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Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I write regarding your forthcoming visit to Greece in order to convey the Institute's policy positions on U.S.-Greece relations.

The United States has important strategic interests in southeast Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. Significant commerce and energy sources transit through this vital region. It is in the United States' best interest for the region to be politically, economically and socially stable, and for democratic principles to flourish, including adherence to the rule of law. Greece, a "pillar of stability" in the region, is a pivotal and dependable NATO ally to advance these interests and is a frontline state against terrorism.

### U.S.-Greece Strategic Dialogue

AHI appreciates your recognition of Greece's value as a "critical ally" of the United States and as a "leading force of regional stability in the Eastern Mediterranean," as communicated in your statement at the inaugural U.S.-Greece Strategic Dialogue held December 2018. AHI applauds your continued personal engagement in the Strategic Dialogue, and during your upcoming visit to Athens, AHI anticipates all facets of the Strategic Dialogue taking their respective next steps forward.

However, a key aspect of the Strategic Dialogue is Defense and Security. Greece continues to be of vital importance for the projection of U.S. strategic interests by its geographic location and its strong, unwavering support for NATO. As home to the most important naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea, NSA Souda Bay, Crete, Greece has been critical to the delivery of U.S. troops, cargo, and supplies, providing access and extending the U.S. and NATO's reach into the Middle East and North Africa.

Further, Greece is demonstrating there is more to its ability to contribute to defense and security in addition to NSA Souda Bay. Greece's Larisa Air Force Base and the transfer of military equipment and personnel to



Stefanovikio are additional examples as the United States and Greece continue to build on defense cooperation. Also, Alexandroupolis is being recognized as a city with increased geostrategic importance due to its port, which can contribute to economic development and energy security.

AHI appreciates the United States' recognized value of these three military installations and its interest to expand military cooperation with Greece. Moreover, last week's announcement that a draft of a modernized Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement has been agreed to and is expected to be signed formally upon your visit to Athens, is to be applauded.

The International Military Education and Training (IMET) program advances the professional military education of the Greek Armed Forces. It enhances interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces, such as Greece's. AHI has championed the importance of bolstering Greece's IMET program on Capitol Hill, having successfully advocated for its current level of \$1 million. Under your leadership, AHI recommends the Department of State continue to provide Congress with the justification to increase investment in Greece's IMET program. Although the FY2020 appropriations process is not complete, AHI is disappointed Greece's IMET program is not slated to be provided an increase in funding from the previous fiscal year.

### **Turkey's Threat to Regional Peace, Stability**

Returning to the notion of the projection of U.S. interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, its success depends heavily on the region's stability. A key to peace and stability in the region is for good neighborly relations among NATO members and respect for the rule of law. Therefore, the U.S. has a stake in focusing on the problems in the region that are detrimental to U.S. interests and to call out those nations that cause instability.

My visits to Greece in 2019 have included numerous meetings with Greek government and military officials, including officials from the new government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Each official conveyed an unprecedented level of grave concern regarding Turkish escalated acts of provocation and hostility in the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, which occur on an almost daily basis. Specifically, Turkey's ongoing egregious violations of Greece's territorial waterways and national airspace in the Aegean are in violation of international law and U.S. law under the Arms Export Control Act and Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. Turkey's provocations also unnecessarily risks lives. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues with provocations, such as publicly calling into question the Treaty of Lausanne, and more recently, appearing before a map depicting half of the Aegean Sea as belonging to Turkey. Greece must expend immense financial resources to defend its sovereignty—estimated to be in upwards of \$400 million a year.

Secretary Pompeo, Greece's sovereignty in the Aegean Sea and respect for the Treaty of Lausanne, both of which are in the best interests of the United States, must be respected. Greece aspires to achieve complete normalized relations with Turkey, however, the latter, as official policy, continues to threaten Greece with war (casus belli) and promotes territorial claims that are unfounded and devoid of any legal basis. These claims disregard all relevant treaties and agreements in force, including the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty. Under this Treaty, the Dodecanese Islands, Kastellorizo as well as each islet which is adjacent to each named Dodecanese island and to Kastellorizo were ceded to Greece by Italy. The United States is a signatory to this Treaty, which means that the United States recognizes Greek sovereignty over the aforementioned islands as a matter of US law.



## Energy Security

Turkey is also a threat to energy security, which is not in the best interests of the United States. Turkey has exercised "gunboat diplomacy" in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although we realize your itinerary does not include a visit to Cyprus, we expect the issue will be discussed within the context of energy security in the region because of the extensive exploration for hydrocarbon resources in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Cyprus. Turkey's most blatant use of "gunboat diplomacy" has been in Cypriot waters and Turkish drillships are conducting activities illegally in violation of Cyprus' sovereignty and international law. Pertaining to Greece, Turkey's threats have extended to Greece's own exclusive economic zone which extends 200 miles from the island of Strongili which is adjacent to the island of Kastellorizo.

AHI welcomes the United States' stated support for the Republic of Cyprus's right to develop its natural resources, including in its exclusive economic zone. However, in May, I wrote to President Donald Trump, urging 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 actions that have dire implications to U.S. security interests. In the same letter, AHI strongly urges the Trump administration to withhold military assistance to Turkey, and any other benefit programs, including trade preferences, due to its behavior in the region. The rhetoric of appeasement toward Turkey that has emanated recently from legislators on Capitol Hill, must not be condoned by the Trump administration. In addition to the initiatives that advance the U.S.-Greece strategic partnership, AHI requests that these issues which demonstrate the instability which Turkey causes be placed on your agenda in Athens to address U.S. interests in the region.

In conclusion, thank you for visiting Greece. Your visit underscores the importance of the U.S.-Greece strategic partnership and Greece's geostrategic value. AHI looks forward to seeing positive results from the next round of strategic dialogue and contributing to the success of these efforts.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis  
President

cc: Mark Esper, Secretary of Defense  
Robert C. O'Brien, National Security Adviser to President Donald J. Trump  
Philip T. Reeker, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs  
Matthew A. Palmer, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European & Eurasian Affairs, & Special Representative for the Western Balkans  
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