

**Letters to the Editor:****Turkish Drones a Threat to Greece and Cyprus**

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It is no secret that since Turkey's invasion and occupation of 37% of Cyprus in 1974 Greece considers Turkey to be its greatest strategic threat. That threat increased dramatically in the last twenty years and expanded still further during the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh between September and November 2020. During that fight Turkey supported Azerbaijani forces with "game-changing" contributions towards reclaiming much of the territory occupied by Armenian forces since 1994. Turkey did this through its capacity to employ drone warfare – armed unmanned Aerial Combat Vehicles (UCABS) and unarmed reconnaissance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVS) - against an unprepared enemy. Today, in terms of countering the threat of Turkish drone warfare, Greece is also an unprepared enemy.

Significantly, Turkey has evolved into a major developer of UCAVs and UAVs and has operationally deployed them in Syria, Libya, and reportedly, Ethiopia. Not resting on its current laurels, Turkey's Baykar Machina unveiled a concept for a super-sonic capable UCAV in 2021 and hopes to fly this new vehicle prototype in 2023.

Since the end of the Cold War, Turkey has increasingly distanced itself from its NATO partners in general and from the United States in particular. Ankara has followed this course in pursuit of establishing itself as an independent regional hegemon. Turkey has directly and indirectly resisted and even thwarted U.S. policies and goals in Iraq and more recently in Syria. In 2019 Turkey determined that despite heavy pressure from the U.S. and NATO, it would go ahead with its planned acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defense system - even at the cost of participation in the F-35 Lightning program that it was already heavily invested in. Moreover, Turkey has militarily involved itself in the Libyan civil war and last year decisively affected the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Turkey's never-ending territorial and mineral claims against Greece in the Aegean are reinforced by Ankara's relentless violations of Greek air space that have continued unabated for decades. Turkish claims to the potential natural gas wealth of Cyprus,

allegedly in behalf of the island's Turkish population, threaten to permanently thwart Cypriot development of the carbon resources of its legitimate territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone against the threat of war. All concerned understand that a Turkish attack in Cyprus would simultaneously trigger a Greek-Turkish war which in its worst case may result in making the remainder of Cyprus and even a number of the smaller Greek islands adjacent to Turkey's coast, integral parts - of Turkey.

Greek planners understand that any territory Turkey may be able to wrest from Greece or Cyprus by force will likely become a permanent part of Turkey never to be returned. They also understand that Turkey is fast becoming an increasingly bolder bully in an ever-expanding regional schoolyard. History shows that such regional bullies, like bullies in any schoolyard, are encouraged and emboldened by successes real or perceived. The success of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 reconnaissance and attack drones against Armenian troops, tanks, artillery and anti-aircraft systems are indisputable and constitute the major force multiplier in the surprising Azerbaijani victory over the Armenians in 2020.

Nations, like schoolyard bullies, are usually wary about picking fights with opponents who they sense can give them a bloody nose or a black eye that causes the bully to endure pain and lose face in the schoolyard even if the bully ultimately prevails. In terms of the success of its drones in Nagorno-Karabakh the Turkish bully now roams its schoolyard with a new set of brass knuckles capable of making any Greek-Turkish conflict more costly for Greece. To be clear, Greek strategy is to avoid a Greek-Turkish war. To do that Greece, the most armed nation of eleven million people in the Free World, must maintain a credible deterrent with forces and technologies convincing enough to make an increasingly aggressive and expansionist Turkey blink.

Greece is not Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh. Its ability to defend itself and cause severe damage to the Turkish armed forces, Turkey itself, and Turkish prestige is understood by Turkish planners. Today, Turkey enjoys a marked superiority in drone warfare over Greece that cannot be ignored even at the cost of delaying or limiting other important defense programs and upgrades. Greece cannot overlook that the numbers of main battle tanks and artillery lost to drones by the Armenian side in Nagorno-Karabakh are the equivalent of half of an entire armored division. A loss like this - to a single component of the enemy's forces - on the Evros River or a major Greek island could mean the difference in retaining or losing territory in mainland Greece or an entire island such as Chios or Rhodes.

In addition to devoting scarce defense dollars to an expedited drone warfare capability, Greece must increase its cooperation with its NATO allies and take advantage of the animus they hold against Turkey and the policies of President Erdogan. The Turkish acquisition of the S-400 anti-aircraft defense system from Russia is one of many

reasons Turkey has lost the trust of America and some of its key NATO partners. NATO countries such as the United States, France, Germany, and Great Britain are well-placed to assist Greece in upgrading its own drone capabilities and defenses against drone reconnaissance and attack.

Greece should increase the access it now gives to the United States to bases on mainland Greece and Crete in support of reconnaissance and even some strike missions that America may want to conduct from Greek bases. And while such access might increase Greek risk to terrorist reprisals, they will also reinforce Greece's importance to the U.S. and other key allies and therefore increase Greek access to weapons and technologies it requires to defend itself against Turkish aggression. Bluntly stated, Greece must "pay to play" if it wants increased support from its allies. The Greek aerospace sector is sophisticated and well-positioned to work on its own or with allies in the development of counter-drone technologies. Greece does not have to match Turkey drone-for-drone just like it does not have to match Turkey F-16 for F016 to mount a credible defense,

One thing Greece should aggressively pursue is the acquisition of the fifth generation F-35 Lightning fighter. In 2019 Turkey foolishly lost access to this program and the initial delivery of the first four F-35s that its pilots were learning to fly in the United States before Turkey excluded itself from the program by the purchase of the S-400s. This was a boon to Greek security insofar that even a squadron of these planes could potentially wreck sheer havoc with Hellenic Air Force (HAF) F-16s and be the "game changer" that could give Turkey victory and control of the air war in some future Greek-Turkish conflict. In the event that the HAF could acquire its own squadron of F-35 Lightnings, the shoe would be comfortably on the other foot and Greece's deterrent posture against Turkey would be significantly increased. Simply stated, you cannot easily shoot down what your pilots and radars can't see.

Greek cooperation with France is already extensive as Athens prepares to sign a deal that could markedly increase the striking power of the Hellenic Navy with new high-tech frigates that could also have deep strike capabilities with long-range cruise missiles. The HAF is looking to acquire French AMD Rafale fighters which are superior to Turkish F-16s. Moreover, the HAF is in the process of converting its own F-16 Fighting Falcons to the advanced F-16 V (Viper) variants what will be superior to Turkish early model F-16s.

These and other initiatives will require sacrifice in one manner or another. Greece, unfortunately is only just now coming out of its long economic crisis and does not have the carbon wealth that permitted Azerbaijan to upgrade its military wherewithal through its association with Turkey and Israel. Greece has good relations and common interests, including natural gas interests, with Israel. And Israel, while a friend of Azerbaijan who

demonstratively contributed to that country's expanded drone capabilities, is currently estranged from Turkey, a situation that will likely prevail for the foreseeable future.

Today Turkey's tentacles are extended and increasingly wrapping themselves around Greece, Cyprus, North Africa, the Middle East and the Caucasus. A credible drone program is essential if Athens wants to see at least some of these tentacles loosen an increasingly tight grip on Greece and Cyprus.

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