

**Public Witness Testimony
to the U.S. House of Representatives
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations Bill | March 12, 2019**

American Hellenic Institute President Nick Larigakis

Good morning, Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Rodgers, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the American Hellenic Institute, thank you for the invitation to testify on FY2020 programs impacting United States' interests in the eastern Mediterranean. My full testimony has been submitted for the record.

In keeping with the best interests of the U.S, AHI opposes: (1) any assistance the Administration will request for Turkey until Turkey withdraws all of its troops and illegal Turkish settlers from Cyprus; and Turkey ceases and desists its acts of aggression in the Aegean; and (2) any reduction in the Administration's proposed aid level of \$5.7 million for the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.

AHI applauds the FY2019 \$1 million enacted funding level for NATO ally Greece's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program and supports a FY2020 investment of \$1.2 million, also in the U.S.' best interests.

The U.S. has strategic interests in southeast Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. Significant commerce and energy sources transit through the region. Greece, a dependable NATO ally, is an ideal strategic partner for the U.S.

With its centuries' enduring presence, its close cultural, political and economic ties to the broader region and to neighboring Western-oriented, frontline countries that share democratic principles, such as Israel and Cyprus—Greece is strategically situated for the projection of those U.S. interests by virtue of its geography and by being home to the most important U.S. military facility in the Mediterranean Sea—NSA Souda Bay, located on Crete.

Although under a different congressional jurisdiction, AHI thanks Congress for recognizing NSA Souda Bay's value by investing \$47.85 million in military construction for FY2019.

The U.S. must continue to enhance relations with Greece, which have strengthened notably, especially in defense cooperation. Greece is an immensely valuable link—"a pillar of stability" in the region as high-level U.S. government officials have noted. Greece is also a frontline state in the fight against terrorism. Greece is one of five NATO members to meet NATO's minimum standard on defense expenditures; and second only to the U.S.

Hence, our FY2020 programmatic request of \$1.2 million for Greece's IMET program.

The IMET program advances the professional military education of the Greek Armed Forces. It enhances interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces.

For 11 fiscal years, the decline of Greece's IMET funding levels resulted in the drastic decrease of an estimated 400 to 500 Greek officers participating in the program.

Our recommended funding request will be an effective investment toward a key component of U.S. security assistance in an increasingly critical region.

The successful projection of U.S. interests in the eastern Mediterranean depends on the region's stability, which is based upon good neighborly relations and respect for the rule of law. The U.S. must denounce nations that cause instability.

Going on 45 years, Turkey illegally occupies the Republic of Cyprus, a member of the European Union, and a nation with which the U.S. has a "strategic partnership," as noted by Trump administration officials.

Especially because of February's violation by Turkish troops of the military status quo on the island, AHI recommends appropriations language that any assistance provided to Cyprus by this Subcommittee should foremost ensure that the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus can fully implement its mandate, while remaining available to also contribute to the creation of a conducive environment for the settlement talks under the auspices of the UN.

Moreover, the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, a previous recipient of USAID support, strives to identify the remains of 1,075 Cypriot victims of the 1974 Turkish invasion despite the difficulty of excavating in areas controlled by the Turkish military.

Further, Turkey's ongoing egregious violations of Greece's territorial water and national airspace in the Aegean are in violation of international law and unnecessarily risks lives.

Turkey is also a threat to energy security and U.S. interests as it has exercised "gunboat diplomacy." We welcome the U.S.'s stated support for Cyprus's right to develop its natural resources, including in its Exclusive Economic Zone, especially as ExxonMobil announced last month the largest find thus far in Cypriot waters.

The issue remains of Turkey's \$2.5 billion purchase of S-400 missiles from Russia. NATO partners are concerned, and it potentially subjects Turkey to U.S. sanctions under CAATSA (the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act).

AHI commends Congress for passing provisions in the 2019 NDAA, and the most recent FY2019 government funding bill, that hold Turkey accountable, including the suspension of the delivery or transfer of F-35 aircraft to Turkey until reports detailing the impact of Turkey's purchase of the S-400s on U.S. weapon systems are provided to Congress.

Until resolved, AHI strongly recommends similar appropriations language for FY2020.

For all these reasons, including its suppression of religious freedom for the Ecumenical Patriarchate—the world's oldest Christian Church--we continue to oppose aid for Turkey, including most-favored nation trade benefits, as not in the best interests of the U.S. AHI welcomes the Administration's intention to terminate Turkey's preferential trade status under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program.

Finally, the region's stability took a step forward with the ratified Prespes Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia. However, we ask the Subcommittee for continued oversight of any assistance provided to North Macedonia to ensure it adheres to the Agreement's principles.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony to the Subcommittee.