

AMERICAN HELLENIC INSTITUTE



POLICY STATEMENTS



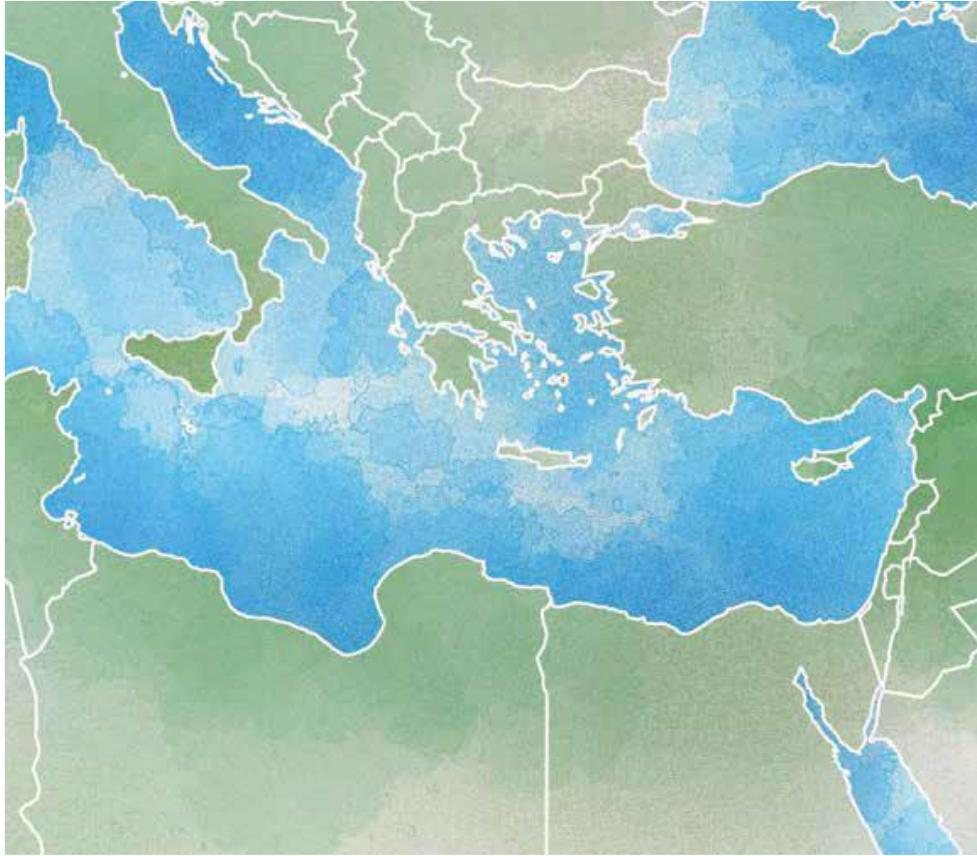
American Hellenic Institute

The American Hellenic Institute was founded in 1974 to uphold the rule of law in matters of U.S. foreign policy, particularly in our nation's dealings with Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey, and educate U.S. policymakers and citizens about the geo-strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean and its relevance to American security. The organization was formed after Turkey's illegal invasion and occupation of Cyprus in 1974.

The Nixon and Ford administrations failed to enforce federal laws that prohibited Turkey's use of U.S.-supplied weapons and equipment in aggression against its neighbor. AHI stepped in to persuade legislators to act. AHI's advocacy prompted Congress to impose an arms embargo on Ankara in 1975.

Since its creation, AHI has championed America's strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, which are best served by enforcing U.S. and international law with all parties. AHI has highlighted the importance of Washington's long-standing relationship with NATO ally, Greece, and strategic partner, Cyprus, as well as the challenges posed by Turkey's violation of the international law, the rule of law, and to U.S. interests. Over time, AHI has become a leading forum for addressing important issues surrounding America's relations throughout the region, including with Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, and Southeastern Europe.

Strategic Importance of the Eastern Mediterranean



The Eastern Mediterranean is the nexus of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Extensive commerce, including critical energy shipments, transit the region. Significant discoveries of hydrocarbons offer the potential for new energy sources, made even more vital by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. U.S. access to allied bases, most importantly Naval Support Activity (NSA) Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete, offers critical support for American military operations in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe.

The policy positions presented take into consideration two main criteria: 1) the question of what is in the best interests of the United States, and 2) the application of the rule of law. Primarily, they address U.S. relations with Greece, Cyprus and Turkey as they affect overall U.S. interests.

Eastern Mediterranean Partnership (3 + 1)

The U.S. government should:

- Provide the administrative and financial support necessary to establish the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center, as authorized by Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act ("the East Med Act").
- Follow the East Med Act by supporting the creation of infrastructure, including the Eastern Mediterranean pipeline, to promote development of hydrocarbon resources.
- Should promote the Eastern Mediterranean as an energy corridor between the Middle East and Central Asia, and continental Europe.
- Should encourage investment by American energy companies in the region, providing diplomatic and other support to help protect them from illegal interference, from Turkey or other countries.
- Should organize regional opposition to Ankara's Memorandum of Understanding with Libya, which contravenes international law, violates the sovereignty of other nations, and undermines efforts to develop the Eastern Mediterranean as a multilateral energy hub.



Since 2010, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel have developed a strategic partnership. Their energy cooperation has deepened with recent hydrocarbon discoveries in the region. Together, the three governments also advance security and combat terrorism amid rising threats in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. Their activities could help develop alternative energy sources necessary to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian natural gas.

U.S. officials endorsed these activities, which became known as the "3 + 1" partnership. Congress reinforced this endorsement with passage of the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act (or The East Med Act). AHI has worked with Congress to initiate an official briefing on these issues.

Moreover, AHI, along with the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association, B'nai B'rith International, and Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations have held biennial meetings with government officials and military officers from the three nations since 2014.

United States Relations with Greece

The U.S. government should:

- Continue to support the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) with Greece.
- Vigorously enforce U.S. statutes and advocate compliance with international law to promote the security of Greece.
- Promote official cross-country delegations between America and Greece to strengthen shared interests.
- Fully implement, along with the congress, the U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021, including appropriating funds under the International Military and Education Training (IMET) program for Greece.
- Provide robust annual Foreign Military Financing for Greece to purchase weapons and other defense equipment.
- Encourage bilateral discussions to expand trade, investment, and other commercial ties with Greece, including within the European Union framework.
- Encourage the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to support worthy economic development projects in Greece.
- The U.S. government should condemn Turkey's violations of Greece's maritime boundaries and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), pressure Ankara to cease its illegal activities, and impose penalties if the latter continues to violate international law.



The American Hellenic Institute has long highlighted Greece's importance to American political, economic, and military interests. Greece enjoys a strategic location, with easy access to southeastern Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, and North Africa. A NATO member since 1952, Greece is a proven, reliable ally. Top government officials across contending administrations have called Greece "a pillar of stability" in a challenging and volatile region.

Greece also is a frontline state in the continuing fight against terrorism. The rise of ISIS demonstrates that threats against the U.S. and the world have changed, not disappeared, since 9/11.

Furthermore, Greece supported American security throughout the Cold War and continues to play a vital role today. Crete hosts NSA Souda Bay, America's most important naval presence in the Mediterranean. Moreover, the port city of Alexandroupolis is increasingly recognized for its geostrategic importance, contributing to the region's economic development and energy security.

Konstantinos Floros, who serves as Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff, called Alexandroupolis the “Souda of the North” because it is an important staging ground for the transit of equipment, including helicopters, tanks, and vehicles of various types to NATO’s eastern flank and Ukraine. This access became especially important after Turkey shut down the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, chokepoints between the Mediterranean and Black Seas, to military traffic. Larisa Air Force Base and Stefanovikio Hellenic Army airbase are key contributors to U.S. security as well. Greece also has sent military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

The U.S. and Greek governments are committed to strengthening defense ties. The MDCA illustrates their long-term commitment to address security challenges in the region. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias signed an extension of the upgraded accord on October 14, 2021. Blinken explained: “This update will allow the agreement to remain in force indefinitely, and it enables U.S. forces in Greece to train and operate from additional locations.”

The U.S. also enacted the U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Partnership Act of 2021 to further enhance defense ties and U.S. engagement within the 3 + 1 framework. In addition, since 2018 the United States and Greece have conducted an ongoing strategic dialogue, further institutionalizing bilateral relations. Reciprocal visits by high-level delegations have reinforced ties.

Geoffrey Pyatt, former U.S. ambassador to Greece, described the U.S.-Greece relationship as being at “an all-time high” and acknowledged Athens to be a key geostrategic partner of the United States, stating that exercises conducted there are “showcasing Greece’s critical geographic position at the nexus of three continents.” In addition, Pyatt stated, “Our security relationship is not just about hardware. It’s about a commitment to a long-term partnership, based on shared strategic interests and values that have united our countries now for 200 years.”

The ongoing U.S.-Greece Strategic Dialogue, which completed its sixth session in Athens with Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s participation in February 2023, further demonstrates the excellent state of relations and initiatives to advance relations across all sectors.

United States Relations with Cyprus

The U.S. government should:

- Strengthen official ties, as cross-country delegations should be expanded and increased in number, to explore shared interests and opportunities for cooperation.
- Continue to support, and Congress should continue to provide, sustained IMET program funding for Cyprus. Training and professionalizing the Cypriot military would strengthen U.S. security interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Permanently lift its ban on weapons sales to Cyprus. In 2022, the Biden administration suspended the prohibition for one year, a positive step. However, Cyprus should be removed from the list of nations to which arms sales are barred under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR).
- Condemn Turkey for its illegal interference in Cyprus' EEZ and threaten economic penalties if Ankara does not halt its violations.
- Take an active leadership role in solving the Cyprus problem by creating a positive climate for negotiations, rather than abdicating its responsibilities to international bodies, such as the United Nations.
- Treat Turkey's occupation of Cyprus as military aggression rather than as an ethnic dispute. Turkey, a member of NATO, is currently occupying a member of the European Union, in Cyprus.
- Insist that Ankara cooperate in helping to recover the remains of Americans who remain missing from Turkey's invasion in 1974.
- Enact policies allowing Americans to seek compensation for property losses in the Turkish-occupied areas of Cyprus.
- Support a settlement through negotiations based on a bizonal and bicomunal federation in a state with single sovereignty and international personality. The resulting entity should embrace democratic norms and principles, European Union standards, decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and other European courts, and relevant United Nations resolutions.
- Actively oppose Ankara's promotion of a two-state settlement and support for illegally reopening the city of Varosha, in violation of international law and UN resolutions.
- Press Turkey to end its military presence in Cyprus, a position long held by President Joe Biden.
- Urge Ankara to remove a minimum of 180,000 settlers illegally moved to the Turkish-occupied areas of Cyprus. In doing so, Turkey has violated international law and the Geneva Convention.



The U.S. should view Cyprus as an important security partner in the region. As such, with Washington's support, Nicosia can help counter malign activities and influences in the Eastern Mediterranean. The U.S. should match the diplomatic commitment of Cyprus, which has assigned a defense attaché to its embassy in Washington, and encourage the expansion of the Cyprus Center for Land, Open-Sea, and Port Security (CYCLOPS), an innovative security site opened with U.S. support in April 2022. Washington also should permanently end its prohibition, temporarily suspended in 2022, on arms sales to Cyprus.

Turkey continues to pose the greatest threat to Cyprus, having illegally occupied more than a third of the island for 49 years. Ankara's continued obstruction, including its demand for a continued Treaty of Guarantee, which would allow unilateral Turkish military intervention in the future, contradicts international principles, including those governing the European Union. Turkey's intransigent position led to the collapse of the 2017 Conference on Cyprus.

Turkey maintains the illegal presence of approximately 40,000 soldiers on the island and has introduced more than 180,000 Turkish settlers to colonize the occupied area of Cyprus. Ankara has violated religious freedom and destroyed Greek cultural heritage sites. Moreover, Turkey is presiding over the imposition of Islamic fundamentalism in occupied Cyprus. Turkey also has impeded attempts by The Committee on Missing Persons to excavate the remains of those killed during the invasion, including of four American citizens.

The U.S. and international community should offer a tougher and coordinated response to Ankara for enforcing the continued division of Cyprus. Turkey's behavior is similar to other aggressor states, most notably Hussein's Iraq and Putin's Russia. The U.S., Europe, and other nations reacted sharply and quickly to these invasions but did little if anything in response to Turkey's attack and occupation of Cyprus. At a minimum, Washington, the European Union, and UN should impose sanctions on what has become an uncompromising rogue regime.

The U.S. should be much more than just an honest broker. Washington should help shape the climate for negotiations and facilitate discussions which involve a NATO member that for years has been armed by America. Ankara continues to look to the U.S. for weapons, giving Washington significant leverage. On January 27, 1989, then-Senator Joe Biden wrote AHI: *"we must urge the new Administration [of 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 policy today as well.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken has frequently mentioned the need of the United States to "uphold the rules-based international order." However, to do this, the application of the rule of law cannot be selectively applied. It must be applied to all countries which seek to undermine the "rules-based international order", including Turkey!

United States Relations with Turkey

The U.S. government should:

- Initiate a full review of policy toward Turkey and its role in the region.
- Update the Eastern Mediterranean Policy Requirements (22 U.S. Code 2372) and adjust economic, political, and security relations with Ankara in response.
- See Turkey as it is rather than as it was in the past or how policymakers wish it would be in the future.
- Prepare an alternative regional security structure, instead of continuing to rely upon access to Turkish military facilities.
- Immediately withdraw nuclear assets from Incirlik airbase and prepare to remove all U.S. personnel and assets. Ankara limits use of Incirlik and uses such facilities to hold Washington hostage.
- Submit a report to Congress on Turkey's violations of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) and apply appropriate sanctions, as required by law. Washington should retain its suspension of arms sales, including F-16s, as well as transfer of munitions to Turkey.
- 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).
- Sanction Turkey under the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA), which requires suspension of munitions and arms sales to countries that engage in "gross human rights violations" and support international terrorism.



The U.S. government should update and strengthen its policy in the region. While the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act is an important first step toward becoming more engaged, much more needs to be done. Current strategy, represented by the Eastern Mediterranean Policy Requirements (22 U.S. Code 2373) retains remnants of the 1975 arms embargo on Turkey and has not been revised since 1978. It is vital to update policy to reflect current realities in such a strategically important part of the world. Doing so would help solve several the current problems with U.S.-Turkish relations.

Today, Ankara recklessly provokes conflict with several nations, especially Greece.. Turkey routinely violates Greek airspace and territorial waters—more than 11,000 times in 2022, according to the Hellenic National Defense General Staff (GEETHA). In the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress declared, "We believe that North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies should not conduct unauthorized territorial overflights of another NATO ally's airspace."

Turkey also has undermined U.S. security interests through its activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and Middle East, most notably Syria. Ankara purchased Russia's S-400 air defense system and held the accession of Finland and Sweden hostage to advance domestic political objectives. Even though Turkey eventually allowed for Finland's accession, it is still blocking the accession of Sweden. Indeed, the Erdogan government's behavior suggests that it is acting as a "Trojan Horse" for Russia within NATO.

The U.S. government, with congressional backing, rightfully sanctioned Turkey for its procurement of S-400s and prevented the acquisition or participation in production of F-35s. Given Ankara's rampant problematic behavior, the Biden administration should drop its support for F-16 sales to Turkey; Congress should block any transfer if the Administration proceeds with its plan. Washington should also deny any other form of assistance for Turkey, including preferences for military sales, benefits under any aid program, and most favored nation trade status.

AHI has closely monitored Turkey's misbehavior, including a range of provocations and violations throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. These activities harm the U.S. directly, as well as America's allies and strategic partners, including Greece, Cyprus, and Israel.

Examples of Problematic Turkish Behavior:

- Acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile defense system, which threatens to increase the vulnerability of U.S. and allied aircraft to Russian attack. This is a blatant violation of Turkey's NATO obligations.
- Blackmailing the Alliance over NATO expansion while Ukraine is under military attack by Russia. The Erdogan government is endangering NATO to bolster its domestic political standing.
- Constant violations of Greek airspace and territorial waters. Turkey's actions force a Greek response, wasting resources that should be directed to Europe's defense. It also creates the risk of an accident or other incident that could create a bilateral and regional crisis. These activities violate international and U.S. law. In the latter case, aircraft are limited to "legitimate self-defense," while Turkey's behavior is invasive and aggressive.
- Turkey's continued illegal occupation of more than 37 percent of Cyprus after 49 years.
- Ankara's illegal incursions and energy development within Cyprus' EEZ, backed by blatant "gunboat diplomacy" with warships and drones.
- Financial support for Hamas, an enemy of Israel designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. Indeed, Ankara has hosted members of Hamas' top leadership, including those Washington designated as terrorists.
- Turkey's complicity with the Islamic State and illegal invasion of Northeast Syria, attacking Kurdish forces allied with the U.S.
- Ankara's decision to play both sides in the Russo-Ukraine war, selling drones to Kyiv while refusing to close its airspace to Russia and harboring Russian oligarchs.
- Russian-Turkish nuclear power cooperation poses a long-term threat to the region.

Religious Freedom in Turkey and the Ecumenical Patriarchate

The U.S. government should:

- Insist that Turkey respect the religious freedom of its people and protect the right of religious minorities to practice their faith.
- Sanction the Turkish government under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for its violations of religious liberty.
- Sanction Ankara and individual Turkish officials under the Global Magnitsky Act, for their violations of human rights, religious and political alike.
- Urge Ankara to recognize the international legal personality of the Ecumenical Patriarch.
- Condemn the Turkish government's persecution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which violates the Treaty of Lausanne and international law.
- Call on Ankara to return thousands of properties confiscated from the Ecumenical Patriarchate over the years and reopen the Halki Patriarchal School of Theology.
- Call on the Turkish government to reverse its decision to convert the Hagia Sophia and other churches into mosques, returning such sites to their previous status as UNESCO-designated museums.



The Turkish government is notorious for its violations of human rights, especially of religious minorities to worship freely and practice their faith. Under both IRFA and the Global Magnitsky Act, Congress has tasked the U.S. government with protecting religious freedom abroad and imposing economic penalties on violators. IRFA targets any government that “engages in or tolerates violations of religious freedom and promotes the right to religious freedom in that country.”

Turkey's many violations of the rule of law and international norms regarding this foundational human right are demonstrated by the government's discrimination against the Orthodox Church and indifference to attacks upon the Greek Orthodox Christian community. In 1994, AHI became the first organization to raise the issue of religious freedom and protection for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the reopening of Halki with Congress and the Executive Branch. The Ecumenical Patriarchate is the spiritual home of the world's oldest and second largest Christian church, and leader of some 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide, including millions of Americans. For these believers the Ecumenical Patriarch is an American spiritual and ecclesiastical leader as well.

The U.S. government should press Ankara to safeguard the Ecumenical Patriarchate, protect its personnel and property, and reopen the Halki Patriarchal School of Theology. Congress should repeat its support for this policy, first made in 1998. The Administration should use its sanctions authority if Turkey continues its current policy. Finally, Washington should urge Turkey to restore the Hagia Sophia and Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora as UNESCO World Heritage Sites open to all faiths.