

Hellenic News of America, June 21, 2006.

Why Greece has no Greek foreign policy

E. G. Vallianatos

From Persia in the early fifth century BCE, to the Romans 400 years later, to the Turks, 1,600 years later, foreign invaders have had a dramatic impact on the Greeks.

The Persian invasion of Greece and the Greeks' victory over that vast empire set the foundations of the Greeks' golden age. The Greeks directed their legitimate pride for their courage and manliness to works of permanent beauty and originality. Instead of counter attacking the defeated Persians, the Athenians in particular rebuilt their destroyed polis with gleaming marble vigorous democratic institutions, flourishing theater, Panhellenic athletic contests-celebrations of goddess Athena, schools of science, medicine and philosophy, uniting half of Greece under their leadership.

Unfortunately, fifty years after the Persian Wars, Sparte, which next to Athens was the greatest polis in the Greek world, saw the Athenian rise to power as a hostile act, leading to the Peloponnesian War, the Greeks' most destructive conflict ever. Sparte even invited Persia into Greek affairs. Persia funded Sparte's defeat of Athens, inflicting a permanent blow against Greek independence.

After the Peloponnesian War, Platon, Aristoteles, Archimedes and other great philosophers and scientists kept exploring human society, nature, and the cosmos as never before, sowing and consolidating the seeds for Greek civilization.

Yet the Peloponnesian War was a point of no return for the Greeks. Their strife facilitated the Roman conquest of their country in 146 BCE. Even the Greek successors to the empire of Alexander the Great failed to defend Greece from Roman danger. By 31 BCE Rome ended their freedom, the entire Hellenic world becoming provinces of the Roman Empire. Weakened and impoverished by Roman occupation and plunder, the Greeks then faced their worst conquerors – the Christians who even forced them to abandon their Hellenic name, calling themselves Romans from the fifth to the nineteenth century.

So by the time the Turks conquered Greece in 1453, the Greeks had gone through the blows of barbarian invaders and centuries of foreign occupation. They survived the Turkish concentration camp by playing the slave, the merchant, the doctor, and the speaker of several tongues. And when the opportunity for freedom knocked at their door, their Hellenism, suppressed by alive, made them instant Hellenes, winning their independence in the 1820s. They also recaptured most of the Greek lands from the Turks by early twentieth century and, in the peril of the Italian invasion in 1940, the Greeks fought exactly like their ancient ancestors, winning another Marathon.

Yet, once again, the occupation of the country by Germans, Italians and Bulgarians sparked another Peloponnesian War, this one fought fiercely from 1944 to 1949 in support of foreign interests. The so-called communists strove to dismember Greece and the communists' opponents, the so-called royalists-nationalists, fought for England and America.

The nine-year war, 1940-1949, nearly starved the country to death. American aid helped the Greeks to stand on their feet, but at a price. The Americans, no different than the Romans, had their own "strategic" interests in putting a brake on the spreading communism and Russian imperialism in particular. They organized the Western European armies under NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as a shield against Russia. And since Turkey shares a border with Russia, the Americans included the Greeks' worst enemy, Turkey, in that anti-Russian alliance. The Greeks, like it or not, had to play ball with American priorities in the Mediterranean, which were rarely pro-Greek. The Americans trained the Greek military, and America became the college for the Greek political class.

This explains why Greece, in the last half century, being entirely under the ideological and military control of America, has no foreign policy that mirrors Greek national interests.

The Greeks, however, do have a foreign policy. They know their enemies are not limited to the Turks. Italians and French dismembered medieval Greece in 1204. Niketas Choniates, a Greek historian who witnessed the atrocities of the crusaders, wrote about the hatred separating the Greeks and the Western Europeans: the Latins, he said, lusting after the possessions of the Greeks, scheming to destroy them. Choniates was right. The Latins prepared the way for the final onslaught of the Turks in 1453.

During the Greek War of Independence, Adamantios Koraes, the father of the Greek Revolution, advised the Greeks to do their own fighting and dying and never rely on foreigners to hand over freedom to them. This was solid Hellenic advice that fell on deaf ears. In the heat of battle, including civil wars, and amidst clashing foreign interests, the leaders of the revolution ignored Koraes.

Giannes Makrygiannes, an illiterate general and hero of the Greek War of Independence, documented the destructive foreign influence during the country's fight for freedom or death. He denounced the pro-Turkish policies of the Europeans. First of all, by 1821, the European governments were like America in the post-Islamic attack of September 11, 2001. They were united in a holy alliance against any revolution, America's version of the "war against terror." Second, official Europe helped the Turks against the Greek revolutionaries, bringing them food and supplies, putting a huge brake to the daring and courage of the Greeks. Europeans also used spies and loans against the Greeks, exacerbating their political divisions, trying to control the fate of the revolution. And when the corrupted Greek leaders, favoring one European government or another, assassinated their first president, John Kapodistrias in 1828, the Europeans took over Greek politics and imposed a German king on them. This act became nearly the norm for Greek political life. Greek parties campaigned largely for Russian, British, French, German, and, since the mid-twentieth century, American policies. In this new order, Greek national interests became secondary. This tradition continues.

Greece probably dreamt that it could change bosses from Washington to Brussels, but EU and America are the opposite faces of the same anti-Greek coin. Western governments have buried the Greek part of their culture. Deep down, the NATO ruling class considers Greece suspect because it is the only country in the world that has a Hellenic past. So they manufacture the Turkey effect, neutralizing the country to a perpetual beggar of American-made weapons, spending the money of tourism to enrich a few American and, sometimes, European munitions companies. And since EU does not still stand on its own feet, Greece has the illusion that following the Americans, even when it hurts like in Cyprus, will be some kind of security against Turkish invasion.

The May 23 "collision" of the Greek and Turkish F-16 fighter jets over the Aegean, with the resulting death of the Greek pilot, ought to warn Greece that, when it comes to her national interests, she is alone. So her primary

responsibility dictates she ought to become a very strong self-reliable country, fueled by livable cities, prosperous villages, organic farming, and solar energy. In addition, Greek society must recover from decades of neglect. This means paying Greek mothers to have more children, enticing the return to Greece of educated Greeks living abroad, and ending Albanian and other immigration. Greece ought to repatriate to Turkey those of the Moslems of Thrace who consider themselves Turks. Moreover, Greece must build a military second to none in Southeastern Europe. But this Hellenic vision would not go very far without building great universities and secondary schools -- with public libraries in every village and town.

Greek Americans ought to speed up such Hellenization of Greece with sharing of their wealth and talent. They must do for Greece what American Jews do for Israel, embracing Greece as their real home.

Once Greece turns to her own national interests, becoming Hellas in fact, the Turkish danger will be manageable, the country having a real foreign policy. At that moment, the new Hellas can resume her civilizing mission.

E.G. Vallianatos is the author of "This Land is Their Land: How Corporate Farms Threaten the World" (Common Courage Press) and the forthcoming "The Passion of the Greeks."