

Greece deepens role as Washington's Eastern Mediterranean bulwark

John Vassilopoulos
28 May 2026

Over the second week of May, Greece's armed forces took part in NATO's biggest special forces exercise, "Trojan Footprint 2026".

The United States-led event took place across 10 countries spanning the Mediterranean, Baltic Sea, and Black Sea, with Greece serving as the exercise's key operational hub in the Eastern Mediterranean. Involved were approximately 1,000 US special operations forces personnel, along with 2,000 from NATO allies and partner forces.

The exercise took place within the context of US imperialism's war against Iran and NATO's war in Ukraine against Russia and was presented as a dress rehearsal for escalation of these conflicts. Sky News reported the exercise was "designed to test responses to attempts by an unnamed enemy—most likely Russia—to infiltrate NATO territory and launch sabotage, cyber and other attacks under the threshold of all-out war."

The exercise was overshadowed by the unravelling of transatlantic relations, as US imperialism's aggressive pursuit of its geopolitical interests cuts across those of the European imperialist powers. This was reflected in Trump's withdrawal of 5,000 US troops from Germany and his halting of the planned deployment of US intermediate-range weapons there.

On May 26, *Politico* reported that Washington had "told allies [at a closed-door meeting of NATO policy directors on May 22] it will gradually scale down the number of strategic bombers, fighter jets, drones, submarines and warships dedicated to NATO as it continues pressing Europe to do more for its own defense."

Given these tensions, that significant numbers of US personnel participated in the special forces exercise—including in Greece—reflects the high strategic value the Eastern Mediterranean has for Washington. In 2019, under the previous Trump administration, the US-Greek Mutual Defence Cooperation Agreement was signed. This expanded the US Sixth Fleet naval base in Souda Bay, Crete, established drone bases in central Greece, and created a combined military base and natural gas facility at

Alexandroupoli in northeastern Greece.

Ahead of the signing, Geoffrey Pyatt, the US Ambassador to Greece commented: "In an era of renewed great power competition and the largest hydrocarbon discoveries of the past decade, this global crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa has returned to the forefront of American strategic thinking. After years of taking the Eastern Mediterranean for granted, the United States has stepped back to take a considered, whole-of-government look at how we advance US interests."

The extent to which Greece is aligned with US geostrategic aims in the region was evident following Washington's illegal assault on Iran. Just days after US and Israeli forces began their bombardment of Iran, Greece was the first to respond to the drone strike on Britain's Akrotiri sovereign base on March 2—attributed without proof to Tehran or its allies—deploying frigates equipped with anti-drone systems and F-16 fighter jets to Cyprus before Britain had announced the deployment of its own warship to the region. A Greek anti-aircraft battery stationed in Saudi Arabia shot down two Iranian ballistic missiles on March 19.

Souda Bay in Crete has provided crucial logistical support to US forces throughout their deployment in the Middle East. The US maintains a permanent troop presence in Greece of around 400 mainly naval personnel, largely at Souda Bay.

Greece's integration into US imperialism's war drive is the culmination of the country's decades-long status as a client state for Washington. Historically, the country has been one of NATO's top defence spenders, consistently and comfortably exceeding the 2 percent of GDP benchmark set by the alliance. This included the years of last decade's financial crisis, when health, pensions and other social provisions were gutted at the behest of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

During the first half of this decade, Greece's defence spending amounted to an average of 3.33 percent of GDP—including just under 4 percent in 2021 and 2022. Over the next decade, Greece is embarking on the largest

modernisation drive of its military in history, planning to spend €25 billion. This includes new submarines, air, sea and underwater drones, and a communications satellite. At the centre of the plans is the “Achilles Shield”, an anti-aircraft and anti-drone dome developed in partnership with Israel.

While this does not yet reach the new NATO target of 3.5 percent of GDP for Core Defence and 1.5 percent for Security-Related Spending, it is a staggering squandering of resources, equating to €2,500 per head of population of around 10 million people. Were the UK to commit to such military spending, this would require the Labour government to hand over approximately about €174.8 billion (£149 billion) to the armed forces.

In contrast to the unceremonious treatment meted out by Trump to Washington’s leading European allies over their failure to commit their military forces to join US strikes on Iran, Greece has been repeatedly singled out by the US President for praise. At a White House press conference in April, he stated that “Greece has been very supportive, actually. Greece has been terrific. [Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis] is a terrific guy because he understands the importance of it.”

An integral part of drawing Greece even closer to Washington has been the forging of close military ties with Israel over the past decade, centred on control of the enormous natural gas reserves discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean by a US Geological Survey in 2010.

At the start of 2016, the pseudo-left Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) government—which had previously campaigned on ending military ties with Israel—signed a tripartite agreement with Israel and Cyprus on energy cooperation, counterterrorism, and military coordination. At a summit hosted by Israel in Jerusalem last December, the leaders of the three countries agreed to deepen cooperation on “security, defence and military matters” to protect “critical regional infrastructure” in the Mediterranean.

The militarisation of the Eastern Mediterranean has served to inflame Greece’s historic tensions with Türkiye, also a US ally and NATO member and, notwithstanding President Erdoğan’s frequent anti-imperialist posturing, no less integrated in Washington’s drive to war in the region.

At the centre are rivalries over control in the Aegean as well as the frozen conflict in Cyprus, which have sharpened since the discovery of gas reserves in the region. Greece’s deepening alliance with Israel has added fuel to the fire, given Türkiye’s escalating rivalry with Israel. In the summer of 2020, Greece and Türkiye came dangerously close to war after Türkiye dispatched a gas survey vessel into an economic zone claimed by Greece and Cyprus, resulting in a stand-off between Greek and Turkish warships.

Since then, Greece has become increasingly assertive in the region. In 2021, its parliament extended territorial waters in the Ionian Sea from six to 12 nautical miles, the first such expansion since 1947. This move is widely seen as a precedent for a future extension in the Aegean, which would effectively restrict Turkish naval movement.

In 2024, Greece announced plans for a maritime park in the Aegean. Türkiye rejected the move, stating it would not accept “fait accompli” actions in disputed areas. Greek Foreign Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis reaffirmed that extending territorial waters to 12 nautical miles is a sovereign right that Greece will exercise when it chooses.

In response, Turkey has advanced its “Blue Homeland” doctrine into legislation, asserting maritime claims in the Black Sea and Mediterranean. Turkish officials describe this as defending national rights against external pressure.

Behind these rivalries lie deep internal crises. In Türkiye, inflation near 80 percent with growing working-class unrest is a major threat to the Erdoğan government. In Greece, long-term austerity—fuelled by the mass movement for justice for the Tempi rail crash victims—has produced repeated waves of strikes over wages and living conditions. Protests and strikes have brought to the fore anti-war sentiment, with demands that funding be allocated to social spending on health, education and housing; not military spending. This opposition will only mount as Greece’s treasury is emptied and handed over for the planned surge in military spending.

Espousal of nationalism and militarism serve to redirect these social tensions outward while advancing the predatory interests of the Greek bourgeoisie in the Eastern Mediterranean. As the WWSW noted in 2022, Erdoğan and Mitsotakis are “united in the attempt to use militarism and nationalism to divide the working class and suppress the growing struggles on both shores of the Aegean Sea.” The answer is the independent political mobilisation of Greek and Turkish workers, united internationally against capitalism and the drive to war.



To contact the WWSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact