷.

Secondly, the Greek scholars supporting a more hardliner stance on these issues tend to present international politics as characterized by completely opposite policies of accommodation vs. deterrence. This image is false. I am sure they know it, but prefer to present an illusion for reasons of policy advocacy. In reality countries always pursue a mix of accommodation and hardline policies in managing their interstate rivalries. Even as the French and British Governments accommodated Nazi Germany in Munich, they began a massive re-armament program whose target was Germany⁸. Greek Governments, like most Governments, are more likely to pursue a mix of such policies. We need to also warn again that the consensus of studies of alliances points out that their presence in a rivalry is war fostering factors⁹. Already, the aftermath of the pact has seen an escalation of Turkish aggressiveness. To be fair nobody denied that this will be the case, but a counter-escalation of Greek efforts may not be the panacea that it is presented as by many.

That said, Greece can and should test the waters of USA and French support. It seems clear that both states see Crete as an important bastion for naval power control in the Mediterranean¹⁰. It may be prudent for Greece to extend its territorial waters to 12 nm around the island. While an escalatory step, it would signal to the Turkish side that pushing its compellence by coercion too far can have consequences it cannot control, and a possible toleration of such a move by the US and France, could create some useful ambiguity concerning a general extension of Greek territorial waters to 12 nm.

⁷ See Travlos. "Mobilization follies in international relations: A multimethod exploration of why some decision makers fail to avoid war when public mobilization as a bargaining tool fails." *All Azimuth* 8, no. 2 (2019): 359-385 .

⁸ Ripsman, Norrin M., and Jack S. Levy. "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s", *International Security* 33, no. 2 (2008): 148–81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40207135> .

⁹ Owsiak, Andrew P. "The Steps to War: Theory and Evidence." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2017 .

¹⁰ <https://mwi.usma.edu/navigating-a-sea-of-challenges-a-new-approach-for-nato-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/> .

One final note; there is a lot of discussions about the potential deterrence role of foreign bases in Greece. Thankfully, most of the discussion is careful, considering the role of British bases in Cyprus. Recent scholarship by Dan Reiter and Paul Poast has indicated that tripwire forces do not provide deterrence against aggression on the host state¹¹. Instead, only significant and major troop deployments (as the USA has in the Republic of Korea and Japan) have deterrence effects. It is my view that France cannot offer such force levels, and it is an open question if US deployments reach that level. If they do, this is well for deterrence purposes, though as some commentators point out it also has restrictive consequences for Greek foreign policy freedom.



Konstantinos Travlos is Assistant Professor of International Relations at Özyeğin University, Istanbul, Turkey. He has a PhD in Political Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a MA from the University of Chicago, and BA from Panteion University, Athens, Greece. His research focuses on interstate managerial coordination and the formation of international order, the Greece - Turkey interstate rivalry, peace and conflict studies and diplomatic history broadly defined.

* Disclaimer: The document reflects the personal view of the author, and in no way the views of Özyeğin University or the Department of International Relations.

¹¹ Reiter, Dan, and Paul Poast. "The Truth About Tripwires: Why Small Force Deployments Do Not Deter Aggression (Summer 2021)", Texas National Security Review (2021). This can be accessed at <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/13989>.