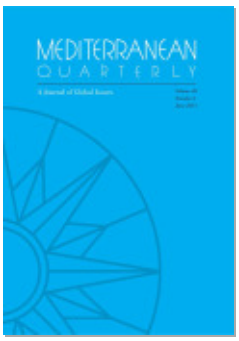
In the Shadow of a Long and Glorious Past: Understanding Greek Foreign Policy



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The Hellenes are one of only a handful of peoples who can claim an uninterrupted civilizational presence for more than three millennia.[1] This constitutes an almost unprecedented record of both continuity and change, often amid dramatic and traumatic circumstances. But it is also a record of fame, of dazzling achievements, and of immense contributions to almost every human intellectual and artistic endeavor including (but certainly not limited to) philosophy, politics, history, sculpture, medicine, and the theater. Mostly (but not entirely) connected to Antiquity, these accomplishments are still studied, contemplated, and marveled at to this very day. For example, in an extended essay discussing the challenges facing the West in the twenty-first century, historian Tony Judt characteristically declared, "We are all children of the Greeks."[2] Not coincidentally, a recent Massachusetts Institute of Technology study of the most famous people of the past six thousand years included in the top ten six who were ancient Greeks.[3]

1. For example, it has been pointed out that "people speaking the language we call Greek have lived continually in the Aegean region since at least 1600 BC, and possibly earlier. Greek is, moreover, one of the most conservative and enduring languages in history. Among those still spoken, it has probably changed the least in the past three and a half thousand years, by any indicator. This is an astonishing feat of continuity and provides an obvious and fair point of national pride, [even though] historians should be cautious of arguments for national continuity whose main foundation is language." Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13.
2. Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 181.
3. The list included (in order) Aristotle, Plato, Jesus Christ, Socrates, Alexander the Great, Leonardo Da Vinci, Confucius, Julius Caesar, Homer, and Pythagoras. See Iro-Anna Mamakouka,

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Modern Greeks can thus lay claim to a glorious, long, historical past. Put another way, Greeks have a lot of history to choose from; this brings to mind the British author Saki (H. H. Munro), who purportedly quipped that "the Balkans produce more history than they can digest."[4] This is indubitably also the case for Greece. In fact, Greece has so much history that it is probably the only Western state that celebrates independence day holidays twice a year: on 25 March, signifying the beginning of the 1821 Revolution against the Ottoman Empire, and on 28 October, OXI Day (OXI meaning *no*), commemorating the decision to resist the invading Italian forces at the outset of World War Two, which links in the Greek mind to Thermopylae, when the ancient Spartans refused passage to overwhelming Persian forces always implicitly present. When the twenty-five-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Marathon was celebrated in 2011, this author thought it would not be a stretch to envision it becoming a third commemoration to be added to the collective remembrance holidays.

Too much history poses some unique problems for the modern Greek nation and also for its academics. For one, there is a tendency associated with the inimitable word προγονοπληξία, rendered in English translation as "stricken by ancestors." In such an intellectual framework, everything harks back to the ancient Greeks, who are always proven to be the first, the best, the nearly infallible trailblazers who can probably explain everything.[5]

A second problem is an overwhelming emphasis on Greece as a significant international player, to an extent that is unwarranted by the country's real power resources and capabilities. This contemporary Greco-centric approach (which is often seen in the work of academics who really ought to know better) was apparently addressed by former president and prime minister Constantine Karamanlis. During a visit at Delphi he was shown the famous *omphalos*

"MIT: Most Famous People of the Past 6,000 Years Are Greek Figures," *Greek USA Reporter*, 17 March 2014, usa.greekreporter.com/2014/03/17/mit-most-famous-people-of-the-past-6000-years-are-greek-figures/#sthash.hm45ZOW4.dpuf.

4. Keith Brown, *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), xi. Brown provides an excellent and accurate presentation of the ways in which this quotation is often used and abused.

5. The somewhat imperfect American analogy would involve scholars who focus exclusively on the Founding Fathers, provide them with almost saintly attributes, and never go beyond asking what they would have done in any situation.

(navel), a stone that was supposed to represent the center of the world.[6] "We should throw it in the sea" was his comment.[7] This should not be read as an example of philistinism but as a wise reaction to an overbearing tendency in Greek politics and especially foreign policy.

These aforementioned remarks stand as a warning to attempts linking (an often long) historical record with more contemporary developments.[8] One must ensure not to be entirely seduced by the sirens of the Hellenic glorious past, avoid altogether the perils of προγονοπληξία and eschew the dangers of an exclusively Greek-centered approach. Duly introduced, this essay presents the major factors that constitute the framework in which Greek foreign policy operates. Such an approach should help explain diplomatic actions that international observers, too often for comfort, view as incomprehensible or simply irrational. At the same time, the essay explores whether this proposed framework has any connections, perhaps vital, to past centuries, with particular emphasis to Antiquity.

Between East and West

If there is one issue that perhaps offers an incontestable continuity with Antiquity it is that of geography. Consider that this author's hometown of Thessaloniki has been around for more than twenty-three hundred years and his place of work, Athens, for even longer. Of course, the borders of both

6. On the *Omphalos*, see Michael Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 36.

7. There is a possibility that this story may be apocryphal, but there can be absolutely no doubt that it accurately represents Karamanlis's true thoughts. For example, in an off-the-record conversation with journalist Panos Loukakos that was published more than two decades after it had taken place, the Greek statesman expressed the following arguments: "We have the syndrome of the Earth's navel. We believe that everything happens either in our favor, or that everyone in the world is philhellenic or antihellenic. We see conspiracies everywhere." Panos Loukakos, *The Unseen View: Press and Politics after the Change of Regime* [in Greek] (Athens: Vivliopoleion tis Estias, 2013), 109.

8. Such an exploration in the past is, however, far from unusual or unreasonable. For example, Paschalis Kitromilides has forcefully argued that "to understand the present [sovereign debt] crisis [we have] to look at the origins of Greek political culture and the ideological traditions that shaped the Greek political community in the nineteenth century." Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and Revolution: The Making of Modern Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), xii.

regional empires and states have fluctuated throughout time, often considerably. But the intriguing fact remains that a certain core geographic area exists that can historically be identified (however imperfectly) with what has been understood at different times as Hellenism.[9] Crucially, this area is located between East and West; and this has consequences.

First, there appears to be a certain realization of living on the frontier of the West and hence acting as a bulwark against barbarian or Eastern threats, defined in different eras as Persian absolutism, Ottoman despotism, or Soviet totalitarianism. This may well have been (at least partially) a way in which military actions by the ancient Greek *poleis*, the Kingdom of Macedonia, the Byzantine Empire, and the post–World War II Greek state, were self-understood. For example, there can be effectively little doubt that in his celebrated *Histories*,[10] Herodotus views the Graeco-Persian Wars (480–479 BCE) being not just about the defense of homeland territory but, much more significantly, about the preservation of Hellenic civilization.

Second, the fact of being situated between East and West has also had cultural and political consequences for both the citizens and the state of Greece. In the estimation of Robert Kaplan,

9. A comprehensive analysis of the concept of Hellenism throughout the ages would require a separate, almost certainly multivolume study. To give an example of the complexities that scholars would have to grapple with, Paul Cartledge defines Hellenism during the times of the Graeco-Persian wars as comprising the "communities which identified themselves . . . on three main grounds: common language; shared descent; and common culture, especially in religious matters." Paul Cartledge, *After Thermopylae: The Oath of Plataea and the End of the Graeco-Persian Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 80. In examining Byzantine Hellenism, Anthony Kaldellis identifies "three main movements: Hellenism as philosophy in the eleventh century; as elite culture (*paideia*) and rhetorical performance in the twelfth; and as protonationalism in the thirteenth." See Kaldellis, 8. By comparison, nineteenth-century Hellenism in Ottoman Macedonia has been presciently defined in a considerably different manner: "In the widest sense of the term [Hellenism was] a force which in Macedonia was not to be identified solely with the Greek language or race. Hellenism derived largely from the Patriarchical Church; from the flourishing Greek schools; and from a class which enjoyed in some measure an economic superiority; a class which was conservative, which had everything to lose. . . . Hellenism was a way of life, of which the outward manifestation was the acceptance of the Greek Orthodox Church." Douglas Daikin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, 1897–1913* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966), 117–8. Given the obvious limitations of space, this essay will not particularly focus on the Byzantine and Ottoman eras and will eschew altogether the debates concerning the precise connection of Hellenism with specific levels of Greek national consciousness during various times of the past three millennia.
10. See Tom Holland, trans., *The Histories of Herodotus* (New York: Viking, 2013).

> Greece is where the West both begins and ends. . . . Greece is Christian, but it is also Eastern Orthodox, as spiritually close to Russia as it is to the West, and geographically equidistant between Brussels and Moscow. Greece may have invented the West with the democratic innovations of the Age of Pericles, but for more than a thousand years it was a child of Byzantine and Turkish despotism. . . . Modern Greece has struggled against this bifurcated legacy. . . . . It is not entirely an accident that Greece is the most economically troubled country in the European Union. The fact that it is located at Europe's southeastern back door also has something to do with it. For Greece's economic and political development bear marks of a legacy not wholly in the modern West.[11]

It is probably true that there is something ambiguous, puzzling, even problematic about Greece's Western character, but also something wonderful in many ways (consider, for example, how contemporary Greek music is so popular in Israel).[12]

Controversially, Samuel Huntington took particular note of this situation and decided not to consider Greece at all as part of the West. Rather, he consigned the country to his classification of Orthodox civilizations. On the basis of this assessment, Huntington forecast a rapprochement in Greek-Russian relations:

> Greece is not part of Western civilization . . . [but] an anomaly, the Orthodox outsider in Western organizations. . . . . In the post–Cold War world, Greece's policies have increasingly deviated from those of the West. . . . Greece will undoubtedly remain a formal member of NATO and the European Union. As the process of cultural reconfiguration intensifies, however, these memberships also undoubtedly will become more tenuous, less meaningful, and more difficult for the parties involved. The Cold War antagonist of the Soviet Union is evolving into the post–Cold War ally of Russia.[13]

11. See Robert D. Kaplan, "Is Greece European?" *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, 6 June 2012, www.stratfor.com/weekly/greece-european.
12. For a conclusive account and explanation of the popularity of contemporary Greek music in Jewish communities, see Katherine E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 195–200.
13. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 162–3.

Athens did actually pursue a significant shift and reorientation in its relations with Russia during the tenure of Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis (2004–9). It resulted in the pursuit of multidimensional cooperative schemes in a number of areas, which included a deal to construct the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline, cooperation in the construction of the South Stream gas pipeline, and even the intention to buy some 420 BMP-3M armored personnel Russian vehicles. This ambitious program of rapprochement did not survive international reactions and budgetary concerns. It seems most likely that almost no part of it will ever be implemented.

Upon closer scrutiny, these somewhat spectacular moves toward Moscow are to be explained not on the basis of any civilizational affinity with fellow Eastern Orthodox Russia but rather on the basis of (mostly misguided) national interest calculations.[14] However, they did prove extremely popular with the Greek people.[15] This suggests that being a "frontier" state means that attempts might be made to pry Athens away from the West, at least to a certain degree. Such a prospect will not necessarily be met with universal domestic Greek condemnation or apprehension; it is worth keeping in mind that during the Graeco-Persian Wars, only "20 or so Greek communities out of a potential 700 or thereabout" actively resisted the Persian military invasion.[16]

Greece Matters (But Needs Help)

The various ancient and modern manifestations of Greek states have had, at times, an almost uncanny tendency to be at the very forefront of international developments, often with global consequences. One need not belabor this point as regards, for example, the Graeco-Persian Wars. The Battles of Thermopylae, Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea continue to resonate and have even

14. See Aristotle Tziampiris, "Greek Foreign Policy and Russia: Political Realignment, Civilizational Aspects, and Realism," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (2010): 78–89.
15. In a nationwide poll, only 4 percent of Greeks disapproved of the various bilateral agreements while a decisive 83 percent approved. See George P. Terzis, "Poll-Message for New Democracy, PASOK" [in Greek], *Kathimerini*, 13 May 2008, www.kathimerini.gr/321946/article/epikairothta/politikh/gkalop-mhnyma-gia-nd-pasok.
16. Cartledge, 81.

penetrated contemporary mass cultural consciousness (albeit in a not always accurate manner). Claims that these battles had profound implications for the future of the West constitute a publishing meme.

More surprisingly, Greece's significance has continued into modern times. This is not to imply that Greece is somehow all powerful (far from it). Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century the 1821 Greek War of Independence presaged the struggles and revolutions for statehood in Europe (Greece is actually an older state than Germany and Italy) and subsequently the entire world.[17] This process has yet to run its course, as exemplified by the contemporary ongoing struggles of members of national groups such as the Kurds or the Palestinians.

Greece also played a key role in the history of the twentieth century following the conclusion of the Second World War. More specifically, in March 1947, US president Harry Truman enunciated the policy of containment precisely in response to the serious armed communist challenge facing Greece (and Turkey).[18] Without any doubt, containment defined to a considerable extent global politics for almost the next half century.[19]

Today, in the twenty-first century, Greece is again on the forefront of dealing with sovereign debt crises — an issue that has demanded the world's attention and threatened to have destabilizing ramifications for both Europe and the world; "Greece may be a harbinger in more than just economics."[20] In many ways, what has happened and will happen in Greece in the next few years could influence the survival and future of the euro, the role of Germany in the European Union, the process of further European integration, the rise of far right movements on the continent, and also the ways in which European societies facing economic crises deal with their immigrant communities.[21]

17. On this point, see also the eloquent analysis in Roderick Beaton, *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 272.
18. See Eugene T. Rossides, ed., *The Truman Doctrine of Aid to Greece: A Fifty-Year Retrospective* (New York: Academy of Political Science and the American Hellenic Institute Foundation, 1998).
19. For a fair appraisal of America's' policy of containment during the largest part of the Cold War, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar National Security* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1982).
20. Philip Coggan, *The Last Vote: The Threats to Western Democracy* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 143.
21. In this I follow Coggan, ibid., 241, as well as some of his arguments more generally.

Thus, in each of the past three centuries, Greece has managed to be at the center of international developments and yet remain part of the West. However, it is necessary to stress that Western intervention was required in all of these instances to secure such an outcome. When the fate of the Greek Revolution hung in the balance, it was the British victory at the naval Battle of Navarino in 1827 that proved the decisive turning point, guaranteeing that Greece would become independent.[22] Greece's membership in the West also came into question in the 1940s when Greek communists fought a civil war, often enjoying an important degree of popular support. Their failure is primarily related to Winston Churchill's October 1944 percentage agreement with Josef Stalin in Moscow (Greece was assigned a 90-percent Western influence quota and the Red Army never crossed the borders from Bulgaria to "liberate" Greece), but also to armed British intervention during the battle of Athens in December 1944, as well as the aforementioned Truman Doctrine.[23]

And it could be argued that there was a moment in 2012 when Greece's membership in the eurozone (and perhaps even in the European Union) was in question, especially if there would have been a declaration of bankruptcy and swift euro exit followed by immense societal pain and political instability. Although the history of this chapter in modern Greek history has yet to be conclusively written, it seems likely that the final decision to oppose a "Grexit" was made by German chancellor Angela Merkel in August 2012.[24] She subsequently informed Greek prime minister Antonis Samaras during a meeting in Berlin.[25] Her decision was not unrelated to the fear of the unknown concerning the future of the eurozone after the exit of Greece, but

22. See C. M. Woodhouse, *The Battle of Navarino* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965).
23. On the "percentage agreement," see Panos Tsakaloyannis, "The Moscow Puzzle," *Journal of Contemporary History* 21, no. 1 (1986): 37–55. For a classic account of the 1944 December events and their aftermath, see John O. Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens: The Greek Communist "Second" Round, 1944–45* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).
24. The possibility of Greece exiting the eurozone was far from theoretical. See, for example, Timothy F. Geitner, *Stress Test: Reflections on Financial Crises* (New York: Crown, 2014), 483. See also the plans that were secretly formulated for the case of Greece's departure as revealed in Peter Spiegel, "Inside Europe's Plan Z," *Financial Times*, 14 May 2014, www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/0ac1306e-d508-11e3-9187-00144feabdc0.html.
25. See, in particular, Marcus Walker, "Inside Merkel's Bet on the Euro's Future," *Wall Street Journal*, 24 April 2013, A1.

it also was made in the context of pressure emanating from US president Barack Obama, French president Nikolas Sarkozy, and various other international leaders and organizations. A worst case, catastrophic scenario was thus averted but at a high price for the Greek people, who faced an often unjust, somewhat unnecessary, and certainly destructive economic depression.[26]

Relative Weakness

Whereas in a country like the United States foreign policy is usually about the exertion of power and the allocation of considerable power resources (even if a process of relative decline is setting in), in a state like Greece diplomacy is primarily about the management of relative weakness:

> Weakness is the most common, natural and pervasive view of self in the small state and it afflicts its leaders and influences their behavior in many ways. . . . It is the dominant fact of the state's international existence. It is unpleasant to be aware of it, either in strategic or human terms, and it often leads to a search of compensation or for an attitude which, when struck, reduces its significance.[27]

The relative weakness of the modern Greek state has been compounded in the realm of diplomacy by institutional limitations and the frequent failure to properly or fully utilize the human resources of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Greek diplomats possibly represent the most elite and cosmopolitan part of the public sector). This institutional dysfunction has even allowed scholars to conclude that "Greek foreign policy can properly be accounted for . . . by seriously taking into consideration three factors: public opinion, the role of personality and the interplay between personalities and society/public opin-

26. Attempts to deal with Greece's "mountain of debt" resulted in the national economy contracting by an estimated 24.5 percent by the end of 2013 while unemployment climbed to 27 percent (64.2 percent for those ages 15–24). See, for example, "Greek Economy to Contract in 2013, Recover Next Year—Central Bank," Reuters, 25 February 2013, www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/25/greece-economy-cenbank-idUSL6N0BP5NM20130225; and "Greece Projects Deeper Economic Contraction," *New York Times*, 24 April 2013, www.nytimes.com/2012/04/25/business/global/greece-projects-deeper-economic-contraction.html?_r=0.

27. David Vital, *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 33.

ion."[28] The lack of reference to parliamentary oversight committees or to the role of foreign policy professionals is striking and mostly accurate.

The persistent relative weakness of the modern Greek state, which has worsened as a result of the current economic crisis, has three major consequences. First, there is an urgent, pressing, and unabated need for allies and friends. Put simply, Greece cannot go it alone. For example, it is widely understood in Athens that in the instances that Greece fought Turkey with minimal international support (in 1897, 1919–22, and 1974), the results ranged from abject defeat to national catastrophe.[29] Furthermore, Athens shows a predilection for alliances that are institutionalized and thus allow it a certain voice in deliberations, as is the case with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and, especially, the European Union; it is not coincidental that the more recent regional rise of Turkey was met by diplomatic overtures first to Moscow and then to Jerusalem.[30]

Second, weakness almost necessitates compensatory beliefs. It is precisely in this context that the rife conspiracy theories or the rampant uncritical blaming of the United States for almost every foreign policy mishap of the past half century have to be analyzed and understood. At the very least, such approaches may be psychologically soothing to many citizens.

The need for compensatory actions also explains diplomatic episodes that may otherwise appear strange and near incomprehensible. For example, while Edward Snowden's revelations about the US National Security Agency's global eavesdropping efforts were rocking the Obama administration and causing problems for America's international image, former Greek foreign minister Theodoros Pangalos came up with an unprovoked self-exposure. He declared on a radio show that while he was in office, Greece's secret services were regularly spying on the US ambassadors in both Athens and Ankara.

28. P. C. Ioakimidis "The Model of Foreign Policy-Making in Greece: Personalities Versus Institutions," in Stelios Stavridis, Theodore Couloumbis, Thanos Veremis, and Neville Waites, eds., *The Foreign Policies of the European Union's Mediterranean States and Applicant Countries in the 1990s* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 142.

29. This is sometimes referred to as the Theodoropoulos Doctrine, after the late Greek diplomat Byron Theodoropoulos, who publicly and conclusively made the argument.

30. See Aristotle Tziampiris, "Greek Foreign Policy in the Shadow of the Economic Crisis," in Pantelis Sklias and Nikolaos Tzifakis, eds., *Greece's Horizons: Reflecting on the Country's Assets and Capabilities* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag and Konstantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy Series on European and International Affairs, 2013), 27–40.

He thus had access, on a daily basis, to transcripts of their telephone conversations.[31] Following the ensuing outcry over these revelations, Pangalos was unrepentant. In his own words, "Why should Greece always be the victim?"[32] Suffice it to say, this is the perfect example of compensatory behavior rooted in weakness. It may indeed then be the case that if the "occupational hazard" of a great power is that of self-righteousness, for a smaller, weaker state, it is that of finding compensatory strategies and beliefs.

Finally, institutional and overall state weakness often allows individual Greek politicians to have a disproportionate impact on foreign policy. Of course, spectacular diplomatic successes are never particularly easy to achieve. The fact remains that in a weaker country "only very exceptional men [or women] with great intuitive gifts and a marked capacity and readiness for the taking of risks and for facing powerful opposition are likely to overcome these [state] disabilities and imbue their colleagues and their public with their own self confidence."[33]

It is perhaps too tempting to search for parallels here with some of the major protagonists in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* such as Pericles and Alcibiades (the Sicilian expedition being a prime example, although classical Athens was far from weak but mostly lacked sufficient constitutional checks and balances). In demonstrating how individual Greek personalities can play an outsized role in foreign policy, it is worth contemplating the role of Eleftherios Venizelos in the two Balkan Wars (1912–13), the personal culpability of dictator Dimitrios Ioannides for the 1974 war with Turkey and the subsequent occupation of part of Cyprus, the impact of Constantine Karamanlis in getting Greece to join as a full member in 1981 of the then European Economic Community, the centrality of Kostas Karamanlis in strengthening relations with Russia, and the significance of George Papandreou in nullifying these close relations and turning to Israel.

31. "Pangalos Bomb: We Also Spied on the American Ambassadors in Athens and Ankara" [in Greek], *Ta Nea*, 29 October 2013, www.tanea.gr/news/politics/article/5050215/bomba-pagkaloy-kai-emeis-parakoloythoysame-ton-amerikano-presbeyth-se-athhna-kai-agkyra/.
32. "Pangalos Insists about the Eavesdropping: Why Should Greece Always Be the Victim?" [in Greek], *Ta Nea*, 31 October 2013, www.tanea.gr/news/politics/article/5050709/thodwros-pagkalos-giati-na-einai-h-ellada-panta-thyma/.
33. Vital, 38.

Nationalism

It is well understood that ancient Greeks had a strong particular attachment to their various *poleis*. (There might even be echoes of this to today, with modern Greeks often emphasizing their region of birth, lovingly called the ιδιαίτερη πατρίδα, "special homeland." For example, this author self-identifies as a Greek Macedonian.) At the same time, notions of a shared Hellenic cultural heritage and reality are well documented, not least in the distinction between Hellenes and barbarians. There is clearly some tension here, and the question of whether ancient Greeks exhibited examples of proto-nationalism that could be understood in more modern terms has been debated by academics. Perhaps classical Athens, given its large population of some three hundred thousand, might have come closer to such notions of proto-nationalism.[34]

The following has even been argued that in a close reading of Pericles' *Funeral Oration*:

> Many of the quintessential elements of nationalism as we know it — even a specifically liberal-democratic type of nationalism — are strikingly apparent . . . love of country as the ultimate good and death for one's homeland as the ultimate sacrifice that wipes out all stains; the seamless connection between collective identity and personal identity within a framework that still leaves scope for a large measure of individualism and mutual tolerance; the idea that popular sovereignty is the foundation of the state's political legitimacy and the mechanism whereby individual members of the populace — rich and poor alike — identify themselves with the social and political collective; [and] the idea that one's own society has a distinctive character that manifests itself in both private and public spheres and that shapes not just political action but also the educational

34. The size of the population of Athens is significant because it involves "a scale of organization and existence that precludes personal contact among the majority of the members of this group, resulting in the creation of an 'imagined community,' *imagined* 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet then, or even hear of them.'" Edward E. Cohen, *The Athenian Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4, emphasis in original. Cohen is citing Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 15–6. A full discussion of this topic, which is beyond the confines of this essay, at the very least requires grappling with the arguments in Anthony D. Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

> system, cultural production, public entertainment, private forms of leisure, and patterns of consumption.[35]

Admittedly, the idea of nationalism in ancient Greece remains open to debate and interpretation, and it becomes far more complex and perhaps even problematic during the long Byzantine era.[36] But it is perhaps less so in modern Greece. The forces of nationalism have been strong since the founding of the modern Greek state. Possibly, the route that Greek nationalism has taken is psychologically fulfilling and provides identity, meaning, even a raison d'être to the lives of large numbers of the population. After all, it is worth keeping in mind that to this day the nation-state "is the only remaining, as well as the best-adapted, source of collective and communal identification."[37]

Without recourse to the identity-forming consequences of Greek nationalism, episodes such as the eruption of the Macedonian name dispute that came to dominate Greek foreign and domestic politics in the early 1990s, with millions of Greek citizens demonstrating in the streets at various occasions, are simply impossible to understand.[38] Domestic political parties, great powers, and international organizations can ignore the magnetism and centrality of nationalism in Greece only at their peril. One should keep in mind, however, that Greek nationalism rarely if ever has fallen to the category of racist hypernationalism as was the case, for example, with the Nazis in the 1930s.

Back to the Mediterranean

Many often think of ancient Greece only in geographical terms that closely match those of contemporary Greece. But this is not entirely accurate. In reality, classical Greece

35. Aviel Roshwald, *The Endurance of Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.
36. See Kaldellis.
37. Tony Judt, *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 120. See also Paul R. Pillar, "The Age of Nationalism," *National Interest*, no. 127 (September/October 2013): 9–19.
38. See Aristotle Tziampiris, *Greece, European Political Cooperation and the Macedonian Question* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000); and Thanos Veremis, *Greece's Balkan Entanglement* (Athens: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, 1995).

> stretched in modern terms from southern Spain in the West to Georgia in the Far East, from what they called the Pillars of Heracles (Gibraltar) to Phasis in Colchis. There were something on the order of 1,000 communities in all, together forming "Hellas," at any one time.[39]

Despite this geographical overstretch, Hellas remained primarily Mediterranean in nature. Most of the crucial economic activity and great intellectual centers were linked to the Great Sea. In effect, "it is now accepted . . . that the study of Greece [and Egypt] and Rome has to take place within the context of a wider Mediterranean world,"[40] and recent scholarship also highlights the importance of the Mediterranean even earlier during the Early, Middle, and particularly the Late Bronze Age especially for places like Mycenae, trade routes possibly playing a role in the era's identity formation and political rivalries.[41]

Today, analysts often consign Greece to being merely a Balkan state. This is implicitly accepted even by those who opt for the supposedly more attractive southeast European designation. But it is of great interest that Greece has begun to actively turn again to its Mediterranean heritage. It is true that "after 1500, and certainly after 1850, the Mediterranean became decreasingly important in wider world affairs and commerce."[42] However, the eastern part of the Mediterranean is currently assuming greater significance in international relations and thus justifiably commanding global attention. In many ways, we may be also witnessing another example of the East versus West battles in which Greece has often partaken:

> The Eastern Mediterranean is already the West's new outer limit. It is where the European attitude toward the use of force meets a very non-European attitude. It is where two strategic cultures meet, each one entertaining very different notions of behavior during conflict. The Eastern Mediterranean harbors a variety of political entities, being perhaps the

39. Cartledge, 80.
40. Charles Freeman, *Egypt, Greece and Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.
41. See, for example, Bryan E. Burns, *Mycenaean Greece, Mediterranean Commerce, and the Formation of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 86–7.
42. David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xviii.

> only area in the world where Western democracies live side by side with rogue states, authoritarian rich oil producers, and some of the poorest countries.[43]

It is within this context that Greece's most significant new foreign policy initiative has taken place: the rapprochement with Israel since 2010. There can be little doubt that what has emerged is a full-fledged strategy of cooperation that contrasts sharply with the previous almost six decades of detached (at best) bilateral relations.[44] Examples of the effort include Greece's former prime minister George Papandreou's visit to Israel in July 2010; Benjamin Netanyahu's historic visit to Athens in August 2010, becoming the first sitting Israeli prime minister to do so; numerous visits by Greek and Israeli Cabinet members to both countries; visits by parliamentarians, diplomats, and journalists; the signing of several treaties and agreements in fields such as aviation and tourism; Greece's crucial help in combating the wildfires in Israel in December 2010; the condemnation of anti-Semitic comments and actions in Greece as well as attempts to properly commemorate and acknowledge Greece's Jewish heritage; the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the militaries of the two states in September 2011; several joint military exercises involving the countries' armies, navies, and air forces; the impressive rise of the number of Israeli citizens visiting Greece (from about eighty-four thousand in 2008 to some five hundred thousand during 2013); the way in which Athens effectively cancelled the Freedom Flotilla II during Summer 2012; cooperation in renewable sources of energy and agricultural technology; and many instances of high quality cultural and educational events.

Perhaps most significantly, extensive efforts for coordination in the field of energy have been pursued, including plans for an electricity cable and a natural gas pipeline, both linking Israel with Cyprus and Greece. It could even be argued that a triangle of energy cooperation is being evinced comprising Athens, Nicosia, and Jerusalem. More recently, there have been efforts to include Cairo in this relationship, focusing on idle Egyptian liquified natu-

43. Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler, "The Importance of Cyprus," *Middle East Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (2001): 51.

44. This brief account and these data concerning cooperation between Jerusalem and Athens are based on Aristotle Tziampiris, *The Emergence of Israeli-Greek Cooperation* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2015).

ral gas facilities to which Cypriot and possibly Israeli natural gas can be directed through pipelines, as well as on wider political collaboration.[45] In effect, through the emerging special relationship with Israel and Cyprus (and probably enhanced cooperation with Egypt in the near future), Greece is clearly returning as an active player in the eastern Mediterranean.

Conclusion: Resilience

Greek foreign policy is a strange beast indeed, often appearing perplexing or inexplicable to outsiders. This essay has argued that any attempt at explanation or understanding requires that certain factors be taken seriously into account. They include the country's consequential geographic location between East and West; the fact that Greece has often found itself at the very center of international developments and debates; Greece's relative weakness that demands allies, elicits compensatory actions, and allows individual politicians to often play an outsized role in diplomatic affairs; the salience of nationalism; and the current return to a more active participation in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was also shown that many of these factors have certain antecedents in previous centuries and, on occasion, possibly even to Antiquity.

Today, Greek diplomacy has been forced to operate within adverse but (from a historical perspective) far from unusual or unprecedented circumstances. This observation brings us to the final factor that completes this explanatory framework in which Greek diplomacy operates: the phenomenal resilience of the Hellenes.

Consider that in the twentieth century alone, Greece confronted two Balkan wars, two world wars, the 1923 Asia Minor Catastrophe, a mass popu-

45. See the Cairo declaration signaling wider tripartite cooperation that was signed by Egytpian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Greek prime minister Antonis Samaras, and Cypriot president Nicos Anastasiades on 9 November 2014. Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Egypt-Greece-Cyprus Trilateral Summit Declaration," press release, 9 November 2014, www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/news-announcements/egypt-greece-cyprus-trilateral-summit-cairo-declaration.html. Greek decision makers expect Israel to be joining these cooperative efforts soon. See, for example, "Israeli Gas Field Tamar Expects Upgrade, Including Pipeline to Egypt," i24news, 20 November 2014, www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/51672-141120-israeli-gas-field.

lation exchange with Turkey, Fascist and Nazi occupations that included a deadly famine, the annihilation of its Jewish community and a death toll in which one out of every fourteen Greek citizens perished,[46] a disastrous civil war, mass immigration abroad, numerous coup d'états, several major dictatorships, the 1974 Cyprus events, and near military confrontations with Turkey in 1976, 1987, and 1995. On the economic front alone, Greece went bankrupt in 1932 (as it had in 1827, 1843, and 1893) and faced acute economic problems during several periods, including the 1940s and early 1950s as well as today.

It is worth keeping in mind, though, that after every catastrophic phase, after every defeat, after every setback, Greeks managed to survive, recover, and even prosper. The resilience and adaptability of the Greek people, as well as that of Greek diplomacy, are simply not to be underestimated. After all, Athens was on the winning side of all major international confrontations of the past one hundred years, remained the only noncommunist Balkan state, and became the first in the region to join NATO and the European Economic Community. Perhaps, then, the most important factor linking ancient and modern Hellenes and their political communities and activities is their predilection for survival. Greeks will continue to do so into the future.

46. See Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: William Heinemann, 2005), 18.