

WHAT HAPPENED TO GREEK "STRATEGY"?

By Special Correspondent

The word "strategy" originates in the Greek *Stratigiki*. Modern Greeks use the word excessively. But usage does not necessarily mean adherence to the concept. Even a cursory look at Greek foreign and security policies of the last several decades reveals a remarkable absence of strategic thinking and, if anything, a permanent tendency to instead jerry-rig. This may be workable if one is trying to fix the hay barn after the latest rainstorm, but guarantees only suffering if it is adopted by national leaders in pursuit of their country's fortunes -- and it could spell disaster if it is the chosen method used to come to grips with the most radical changes affecting the international system since the end of the Cold War.

There are certain universal principles concerning the building and implementation of *Stratigiki*. Strategy, for example, is not for short order cooks posing as "leaders." Strategy may not be bought in a box off the shelf. Strategy can be studied but rarely can it evolve without an environment promoting all-round education, planning rigor, rational longer-term objectives, and constant training in contemplating individual "trees" both on their own *and* as parts of the proverbial "forest." Strategy, in its operational form, is inhospitable to political wrangling. And strategy is *never static*, but, rather, an effort to constantly adjust one's position to challenges and remain properly postured at all times.

To Greek political elites, all of the above form an indecipherable blob that is better left alone since it offers little, if anything, to the promotion of the staple of petty partisan politics and what passes as "policy making" inside Greek governments. Greek politics, especially since the fall of the military junta in 1974, have expended whatever energy they could muster to promoting a sense of artificial, flabby wellbeing centered on borrow-as-you-go consumerism. Greece is replete with "thinkers" juggling various versions of "peace" theories, emerging from a relentless, conscious, political drive to reduce anything that might even remotely rub on a nation's need to *actively* defend what it possesses. No wonder then that this country woefully lacks the intellectual agility -- not to mention "the fire in the belly" -- to address the issues of national strategy.

In recent months, this strategic dearth is becoming painfully obvious. With a burgeoning Turkey expanding its military provocations in the Aegean, with the evident aim of fomenting a crisis that would further undermine Greek sovereignty west of the Lausanne Treaty sea demarcation line limiting Turkey to a narrow zone along the Anatolian coast, Greece shines in its complete strategic inertia and numbness. Turkish aims, quite manifest to all but Greece's governors, have focused for the longest time on *the dismantling of the international treaty status affecting the Archipelago and the effective Finlandization of Aegean island Greek territories*. These aims successive Greek governments

have tried to counter with a hollow "European membership" attitude which, as the late Panayotis Kondylis, postwar Greece's only civilian strategist of recognized caliber has put it, is the product of a "...masqueraded desire to have others feed us and guard our borders."

The complete absence of literate strategic statements by Greek leaders is only the stark confirmation of what transpires inside Greek "planning" staffs charged with this country's security and national defense. It is significant to note that even the most persistent researcher will be unable to locate any cohesive official narrative of strategic interpretation and assessment in the ever growing pile of government publications. Greece possesses no institutional bodies that deal with the development and implementation of strategy -- either "mainstream" or "grand." Even within the military, strategy remains a pursuit hobbled by barren political "guidance," lack of proper education, and the general tendency of the Greek bureaucratic system to obfuscate and keep everything at the lowest possible level of a self-sustaining cycle.

This already dangerous strategic deficit is only accentuated by the disastrous spread among Greek elites of the mantra suggesting that, somehow, economic cooperation and intertwining of capitalist structures can reduce political and, ultimately, military conflicts. It isn't difficult to see that those who promote such views have either no historical understanding or they are eager to enhance "friendship" at the prospect of short-term gain. Needless to say, strategic thinking and strategic requirements couldn't be farthest from such "common sense" economic ecumenism, which, in certain forms, is also present in the discourse of the much-touted "European integration" (copiously quoted by the Greek adherents of 'Greek-Turkish rapprochement.')

As Colin S. Gray recently wrote, Thucydides, the all-time Ancient Greek theoretician of Strategy, posited that "the primary motives behind diplomatic and belligerent behaviors are 'fear, honor, and interest' ". It would be interesting to apply this triptych upon the study of the roots of Greece's divorce from Strategy. We propose the following working hypothesis: Greece has succumbed to *fear*; has devalued *honor*; and has misjudged *interest*.

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