



Reimagining Mediterranean Security with Greek Minister for National Defense Nikos Dendias

February 3, 2026

Featuring Nikos Dendias

Moderated by Jonathan Schanzer

Introductory remarks by Symeon Tsomokos and Endy Zemenides

TSOMOKOS: Welcome to this concluding session of the 7th Delphi Washington Forum, and of course, very many thanks to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Jonathan, thank you deeply for hosting this discussion today with our minister.

But before, allow me to express my great gratitude to our partners, and primarily my very dear friend Endy Zemenides. Please join me for a big hand because he did a lot of work for us.

And Tom Ellis from the Kathimerini. Thank you, Tom. And of course, my colleagues Dimitra and Antigone who worked very hard.

Before we proceed, one second – two moments to say few words to our minister because he always honors with his presence are- for either in London or in Delphi or wherever we go. And I think we are somehow privileged to be joined by a great political leader whose career I think reflects a rather rare combination of strategic clarity, institutional experience, and their commitment to democratic values.

Minister Dendias has played a central role in strengthening Greece's defense posture, modernizing its armed forces, and deepened cooperation with key allies and partners. Beyond titles and offices, what distinguishes Minister Dendias is his consistent focus on the broader scope of defense and diplomacy, safeguarding sovereignty, promoting stability, and pursuing that security serves peace.

So, Minister, we thank you deeply for coming and I would like to give the floor to Endy Zemenides to continue these proceedings.

Endy, please join me. Thank you.

ZEMENIDES: Good afternoon, ladies, and gentlemen, and welcome. And on behalf, first of all, of the Delphi Economic Forum, which we're proud to partner with Kathimerini. I am Endy Zemenides, executive director of the Hellenic American Leadership Council. Thank you for joining us for this fascinating conversation hosted by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Today's discussion will discuss Athens's position at the crossroads of energy and security in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. I think the difference now from years past is we're looking at a greater Eastern Mediterranean that goes maybe as far north to Ukraine as far south – there's a Red Sea as far east as India.

At the recent trilateral summit in Jerusalem, leaders from Greece, Cypress, and Israel advance a shared vision of regional stability, prosperity, and cooperation. These nations, alongside the United States, are deepening coordination through mechanisms such as the Partnership for Transatlantic Energy Cooperation, the 3+1 framework, and the Achilles Shield program. As Greece emerges as a pivotal partner in U.S. energy strategy, these initiatives are cementing Athens's roles as the linchpin of Eastern Mediterranean security.

Now, here to discuss Greece's trilateral diplomacy with Israel and vis-a-vis Turkey, the intersection of energy and security, and more are FDD Executive Director – and good friend of Endy's – Jonathan Schanzer, and Greek Minister of National Defense – and a favorite here – Nikos Dendias.

Before we dive in, a few words about FDD. For almost 25 years, FDD has operated as a fiercely independent non-partisan research institute, exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. As a point of pride and principle, FDD does not accept foreign government funding. For more on FDD's work, please visit [FDD.org](https://www.fdd.org), follow them on X and Instagram, and subscribe to their YouTube channel.

Jon, the floor is yours.

SCHANZER: OK, thank you very much, Endy. Hope everybody can hear me all right. I think the mic's working.



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Minister, thank you so much for agreeing to do this today. It's an honor to share a stage with you. It's great to see you again.

I want to, if I can, just start with a – I think maybe where Endy just left off. Think about where Greece is, almost equidistant between the war in Gaza, the war in Ukraine. We're safe, but yet sandwiched between two conflicts very consequential and important here in Washington. If you could, share with us the view from Athens of how both of those conflicts look right now?

DENDIAS: Well, first of all, the honor is all mine. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about where we are and the way you see the – we see the world.

(OFF-MIC)

DENDIAS: Oh, does that work?

(OFF-MIC)

DENDIAS: Oh, I'm getting – this is my third microphone for a day, but I'm doing well. No. Yeah, that's better.

So, you're right to point out two important conflicts. Ukraine, Black Sea, Gaza. But it's not only that. Look at Iran. How far is Iran from Greece? Look at Sub-Saharan Africa. How far is Sub-Saharan Africa from Greece? Look at Syria. As just a few months ago, a failed state, now a new government. We're waiting to see the true colors of Al-Sharaa. Look at Libya. Still a failed state.

So, we're in the middle, in the very middle, of a huge geopolitical upheaval. That's where we are. And we're at the same time, a mid-sized European country, member of the European Union, democracy, member of NATO, looking in order to create a better future for the Western Balkans, create stability in the East flank of NATO and of Europe, a geographical entity who have lots on our plate. Lots on our plate. And I'm not telling you something that is not on already. We need help. We need help from the European Union. We need help from the United States.

SCHANZER: OK, so you read my mind. Next question.

You're meeting with U.S. officials. You're here in our capital. What are your needs? What sorts of capabilities, platforms, assistance do you need from the United States or has Greece prioritized in its discussions with the United States?

DENDIAS: Well, I was in the Congress in the morning; meeting the secretary in the afternoon. Our immediate need is not asking for particular platforms or particular systems or for money. What I prioritize as number one is to have a clear understanding of where we are. Because if that's there, all the rest will follow. But we have to serve a common view on the challenges of our region. If that is not there, then all the rest will be a problem, will be a negotiation, will be a discussion, will be whatever.

But if we agree where we want – for example, the world in around Greece, in the Southeast Europe to be, or Middle East or Northern Africa or the Black Sea, where – if we agree with the United States where we want that part of the world to be in 10 years' time, then the rest will follow.

SCHANZER: OK. I think that is a more than fair approach. I think one key question that will automatically come up with this administration is how much are you spending percent of GDP on defense, and are you satisfied as defense minister with – with the investment that you're making in Greece's defense?



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DENDIAS: Well, for us, the discussion that with the United States on that is easy because we have spent north of 3.4 percent. We are sometimes – we're 3.7 percent, and please take into account that Greece is a country that exited the huge crisis, a very big 10-year crisis in which we lost almost 30 percent of our GDP, which is equivalent to – to a war, a big war, a big catastrophic war. And yet we still stand, and I think we have one of the best armies, one of the best armed forces within the European Union, taking our size into account, and much better the countries that have three, four, five times our GDP.

So, we had never had the problem with the United States on that level. Also, what we're trying to do now, and I think that will – will sound interesting to the United States, is we're doing a total reform, we call the Agenda 2030. Because let us be frank, in the past, armed forces used to be, no – a number of systems supported by capable and well-trained personnel. It is not like that anymore.

Now armed forces of the 21st century are an information machine. They have to be able to absorb data, understand data, and then try to answer to the challenges according to the – the – the data they are processed and the personnel has to be qualified to deal with that kind of thing. And the systems have to be systems, depending to a holistic approach, be it cybersecurity, being space, being ballistic missiles, being sea, being under the sea. So, it's – it's totally a different game. Totally different game. And I think we have understood it well, and we're trying to reform ourselves accordingly.

SCHANZER: So arguably the one country in your immediate neighborhood that has done the best job of integrating all of this data and all these systems, and in fact using AI on the battlefield, the Israelis. I know that there's been a lot happening between Greece and Israel over the last, I mean, well before the last two and a half years, but it's obviously become more intense, the engagement between Athens and Jerusalem.

If you could, talk a little bit about the relationship and how it's evolved. I know it hasn't always been easy. But it has looked to be very productive and actually maybe more of a partnership now than ever. Am I wrong?

DENDIAS: No, no, no. You're not wrong at all. You're right. And my counterpart, Minister Gantz was in Athens just like 10 days ago, and we had a very thorough discussion, and we also agreed on next steps between ourselves and Israel.

I think Israel is a partner for Greece now that could show us how it addressed challenges of the 21st century. And we were glad to copy because you know, when you're clever, you don't reinvent the wheel, you – you just find a wheel, and you create a wheel that serves your needs. But also, we have a quite similar understanding with many challenges in the region with Israel.

So, it's both political and factual in the sense that we do things together.

SCHANZER: Well, I think maybe let's just talk about the elephant in the room then. When we talk about...

DENDIAS: There is one?

(LAUGHTER)

SCHANZER: I think there's one. And it's a big one I think right now for both Israel and Greece, right? I'm talking of course about Turkey. This is a country – you and I were speaking about it right before our event started today, that Turkey has had a remarkable surge in the region, right? We see it in we see it in Syria, we see it in Gaza, making inroads reportedly in Lebanon, the Horn of Africa, and beyond. And I think that if there is in fact a war between the United States and Iran, I'm going to expect that Iran loses power and Turkey probably gains. This is not in the interest of Greece, and it is not in the interest of Israel.

So, I guess if you could describe the common vision of what you'd like to see and maybe what you would not like to see as a result of Turkey's increased – they call it "Neo-Ottoman" – expansionism. I'll let you describe it as you will.

February 3, 2026

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DENDIAS: Well, first of all, I'm going totally to agree with you that Turkey was, has been – “Türkiye,” I call it that – President Erdogan wants his country to be called Türkiye. “Turkey,” he thinks it's diminishing the country because of the relevance to the bird.

So, I would totally agree with you that Türkiye has been extremely successful in the last few years. You mentioned a number of Turkish successes, I will add Libya to it. There's a military presence in Western Libya now, and I believe that Türkiye is also creating an understanding with Eastern Libya. And also, Türkiye is present in Africa, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. When I was foreign minister, I was flying around Africa. There was clearly Turkish presence around. Twice I found President Erdogan on the ground. So, Türkiye has been extremely successful; also, has been extremely successful in the Southern Caucasus.

Now the question, not read me wrong, I'm not in any way anti-Turk, and I don't believe even Israel is anti-Turk at all. Please remember that a few years ago, 20 years ago, 25 years ago, Israel and Turkey were the best of friends and close allies. Israel was closer to Turkey than it was to Greece. It was never an enemy to Greece, but it was not as close to Greece as.

So, what has changed? Let's take it from the Israeli view, not the Greek view, because from the Greek view, you may, somebody will, may say, I'm biased. Let's take it from the Israeli view. Now, who is advocating for Hamas? Real advocating for Hamas. Who has never expressed any regret for what happened the 7th of October in Israel? Who hosts the Muslim Brotherhood? And I'm always saying when I'm in European capitals, and now I'm in Washington, the capital of the United States, I proposed a test, which I think is very, very easy to perform.

We do have artificial intelligence. Great. So, let's ask the Americans to produce a photo of the future in 10 days – in – in 10 years' time or in 20 years' time. How the – according to their interests, is Eastern Mediterranean to be, and the Middle East? And then go to Ankara and ask the same question to President Erdogan, to project in a photo how he would like that region to be in turn on 20 years' time. Now, how similar those two photos will be, you think? I think they will not be similar at all.

SCHANZER: No.

DENDIAS: They'll be totally, totally different. So that's my answer to the United States. What – what do you want? What serves your interest? The Israeli, let's say, point of view, or the Turkish point of view? And act according to your interests.

SCHANZER: OK. So clearly, and by the way, the – the list that you mentioned of all the crimes of this regime in – in – in Ankara I think is all accurate.

DENDIAS: No, I – I only stated facts.

SCHANZER: Oh, I was going to say...

DENDIAS: I didn't characterize anything.

SCHANZER: No. And, but I would just –

DENDIAS: But not a word.

SCHANZER: – I would just also argue they've laundered money for the Islamic Republic at the height of the standoff over its nuclear program; the support of ISIS. I mean, the ways in which this regime in Ankara have worked against American interests, Greek interests, Western interests, Israeli interests, it is truly remarkable. So, I think my next question to you would be, what can or should be done? Is this an EU thing? Is it a NATO thing? Is it just a trilateral thing between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus?

February 3, 2026

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In other words, if the region is to fight for itself and not to have the intervention of the United States – because I think we can all agree the president of the United States and the president of Turkey have a good relationship right now – the odds of the United States intervening and pushing Turkey back seems low right now to me. That's my assessment.

Are there ways in which the region can gain more ownership? For example, people here have talked about the Greek and Israeli navies patrolling together on the Med. Is that something that you're considering? Are there other initiatives that might be a deterrent to Turkey?

DENDIAS: So, I'll start with your point of the friendship between President Trump and President Erdogan. Great. Why can it be the right way? President Trump pulling President Erdogan towards Western values, towards the Western approach, toward Western interest, instead of vice versa? I mean, why would President Trump accept the idea of an Islamist element in the region and not pulling President Erdogan towards his original position?

And please allow me to remind you, what was the original position of President Erdogan? He wanted Türkiye to become a member of the European Union. He wanted human rights. He wanted rule of law in Türkiye. Why can't we bring him back in that original DNA of his? I mean, of course it's a rhetorical question. Who am I to dictate to President Trump, and who am I to dictate to President Erdogan? I respect them both. They are leaders of their countries and leaders of their governments and their nations but – now, as far as Greece and Israel is concerned, Greece and Israel is reacting to common challenges. So, we don't try to keep Türkiye out. We're not trying to exclude Türkiye from what we're doing. We would love if eventually Türkiye would subscribe to what we're doing and come and join us. But that has certain preconditions. For example, you speak about this, the Mediterranean. There are rules. The rules is not Israeli rules, not Greek rules, not Egyptian rules, not Turkey's rules. It's the international Convention of the Law of the Sea.

If Türkiye accepts international Convention on the Law of the Sea and subscribes to the international Convention of the Law of the Sea, then we cooperate altogether. Why not? But if not, if Türkiye has this strange idea – which only China shares in the world, and China partly, never expressly – that islands are not entitled to continental shelf, are not entitled to territorial waters more than six miles, are not entitled to exclusive economic zones, regardless of the size. For example, Crete, according to Türkiye's way of interpreting international law – and "interpreting" is within brackets because you cannot interpret international law like that, even if you're drunk – but it is, "Crete is entitled to nothing except six miles of territorial waters." How can you reason if somebody has that kind of approach?

And yet again, the position of my government, and I have to say of myself, is continue talking to Turkey, to Türkiye. Continue arguing. Because at some point in the future, if we have lines of communication open, eventually Türkiye may understand that its interests also lie much closer to what we are doing, what Israeli is doing, what the European Union is doing, than on a rather individualistic approach towards recreating some sort of Ottoman Empire which was there up to the First World War. And I think it would be rather difficult to recreate it now.

SCHANZER: Okay, so you've explained, in essence, the Blue Homeland policy of –

DENDIAS: Yes. Which, by the way, is quite new.

SCHANZER: Yes.

DENDIAS: It was not there 10 years old, 15 years ago.

SCHANZER: Yeah.

DENDIAS: This Blue Homeland, *Mavi Vatan* thing. I remember myself, I was foreign minister the first time I saw President Erdogan speaking to his college of naval cadets. And behind was that Blue Homeland (inaudible). And I called a Turkish friend of mine and I – "What the hell is that?" And believe it or not believe it, his answer was, "Nikos, he didn't know what is behind him. He didn't know."

February 3, 2026

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Why I mention that? Because at that time, *Mavi Vatan* was a very new approach. Within two or three years, it became an official (inaudible) thing of the Turkish state. And I'm told now they teach it in the Turkish schools. But I'm afraid that is a trap for all of us and especially a trap for the – for the Turkish society.

SCHANZER: So, let's talk for just a minute. We haven't mentioned Cyprus yet. Cyprus seems to be getting hit the hardest from some of the Turkish adventurism in the East Med, a complete violation of the – the coastline heading into, you know, what is territorial waters of Cyprus.

And Greece is, I guess from my perspective, it's the only country that would – I mean, you're like brothers, right? You're two countries, two Hellenic countries in the region. What is – what is the collective response from Greece and Cyprus to this? I mean, are you providing alternatives to Blue Homeland? Is it direct challenges to the Turkish navy? I mean, this is very delicate, is it not?

DENDIAS: One trap that Greece is avoiding and should avoid is creating some sort of similar idea to the Blue – to the Blue Homeland, just opposite of it. It's easy for any system to produce these grand ideas of the 19th century, you know, of expansionism, et cetera, et cetera. But this is totally outdated. This does not serve a modern state or a modern country or the modern society. So, no, Greece does not promote something like that.

And when we are speaking about Cyprus as a brother country and a brother nation, we don't speak only about the Greek Cypriots. We speak about the Turkish Cypriots as well. What we are advocating for is a unified Cyprus, member of the European Union, for full rights for everybody.

And honestly, even, I mean, if there was a Turkish friend here, and he could speak secretly to us without being overheard, and we asked him one simple question, "Where would the Turkish Cypriot's rights be more protected? Within the European Union or within Turkey?" Where would he sleep at night, being sure that he would not wake up and arrested in the morning for his beliefs or whatever he said against somebody in the Turkish political establishment?

So again, we're advocating for a unified Cyprus with full protection of the rights of the Turkish Cypriot community as in a member state of the European Union. And we believe that is to the interest of the Greek Cypriots, the Turkish Cypriots, and to the interest of Turkey as well. I believe that Türkiye's interest is totally different, to my humble opinion, who am I to say? Not towards a distant past, but towards a bright future as a democratic, affluent, important, big country, and a very close friend to Greece. Eventually, at some time.

SCHANZER: I like your optimism. But I also have to note that you have a backup plan. Right? We have all heard about Iron Dome. We heard about Golden Dome. You have Achilles Shield.

DENDIAS: Yes, we do.

SCHANZER: So, that's obviously there for a reason. That's in case your vision for the region begins to crumble.

DENDIAS: Well, being an optimist –

SCHANZER: Yes.

DENDIAS: – it doesn't mean I'm a fool. I can see what's all around. My government, my prime minister, the Greek parliament, all the Greek parties appreciate the challenges. So, we have to prepare for the worst – the worst and hope for the best. Now, Achilles Shield, it's a much more holistic approach than anything else existing right now. It's much more holistic than Iron Dome or the Golden Dome because it includes everything. Every kind of challenge being: coming from the space or cybersecurity or the sea or under the sea or the air or ballistic missiles or cruise missiles, whatever.

February 3, 2026

Featuring Nikos Dendias

Moderated by Jonathan Schanzer

Introductory remarks by Symeon Tsomokos and Endy Zemenides

And we're working with Israel on this and we're asking Israel for help and assistance, but, but not as it used to happen in the past, by purchasing platforms or weapons system. We're not going to do that. We're going to produce at least 50 percent of those systems in Greece and also get the knowhow and have this extremely efficient and extremely successful Israeli innovation ecosystem to work with our ecosystem because we need a jump start. On that, we have been a little late.

SCHANZER: I think it's a terrific idea. And obviously the Israelis have had incredible innovation in air defense and in – in other areas of defense as well. So, I'm glad to see this production, local production, for –

DENDIAS: Yes.

SCHANZER: You're going to have a defense industrial base that is entirely Greek.

DENDIAS: It is – it will be Greek up to 50 percent.

SCHANZER: Up to 50 percent, and then –

DENDIAS: But knowledge also of knowhow, knowledge of the code, of the systems.

SCHANZER: Uh-huh. So –

DENDIAS: So, you could influence development of those systems in the future. And I think Israel can gain from that as well. And you were very right to point out how Israel has been very successful on the air, on the anti-missile defense, air defenses. But also, please remember the sea is there as well.

SCHANZER: Yeah.

DENDIAS: And we could teach Israel a few things and would be helpful for them and for us as well.

SCHANZER: I think so as well. And I do get a sense that there is an appetite for it, which is why I was raising this issue of perhaps joint patrols and maybe learning from one another but also projecting defense together.

I want to ask you about NATO and maybe also a little bit about the EU. Some of these multilateral structures that Greece has always enjoyed being part of, they're under strain right now; they feel like they're under strain. Can you just give us a sense from being inside the tent what – what some of the dynamics that are at play?

DENDIAS: Well, there was always – let's speak about our family, the European Union, because myself, I think most Greeks, we are committed Europeans, we believe to the European experiment, and we're very proud of the European experiment. It's – I think its unique achievement in the history of mankind. I'm repeating myself by saying it's a part of the world where is democracy, human rights, women's rights, rule of law, possibility of everybody to express freely what he or she believes. I think this for the – the humankind is an achievement.

But we have delegated the defense of this achievement to the United States. And now everybody knows that. Very affluent, very successful countries like the Federal Republic of Germany, didn't have any serious armed forces to speak of. Explainable because of historical reasons, but I think it's quite naive to believe that you can be successful, you can be affluent, you can be rich, and you can have no defenses. That is not this world. This would have been called paradise.

SCHANZER: Yeah.

DENDIAS: So, we have to work again and work within Europe. And now Europe feels strangely because of the new United States position, which says clearly to Europeans, if you don't spend enough of your own defense, don't rely on us. And even Article V of NATO, which was sacrosanct up to now, it's sometimes under question. Although I have to say many American officials that speak to me tell me, "You know, Article V of NATO is there to stay." But in some European capitals, there is doubt.

February 3, 2026

Featuring Nikos Dendias

Moderated by Jonathan Schanzer

Introductory remarks by Symeon Tsomokos and Endy Zemenides

Let me give an example. The Baltic capitals. Europe has to be able to create a defense autonomous possibility. That would be the answer. It will take years, probably will take decades. It cannot happen tomorrow. We will still have to rely on the United States for many things, especially on logistics, on transport planes, on enablers. We cannot build that capacity from one day to another. And announcing huge amount of money does not resolve the problem. You have to enhance your production basis. You have to create new lines of production. That does not happen in one year and doesn't happen in five years. It has to be a long-term process.

But Europe has to do that and has to be able to defend itself and of course deal with the United States on an equal basis. We still want United States presence in Europe, military presence in Europe, hard power presence in Europe. But also, we have to be able to defend ourselves.

SCHANZER: Yeah, and I mean, I think it's interesting because of course the U.S. is asking for this. It was asking for this before the invasion of Ukraine. Now it's even more urgent after this, this idea that Europeans need to handle their own neighborhood while the United States pivots to its great power competition, as we call it in this city, with China.

And there I just wanted to ask you about where Greece sits. I think we see it with a lot of countries, not just in Europe, but around the world. They have been relying on China for cheap goods. They've been relying on China for a range of, you know, products and services. And there's also an exposure to China in terms of infiltration, acquisition of intellectual property. These are all things that 10 years ago we weren't really talking about. Now, I know it is the dominant conversation with the United States and every one of its partners.

So, I'm wondering if you could just share with us for just a minute about how this is impacting you. The great power competition between China and the United States, how is that impacting Greece?

DENDIAS: Well, I'll give you an example, which I have repeated once or twice. You know that COSCO Pacific, who is based in Hong Kong, but it's a Chinese state company, has an important print in the Port of Piraeus. And the Port of Piraeus is the biggest port of Greece and is on its way to become the biggest port in the Mediterranean and one of the biggest ports in Europe, maybe in 10 years' time, the biggest port in Europe as well.

And now when I travel in capitals, especially in Washington, I'm being asked, "Why did you let the Chinese have such a precious part of your infrastructure?" And the answer is very funny. We didn't let it happen. We were obliged to do it. And let's move back during the crisis. You know, during the crisis, Greece was obliged to sell state assets in order to balance our books, which I understand.

Now, one of the state assets we were obliged to sell was the Port of Piraeus. So, at the time we flagged the issue, we asked all Europeans, the European Union especially – because the Troika was the one obliging us to sell the asset – that they should present at least a European company to take over the port. And then we flagged the same issue to the United States, so they would bring an American company to take over. And nobody, nobody was willing to take the geopolitical risk.

So, the Chinese appear out of nowhere, and they take over the port. And now we have to answer why the port is being owned by the Chinese. That shows the lack of strategic thinking of the Western world. Because that was not two centuries ago. That was 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014. So, 10, 15 years ago. So, if you cannot foresee that China would be – let me use a very mild word – China will be a competitor of yours in 50 years' time, if our system cannot see 20 years ahead, I'm sorry, but then probably we're doomed. So, we need strategic thinking. That's what we need. And sometimes that's what we lack.

February 3, 2026

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SCHANZER: Okay, I'm about to ask you my last question. So, that means everybody in the audience, please prepare for your questions so you can ask the minister. My question is about strategic thinking. You have been thinking about the future of your neighborhood, of Greece's security, regional security. When you look five years into the future, 10 years into the future, what do you see right now? I mean, what are the things that you are thinking about to prepare Greece and to prepare the West for the challenges ahead?

DENDIAS: As far as Greece is concerned, I think the agenda, especially the Greek armed forces, because if I will start talking about the Greek economy, it will take time. But if we're speaking about our defense agenda and protecting the country from external challenges, I would say Achilles Shield. And the Agenda 2030 has all components that could enable Greece to address whatever challenges the future may present. But what I would like to see there is A, a European defense element. Europe to be able to project power. Europe to have the capacity to understand challenges not just coming from Russia and the north, but challenges coming from the south.

The Sahel right now – I'm repeating myself constantly trying to wake up my European friends – the Sahel is right now a paradise for Islamist radicalism and terrorism. And we don't do anything about it. Autocracies upon autocracies and dictatorship are being created in Sahel, and we just watching without acting at all.

And the other thing we have to do is bring India closer to us. India is the biggest country in the world population wise, 1.5 billion people, four times the population of the European Union. It will be the third economic power in the – of the world in a few years, and they're a democracy. So, we have to create a common understanding with India. And by the way, I'm flying to Delhi immediately after Washington.

SCHANZER: OK, safe travels. By the way, I – I think it was all a very good outcome between Trump and Modi...

DENDIAS: Yes.

SCHANZER: ... and maybe starts to pave the way for some of what you're talking about here. I'm – I was actually very heartened by that.

DENDIAS: But you know, it – I'll – I'll say something which is funny. You know who was the person that facilitated my first visit and – and contact with India? It was Ambassador (inaudible), who is sitting right here. Because at that time, that was the main strategic thinking and writings of – of the United States. Let's bring India towards the European Union and to towards the Mediterranean. So, seeing suddenly this turning itself to a problem between the United States and – and – and India, whom it doesn't make sense. India should be made an ally of the United States.

SCHANZER: Yeah. And I think the nonaligned nature of India has made that challenging, but we've actually seen India take part in, for example, the fostering of the Abraham Accords, and I know that's something that you are also very invested in. They played a role, and I think they will continue to play a more quiet role, but we want to draw them out, and that, I think...

DENDIAS: They – they are quiet by culture, but yet again – for example, they – we had common exercises with them, the Indian navy with the Greek navy. Indian frigates were present in the Red Sea, not involved in – in cooperation Aspides – in Operation Aspides, but cooperating with Aspides. So, India is quiet, but India could be a very important actor.

SCHANZER: OK. We are going to take your questions now, folks. I see a hand raised right over here. We'll start here. If you would just please say your name and where you're from, who you represent, and try to keep your question relatively short so we can get more answers from the minister.

VLASIC: (OFF-MIC) Thank you so much. My name is Marc Vlasic. I am a TV producer and film producer in Hollywood and a presser here in DC; also proudly related to FDD, so thank you for your good work.



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You have done a lot of work with your colleagues in Egypt, and I'm working on a pro bono matter to help preserve the ancient documents in St. Catherine's Monastery in Egypt. The challenge to this has been security clearances or visas for six Greek nationals to travel to Sinai. I know you float in a lot of these circles. I'd love to hear your thoughts on how your ministry and your colleagues can help support the preservation of cultural heritage – or collect the cultural heritage and our Greek heritage, as well. (Inaudible).

DENDIAS: Well, I – I have to say I was not expecting to – to get a question on St. Catherine's Sinai Monastery, but I'm – I would be glad to answer that. But I would like to put it in the context of the Greek-Egyptian relations.

Now, Egypt, for us Greece, but also for us Europe, is an important partner, and I have to say also that stability in Egypt is of cardinal importance for Greece, for Europe, for the Western world. I do know that President Sisi has an authoritarian element in his rule, but please always remember that the alternative to President Sisi is Muslim Brotherhood. And speaking about preservation and respect of human rights in a Muslim Brotherhood country, well, you – you all know what I mean.

And why I'm saying that here in Washington? Because if you remember, a few years ago, President Obama was in Cairo, and President Obama was addressing the idea of Muslim Brotherhood as the Muslim Brotherhood was a – was a kind of benevolent democrats which will take over the Arab world, and the Arab world will become democratic, and we will live happily ever after. And you know where we are.

So, our relation with Egypt are very close – and after India, will travel to Cairo, by the way. St. Catherine's Monastery represented to us a problem because St. Catherine's Monastery – I don't know if you've ever been there, but I have been there, as well. Believe me, it's amazing. It's another world. As I was walking around the monastery, I thought, speaking to myself, "If I stay here for a week, I would become a prophet myself."

(LAUGHTER)

The – the nature is magnificent, but also the icons to the monastery, the – what the arches of the monastery have, they are quite unique for Christianity, not just for Greece, not just for – for the Orthodox world; for Christianity itself. So, we are trying to explain to – to our Egyptian friends that freedom and ownership of the monastery is important to preserve this tradition, and this can be extremely helpful for the Egyptian state as well, because it would create tourism, but also, it will create the feeling of openness of the Egyptian regime towards the Western societies.

SCHANZER: OK, got a question right here.

SCHIRMACHER: OFF-MIC: (inaudible).

DENDIAS: You could have mine.

(LAUGHTER)

SCHIRMACHER: I used to preach. Just in practice, Greece did a near perfect job for the monasteries, I think very often as I do my charity and I congratulate you on that. My question is, I've heard you, and I've prayed about this strategic question. I would like to hear your genius strategy on how to reconcile this whole idea with the fact that we have elections every four or five years and might be ping-ponged between left-wing and right-wing parties here. Is this not a prison that puts us into four year partnerships? Because you never know what the next government will do with your strategy. Take countries which are for Ukraine, election, against Ukraine. How can you go forward, yeah? So, I – I'm just not against, you see? It's of utmost importance. You cannot blame your own family if it changes every four years. (Inaudible) but I'm looking for genius how to coincide this with the typical democracy that – that has an action plan.



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DENDIAS: Well, this is absolutely true, and it's a big challenge for all democracies around the world. It's one of the handicaps of democracy, is that sometimes – and to be honest, most of the times – you cannot take the long view. Every politician, myself included, speaking – speak within and think within political circles. I have to be reelected now in 14, 15 months' time, so election is in my mind, what I do, what I tell to the public. Can I take decisions that are not something that my voters will accept?

But having said that, it – it is absolutely necessary to take the long view. I mean, you cannot negotiate with President Xi unless you take the long view because he does take the long view. The answer that we – I'll give one example that has to do with a – with Greece, my country. Well, we have – we are the cradle of democracy, yes. We – but also, you know, we do not have a very proud record of how we use that democracy, especially – you remember, all small democracies and nations, Greece fighting each other, Athens, the proudest example, taking many times their own decision, expelling the best of their leaders. Aristides was expelled because he was too honest – they didn't like him. But yet again, with very patient work, you have – have common understanding on issues within societies which will allow you to take the long view.

And the one example I will mention is the relation that we're speaking before between Greece and Israel. Some of you may not know but Israel was one of the last countries – Greece was one of the last countries to recognize the state of Israel. Recognize the state of Israel just in 1990 because Konstantinos Mitsotakis, the father of the president – my prime minister, was the one that recognized Israel. And then George Papandreou, the son of Andreas Papandreou, continued that policy.

Now, if you make any survey within the Greek public – will show that the Greek public overwhelmingly supports close relations with Israel, even more than the one supporting close relations with the United States. And this is bipartisan, and not only bipartisan, tri-partisan. Both my party, PASOK, SYRIZA – when SYRIZA govern the country under Prime Minister Tsipras supported the relation with Israel, regardless of what other small parties were saying around the country.

So, it's not easy but it's the obligation of politicians and of parties to create common grounds and common understanding on very serious issues. Unless you're able to achieve that, countries have problems, serious problems.

SCHANZER: Yes, sir?

LARIGAKIS: I have a big mouth. Nicholas Larigakis, president of the American Hellenic Institute, good to see you again Mr. Minister. My question, basically a follow-up a little bit to what you just mentioned now regarding the tripartite relationship that exists between Greece, Israel, and Cyprus, which has been going on for more than a decade now and it's extremely important to the peace and stability of the region and, frankly, for the projection of U.S. geostrategic interests in the region. However, it's always colloquially stated as "3+1," the United States being a major component to this relationship, which I feel is extremely important and I'm sure the – three of the countries in the region feel it's important.

Do you feel that this administration right now is viewing this relationship in – in a positive way and – and a way that they should contribute in some capacity? I know Ambassador Guilfoyle has stated as such in numerous comments in her post in Athens, but what gauge, you know, do you get from the administration here as to the 3+1 and their engagement in it in the full capacity?

DENDIAS: Well, I – I would – have been glad if this discussion would have taken place after I would have met Secretary Hegseth because then I would have heard – excuse my wording – from the horse's mouth what they are expecting and – to do and how they see our strategic dialogue going forward.

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But based on experience – and by experience, I mean Trump one, the first Trump administration, and of course after that, the Biden administration – I believe the United States system is committed on the 3+1. And I think that the United States system – it – what sometimes they call “the deep state,” understands the necessity of the presence of the United States in the cooperation of the United States with Israel, with Greece, and with Cyprus.

And I'm always underlining one element which I think important – this is not a kind of understanding against anybody. It's not the 3+1 against a fourth one, be it Türkiye or be it somebody else. It's an understanding based off common interest, and I will say that although sometimes lacks meaning, common values. And we would lucky – we would love if other countries subscribed to this experiment.

SCHANZER: Can I – when we talk about common interests, we're obviously in part talking about energy, which is a word that hasn't come up at all today, remarkably. Any, any thoughts on those common interests there?

DENDIAS: Well, it – it does – it was not used as a word, but it was always there...

SCHANZER: Yeah.

DENDIAS: ... it was always there because let us be frank, modern societies, modern countries, modern states cannot work without sufficient energy. And we consume much more energy as we go forward. As you know, data centers, for example, need a lot of energy, you know? So, the artificial intelligence models will need a lot of energy. We – so we have to produce more and we have to serve more energy.

Unless we create grids between countries, similar-minded countries, we – we will not be efficient and we cannot create growth in our economies, and if we don't create growth in our economies, democracies don't function. We see that. You cannot have a democracy, long term, with a problematic economy. The best of the Western model of democracy is based on creation of growth. We need energy for that. So, we need understanding on energy. We – of – all my like-minded countries – and as I said before, we have a very clear understanding with Israel. We do have an understanding with Cyprus. We do have an understanding with Egypt. We do have an understanding with the United States. I hope that Türkiye will – will come out.

SCHANZER: Me too. OK, we have time for one more. Henri?

BARKEY: Thank you. (Inaudible) criticize or discuss a crisis and how a crisis was managed. And here, I mean – I am – I'm talking about the Red Sea crisis. What do you – how do you think the international community dealt with it? What could have been done? Was it a success? Was it a failure? What could have been improved, given the fact that Greece really relies – is a maritime power and relies on shipping and it's an important part of its economic – economy.

DENDIAS: Thank you for the opportunity. I – no, I will not call it a success, and I will explain why, especially from the European angle.

Now, the Red Sea is of great importance for Europe. It's of great importance for Egypt, it's a – of great importance for Israel, for many other countries, but speaking from the European angle, it's extremely important for Europe. It's a communication line through the Suez Canal. So, freedom of navigation through the Red Sea has to be something that the European Union can be able to guarantee for its own prosperity and for its own stability.

Yet again, when the Houthi regime – and I don't see the Houthis as being such a strong element, OK? I understand how they can interrupt or how they can create problems, but they're not in any way a kind of superpower.



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So, when the Houthis, using really primitive drones, created problems in the Red Sea, it was Greece that had to take the initiative to create an operation called Aspides – it – it's mentioned – it's "shield," it's a Greek name – in the Red Sea. And so, the Operation Aspides has a Greek commander and one of only four vessels, one of which is Greek. Now, European Union is pretending to be a world power, some sort of superpower. Can you imagine a superpower which was denied access from a group like the Houthis, not being able to send a fleet of no more than four ships in – in the region?

I mean, for me, honestly, it – it shows – it manifests clearly how far the European Union has to go in order to become a credible and important power in the world. European Union is a big economic power up to now but it's not a military power in any serious way.

SCHANZER: OK. Unfortunately, we have run out of time. I'm sorry for those who weren't able to get their questions in. I don't know if – Mr. Minister, if you're going to be sticking around or if you – I think you may need to rush off to your next meeting, which is fully understandable. You've got business to attend to. But I want to thank you for a terrific conversation here today, I want to thank you for your candor; to all of you for coming here in person. I want to thank you for all of you online, also thank you for joining.

For more information about FDD's program on the East Med and the work that we do on Turkey, I certainly want to encourage folks to go to FDD.org. You can find all of our terrific analysis there. Our work is spearheaded by my colleague Sinan Ciddi, the director of our Turkey Program, and we have others contributing as well.

We hope to do this again soon. I want to thank the Delphi Forum for – for partnering with us. I want to thank my friend Endy for helping to organize all of this. And we hope to see you again soon.

DENDIAS: Thank you.

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