

# Syriza government endorses “war on terror” to divert opposition to austerity

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9 May 2015

Greece’s Syriza-led government is endorsing the US-led “war on terror” and promoting militarism to divert rising social opposition to its sweeping austerity policies.

At a conference on defence and security organised by the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce in Athens on Tuesday, Greece’s defence minister and leader of the far-right Independent Greeks (Anel), Panos Kammenos, said Greece would allow NATO to use its military bases for wars in the Middle East.

Kammenos declared, “Greece is ready to undertake this initiative in NATO’s southern sector.” He added that Greece would allow the use of its “facilities, our armed forces and large bases in the region of the southern Aegean, to facilitate the forces of the alliance in the war against terrorism.”

Kammenos’ comment underscores the reactionary character of the Syriza-led government. Since it came to power in January, having campaigned on promises to end austerity, it has repudiated its promises and intensified draconian austerity measures demanded by the troika—the European Union (EU), European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Now Syriza’s austerity policies are accompanied by its support for reactionary wars conducted by the US and its European allies in the Middle East.

Commenting on Kammenos’ statement of support for US-NATO wars, *Kathimerini* wrote, “With the stances of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias notably different to those set out by Kammenos yesterday, government sources expressed concern over the defence minister’s comments. Diplomatic sources appeared troubled by the fact that matters of strategic importance were being broached at a conference.”

In fact, the differences inside the Syriza-Anel

coalition government on the escalation of imperialist wars in the Middle East are of a purely tactical character, over how quickly and how openly to adopt a pro-war posture. Both Syriza and Anel are committed, however, to supporting US-led wars and the broader geo-strategic interests of the imperialist powers of NATO.

Soon after taking office, Tsipras made clear his support for NATO foreign policy by declining to veto EU financial sanctions against Russia over the conflict in Ukraine. Instead, Syriza voted to escalate EU sanctions against Russia as the US and NATO threatened war with Moscow. Tsipras’ support for NATO provocations against Russia was of a piece, however, with his broad support for the foreign policy of the leading imperialist powers.

Before the election campaign, during Tsipras’ meeting with officials in the major imperialist countries, Tsipras repeatedly made clear that Syriza would not jeopardise NATO policies if it were elected.

During Tsipras’ visit to Washington in 2013 for meetings at the Brookings Institution think tank, the *New York Times* published an op-ed titled “Only SYRIZA Can Save Greece.” The piece, which was co-authored by future Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, pledged Syriza’s loyalty to NATO and to US imperialism. If Syriza took office, it said, “nothing vital would change for the United States. Syriza doesn’t intend to leave NATO or close American military bases.”

The article also praised Syriza’s proposal to restructure Greek debt as a good thing for Greece’s creditors, writing: “Banks and hedge funds know that most Greek debt is held by European taxpayers and by the European Central Bank, and what’s left is being snapped up by investors because they know it will be

paid.”

Syriza’s election victory has exposed its reactionary political agenda as a party of austerity and war. As it prepares deeply unpopular measures, including further cuts to wages, pensions, and social spending and privatising state-owned companies, Syriza is considering using military force and supporting imperialist war to divert rising social tension into reactionary channels.

The Syriza-led government is signaling a more aggressive military posture as it plans sweeping austerity measures demanded by the troika.

In order to obtain a further €7.2 billion loan from the troika, Syriza is preparing to provide detailed social cuts, including to pensions and health care and structural reforms. These reforms include reactionary changes to labour laws, layoffs in the public sector, and the privatisation of state-owned companies.

Greek Deputy Prime Minister Yannis Dragasakis, who oversees the Syriza government’s economic policy, said he was optimistic on talks with the troika and hoped to strike an agreement with it at the eurozone finance ministers meeting on May 11.

He told Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper: “I hope on Monday a sign of progress will be given and [they say] an agreement is visible. Talks, so far, have shown there is common ground in changes and political measures and, therefore, I believe a deal is possible and in the interests of everyone.”

On Wednesday, during a telephone conversation, Tsipras discussed pension and labour reform measures with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. According to their joint statement, “They registered the progress that has been made in the recent days between Greece and its partners on the issue of the detailed package of reforms in order for the evaluation to be completed successfully.”

Amid increasing pressure for Greece to make further cuts and repay its creditors, the financial press reported that the Syriza government is already repaying its loans by increasing taxes and reducing social spending. Syriza is thus proving to be a more convenient tool for the financial elites to impoverish the working class and loot Greece.

Recently, the government ordered state entities, including pension funds, local authorities, hospitals and universities, to hand over their cash reserves to the

central bank to pay off the EU. On Wednesday, the government paid the IMF €200 million and it is preparing to pay €700 million on May 12.

Greece must find more than €10 billion for its creditors before the end of August, according to BNP Paribas.

On May 6, the *Financial Times* wrote, “Despite many predictions the country should have gone bust by now, the Syriza-led government has managed to scrape together enough funds to pay its creditors... Not only have tax receipts crept back up to where they’re almost at last year’s levels (and pre-crisis estimates) for the first quarter of the year, but spending has been slashed to where the government has paid out €1.5bn less than anticipated.”

Without any public discussion, Syriza is finding the money to pay off its creditors by systematically starving critical social infrastructure of funding. The *Financial Times* explained, “Healthcare spending in particular has taken a hit. A line item for ‘cover of hospital deficit’, for example, has seen only €43m in spending thus far, while it will eventually cost the government €1.1bn this year. Investment spending, budgeted at €6.4bn, has only seen €542m in payouts.”



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