



AHI POLICY POSITIONS

American Hellenic Institute

The nation-wide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI) cares deeply about the role of the United States in the Eastern Mediterranean, in particular America's relations with Greece, Cyprus, and her neighbors.

AHI was founded in 1974 after Turkey invaded and occupied Cyprus. The Executive Branch refused to enforce federal laws prohibiting Ankara's aggressive use of U.S.-supplied arms and equipment, leaving AHI to persuade Congress to act.

As a result of AHI's advocacy, an arms embargo was imposed against Turkey in 1975. Since its inception, AHI has championed the promotion of the rule of law in the Eastern Mediterranean, more specifically the enforcement of U.S. and international laws as it pertains to actors in the region, which we believe to be in the best interests of the United States. Over time, AHI has become a leading forum for addressing important issues that affect America's relationship with Greece, Southeastern Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Cyprus.

With the change in administrations and the congress will come new approaches to issues of concern to AHI and new personnel responsible for managing relations with countries of interest to AHI.

U.S.-GREECE RELATIONS

AHI's Positions Based On U.S. Interests:

- Expand the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement with Greece as circumstances warrant.
- Condemn Turkey for violating Greece's continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) and insist that Ankara cease and desist from its illegal activities.
- Employ the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to back worthy projects to encourage Greece's economic development.
- Increase funding for Greece's International Military and Education Training (IMET) program to the authorized level of \$1.5 million.
- Provide robust Foreign Military Financing for Greece to purchase U.S. weapons and other defense equipment.
- Join in commemorating Greece's 2021 bicentennial, celebrating the historical U.S.-Greece friendship, and expanding strong people-to-people ties between the two countries.
- Encourage bilateral discussions to expand trade and investment and strengthen other commercial ties within the framework of the EU.
- Participate in official cross-country delegations between the United States and Greece and strengthen shared interests.
- Commit to enforcing U.S. and international law to promote Greece's security.

The American Hellenic Institute has long maintained that the U.S. should have a “special relationship” with Greece, recognizing the latter’s strategic location in southeastern Europe and support for important American political, economic, and military interests. A NATO member since 1952, Greece is a proven and reliable strategic ally. Indeed, Greece long has been “a pillar of stability” in a challenging region, as noted by several high-level U.S. government officials, including U.S. Ambassador to Greece Geoffrey Pyatt.

Greece is a frontline state in the fight against terrorism. It is home to America’s most important naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea, Naval Support Activity (NSA) Souda Bay, Crete. Larisa Air Force Base and Stefanovikio Hellenic Army airbase also contribute greatly to U.S. security.

The revised Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States and Greece illustrates their shared commitment to address security challenges in the region over a longer term. The U.S.-Greece relationship remains healthy even as governments change in Athens and Washington. Recent exchanges of note include the ongoing U.S.-Greece Strategic Dialogue, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis’ January 2020 White House meeting with President Donald Trump, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s historic second visit to Athens, a first for a Secretary of State, which included a trip to Souda Bay. This expanding bilateral relationship covers a range of sectors, especially defense and security.

Greece is an increasingly important player in international commerce and trade. Key 2020 advances in U.S.-Greek commercial ties included removing Greece from the Special 301 Report regarding IP protection and signing the U.S.-Greece Science and Technology Agreement, which promoted research cooperation and economic development. AHI supports taking additional steps to strengthen economic ties, especially to expand commercial partnerships and investment opportunities in Greece.

Also significant was the decision by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) to begin operations in Greece, which previously had not been eligible. AHI officials met OPIC officials, the Hellenic Caucus Co-Chairs, and White House officials to promote the policy change. OPIC later merged with another federal agency to become the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). Since then, AHI has engaged DFC to explore additional ways to attract investment to Greece.

Finally, the bicentennial of Greece’s independence in 2021 offers an opportunity to greatly enhance people-to-people ties. AHI urges the U.S. government to build upon the two nations’ lengthy friendship and be actively engaged in the commemoration. According to Ambassador Pyatt, “Celebrating Greece’s bicentennial together, we see the upcoming year as an opportunity to take our relationship to new heights. In 2021, the U.S. will continue to rely on Greece’s role as a pillar of stability, promoting security, peace and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans.” The United States should commit to increased cooperation to ensure Greece’s security and economic development and expand progress across all sectors.

TURKEY'S VIOLATIONS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND BROADER REGION

AHI's Positions Based On U.S. Interests:

- Reform & update the Eastern Mediterranean Policy Requirements (22 U.S. Code § 2373), to reflect current realities and circumstances and promote the enforcement of the rule of law and existing U.S. laws.
- The Biden Administration, in coordination with Congress, should conduct an official review of U.S.-Turkey relations.
- The Administration should hold Turkey accountable for its violations of U.S. policy and threats to U.S. interests by expanding existing sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).
- The Administration should submit a report to Congress on Turkey's violations of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), as required by law.
- The Administration should follow AECA and the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA), which require suspension of munitions and arms sales to countries that engage in "gross human rights violations" and support international terrorism. Given Turkey's violations of the AECA, the Administration should consider suspension of arms sales and transfer of defense munitions to Turkey.
- The Administration should immediately remove all nuclear assets from Incirlik airbase and plan for the eventual removal of all U.S. personnel and assets.

To encourage protection of U.S. security interests, AHI closely monitors Turkey's provocations and violations in the Eastern Mediterranean. AHI will continue to keep key U.S. government officials apprised of developments that affect U.S. interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and harm allies and strategic partners, including Greece, Cyprus, and Israel.

Turkey recklessly risks provoking conflict with Greece. Turkish violations of Greek airspace and territorial waters are routine. The most egregious recent case occurred in 2020 when Ankara announced it would conduct seismic surveys off the coast of the Greek island complex of Kastellorizo.

The U.S. government, both executive and legislative branches, rightly sanctioned Turkey for its procurement of the S-400s under CAATSA in December, 2020. Those penalties should be expanded.

The Administration should similarly penalize Turkish entities responsible for Ankara's many illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and northeast Syria. Washington also should deny any foreign assistance for Turkey, including any preferences regarding military sales, benefits under any other assistance programs, or most favored nation (trade) treatment. These actions would promote international law and regional stability, both of which are significant U.S. interests.

In addition, the U.S. government needs to have a proper official policy regarding the Eastern Mediterranean. While the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act is an important first step towards becoming more engaged with the region, additional steps need to be taken. The Eastern Mediterranean Policy Requirements (22 U.S. Code § 2373) contains the policy remnants of the Turkey arms embargo of 1975, and has not been updated since 1978. It is unacceptable to have statutes that are decades-old and anachronistic, pertaining to such a geo-strategically important part of the world. As such, the Eastern Mediterranean Policy Requirements, needs to be updated to reflect the realities and circumstances as they exist today, as well as ensure the enforcement of existing laws, such as the AECA, as it pertains to actors in the region.

Policy issues involving Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean and broader region reflect:

- Turkey's continuing violations of Greece's territorial waters and airspace, numbering over 7,000 violations in 2020. There were 4605 airspace and 3215 maritime incidents;
- The Turkey-Libya Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on maritime borders, which has been resoundingly dismissed by the international community as null and void and without any legal foundation. Under the MoU, Turkey announced its intention to engage in exploratory drilling from the north of Rhodes to the southeast of Crete; and
- Turkey's violations of the AECA every time Ankara orders U.S.-supplied F-16s into Greek airspace because they are legally restricted to "legitimate self-defense." Not even Turkey alleges that Greece provoked these sorties. Ankara also violates international law when its planes enter Greek airspace;
- Turkey's aggression against Cyprus, which includes its continuing illegal occupation of 37.3 percent of the island;
- Turkey's numerous incursions and illegal drilling in Cyprus' EEZ supported by Turkish warships and drones, and other instances of "gunboat diplomacy;"
- Turkey's illegal weaponization of migration policy to create a crisis on the Greece-Turkey land and sea border. Ankara thereby undermined the EU and elevated tensions amid the coronavirus pandemic. These actions further threaten Greece's economic development;
- Turkish support for Hamas, designated by the U.S. as an anti-Israel terrorist organization. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hosted Hamas' top leadership, including individuals designated as global terrorists, leading to State Department condemnation in August 2020.

THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERSHIP (3 + 1)

AHI Policy Positions Based On U.S. Interests:

- The Administration, in concert with Congress, should allocate the resources necessary to establish the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center, as authorized by the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act.
- The Administration should encourage American energy companies to invest in the Eastern Mediterranean and protect them from illegal Turkish interference.
- The Administration should promote the Eastern Mediterranean as an energy corridor for the region and continental Europe.
- The Administration should oppose Turkey's MoU with Libya, which contravenes international law, impinges upon the sovereignty of third parties, and undermines regional efforts to establish the Eastern Mediterranean as an energy hub.

Since 2010, Greece, Israel, and Cyprus have formed a strategic relationship. Their ties center around energy activities, based on recent discoveries over the past decade, as well as security and counter-terrorism cooperation, which is increasingly important amid rising threats in the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, this area could serve as an alternative source of energy for Europe, making the continent less dependent on Russian gas.

On March 20, 2019, U.S. officials met with government representatives of Greece, Israel, and Cyprus. Washington endorsed the trilateral partnership, hence the term "3+1." U.S. backing was further institutionalized by passage of the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act ("The East Med Act").

AHI, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, B'nai B'rith International, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations have held bi-annual meetings with leadership delegations from the three countries since 2014. In addition, the AHI initiated, in conjunction with the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, an official briefing on energy in the Eastern Mediterranean in March 2020.

THE CYPRUS PROBLEM & U.S.-CYPRUS RELATIONS

AHI's Positions Based On U.S. Interests:

- The United States should condemn President Erdogan's promotion of a two-state solution for Cyprus, and support for illegally re-opening the beach in Varosha, in violation of international law and United Nations Resolutions. The U.S. should actively oppose the Erdogan plan and not leave the issue to the United Nations.
- The Administration must view the Cyprus issue as one of invasion and occupation by Turkey, similar to that of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, rather than an ethnic dispute.
- The Administration must actively take a leadership role in solving the Cyprus problem by creating the proper climate for negotiations, rather than abdicating such responsibilities to the United Nations and other international bodies.
- The Administration should support a settlement of the Cyprus problem through negotiations based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation in a state with single sovereignty and international personality. This entity should embrace constitutional democratic norms and American principles, the EU acquis Communautaire and EU Founding Treaty, UN resolutions on Cyprus, and pertinent decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and other European Courts.
- The United States should *fully and permanently* lift its arms prohibition on Cyprus and remove Cyprus from the list of countries to which arms sales are prohibited under International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR).
- The Administration should condemn Turkey for its illegal interference in Cyprus' EEZ and urge Turkey to halt its violations.
- The Administration should demand the immediate removal of all Turkish troops in Turkish-occupied Cyprus, a position that President Biden has advocated for in the past.
- The Administration should demand Turkey's cooperation in helping recover the four Americans who are still missing as a result of the 1974 invasion of Cyprus
- The Administration must call upon Turkey to remove its over 180,000 illegal settlers from Turkish-occupied Cyprus. Turkey's efforts to promote illegal settlement in occupied Cyprus is in violation of international law and the Geneva Convention.
- Americans must have the right to seek financial remedies for their property losses in the Turkish occupied territory of Cyprus.
- Official cross-country delegations between the United States and Cyprus share interests and expand relationships. Such trips should be made even more frequent.
- Provide sustained IMET program funding for Cyprus. This will strengthen United States security interests in an increasingly important part of the world by helping to train and professionalize Cypriot military personnel.

2021 marks the 47th anniversary of Turkey's invasion of Cyprus. Ankara's continued obstruction, including insistence on a continued Treaty of Guarantee, which would allow for future unilateral Turkish military intervention, contradicts the governing principals of European Union member states and led to the collapse of the 2017 Conference on Cyprus. Moreover, Turkey refuses to withdraw its more than 40,000 troops illegally stationed in Cyprus. In addition, Ankara's illegal activities in the Cypriot EEZ and reopening at Varosha undermine efforts to resume Cyprus settlement talks.

Regarding the United States and the international community more broadly, there needs to significantly larger condemnation regarding Cyprus. Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974, and subsequent occupation, is parallel to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the United States worked in tandem with the United Nations in demanding an immediate and unconditional Iraqi withdrawal, and in imposing broad-based U.S. & U.N sanctions on Iraq. Later on, the United States led an international coalition which expelled Iraq from Kuwait by force. To be clear, using military force against Turkey should be an option of last resort. That being said, at minimum, the United States as well as international bodies, such as the United Nations, need to impose sanctions on Turkey commensurate to those imposed on prior rogue regime that have illegally invaded and occupied another nations.

The U.S. should be not only an honest broker, but an active facilitator in order to create the appropriate climate for negotiations. On January 27, 1989, then-Senator Joe Biden wrote to the AHI, in which he stated:

"...we must urge the new Administration [President George H.W. Bush] to make Cyprus a higher policy priority in American foreign policy...we cannot lose sight of the fact that the rights of Greek Cypriots have been trampled upon, and we must ensure that their claims to ancestral land and property seized during the 1974 invasion are not compromised. Finally, we must send a signal to Turkey that until it has removed every last soldier from Cyprus, it will never be recognized as a full member of the international community."

This should be President Biden's position today!

There are other serious consequences of Turkey's illegal occupation. For instance, Ankara has sent more than 180,000 illegal colonists/settlers in Cyprus, violating the Geneva Convention. Moreover, religious freedom has been abrogated and Greek cultural heritage sites in Turkish-occupied Cyprus have been destroyed.

Turkey's illegal occupation of Cyprus also has restricted The Committee on Missing Persons' ability to excavate the remains of Cypriots missing since the invasion for proper identification. Five American citizens died during the fighting; the remains of four of them are still unaccounted for.

The United States and Republic of Cyprus significantly strengthened their strategic partnership in 2020 with a conditional, partial lifting of the arms prohibition on Cyprus and first-time U.S. investment in an IMET program for the Republic of Cyprus. Although a good first step, the partial lifting of the arms prohibition only addressed non-lethal defense articles for commercial sales and only for one year. The Administration should remove Cyprus from the ITAR list, making it eligible to acquire U.S. defense articles and defense services without conditions. The first-time provision of IMET funding for Cyprus also signaled deepening security cooperation and recognition that Cyprus is an important partner in countering malign influences in the Eastern Mediterranean.

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE & RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN TURKEY

AHI's Positions Based On U.S. Interests:

- The United States should condemn the Turkish government's persecution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, an obligation under the Treaty of Lausanne and international law.
- Call upon the Turkish government to recognize the international legal personality of the Ecumenical Patriarch.
- Call upon the Turkish government to re-open the Halki Patriarchal School of Theology.
- The Administration should sanction Turkey for its violations of religious liberty under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).
- The Administration should penalize Ankara and individual Turkish officials for gross human rights violations under the Global Magnitsky Act.
- The State Department should suspend or terminate the MoU regarding cultural property.

The Turkish government's suppression of religious freedom for minorities and tolerance of assaults upon Greek Orthodox Christian community demonstrate how Turkey habitually violates the rule of law and international norms governing religious liberty. In 1994 AHI became the first Greek-American organization to raise the issue of religious freedom and protection for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the spiritual home of the world's oldest and second largest Christian Church, and the reopening of Halki Seminary with Congress and the executive branch.

The U.S. government should demand that the Turkish government to safeguard the Ecumenical Patriarchate, protect its personnel and property, and reopen the Halki Patriarchal School of Theology. Section 2804 of the 1998 Omnibus Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act called for the Turkish government to respect the Ecumenical Patriarchate and reopen the Halki Seminary.

Moreover, IRFA targets any country whose government "engages in or tolerates violations of religious freedom and promote the right to religious freedom in that country." The Act authorizes the Administration to impose a variety of diplomatic and economic sanctions, including suspending aid and restricting trade.

The Erdogan government also forcibly converted Hagia Sophia and Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora—historic Orthodox sanctuaries and UNESCO World Heritage Sites—into mosques. AHI urged the State Department to reject Turkey's request for an MoU on cultural property originating prior to 1924 out of fear that Erdogan would consider such an agreement to justify the conversions. Unfortunately, the U.S. government agreed to Turkey's proposed MoU on January 19, 2021. The Biden Administration should suspend or revoke the MoU until Ankara commits to protect rather than destroy Christian patrimony under its control.