

# AHI

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February 27, 2018

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President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I write to urge the U.S. government to condemn strongly the acts of Turkish provocation and aggression in the eastern Mediterranean and broader region that have dire implications to U.S. security interests.

During this month alone, Turkey's antagonistic behavior—or "gunboat diplomacy"—in the Aegean Sea against NATO partner Greece, and bellicose threats to EU member Republic of Cyprus' sovereign right to explore for natural gas with its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), were taken to new dangerous heights. In fact, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened Greece, Cyprus, and international oil and gas companies, warning them not to "step out of line."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Turkey's acts of provocation have also been directed at the United States.

With regard to the Aegean Sea, a Turkish coastguard vessel collided with a stationary Greek coastguard vessel near the Greek island of Imia, on February 12, 2018. Video footage of the incident has since been released and shows damage to the Greek vessel's stern. In addition, Turkey continues to violate Greece's airspace. According to press reports, 33 Turkish aircraft have violated Greece's airspace during the first twelve days of February 2018.<sup>2</sup> Combined with what transpired on the seas, these are very serious incidents that risk placing lives in harm's way and violate international law.

With regard to Cyprus and implications to the potential for energy security, Turkish warships harassed the surveying vessel of Italian oil company Eni and threatened on February 23, 2018 to sink it in the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus. According to press reports, Eni's ship was forced to make maneuvers to avoid a collision after the Italian captain's request to the Turkish vessel to change course went unanswered.<sup>3</sup>

The Republic of Cyprus has the sovereign right under international law to explore and exploit its natural resources within its exclusive economic zone. The United States has stated repeatedly it supports Cyprus' sovereign right to explore energy in its offshore areas, most recently by a State Department Spokesperson earlier this month. "The United States recognizes the right of the Republic of Cyprus to develop its resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone," the spokesperson said, adding, "the island's oil and gas resources, like all of its resources, should be equitably shared between both communities in the context of an

<sup>1</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/erdogan-warns-greece-cyprus-gas-search-aegean-islets-53039172>

<sup>2</sup> <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/02/13/turkish-forces-violate-greek-airspace-waters/>

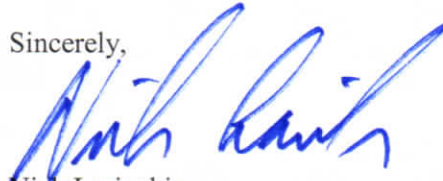
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ekathimerini.com/226092/article/ekathimerini/news/turkish-ships-threaten-to-sink-eni-drill-vessel>

overall settlement.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Turkish aggression in Cyprus' EEZ presents an endangerment to U.S. companies, such as ExxonMobil and Noble Energy, who have been, or will be, working to explore for hydrocarbons in the eastern Mediterranean.

Moreover, Turkey continues to demonstrate it is not a true and dependable U.S. and NATO ally. President Erdogan threatened United States military forces with an "Ottoman slap" if they continued to partner with Syrian Kurds. Turkey's military campaign against the Kurds in Syria places U.S. troops in Manbij at risk of peril at the hands of a NATO partner.<sup>2</sup> Further, Turkey's \$2.5 billion purchase of four divisions of S-400 surface-to-air missiles from Russia has raised concern among NATO partners and potentially subjects Turkey to U.S. sanctions based upon the recently-enacted Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), according to a U.S. administration official.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. President, Turkey is a significant force of instability and a failed U.S. ally. Historically, this has been the case; however, Turkey demonstrated this yet again in the short span of three weeks this month. Turkey's aggressive and provocative actions directed at the United States and U.S. allies, Greece and Cyprus, are overt, egregious and dangerous. I urge the administration to act to uphold the rule of law and to call on Turkey, the provocateur of these tensions, to cease and desist with its aggressive actions that are a threat to peace and stability and are not in the best interests of the United States.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis  
President

CC: Vice President Mike Pence  
U.S. Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson  
U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Mattis  
Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, A. Wess Mitchell  
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Jonathan Cohen  
U.S. Ambassador to Greece, Geoffrey Pyatt  
U.S. Ambassador to Cyprus, Kathleen Doherty  
U.S. Department of State Cyprus Desk Officer, Diviya Sharma  
U.S. Department of State Greece Desk Officer, Wendy Stancer  
Congressman Gus Bilirakis, co-Chair of the Congressional Hellenic Caucus  
Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, co-Chair of the Congressional Hellenic Caucus

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<sup>1</sup> <http://cyprus-mail.com/2018/02/14/us-recognizes-right-republic-cyprus-develop-eez-resources/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/turkish-diplomat-defends-ottoman-slap-threat-to-us-amid-signs-of-deal/article/2649330>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ahvalnews.com/nato-turkey/s-400-purchase-might-expose-turkey-us-sanctions-us-official>