

Will the US Use Greece to Block Russia in the Black Sea?

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*The Trump administration last week made its first major step to create a Greek-centric NATO corridor following United States Ambassador to Greece, **Geoffrey R. Pyatt**, announcement that his country intends to acquire the strategic port of Alexandroupoli. If Athens is to accept such a proposal, the country would be contributing to a geopolitical escalation. The US is attempting to push Greece, a traditional rival to Turkey, closer to them at a time when Ankara continues to defy NATO by strengthening its relations with Russia.*

The port of Alexandroupoli is of particular importance to US policy in not only the Balkans, but especially to Russia. It is also an important energy route as the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB) pipeline and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) is in the region. The port is also important for transportation as it is strategically located close to the Turkish-controlled Dardanelles that connects the Aegean/Mediterranean Seas with the Black Sea, and therefore Russia.

With the acquisition of this port, NATO and US forces may be in the Balkans in only a few hours and can easily stop Russian trade with the world via the Black Sea by blockading the Dardanelles. With Turkey increasingly defying NATO – in which Greece is also a member state of – by improving relations with Russia and buying the S-400, the US can make Greece more aligned with it under the guise of ensuring Greece’s security.

Turkey violates Greece’s maritime and air space on a [daily basis](#), Erdogan makes continued [threats to invade](#) the rest of Cyprus. Only weeks ago he made a speech in front of a map that shows Greece’s eastern Mediterranean islands [occupied by Turkey](#), and days ago Turkey removed the inhabited Greek island of Kastellorizo from [online maps](#) to claim sovereignty over oil and gas reserves, while continuing threats to [flood Greece](#) again with illegal immigrants, among others. Greece undoubtedly has an extremely aggressive neighbour.

With Turkey illegally occupying large areas of northern Syria and Cyprus, and illegally intervening in Iraq, Greece must deal with an extremely provocative and expansionist-driven neighbour. With Russia traditionally remaining silent on Turkish provocations towards Greece, it is unlikely that Moscow will stop doing so now that relations are flourishing between the two Black Sea neighbours.

The US are trying to capitalize on Erdogan’s aggression towards Greece by attempting to pivot Athens towards them. If the Greek leadership decide to accept the US offer, it will be a powerful blow towards Turkish expansionism in the Aegean and will create a major security threat for Russia. As Greece is a rival of Turkey, the fact it prioritized creating a powerful

navy and air force that could block the Dardanelles if needed, might embolden Greece to take direct actions against Turkey's continued aggressions and threats.

Despite Greece being an economically ruined country today with a demographic crisis, it still maintains high military standards. This is reflected with Greece having the [best pilots in NATO](#), in which Turkey is also a member of. In maritime matters, Greece has a far superior navy and experience in the Aegean. The Greek Navy has a long tradition and has [never been defeated](#) in combat. For this reason, Greece's navy is one of the most important world naval powers today, at a military and commercial level. Although Turkey's army makes it one of the largest in the world, it is rendered useless in any war with Greece. Although Greece has a significant maritime border with Turkey, the land border is only 200km long, making it easy to fortify.

With security against Turkey's continued aggression being a major priority for Greece, the US ambassador is trying to woo the country into allowing the privatization of the port of Alexandroupoli. He stated: "Alexandroupoli is a crucial link to European energy security, regional stability, and economic growth, so it makes sense that the United States and Greece have chosen here to work together to advance our shared security and economic interests."

With his emphasis on security, it will likely spark huge debates in Athens as it needs security assurances but will also not want to provoke Russia, a country that Greeks see with fraternity when remembering their shared Christian Orthodox faith and Russia's military and diplomatic role in securing Greece's independence from the Ottoman Empire. Although Russia is unlikely to back one side or another, a US-controlled port in Alexandroupoli can significantly weaken Russia's Black Sea capabilities.

If comments by the National Defense Minister, Nikos Panagiotopoulos, of the newly elected neoliberal government is anything to go by, it can be expected that Athens will allow Alexandroupoli to become a US-controlled port. He said that the "use of the port by the US Armed Forces" will be allowed "when there is [certainly] a need" for it, especially as Greece's current "strategic defense relationship with the US and cooperation" are strengthened, "thereby contributing to regional stability and security." In direct reference to Turkey, he also said "Greece is ready at any time and moment to defend and safeguard in full its sovereign rights."

In order to avoid a US naval base on the other side of the Dardanelles, Russia should take a position it has proven to be capable of, and something the US lacks experience in-peacebuilding. If Russia can act as a mediator between Greek and Turkey, it might be enough to avoid Athens pivoting towards the US so that it can ensure its security. Russia has proven in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere that it is willing to serve as a mediator in international affairs. With Moscow currently having amicable relations with Ankara, Russia being viewed positively by the majority of Greeks, being a regional country to both Greece and Turkey, and having its own vested interests in the region, Russia is in a unique position to be able to mediate mutually to find a lasting peace between Greece and Turkey, and to prevent the US acquiring the port of Alexandroupoli.

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