



NATO Foundation
Defense College

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN December 2016

Special but not exclusive: Greek-Israeli alliance and its military core

Greek-Israeli relations have progressively improved since 2010: such a dynamic was accelerated by the worsening of Israeli-Turkish bilateral ties. In this picture, the rapid enhancement of military cooperation between Greece and Israel from 2015 on looks even more surprising, taking into account SYRIZA's electoral victory, the Greek radical left party which traditionally put in the forefront the Palestinian issue.

From a broader perspective, Greece, Israel and the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) are a geopolitical block on the rise in the Eastern Mediterranean sub-regional order: they are no more a simple *alignment*, since they have already turned into a multifaceted, but not exclusive, *alliance*. As stated by the Jerusalem Trilateral Declaration on December 8, 2016, "*though our partnership is special, it is not exclusive in design or nature*". As a matter of fact, this alliance is not only about balancing vis-à-vis Ankara or energy discoveries in the East Med, even if these factors are surely remarkable drivers of cooperation.

Current teamwork between Athens and Tel Aviv finds its roots in common threat perceptions and overlapped elite interests. As emphasized by Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, Greece, Israel and the RoC are "three democracies in the Eastern Mediterranean": in their neighborhood, the Middle Eastern order collapsed and has not stably reconfigured yet, leaving room for states fragmentation, transnational jihadi terrorism and uncontrolled migrant movements.

Therefore, reflecting long-term regional security dynamics, the Greek-Israeli alliance is not going to be affected by the recent rapprochement between Israel and Turkey. Moreover, Iran's enhanced influence in the Levant fosters Israel to enlarge its set of alliances, as well as Turkey's military involvement abroad (in Syria and Iraq) persuades Athens to explore new security connections.

The military field is the core of the rising Greek-Israeli alliance. In 2010, after Israel's Prime Minister historical first visit in Athens, Greece and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed to establish cooperation in the military sector. From that moment on, combined military drills have achieved a remarkable level of continuity and complexity, with particular regard to air forces.

On July 2015, bilateral military relations have been furtherly upgraded with the signature of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which allows Israeli and Greek military personnel to be hosted in Greece and Israel for joint military training exercises. Such a choice highlights the strategic horizon of the alliance between Athens and Tel Aviv, demonstrating also how Alexis Tsipras' foreign policy is driven by smart pragmatism rather than ideology.

The second Greece-RoC-Israel trilateral meeting was held in Jerusalem on December 8, 2016, reflecting the comprehensive nature of their security relations. The launch of an emergency multinational force, with a joint command center, was extensively discussed to coordinate the response towards environmental crises (such as firefighting, earthquakes, floods, search and rescue operations). In recent years, firefighting activities have represented an unmatched confidence-building chance for mutual assistance and cooperation between Greece and Israel.

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