

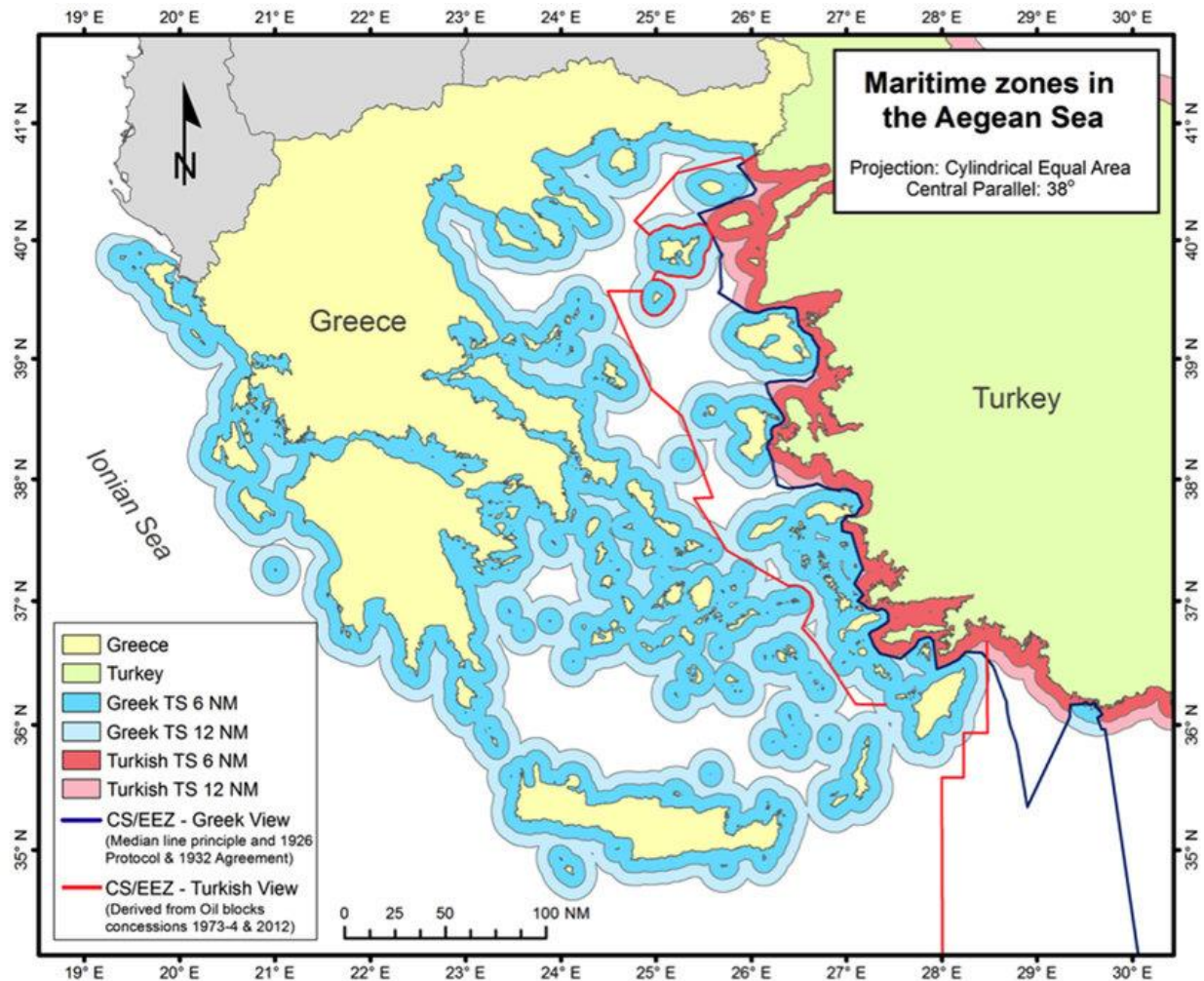
Don't Count on Trump for Greece

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Many Greek-Americans support President Trump, even to the point of treating him as a cult-like figure that can do no wrong. They have every right to their views for whatever reason. However, after the events of October 2019, I would hope none are so delusional as to believe that Trump would deter Erdogan should he provoke a crisis with Greece and Cyprus. Erdogan has achieved in northern Syria his first step in righting the wrongs he perceives inflicted on the Ottoman Empire after World War I. He did so with the support of the President of the United States. He believes he also has the support of the President of Russia (which may not be so certain). Finally, he has stoked the irredentist emotions of his political base, blending Kemalist nationalism with religious fervor and nostalgic for the glories of the Ottoman Empire. He will, almost certainly, proceed to continue his efforts to Turkish glory. He has made serious inroads into expanding his influence over territories in Syria and Iraq lost after World War I. Sooner or later, we should expect him to move to control the economic riches of the Eastern Mediterranean as ordained by history, Erdogan and God (the latter two being occasionally indistinguishable).

Erdogan has already clearly laid out how he would proceed: asserting control of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of Greece and Cyprus currently denied him by the terms of the United Nation's Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS). The UNCLOS states that inhabited islands, no matter how small, have the right to be part of calculating the EEZ of whatever sovereign state to which they belong. The UNCLOS puts almost all of the Aegean inside the Greek EEZ. Of particular importance, the island of Kastellorizo, which lies some 78 nautical miles east of Rhodes and hard by the Turkish coast, has an EEZ (as defined by the UNCLOS) which links up with the Cypriot EEZ. The Greek and Cypriot zones form a continuous belt across the Eastern Mediterranean separating the Turkish EEZ from that of Egypt. Of significance in these matters is that only two countries with seacoasts have refused to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty: Turkey and the United States. Senate Republicans refused to vote for the Treaty for fear it might impose some environmental regulations on the US and/or generally oppose international agreements that might limit US sovereignty. Nonetheless, the US informally observes it.

Turkey refuses to recognize the Greek EEZ whether in the Aegean or the East Mediterranean. Turkey asserts that the EEZ can only be calculated from the mainland, essentially extending the Turkish EEZ over half the Aegean and extending it until it meets the Egyptian EEZ west of Cyprus. By the same token, Turkey asserts that the Cyprus EEZ is limited by the existence of the puppet "Turkish Republic of North Cyprus" (TRNC) which has equal rights to the entire Cyprus Republic EEZ. Turkey asserts the right to intervene in the Cyprus EEZ to protect the rights of the TRNC.





EEZ as claimed by Turkey and the Turkish R. of NC



Turkey actively challenges both the Greek and Cypriot EEZ. Turkish warplanes constantly overfly Greek islands and territorial waters in the Aegean. Equally troubling, Turkish geologic exploration ships already operate in Greek and Cypriot EEZ. Turkey has warned off foreign oil companies conducting exploration under contract with Cyprus and the Italian ENI company complied. Fortunately, the biggest operator in the Cyprus EEZ is a joint venture between the American giant ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum, a key Turkish financial ally. Turkey has complained but not threatened these behemoths.

If Turkey's claims go unchallenged, you can say goodbye to Cypriot natural gas development and pipelines from Cyprus to Greece. In November, Turkey concluded an agreement with Libya demarcating the two countries' EEZ that ignores Greek claims and UNCLOS. So far, the US has issued warnings even flabbier than the sanctions imposed on Turkey for slaughtering America's Kurdish allies. The United States imposed tariffs on Turkish steel it does not buy and stopped a trade negotiation that had already suspended. In any event, the United States "withdrew" these sanctions after Erdogan rolled Pence and Pompeo a week later. The EU has wagged its finger at Turkey a few times but appeared cowed by Erdogan's threat to unload another million refugees into Europe through Greece. The Italians sent a frigate with instructions to avoid Turkish warships.

Turkey's Erdogan has repeatedly asserted irredentist claims over Greek islands to build nationalist support. Famously, he once said, "We gave away the (Greek) islands that you could shout across to..." He was referring to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne which defined modern Turkey's boundaries.

Let's assume one likely scenario. A Turkish drilling ship parks itself about twenty miles south of Kastellorizo and starts drilling in what the UNCLOS defines as the Greek EEZ. Athens protests to the US and the EU who in turn protest to Ankara. The Turks keep drilling; every day they drill Greek legal rights erode. Greece protests and then threatens to remove the drilling ship by force; Turkey responds by surrounding the drilling ship (and Kastellorizo) with warships and dares Greece to shoot first or accept a *fait accompli*. Turkey moves the Russian S400 missiles opposite Kastellorizo to complicate Greek deployments. The EU gesticulates and NATO paralyzes (as always) in a dispute between two Alliance allies. We have seen this movie before; it was called "The Imia Crisis of 1996." Greek warships were a couple of hours short of striking Turkish troops on Imia when, at the eleventh hour, President Clinton telephoned Ankara and the Turks withdrew. Clinton was not the first American President to intervene to prevent the two countries from going to war. Dwight Eisenhower intervened after the 1955 Constantinople massacres, and Lyndon Johnson called off a Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1964.

Can anyone seriously expect Donald Trump to force Erdogan to step back and stop drilling? Not if what just happened in Syria with the Kurds is any indication. Trump took a call from Erdogan. The next day he blindsided his entire administration by ordering the

withdrawal of US troops and inviting Turkey to enter Syria and establish a twenty-mile deep "security corridor" over the dead bodies of America's Kurdish allies.

Greece has established a new and very strong relationship with the US military. Similarly, the Kurds were actually fighting side-by-side with the US military against ISIS. Trump tossed that relationship into the garbage can. He then derided the Kurds saying "They never fought at Normandy" and "They live in the sand." The Turkish foreign ministry has probably already written Trump's talking points for abandoning Greece. "Why should the US interfere because the US has not ratified the Law of the Sea Treaty" and "Greeks and Turks have been fighting for a thousand years."

Trump's admiration for the Turkish strongman never ceases to surprise. He apologized to Erdogan after his goons beat up demonstrators in front of the Turkish Embassy. He put extra-legal pressure on the Justice Department to extradite a Turkish exile in the US to Turkey. Trump insulted General Mattis, his Secretary of Defense, after Mattis resigned in disgust at Trump's decision to abandon the Kurds to the tender mercies of the Turks. Trump tried to keep the Turks in the F-35 fighter program despite the decision of the US Military to expel Turkey after it bought Russian S-400 missiles.

Trump's relationship with Erdogan rivals his bromance with Putin. But, why? Admittedly, Trump has no compunction about advancing his business interests over the interests of his own country. In 2016 Erdogan called for removing Trump's name from his towers in Istanbul over Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric; by 2019 Trump speaks glowingly of those same Towers. What transpired in the meantime? Promises of more Towers? Trump seems to particularly admire Erdogan for turning a nascent Turkish democratic system into one-man rule. Perhaps because he wants to learn how to do the same in the US? Nor should we assume that Trump has any particular affection for Greek Americans. The half-life of Greek Americans serving in the administration is about six months. Remember some guys named Priebus, Gigicos and Papadopoulos?

Russia's EU Ambassador on a visit to Rhodes said Greece was "wrong" to sign a revised defense deal with the US. Speaking to the Russian News Agency TASS, he said "You need to ask the Greek side why they made such a decision. But I do not rule out the possibility that they did so amid tensions between the US and Turkey." The Russian envoy added: "We had warned the Kurds that the Americans will abandon them. And here, in Rhodes, I can personally warn the Greeks about it, that they will have the same fate as the Kurds."

One's mind occasionally drifts into more sinister explanations. Erdogan's management of the Khashoggi murder in Saudi Arabia's Istanbul consulate was a masterpiece of political choreography. He exploited with genius the achievements of what most admit is Turkey's superb intelligence service. He singlehandedly torpedoed a seventy-year-old alliance between the Saudis and the US. If the Khashoggi affair is any

indication, the Turks can run circles around the Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight in the White House at digging up dirt. Perhaps, there is something on Trump or his kids?

Erdogan must be salivating at the opportunities for his ambitions that five (or more) years of Trump as President could provide. Some of those ambitions will come at the expense of Greece and Cyprus.

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