

Greek Navy Seals in rightist provocation

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A video by reporting agency Eurokinnisi depicts a Greek Navy Seals (OYK) detachment shouting extreme right-wing slogans during the annual March 25 Greek Independence Day parade in Athens.

The men can be seen on YouTube marching through the centre of Athens, chanting, “Our dream is to enter the City, to raise the flag and sing the anthem.” “The City” [*I Poli* in Greek] is a colloquial term for Istanbul, while the slogan is a reference to the historic aspirations of the Greek bourgeoisie for a “Greater Greece.”

Independence Day commemorates the start of the Greek War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821. The main parade held in Athens is a display of Cold-War style militarism, with military detachments, including missile and armoured vehicle units, marching past the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Syntagma Square in front of the Greek Parliament.

Five years ago, during the 2010 Independence Day Parade, the OYK detachment chanted, “You’re born Greek, you never become one. We’ll spill your blood, you Albanian pig.”

Modelled on the US Underwater Demolition Team (later Navy Seals) during World War II, the OYK was set up in 1953, shortly after Greece joined NATO, when the first men were sent to the United States to be trained in underwater demolition. One of the bastions of the military junta that ruled Greece between 1967-1974, in more recent years the OYK have developed strong links with the fascist Golden Dawn.

Speaking to the newspaper *To Vima* in 2013, a former Golden Dawn member said that the neo-Nazi party’s storm troopers were trained by “former and current members of the OYK, the LOK (Mountain Commandos) and other special units. Many of those who make up Golden Dawn’s units come, as a priority, from the army’s special forces.”

A number of Syriza MPs have issued token

denunciations. In a statement posted on Facebook, Vassiliki Katrivanou said that the slogans were testament to “the existence and the activity of organized neo-fascist cells within the state apparatus.” She called on the government “to prove its political will to destroy these cells, breaking the culture of cover-ups and impunity, the consequences of which were seen [at the parade].”

Speaking to *Vima FM*, government spokesman and Syriza MP Gabriel Sakellaridis showed the full extent of the government’s “political will” by stating that he was “annoyed” by the “various slogans heard from some of the marchers”, before proceeding to state that he didn’t know who these marchers were despite documentary evidence to the contrary. After issuing a token condemnation, he stated, “I would obviously imagine that the relevant authorities will take the necessary steps, so that such things are not repeated again.”

The “relevant authorities” have done the exact opposite. While claiming to have ordered an investigation into the incident, Defence Minister Panos Kammenos denied that the OYK men chanted the slogan, and that the video was from last year’s parade. Eurokinnisi responded by denying Kammenos’ claims, reiterating that the footage is current.

Kammenos is the leader of the Independent Greeks (ANEL), the right-wing split-off from the conservative New Democracy, which is Syriza’s junior coalition partner. Kammenos has very close links to the military, and his control of the Defence Ministry was one of the preconditions for entering into coalition with Syriza. In an interview with the defence news web site *Onalert.gr* last December, he pledged to “protect the Armed Forces from some of the strange mentalities within Syriza.”

He didn’t have to work hard to counter these “strange mentalities”, which in the past included calls by some

Syriza MPs to abolish military parades. On March 11, Attica Prefect Rena Dourou, previously a Syriza MP, met with Kammenos to discuss arrangements for the parade. To present the parades as “inclusive”, it was decided to remove the barriers that kept the crowd apart from the dignitary stand, while Greek flags were handed out to people by soldiers. The parade was followed by a fiesta of folk dancing, accompanied by music played by the Armed Forces Orchestra.

Including folk dancing harks back to the junta era, when such events were commonplace during Independence Day. Kammenos responded to such commentary by asking, “Was it only the junta that danced the tsamiko [a traditional folk dance]? Did the left only dance the waltz?”

The OYK’s slogan of “enter[ing] the City” was entirely in the spirit of the parade. For the first time ever, army detachments from the Evros region and the island of Rhodes took part in the parade. The River Evros marks the land border between Greece and Turkey, while Rhodes is just off the Anatolian coast of Turkey.

This must be seen within the wider context of Kammenos’ belligerent stance towards Turkey since taking over as defence minister. In February, Kammenos provocatively flew over the islets of Imia, whose ownership Greece disputes with Turkey, to drop wreaths in memory of three Greek officers killed nearby in a helicopter crash 19 years ago. In 1996, Greece came close to war over the islets. Kammenos’ provocation resulted in Turkish fighter jets being scrambled and entering Greek airspace. They were intercepted by Greek jets, while seven Greek coast guard boats faced three Turkish ones off of the islets.

This whipping up of jingoism and nationalism serves as an important political cover behind which Syriza works with the European Union (EU), European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to impose yet more austerity on the Greek working class. In the run-up to the parade, Kammenos stated, “We will show our partners with our dances and our traditional costumes that the people are a sovereign state and united.”

The openness with which the OYK detachment shouted fascist slogans during the parade should serve as a warning to the working class and youth. Having already capitulated to the EU, ECB and IMF, the Syriza-

led government will increasingly rely on repressive measures in order to quash opposition to its pursuing of the same austerity policies as its predecessors.

In the years before taking power, Syriza made great efforts to cultivate its relations with the armed forces. In June 2012, party leader Alexis Tsipras held talks with the Greek Defence Ministry and army high command to make clear his readiness to work closely with the army. “Defending the country’s territorial integrity and national independence is a non-negotiable priority for Syriza,” he said.

In October 2014, he met with the political and military leadership of the Defence Ministry to learn of Greece’s geostrategic goals. Tsipras denounced Turkey for violating the sovereign rights of Cyprus, warning that Greece’s “deterrent capability remains strong ... due to the selfless stance” of military personnel.

Prior to taking power January 26, Tsipras authorised a phone call to the chief of the General Staff of the Greek Army and a meeting with the leader of the Greek Police by leading party figure Thodoris Dritsas. According to the Independent Balkan News Agency, Dritsas conveyed to the two officials Syriza’s desire “that everything goes smoothly during this critical election campaign, and that at no point should the senior government officials in sensitive positions in the state apparatus feel that there is a vacuum of power or lack of trust.”

As soon as the polls closed, Syriza’s Nikos Voutsis phoned the heads of the police and the army. According to Channel 4 News journalist Paul Mason, Voutsis, who was soon afterwards named interior minister, told them, “We trust you.”

Prior to the election, Syriza said they intended to disband riot police units and merge them into the general force. This pledge was abandoned immediately, with a Syriza deputy minister at the ministry of the interior announcing, “The police will have weapons at protests.”



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