

Towards a Greater Eastern Mediterranean: Opportunities for Strategic Integration in the Region

*Featuring Bradley Bowman, Amb. Eric S. Edelman, Dimitris Keridis, Jonathan Schanzer
Moderated by Lena Argiri
Introductory remarks by Endy Zemenides*

ZEMENIDES: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for joining us. I'm Endy Zemenides, the Executive Director of the Hellenic American Leadership Council, which is pleased to co-host, along with the Delphi Economic Forum and Kathimerini, the fourth, right? ... COVID is throwing me off, but I think it's the fourth... Southeast Europe and East Med Forum. And we are actually becoming regulars at the FDD, so first of all, I want to thank the Foundations for Defense of Democracies for hosting us and putting together this star panel. For those of you who don't know FDD, for more than 20 years, FDD has operated as a nonpartisan policy institute focused on national security and foreign policy. It's a source for timely research, analysis, and policy options. They proudly take neither foreign government nor foreign corporate funding. They've done excellent work, we've been great to work with them on the East Med. They've been cutting edge on the East Med. And of course, because we have this podcast, this daily podcast called Recurring, we have two of our favorite guests here, Jon Schanzer and Brad Bowman. I think Jon is edging you out, I'll just tell you.

And they've put together a great panel for us about the challenges and opportunities in the region in the Eastern Mediterranean, including how developing institutions like the Abraham Accords and the East Med Gas Forum can lead to greater integration in the region. Among the stars, first we have Ambassador Eric Edelman. Eric has had a long and distinguished career in the U.S. Foreign Service. He's served as U.S. Ambassador to Finland and Turkey, so you must have interesting conversations with a lot of your colleagues, as well as the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and Principal Deputy Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs. He is a senior advisor at FDD and is currently serving as the vice chair of the National Defense Strategy Commission.

Brad Bowman, who serves as Senior Director of FDD Center on Military and Political Power. He previously served as a national security advisor to members of the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committee, as well as an active duty U.S. Army officer, Black Hawk Pilot and assistant professor at West Point.

And since this is co-hosted by the Delphi Economic Forum, I have to give Brad a little Delphic oracle status, because before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Brad analyzed the new mutual defense cooperation agreement between Greece and the United States, and threw a nice little tidbit of about how important Alexandroupolis could become, in case Turkey wanted to blockade or not provide free passage through the Dardanelles. So you get the Delphic Oracle Award over the last year, Brad.

Dimitris Keridis, member of Hellenic Parliament, representing Athens-North, and a professor of international politics at the University of Athens. He serves as the head of the Israel-Greece Friendship Parliamentary Group, and is in the now-launching, just-authorized last year by Congress, the "3+1" interparliamentary legislative committee that, on this side of the pond is headed by Senator Menendez.

Jonathan Schanzer, my favorite Philadelphia Eagles fan, wants to remind us with his tie. He serves as Senior Vice President for Research at FDD. He worked as a terrorism finance analyst in the U.S. Department of the Treasury, and has written four books on the Middle East, including... Was it last year's book on Gaza?

SCHANZER: 2021.

ZEMENIDES: I told you COVID threw me off. And finally, we are privileged to have as our moderator, the incomparable Lena Argiri. Lena is the Washington, DC correspondent for ERT, the Greek public broadcaster. In her role she covers the White House State Department, the Treasury, and Capitol Hill on issues related to Greece and Eastern Mediterranean by providing commentary and articles in Greek media, including Kathimerini. And sorry, Brad and Jon, but I think Lena is also infinitely more popular on the Greek Current than you guys. Lena, over to you.

ARGIRI: Thank you for your kind words. Thank you all for being here with us today. A special thanks to FDD for hosting this event for a second year in a row. And thank you, gentlemen, for taking the time today to help us better understand the very difficult region, the opportunities, the challenges and the threats. And Mr. Edelman, I'd like to start with you, and we'll discuss today about the very complicated region where the alliances in the dynamics frequently change. Can you please help us understand why this region is historically important for U.S. foreign policy, referring to both the literal state as well as the government?

EDELMAN: Sure. Thank you, Lena. Thank you, Endy, for that introduction. I think that the emphasis on my career needs to be long, because I'm approaching sort of senescence now. So before I start and answer your question, Lena, I really think it is appropriate to start first with an observation about the terrible tragedy that's befallen Turkey and Syria today with the two earthquakes. And potentially, as I understand it... I'm not a seismologist and I don't play one on TV, but as I understand it, there's potential, because of instability along the fault lines there, for even more and perhaps even stronger earthquakes in the next day or two. I would recall that in 1999 it was a similar kind of earthquake, although this one seems to be even stronger in terms of the damage that it's done, that brought about a rapprochement between Greece and Turkey because it emphasized, of course, the common human toll that these kinds of tragedies take. And so, one can certainly hope that if there's anything good that comes out of what has happened today, that we might see a bit of a reprise of that kind of attention to the humanitarian costs of this on all sides.

We tend to forget, here in Washington anyway, that the Eastern Mediterranean has been an important strategic part of American grand strategy for a long time, certainly dating back to 1947 and the onset of the Cold War. Historically, of course, the Mediterranean was an important international waterway going back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. But for the United States, the passage of British and imperial power out of the region because of the economic burdens of World War II, forced the United States to take up political responsibilities that it had heretofore avoided, when Britain informed the United States it could no longer be responsible for the security of the Eastern Mediterranean. Both Greece and Turkey were going through difficult challenges: Greece, a civil war; and Turkey, enormous pressure from the Soviet Union on the control of the straits. And so President Truman called for American aid to countries withstanding the forces of totalitarianism, and the United States became deeply involved.

The broader region was important because the United States was trying to help Europe and its reconstruction after World War II, and the energy resources from the broader region were absolutely essential to the reconstruction of the European economy. And so the Eastern Mediterranean took on a very important role. It was only a year later that we had the beginnings of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and of course one of the very first expansions of NATO... We talk a lot about NATO expansion in context of Ukraine these days, but one of the very first NATO expansions was the addition of Greece and Turkey to the Alliance. At the time of the Truman Doctrine speech and the Truman aid, Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, who was actually, I think, Undersecretary then, testified in a closed-door session to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And he had to make the argument for aid to Greece and Turkey by noting that they were imperfect democracies, each in its own way.

And certainly, Greece has had, over the years, challenges with democracy, particularly in the sixties and seventies. Turkey had not yet, at that time, had an election that would allow for the transfer of power that was not to come until 1950. Then, of course, Turkish democracy has been undergoing severe challenges in the last decade-plus with the creeping authoritarianism of President Erdogan. My view has always been that the United States' role in that regard was to try to help both Greece and Turkey and the region as a whole, perfect its democracy and move in a more democratic direction.

But one thing about the importance of the region is that while it maintained its importance throughout the Cold War and the United States maintained significant military forces, particularly Navy forces, in the Mediterranean, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a loss of attention to the importance of the region. And even the fact that the largest natural gas findings in the world in this century have been uncovered in this part of the world, I think it still lacks the kind of focused attention, certainly here in Washington, that it deserves. And we can talk more about ways to remedy that. But I think that the region retains an important role, and there are challenges in Washington to how we deal with that, that are bureaucratic that I can go into a bit more detail on later. But I think that we need to recover some of what we used to know, which is that this is a very crucial part of the world that can only suffer from American inattention.

ARGIRI: And regardless of how complicated this area is, and Mr. Edelman gave us a very good picture, all the major transnational issues like terrorism, climate, energy, and immigration are the same, are the same for all of it. It seems to me that the only way through these challenges is a multilateral regional approach. Greece has been quite tactical on that front from how successful have these initiatives been and what else needs to be done in order for this regional approach to retain hold.

KERIDIS: Thank you very much, Lena. It's wonderful to be here back in DC thanks to the kind invitation of Delphi Forum and my friend Endy. And it's always great to have this opportunity for a dialogue, for a transatlantic dialogue in this trouble of change and trouble that we have with this esteemed partner. Now we are in the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, and I think I would state the obvious by saying that the most important election in 2023 for American interest, for Western interest, for Europe, for Greece, for everybody in the area is obviously Turkey's election. And it is true that we have seen a lot of, to put it mildly, democratic backsliding in Turkey recently.

Now, as a representative of the Greek people, I want as well, to express my greatest sympathy and condolences for the humanitarian disaster that has struck Turkey. And already I have been urging my fellow Greeks. The Greek government has already announced immediate aid to Turkey, and for Europe as well, to take the lead. This can have a significant political meaning, as well as a political gesture, because we have seen with great anxiety the cultivation of an anti-Western, anti-European, anti-Greek anti-American, very xenophobic discourse in Turkey's part of Erdogan's election campaign, that Turkey is a victim of banning foreigners, the imperialists, the infidels, I don't know what... The Greek says "the American stooges" in the area. And we have to send a message that we are here to help, that we are open to this kind of cooperation.

We are very firm in defending the law, but at the same time, we extend the hand of cooperation at this time of great need in a region of Turkey that is poor, that houses a lot of Syrian refugees. The weather is very, very cold. And so the chances of surviving in the rubble are quite slim. And we haven't seen anything yet. I think the victims will go up in the tens of thousands given the force of the earthquake and the usual predicament problems in how buildings are built in this great economic boom of Turkey. Often rules and regulations are disregarded. There is a lot of corruption, there is a lot of state weaknesses, and we have sent a message at this time of need. So there has been a sea change as far as crisis is concerned, and there is no doubt about this. And let me put it briefly, that this is a region that the Greek presence historically has been very strong, obviously from time immemorial, and certainly from the great conquest of Alexander the Great and ever since, culturally under a strong Greek influence.

But it is true that with the rise of Arab nationalists, basically radical Arab nationalists, these historical connections were severed. The Greeks of Egypt were expelled in the 1950s, and for some time the region was left on the back burner of Greek interest, which was totally Western-oriented and integrated with Europe. In the eighties, there was some return in the region, not always in a Western-positive way. The Greek socialist government at the time played around

with radical Arab nationalists. But since then, there has been a sea change and nowhere this is more obvious than the relationship with Israel. Now, Greece was the last country to recognize Israel de jure, only in 1990. But since 2010, the relationship has flourished, and has been strategic. And not only economic and cultural, but also strategic.

We are cooperating in all levels. Militarily, very, very strong. We are buying weapons, we are developing different relationships of all sorts with Israel. And for Israel, I would say, it is existential the survival of Greek Cyprus. That Greek Cyprus, surrounded by Muslim nations and Islamists and not always nice, friendly neighbors, to put it mildly. Greek Cyprus is a stepping stone to the West, to the free world, and it should remain as free and secure from Turkey's pressure as possible. And as an extension, obviously, Greece stabilizing Western-oriented access. A second development was Egypt, obviously, and what happened there with the coup of Al-Sisi in 2013 and the breakup between Egypt and Turkey, as a result of Turkey's support for the Muslim Brothers and Mohammad Morsi. And this has created the dynamics for this emerging cooperation, for sure.

Now, Greek foreign policy has been very active in this part of the world. We have signed a partial delineation agreement with Egypt and we are eager to further develop the relationship. We have welcomed the UAE's presence in the East Mediterranean to create a western-oriented front of stability and not to allow troublemakers to take advantage of the weakening presence of the United States. There are troublemakers and the Western and outside EU, Russia, China, and obviously, Turkey has played very active and not always would play, to put it mildly- nice game in places like Syria and Northern Iraq, in Libya, and even in Ethiopia and down further south in the Red Sea in Somalia in a very, very extended way. This is the idea, of a force of stability without excluding anybody, always extending the hand of cooperation with anybody willing to pick it up on the basis of law.

The troubles in Eastern Mediterranean can be simple and the question is simple. Are we going to resolve any question based on the law or based on force? The answer cannot be but the law. We need to do more with the Europeans who are always, and I think, I can talk forever. Now, the Europeans are focused. Europe cannot do many things at the same time, even at the best of times. The European governments are divided. There's a lot of confusion and they have been totally concentrated on Russia. For them, anything beyond Russia is a distraction. I go all the time to the Council of Europe, to the meetings of the National Parliament of Europe. I'm representing Greece everywhere and for the Bats and the Poles and the Slovaks and the Slovenes and the Czechs and the Scandinavians, anything that has to do with the Eastern Mediterranean is an unnecessary distraction. It's almost a pro-Russian unnecessarily. They're obsessed. They cannot see the strategic connections. I always try to tell them that what happens in Syria has a lot to do with Russia, that Russia is not... These Southeast connections are all too clear to see. We should not only focus... I mean, obviously, this is the priority, the war in Ukraine, but it's always a struggle. Greece can provide, together with a few others, just digitally more agile powers like France, this direction.

ARGIRI: Thank you so much. Mr. Schanzer. Mr. Keridis talked about the weakened presence of the U.S. in the region. What grade would you give the U.S. for its approach both to based Eastern Mediterranean and the Abraham radicals? Do you see any missed opportunities or mistakes that need to be rectified, especially now that the great power competition seems to be on full display, Russia and China demanding dominant roles and rogue regional players, right? Turkey, talking about Turkey and Iran seeking to disrupt the region. Also, do you think that more involvement, more engagement, more commitment from allies is necessary?

SCHANZER: Well, first of all, thank you. Thank you all for being here and thank you for moderating. Thank you for coming all the way from Greece and thank you, Endy, for organizing all of this. Let me start with the East Med. If I'm going to give out grades, it's always tough, I'd give it probably a C+ for the United States.

ARGIRI: Not a good grade?

SCHANZER: Not a great grade, but better than maybe it would've been two years ago. Remember two years ago, the spokesman for the State Department, Ned Price, wouldn't even say the words, "Abraham Accords." There was that famous exchange with him and Matt Lee, an AP reporter said, "Well, what do you call those," and he says, "Oh, well, those are normalization agreements." "No, no. What was the proper noun for it?" "Oh, I don't know. It was normalization something." "No, what was the name," and he finally said, "Abraham Accords," and it was like pulling teeth to get him to say it out loud. Well, fast-forward to last year, the U.S. helped to broker, at least theoretically, the transfer of power over two islands that belong to Egypt and now will be in the hands of Saudi Arabia, Sanafir and Tiran, and in the process, that actually prompted the Saudis to recognize the state of Israel, at least on paper. That's a very important step forward.

I would also actually add that the collapse of the Iran deal, such as it is right now, it's absolutely obviously not entirely dead, but as they say in the movie, "The Princess Bride," it's mostly dead. I think the sense that that is losing steam right now is giving added impetus for some of these regional actors to coalesce together. I don't know if that's because of American actions or despite of American actions to be honest, but I think it's an interesting dynamic to watch. But, there is still a trust gap that exists between Washington and a number of Arab capitals. I think that's really important to point out. The Saudis in particular, that relationship is still not entirely solid. This is still a relationship that I think we were able to really observe open mistrust between Washington and Riyadh. Some of this stems from the fact that President Biden, when he was campaigning, said that he wanted to turn Saudi Arabia into a pariah state. Well, you'll have to forgive Mohammed bin Salman for not wanting to give President Biden a Nobel Prize. After hearing that, you can get a sense about why the Saudis have a certain amount of reticence. I do think that the Israelis and the Saudis are moving together at their own pace. And I think there's positive things happening there, whether or not the U.S. is involved or not. I think that is probably the greatest takeaway here is that these things are happening despite whatever challenges we see in the region. The Arab states and Israel continue to come together because they see it as being in their own interests. We saw that recently with Benjamin Netanyahu going to Chad and reestablishing ties there. I think that's really positive.

One thing that I'll just note that we're watching at FDD that I think is worth watching writ large is that some of the original peacemakers with Israel are waffling a little bit. The Jordanians are not entirely comfortable with the relationship. By the way, I would say that Greece's strong relationship with Jordan offers an opportunity to perhaps bring the two sides back together. And we will talk about Egypt maybe a little bit later, but I see instability there as being highly problematic for the broader construct of normalization and for the East Med. As for the East Med progress, if I'm going to give that a grade, probably a B-, pretty close to a C+, but maybe a little bit better. I think it's primarily because the U.S. has not ostracized the countries that are involved, although I do think that greater involvement is really what's necessary here.

You mentioned China and Russia and great power competition. If the U.S. truly wants to secure the East Med as this strategic region where the U.S. can operate, it can block the tenders of the Chinese, it can block the strategic maneuvers of other great powers that seek to challenge us, well then, that will require greater investment on our part. It's going to involve, for example, providing additional weaponry, blocking the weaponry, for example, to countries like Turkey who are essentially destabilizing this alliance threatening Greece in regular intervals about invading in the middle of the night. That cannot be tolerated by the United States and I think the U.S. at some point is going to need to pick sides. It's not to say that we have to jettison Turkey from the transatlantic alliance, but I think we do need to stand on the side of those that have not been provocative and that are trying to work multilaterally. That's something that I think we need to watch and develop further.

I think, by the way, also the U.S. needs to be more forceful in opposing Turkey as it violates the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus. I think we ought to be rejecting outright any agreements that Turkey tries to strike with Libya over EPZ issues as well. I think we've just not been as actively engaged as we should be and that's where I think we've got some negative points against us. That said, we are still seeing engagement, particularly at the parliamentary and congressional level, which I think is very positive and I think where we are probably going to continue to focus for the next several years.

ARGIRI: Thank you. Mr. Bowman, you have written extensively about the military aspect of this regional corporation, key developments like the new Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States and Greece and joint exercises like Iniochos. A quick look at the map demonstrates that the U.S. can deal with fast points from Ukraine to Yemen with the forward presence in this region. How can a more integrated Eastern Mediterranean give the U.S. greater power projection or mobilities?

BOWMAN: Thanks so much for the question and it's a pleasure to join my distinguished colleagues and I echo the comments about my sympathies to those suffering from what happened recently. Yeah, no, this has been a real focus for our Center on Military and Political Power here, looking at a range of things, including military exercises. There's just a couple of anecdotal examples I'll offer to you that I think help us understand great strategically what's happening and also lays out awesome opportunities. Undoubtedly, the U.S. has at times been unreliable, shall we say, if I'm being polite, if one looks at the Afghanistan withdrawal and the messages that were sent around the world based on that disaster, I would say. But news of the U.S. departing the region is premature, shall I say. I would point you to the Juniper Oak 23 military exercise. That is the largest military exercise between the U.S. and Israel in history.

The U.S. flowed combat power into that exercise in a way that no country in the world can match. Including four B-52s flying from the United States, coordinating and conducting three ways of attacks on simulated targets after defeating air defense, after teaming up with Israeli F-35s supported by F-15s and F-18s. I can go on and on and on. If you're sitting in a place, I don't know, like the Islamic Republic of Iran, that message is for you. Okay, yes, we are unreliable at times, but we also continue to understand the importance of the region and we have combat power that can flow into the region in a way that's unmatched in the world.

I was reviewing the iteration of this last time and Jon Schanzer's introduction, I thought, really laid out some key points regarding the historic importance of this region, the intersection of maritime routes, energy, and so forth. So, I would point you to that Juniper Oak exercise. It's just an example of, yeah, our posture changes in the region, it's always changing, but don't miss how we can flow combat power into the region. That exercise is speaking to Israel about our rock-solid commitment to them. It's speaking to our Arab partners and it's also speaking to this Islamic Republic of Iran and its terror proxies about we retain the means of do us necessary to protect our interests. I would also applaud Greek for its Iniochos exercise that I've written on a fair amount and a pleasure to join the podcast a couple times on that.

In the past, Greece has invited Israel to participate many times, UAE has participated, Bahrain has participated. I note that Egypt and Jordan have been observers. Wouldn't it be nice if Egypt and Jordan would send combat forces to that exercise? I hope Israel attends again. I would note that the distance between Israel and Greece is roughly equivalent to that between Israel and Iran. That provides some valuable rehearsal, shall we say, that might be necessary should Iran move forward with its nuclear weapons program. Then, all this is in the context of another thing we look at is armed sales and we can talk about this in Q&A if you want to, but F-35 acquisition by Greece we can talk about that. We also can talk about Turkey's desire to acquire the F-16.

I would just highlight a couple of things that I look at on the F-16/F-35 front if it's of interest. One is an F-16 is not an F-35, right? These are very different capabilities. You'd have to start there. When Turkey decided to acquire the S-400, an advanced air and missile defense system from the leading threat to the NATO alliance, not exactly the behavior one would expect of a NATO ally. Despite repeated warnings from Washington, we had no choice but to evict Turkey from the F-35 program. And I wrote on that and that was clear.

F-16 is a fourth-generation fighter, even if it's a block 70 or a near-block version. Very, very different. And right when I'm starting to think that, hey, maybe we should consider that, I see things like the November '23 airstrike in Turkey, excuse me, in Syria, by Turkey where U.S. troops' lives were put in danger, right? I mean, this is a DOD statement. The recent Turkey airstrike in Syria, "Directly threatened the safety of U.S. Personnel who were working in Syria with local partners to defeat ISIS." Okay? My sincere heart goes out to the people in Turkey for the terrorist attacks that they've endured. America has had some terrorist attacks of our own, so that's unacceptable, but we have to find a way forward where we can support our partners in Syria to make sure that we defeat in a durable way the ISIS caliphate while avoiding irresponsible behavior like we saw in November from Turkey in Syria. I would just also flag with a lot of people who may be tracking the accession, and with deference to the ambassador, of Finland and Sweden to the NATO alliance. I would just note that the initial paperwork was exchanged at NATO headquarters in June, June 29th, of last year. That's when this all started. All except two countries have now ratified the accession of those two countries left. Who's left? Turkey and Hungary. The last country to add itself was Slovakia on September 27th. I'm no mathematician, that's four months ago. Delaying slow rolling, I'd say, for cynical political purposes in the accession of Finland and Sweden at a time when we need to have unity and strength from NATO and not a division of weakness. I could keep going, but I'll stop. Thank you.

ARGIRI: Mr. Edelman, back to you. Mr. Schanzer said a while ago that if the U.S. really wants to secure this region, the U.S. needs to do more. How can the U.S. best support regional integration? It's clear that more involvement will help, but can you please identify some diplomatic opportunities or some diplomatic initiatives that could facilitate this involvement? I mean, the 3+1 comes to mind, maybe the establishment of the special coordinator for the Abraham Accords or the Eastern Mediterranean Department of State. What are your hopes?

EDELMAN: I think first we have to start with what are some of the obstacles to having a more focused U.S. approach to the region. One of the main obstacles is that the region, qua region, sits astride a lot of bureaucratic divides in the United States. So, it sits a fort the dividing lines between the European Affairs Bureau and the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau. It sits a fort the lines between the Unified Command Plan between the European Command and Central Command. As a former U.S. Ambassador in Turkey, I had had to live with that. I mean, it is a very real obstacle to a concentrated approach to the region as a whole. By the way, the Eastern Med is not unique in that regard. I mean, one of our colleagues on the panel talked about some of the unhelpful Turkish involvement in the Horn of Africa. The Red Sea has the same issue because it too sits a fort bureaucratic and military command lines.

Some of this, I would say, has been eased a bit by moving Israel from where it used to sit in the Unified Command Plan in European command to central command. As I might have said in an earlier part of my career, it's not an accident comrade that Juniper Oak was conducted in the manner it was since the transfer of Israel from European to Central Command. The other obstacle is if you think that the EU has trouble dealing with more than one big thing at a time, I promise you it's, even more, the case with the U.S. government, which has a lot of difficulty dealing with more than one big national security issue at a time. And the Biden administration, I think, was in the early days, very preoccupied with Afghanistan and certainly the disastrous withdrawal, as Brad mentioned, but of course, since February 24th of last year, it's been very preoccupied by the war in Ukraine for good and sufficient reason.

All of that tends to distract from paying adequate attention to this region. I think that's manifested itself, for instance, in lack of attention to productive formal like the Middle East Gas Forum. I mean, people who know me know that I'm pretty sparing in my compliments to the Trump administration, but the fact that Secretary Pompeo attended the Middle East Gas Forum obviously was a signal of serious high level U.S. Attention to this region and to this part of the world. The failure for this administration to actually pay adequate attention to regional coral like that was underscored by an early statement boo-hoing the economic viability of moving gas out of the region to Europe, which is now assumed a much higher priority given the urgent need to get Europe off its dependence on Russian gas.

So, there's a huge strategic imperative, it seems to me, to the administration to get on this. For the moment, it seems that they've decided to leave this in the hands of their special envoy for Energy, Ambassador Amos Hochstein, but it seems to me that given what Jon, and what others on the panel have been saying, the region has many more issues than simply the energy piece. The energy piece is very, very important, but there are a lot of other pieces, including the stability of Syria, including relations with Israel and expansion of the Abraham Accords, et cetera. It does seem to me that appointing a special envoy for the Eastern Med makes a certain amount of sense to try and pull together the various strands, both substantively and bureaucratically of U.S. policy for this region, and I would approve of that. If I could, I would like to add just a couple of comments on two other issues that have come up in the panel. One is the anti-Westernism we've seen on display in Turkey, sadly, is I'm afraid more than just a reflection of the current election campaign in Turkey.

A lot of it has to do with, and it's not just the AKP government either, I'm sorry to say, but also trends in the opposition as well, pouring this kind of poison into the Turkish body politic as the fact that government has a virtual monopoly on the media in Turkey just means that it's been very little to cut against that, and unfortunately it's ongoing. I suspect that the comments by the Interior Minister, Minister Soylu, yesterday to the American Ambassador Jeff Flake, that he should keep his dirty hands-off Turkey, but was probably one of the more spectacularly ill-timed interventions by a government official that I can think of, given, sadly, what's happened last evening and this morning in Turkey. And then finally, just to add to what Brad said about Finland and Sweden's session to NATO and the Turkish veto, hopefully, the Hungarian problem will be taken care of this month when the Hungarian parliament comes back into session. I think Endy mentioned in the introduction that I was both ambassador to Finland and Turkey. I think the Venn diagram of people who have had both experiences, well I think you're looking at it.

So I would say this. First of all, I think it's clearly, as Brad said, been motivated by short-term political advantage for President Erdogan. There are some genuine issues with Sweden and support for the PKK. Those can, I think, be easily managed if there's a will to do so on both sides. Clearly, it's being exploited for other purposes. I think there's a stunning failure to recognize the incredible symbolic, and not just symbolic, but substantive, strategic advantages of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO. These are two countries that bring to the alliance more military capability than any new member of the Alliance has brought with it since the accession of Poland in 1997.

These are two countries that have serious defense industries in a period of time when the U.S. and the West are going to have to, once again, step up military production in order to remain the arsenal of democracy around the world. These are two countries that provide access to the Arctic through the high North, which is increasingly, to your point, Lena, a space for great power competition, with both Russia and China showing interest in the Arctic. And the fact that both Ericsson and Nokia, two incredibly important industrial partners and 5G telecommunications, are now part of the Western alliance will be, I think in the long run, very, very important with regard to competition with China. So Turkey's holding this up is a huge deal and I don't think some Turkish officials understand how much antipathy they are stirring up in the alliance.

Jon correctly, I think, said we can't really expel Turkey. There's no mechanism for doing that, notwithstanding the op-ed written by a former U.S. national security advisory recently. But I do think Turkey ought to take note of the fact that this is really creating enormous ill will in the rest of the alliance for Turkey. And that's something that will not go away after Finland and Sweden have exceeded, I hope, by the time that we have to summit.

BOWMAN: May I just interject, I don't want to mess up your plan, but no, I just completely agree with the ambassador on the statement that the addition of these two countries to the NATO alliance is an asset, not a liability. We published on this last year, kind of laying out the military details on that, and we use the word deterrence a lot. It's a favorite word, and in DC and not everyone understands what it means. I can geek out on it for a while, but I won't. But the big idea is, just on layman's terms, you want to create dilemmas for your adversaries that are so tough to solve, they don't try the aggression in the first place. That's how I would explain it to my family back in Oregon, right? That's essentially deterrence. Imagine the kind of dilemmas we create for Russian military planners if you have Finland and Sweden fully in the NATO alliance, right?

You'd say, "Oh, well wait, we worked with Finland and Sweden a long time. We do exercises." Yes, but when someone's in the alliance, you can make assumptions in your war plans and the Russians know that. So, we talk about, "Oh, that long border with Finland, right? Oh, that's a real liability." Is it a liability or is it an asset? It's an asset, right? Because if you're Russia and you want to do something obnoxious in the Black Sea region, once they're in the alliance, you have to be worrying about counter attacks or counteraction along that long common border with Finland. NATO is not an aggressive alliance. NATO is not Napoleon in terms of invading Russia. NATO is not Nazi Germany. Everyone knows that, Vladimir Putin knows it. But the beauty of these two countries in the alliance is it creates dilemmas that decrease the chance of Russian aggression, not increase it. So I just wanted to offer that.

ARGIRI: Mr. Keridis, let's go back from the NATO enlargement, which first paramount to regional integration, and perhaps the sole starting point for this process, would be to try to involve European and partners to Middle East, vice versa. The EU has association agreements with Israel and Haiti, there has been talk of European states becoming members of the NATO forum, what role police can play during this process.

KERIDIS: Can play a very important role. I was in Stockholm the other day because Sweden has the EU presidency this semester. I can tell you that the Swedes are in shock. They didn't expect it. They totally underestimated. They are not used to being part of the controversy. This is a country that has been praised and has been accustomed to praise internationally for its human rights records, for its democratic record, and suddenly they have to deal with Mr. Soylyu and all these other unpleasant people in Ankara, for sure is a very big prize. And I think it is the accession of Sweden and Finland coming away from a neutrality of centuries, when it comes to Sweden, from the time of the Battle of Poltava back in Ukraine in the early 18th century. And it shows how badly Putin miscalculated, I mean, he had a problem with a Ukrainian city, and then suddenly Finland and Sweden, two traditionally neutral countries.

So it's very important. I will go a step further, and I will say that we have the anti-EU forces, forces that want to see the disintegration of a European Union, and that we have been naive in how we deal with it. Before I look at how the EU can play a role in the Middle East, first we have to have an EU. It's not a given. It's a constant struggle. And I think what we have seen with the Quran burning, for example, recently, is this underground, hard to prove, but suspected alliance between Erdogan and Putin. Now, Putin on the one hand finances extreme right-wing groups and activists in Europe to go around provoke Muslims, for example, by burning. Suddenly, we started burning out of nowhere, Qurans outside the Turkish embassies.

And then we have Erdogan playing the Islamist card, and you know how many millions of Muslims live in places like France and elsewhere, to have a role between fascists and Islamists and we, the European forces of reason, in the middle being the prey and the victim of this kind of polarization. Now, this is not something fantastic and out of the blue. Something that happened, for example, in the last French elections, parliamentary elections, President Macron lost his majority in parliament and made France fairly ungovernable. Now, it was never easy to govern France, but even less so now because Melenchon took all the Arab vote, the Muslim vote, according to whom for everything, France is to blame, Algeria and colonialism, et cetera. And Le Pen took all the French votes, and the center was left weakened. And this is a model that these are the anti-Europeans in Moscow and Ankara won't repeat as well.

And we've seen now this hybrid internal threat within our democracies playing around. And Europeans have been so strategically naive. I mean, I've spent two days with the Swedes who are defending the freedom of Swedes, et cetera, et cetera, trying to persuade them. I mean, there is nothing about freedom of speech burning the Quran. I mean, let's be a little bit more suspicious and serious, and not to give excuses to be undermined, right. Now, if one is critical of the US, I don't know what one needs to be with the Europeans. I mean, the EU Mediterranean policy was a disaster. It never worked. EU is absent in places of vital importance, like Syria or Libya. We are totally divided among ourselves. I mean, the Italians are fighting with the French, the French are fighting with the Germans in these issues.

We have handed the keys to Europe to Mr. Erdogan, who controls both the East Mediterranean and the Central Mediterranean route through his support and control of the Tripoli police government in Libya so he can raise the heat and lower the heat, directly affecting EU elections in places like Italy and Germany and the rest. And we have been very naive and inactive and almost exhausted from the continuous crises that we have faced from the Eurozone, the refugee crisis, the pandemic crisis, and now Ukraine, it's been like 10 years. I mean, this is a leadership that was not prone on stress, and it has been stressed beyond capacity the last 10 years.

And so Greece has a vital role to play. Greece is a small country, of course, we don't, we don't...but it can play a disproportionately sized role because of history, geography. Now, most people don't understand and don't know things, like Greece is today supporting energy-wise, Bulgaria, Romania, because we have reverse flow. Unlike the Germans, we had no LNG terminal, and Greece did have one, and through reverse flow, now we are there for East European countries where Russian influence is not weak. I mean, Bulgaria is not a country that is a hundred percent on the West. It is a battle to be fought in Bulgaria and in Romania, and Greece is helping that battle.

Now, if the war in Ukraine is an intra Orthodox Christian war among Christian Orthodox, the Greeks being the oldest Christian Orthodox people with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in Istanbul and the other in Jerusalem and Alexandria, there is a war there. The Russians are picking up on Greek parishes in Africa, in the Middle East, through money. So it's a multifaceted front where the Greeks, because of history, have an understanding that – to put it mildly – the Luxembourgiens and the Belgians lack and we are trying to mobilize these sources. We have some successes. We have moved away from the...I don't want to go in to Angela Merkel now, we will take hours to criticize. But we have a very long ways still to go for sure.

ARGIRI: Thank you very much. You gentlemen talked a lot about Iran and Turkey. So Mr. Schanzer, is the U.S. doing enough to counter the malign influence of factors who work over time to obstruct integration? Is the U.S. setting distinct red lines and limits? Is the U.S. setting clear messages to the troublemaker of the region? What do you think?

SCHANZER: Well, I can shorten my answer very quickly and just say no, or I can go into maybe just a few minutes.

ARGIRI: You can give us...

SCHANZER: So, I'll take just a few minutes. And look, Turkey, I think we already know we're seeing the provocative statements in ways that, I mean I think it's unprecedented, with Turkey directly threatening Greece, a fellow NATO ally, makes the implication of Article V a bit odd, to put it mildly. If they ever followed through on some of these threats visiting Greece in the middle of the night, the sort of rhetoric that we're seeing out of the Erdogan government, the violations of the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus is a huge problem. The meddling in Libya is another problem. The sponsorship of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, which is of course still threatening the East Med as we know it.

Another problem, Turkey has got its hands in a lot of places where it should not, and rather than the U.S. taking definitive measures to punish, as we discussed, the F-16 deal is still on the table. Admittedly, they've cut off F-35, but I don't know if that's enough. I don't know if that message has been delivered. Of course, it's a balancing act when you consider the fact that the Turks hold the accession of Finland and Sweden and their hands at the same time. This is the balancing act that we're watching, but you can certainly see that the Turks are not playing a positive role. Another actor that I think we obviously need to keep an eye on is Iran, really the preeminent malign actor in the region. Destabilizing Gaza, of course completely gutting the state in Lebanon to the point that Hezbollah has now taken over, the key sponsor of Syria, right? I mean, there's just virtually nowhere that you don't see the fingerprints of Iran in ways that have deteriorated or undermined security in the region.

And that really, again, we hope anyway from the U.S. perspective, is that we take the Iran deal, the nuclear deal completely off the table. We take sanctions relief completely off the table, begin to impose penalties, and maybe even try to hasten the downfall of the regime with some of the actors that have been coming out into the streets. This would be, I think, a positive thing on the part of the U.S. and would be some wind in the sails of this sort of new regional architecture. Two other actors that I'll just mention briefly, the Qataris, I think are actors to keep an eye on. They're the financial sponsors traditionally of the Turks, hot cash flowing into Turkey to keep the economy afloat, and they have this sort of joint mechanism, a joint view of how they want to spread Islamism and Muslim Brotherhood ideology across the region. I don't know if it gets enough attention. And by the way, at the same time you see the Qataris using their vast wealth and malign influence to buy off members of parliament, be really undermining the very democratic structures in Greece.

Greece and beyond and... Right, I mean Greek parliamentarian, you've got the European Parliament. These are things that really should not be tolerated, and I don't know why it's been still relatively muted up until now. The last actor that I'll just note, and I think it's obvious, it's the Russians using energy as a weapon, which by the way gives us added motivation to support the East Med structures as they're developing, right? This is the alternative. But in the meantime, the Russians are obviously making a mess out of the region. The Russians are, of course, controlling the skies over Syria, so they've got an East Med perch over there, which is limiting the ability of the Israelis to interdict weapons in Lebanon. We also have seen reports of the Russians backing the Wagner group in Libya. So, we've got a lot of problems on our hands. These are the main, I guess, four actors that threatened the structures as we know it.

ARGIRI: And one last question for you, Mr. Bowman, before we go to our Q&A session. There's quite a difference between the diplomacy that we're witnessing and the natural military corporation, what are the benefits of such a corporation would be for the US, and how a military alliance like that can be achieved, can be established in terms of creating a military corporation and security cooperation.

BOWMAN: Sure. Thanks. I can be real quick because I'm excited to get to questions, and I think the bottom line is that the security cooperation between the U.S. and Greece is as strong as it's been, arguably maybe ever, or certainly in a long, long time. In July of last year, the Greek defense minister met with Secretary Austin in the Pentagon, and if you didn't see that statement, it's worth taking note of. Secretary Austin cited two examples... of how Americans benefit from this growing security cooperation with Greece. One was the continued access of U.S. Naval Forces at Souda Bay, which helps make our regional military posture more effective and more powerful to deter aggression, as we were talking about earlier. And he also cited the priority access that we now enjoy at the Port of Alexandroupolis, which Endy talked about in his introduction.

And I would just highlight from 2020 to 2021, according to the *New York Times*, there was a 14-fold increase in the amount of U.S. military equipment going through that port. And then by mid-year last year, we had already increased that amount from 2021.

I mean we're talking about thousands of pieces of military equipment going through that port going up. And so we talk, "Hey, let's reinforce NATO's southeastern flank." That sounds really nice in the beltway, right? Okay. How do you do that? How do you do that when you don't have unfettered access up through the black city via maritime routes? Well, you're doing that through that Port of Alexandroupolis. And I'm so thankful that we've worked with our Greek allies to make sure that Russians aren't running that port, or the Chinese aren't running that port. And so that's just an example. We're often on the losing end. "Oh, shoot. China's running that port, they're running that port. Oh gosh darn. What do we do?"

Finally, we're starting to get ahead of it and we're building Greece's defense capabilities. We're strengthening our posture. And we're making smart decisions like we did at the port that are good for NATO, good for Greece, and good for United States, and all of us in the regional security.

ARGIRI: Thank you for your statements. End's waiting for your questions though. We can start. Okay, so you can help us I think.

ZEMENIDES: You're going to try to get a few questions in? Henri Barkey.

BARKEY: Thank you. Two questions. One's for Eric. What happens if Turks block only Sweden for some time to come? I'm assuming Erdogan is going to win the election and may still be angry. And Dimitris, you talked about the how the Russians are using populist parties. What about Italy? What's your take on Italy? Because we know very well about Italy given the new government and you have been obviously interacting with them. Thank you.

EDELMAN: Well, briefly, Henri, I think there's already been as you know a lot of speculation both in the Finnish and Turkish press about the possibility of the Turkish Grand National Assembly approving Finland and holding Sweden in abeyance. The formal position, I think, of the Finnish government is they still intend to proceed in tandem with Sweden, much as they did for EU membership back in the early 1990s.

I think there's a potential that you could see that happen. And if after May 14th there's some kind of accommodation with the Swedes, as long as it's all done in time to have them both at the table at Vilnius and the summit, I think there's a possible path there to get through this. I think a long-term sort of veto on Sweden will cause really deep alienation between everyone else in NATO and Turkey and I think be enormously costly to Turkey in the long run, way more than any possible benefit they could get.

BARKEY: Can you be specific on what the cost will be?

EDELMAN: I think it's too early to say what the cost will be because I think it's going to take time for people to assimilate all this and then figure out how they're going to make Turkey pay a price. But I think people will want to extract a price from Turkey for doing this.

KERIDIS: I mean, there is a great paradox in all of this for sure, because officially Turkey still wants to join EU, where Sweden is a member. So Sweden is bad in NATO, but it's okay as an EU partner. And obviously Erdogan is trying to divide the two. He's already hinting of that. And this is an additional horror in Stockholm. Now, going back to the strategic alliance with America, I just want to share with you an experience I recently had back in September. Under the Acropolis there's a famous open-air theater from ancient times. Now, in the good old days, a U.S. ambassador would never appear in front of 5,000 people. The security is very difficult because it's very steep and it's not easy to control, et cetera, et cetera.

Now, this September I was there for a concert and Ambassador Tsunis, the U.S. Ambassador, and he was received as a rockstar, with the whole field the 5,000 Athenians stood up on their hill and clapped and applauded. And he enjoyed it and he reciprocated. I mean, this shows you the change in people's feelings. I mean, we always had a very strong and historic relationship. I mean, modern Greece was born out of a revolution that was an extension of the American and French Revolution. And we all fought together from the same side throughout the 20th century. We were always on the same side of history, the good side of history. And we remain with Ukraine now, and very strongly so, despite the historical connection that we have with Russia. But this kind of popular feeling towards a U.S. ambassador is incredible. I mean, I was really taken aback.

Now Italy, Italy is a positive surprise, obviously, they are not... I understand they're a right politician. And they are not necessarily my cup of tea, Mrs. Meloni. She does not belong to the EPP, to the European People's Party, a center right coalition. She's to our right. But she was pro-NATO, anti-Russia. Compared to some of her coalition partners that, to put it mildly, have accepted gifts from Vladimir in the past, both Mr. Selvini and Mr. Berlusconi.

Now the Italians have a generic problem because for them foreign policy is all about trade, it's about selling goods. They have these big industrial interests in northern Italy. And basically, Italian government in is an extension of any and feared, and I mean, openly so. I mean, I was in Rome two weeks ago because we have a very peculiar, complex, strong close, and difficult relationship with Italians. In order to try to see eye to eye, I Libya where we have our difficulties, et cetera. Overall, Meloni is better than expected.

By the way, it's good that after 15 years, since 2008, we have a political government, not a Democratic one, an elected government. Because in Italy they have elections and then they put a technocrat. There is the charade, jokingly, of elections, but then it's not the politicians who they elected, politicians. They ask Monti, or Prodi, or Draghi to govern. So for the first time after the 15 years, we have a strong, stable coalition with Meloni in charge and Italy can play return after 25 years of absence, take advantage of Brexit as the third, so to add into the French-German axis. So it's an interesting thing happening.

ARGIRI: Mr. Garaves, we're running out of time. I think we'll have a few more minutes. Maybe only a few more questions.

ZEMENIDES: One, two, sorry.

MIRVISS: Great. Great. Thank you guys so much. It's been really great hearing all the great things you guys have to say. So I have a two-part question here. I'd love to talk about the 3+1 inter-parliamentary group. So Greek, Cyprus, Israel, and the United States. Would just love to hear a little bit more. We talked a lot about what the administration could be doing better in terms of expanding cooperation and work in the East Med. Would love to hear a little bit more about what you think Congress can do and what the inter-parliamentary group could do together.

And then my second part question is a bit of a leading one, so bear with me, but the authorization for three plus one inter-parliamentary group authorizes the Senate to participate in the inter-parliamentary group but does not authorize the House to participate, House members to participate. So I was hoping I could speak a little bit to what challenges that might pose to inter-parliamentary group cooperation or congressional cooperation when you only have one chamber that's involved in that progress. Thank you.

ZEMENIDES: You know what with Cliff's question too, so...

ARGIRI: Yeah. That's going to be the last question.

SMITH: I was going to throw something out here and let somebody respond to it. As of Friday, there was a report in the *Wall Street Journal* that said at least 13 Turkish firms of exposure total of \$18.5 million worth of items including plastic, rubbers, and vehicles to at least have Russian companies sanctioned by the U.S. for the role in Russia's assault on the Ukraine. That seems to me to be a relevant thing to discuss, given what we're up to.

ARGIRI: Gentlemen? Who wants to...

SCHANZER: I recommend Brad as the only one who's actually worked on the Hill to perhaps talk about this.

BOWMAN: Okay, well yeah, nine years U.S. Senate, so I'm a little biased for the upper chambers. So if you have to start with one of them, I say you start with the Senate. But more broadly I would say inter-parliamentary exchanges are a positive thing. I sat in more than my fair share of meetings with my former Senator bosses where they were meeting with Parliamentarians from other countries. And I know my bosses and myself at the humble staff level found those to be incredibly useful, incredibly constructive, and productive.

And so it sounds kind of touchy-feely, like "Oh, let's just get together and talk." But I found them to be very, very positive. And I think the more that we can have this with our key allies and partners, the better. And I would agree that it would be stronger if you had both the Senate and House of Representatives participate. And that's just from my Senate staffer background. That'd be my humble opinion on that. Yeah, I'll stop there. If the ambassador or anyone else wants to add that.

ARGIRI: Dimitris?

KERIDIS: Starting from the last, there is no doubt in my mind. And I've said it time and again in the various European fora I participated. Turkey is playing a role of black marketeer in Ukraine and making money out of it. Very important money for Erdogan because his economy is in shambles. And he moves towards elections, one can only look at the accounts of the Turkey Central Bank to understand the flow of money from Russia into his coffers. And for Putin, is very important to have Erdogan reelected and he would do everything possible. We know how he mingled with our elections in the past. We know it very well here, in that side of the Atlantic, and in Brexit, and in the French presidential

elections in 2017. For him, the Turkey's election is very important. And Erdogan is breaking the sanctions left and right, and making us all look fool to our electorate.

Now imagine how difficult it is for a Greek legislator, for a Greek Parliamentarian to go to the Greek people as I do every day through my various TV appearances, to persuade them that we need to send more weapons and support more Ukraine when our next-door neighbor makes money out of the war. I mean, here is Greece traditionally, culturally, historically friendly towards Russia for a number of reasons, not going to explain further. And we have to make this sacrifice. We cut all the tourist trade, all the this and that. And Turkey's making a profit. I mean, it makes us all look like fools because my voters ask me, "Why should we bear the sacrifice?"

ARGIRI: That's a question that we have here in the United States as well. Do you want to say a few words about the 3+1?

KERIDIS: There is nothing, and I'm biased obviously as a legislator, but I very much believe in parliamentary diplomacy, because you get the gut feeling of the people. I mean, government is obviously... has the priority and takes the lead. But there is nothing like Parliamentarians speaking to each other because they represent very real people. I mean, when I speak to my Polish counterparts or the Hungarians, those unpleasant people from Fidesz, you really get the gut of the matter, right? As you say. And the same goes with the Parliament. Now if you add to that, that you are speaking with the U.S. Senate and that the whole thing is charged by Bob Menendez who, contrary to our systems... Because we are important but we are not that important in our own division of power. But here in America, I understand that the head of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee is second only to the President when it comes to foreign policy... fifth, fourth. Okay. I wish I was fourth in my place. So we have very important work to do, and it shows how close the relationship is between the Knesset, the Cypriot House of Representatives, the Atlantic Parliament, and the U.S. Senate. And obviously if we can bring in the House, so much the better.

ARGIRI: One last word, A last word from Jonathan.

SCHANZER: Yeah, just in answer to Cliff's question, we at FDD for quite some time have been tracking the illicit financial flows out of Turkey. They are significant and they go back now for the better part of two decades. There was the famous case now known as gas-for-gold that entailed Turkey moving about \$20 billion on behalf of the Iranian regime at the height of the sanctions regime, the support for Hamas, the support for the Islamic State at one point. The support for al-Qaeda-related groups in Syria. The sheer amount of illicit activity. By the way, we see indications of Venezuela's sanctions busting. And now we're seeing it in the Black Sea.

And there is of course questions about whether Russia should be designated as a state sponsor of terrorism itself. Fine. But I would just say broadly speaking, Turkey has now solidified its place, at least in my view, within the U.S. policy structures as a state sponsor of terrorism in its own right. It is a jurisdiction of illicit finance concern that cannot be ignored. The question is, quite frankly, what do we do about it? And I think that's very relevant to our discussion today as we think about supporting this burgeoning structure in the East Med. There is really one major menace right now, and that is Turkey. And that's undermining so much of the efforts that we're trying to push forward.

ARGIRI: Gentlemen, thank you very much for this last bit of discussion. Thank you all for being here. There are many panels and discussions around the city today and tomorrow, so make sure to attend.