

Souda Bay: NATO's Military Gem in the Eastern Mediterranean

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Executive Summary

The Middle East is afire, Russia is on the march and France, the United Kingdom, the United States and dozens of other countries are at war with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The Eastern Mediterranean is at the center of a titanic geo-political and strategic struggle as refugees flood to Europe from the Near East and North Africa. United States air units are deployed to Turkey and Russian forces to Syria. Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Israel are building up military defenses due to increasing chances of conflict in the region. The U.S. and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) need a stronger presence in the Mediterranean to monitor activities, and to prevent attacks on members and partners.

The increasing conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean calls for a stronger U.S. Sixth Fleet, but Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral John Richardson, has stated there is no plan to bolster scarce U.S. naval resources in the region. This means the alliance must adapt by developing a new approach to its southern flank, increasing its presence, developing a European Maritime Security Strategy, and building ally and partner relations and regional security architectures. To deter aggression in the region, NATO also needs to boost the military power of its existing members. Greece is one example of a member nation that could increase its involvement, and thereby strengthen NATO's capabilities.

Greece has a long history with the West, and serves as a key geopolitical point for NATO. The country forms the alliance's southern tip, and its large eastern border is exposed to volatile conflicts that unfold in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf. According to Admiral James Stavridis, former Supreme Allied Commander at NATO, and current Dean, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, has shared, "Greece occupies a remarkable geopolitical position as a solid southeastern anchor to the NATO Alliance. The bases on Crete are particularly critical when looking at the instability in the Levant. NATO should work with Greece, the United States, and other allies to strengthen the bases and increase their utility to NATO and the European Union."¹ Greece is a trusted and capable ally that is one of five alliance members that meets the alliance goal of spending two percent of gross domestic product on defense, consistently surpassing the minimum as far back as 1988.

The Hellenic Republic regularly participates in military exercises with allies and partners, and hosts U.S. forces and multiple NATO facilities. Greece's contributions allow for alliance cohesion, and the security of the Mediterranean and Europe by helping with reconnaissance missions, logistics, maintenance, and air refueling support. Admiral Mark Ferguson, Commander, Allied Joint Force Command Naples, and Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, has confirmed that Navy Support Activity Souda Bay located on the Greek island of Crete is a strategic logistics and maintenance point that supports both allied and U.S. ships and aircraft conducting operations in the Mediterranean Sea. American forces rely on the strategic location and support capabilities of Souda Bay to sustain U.S. forward presence and respond to crises in the Eastern Mediterranean.² Souda Bay is one of the few locations capable of hosting a permanently based aircraft carrier in the Eastern Mediterranean along with destroyers and amphibious ships that would allow for quicker and cost effective responses in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf.

In addition, NATO Maritime Interdiction Operations Training Center at Souda Bay serves as a "One Stop Shop" in the area by educating maritime law enforcement. The NATO Missile Firing Installation is located nearby, serving as the only place in Europe where missiles can be test fired, and is capable of hosting Marine battalions when forces are needed in the region. The NATO Fleet Operational Readiness Accuracy Check Site ensures vessels are working properly so alliance members can share accurate information. Athens, Washington, and NATO should identify more synergies to work together and protect peace and commerce in the Mediterranean Sea.

Growing Instability in the Mediterranean, Middle East and North Africa

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is facing two major threats to the European continent: a more aggressive Russia and the multi-dimensional danger of organized jihadist terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa. Since Russia invaded Ukraine and occupied Crimea, East-West relations are at the lowest level since the Cold War. A more hostile and capable Russian Navy has increased its presence and conducts military exercises in the Mediterranean, NATO's southern maritime flank. The exercises practice anti-submarine, anti-ship and air defense operations, inconsistent with a counterterrorism strategy, and test European boundaries in the air and water.

Recently, Russia launched 26 cruise missiles over 900 miles from ships in the Caspian Sea aiming for Syria, a very dangerous move considering Russia's liberal use of nuclear threats against NATO countries; not until impact was it clear if the missiles carried conventional or nuclear warheads. Moscow also signaled its intention to destabilize the balance of power across the Middle East by considering to supply friends and clients in the region with advanced military capabilities, such as Iran. Furthermore, Russia announced its anti-access/area denial strategy in 2015, a growing problem in the Eastern Mediterranean, as its submarine patrols have risen by about 50 percent compared to the year of 2014. Russia's submarine fleet is becoming better armed and stealthier, and monitors and targets underwater cable systems rich in intelligence – over 95 percent of information available on the Internet can be found in these wires.

Admiral Mark Ferguson, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, underscored how Russia's Navy aims to create an "arc of steel" by establishing bases from the Arctic to the Mediterranean. The Russian base at the port of Latakia, Syria, in particular, allows Moscow to project power into the Eastern Mediterranean which may deter NATO maritime forces in the region. Furthermore, Moscow claims it entered the war in Syria to attack the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). General Philip Breedlove, NATO Commander, Europe, has stated that about 80 percent of Russia's declared targets have been in areas not held by ISIS.³ It appears that defeating the terrorist group is at the bottom of Moscow's list

*The aircraft carrier
USS Harry S. Truman departs Souda
Harbor on a deployment to the U.S.
Sixth Fleet area of responsibility.*

(Retrieved from U.S. Navy)



while its main goal is to influence Damascus' future and increase Russian presence in the Mediterranean Sea. In response to Russian aggression, Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries have increased military spending and have requested NATO's help to bolster their defenses.

The jihadist extremist threats in the Middle East and North Africa are growing more powerful, dangerous and brazen. ISIS has brought down a Russian airliner, conducted terrorist bombings in Lebanon, and killed more than 120 civilians in Paris. After Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi was captured and killed by rebels in October 2011, a power struggle among multiple groups resulted. Currently, Yemen is enduring a civil war with Houthi rebels taking over the capital and other areas, and Syria's civil war has resulted in over 250,000 deaths, 800,000 injuries, and more than six million refugees. ISIS has become stronger in Syria and is growing its presence in Libya, Egypt, Yemen and even Afghanistan, using ruthless tactics to terrorize civilians and conquer territory. Due to unrest in the Middle East, refugees flood to Europe through Greece and Italy, the largest number of foreigners to enter Europe since World War II. The influx of immigrants is a security concern due to the difficulties involved in tracking so many people and the demonstrated danger that terrorist members are able to infiltrate refugee flows.

The fear of crisis breaking out in the Eastern Mediterranean is illustrated by the actions of regional players. Egypt is seeking to acquire new military capabilities from countries other than the United States, and Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States are building up missile defenses, advanced surface combatants, combat aircraft and precision munitions. Israel is also expanding missile defense capabilities, most recently with the decision to deploy the David's Sling system. In 2013, Ankara asked the alliance to deploy Patriot missiles to Turkey for protection against the Syrian threat.

NATO Needs More Robust, Quicker Response Capabilities

Since future conflicts are expected to happen quickly on NATO's flanks with no time to build military presence and execute responses, the alliance needs to respond much faster to threats than in the past, according to Admiral Ferguson. Some ways NATO could decrease response time is by developing a strategy for its southern flank, creating a clear European Maritime Security Strategy, such as the U.S. Department of Defense published on the Asia Pacific, and building ally and partner relations and regional architectures.

A strong and regular exercise regime that focuses on southern scenarios and maritime ballistic missile defenses would allow the alliance to test its ability to understand and respond to various threats. High-end training lets allies practice individual and collective responses to common threats while moving soldiers and assets quickly. Possessing the capability to rapidly move soldiers and equipment deters aggressive action from potential enemies, while delaying the movement of troops and assets increases the likelihood of battle.

The attacks in Paris highlight the need to improve U.S. and NATO intelligence cooperation to foresee threats. Coordination with European intelligence services is inadequate, lacking a comprehensive list of suspected extremists and a common biometric identification system, and further weakened by open borders within the European Union. Rear Admiral Brett Heimbigner, Headquarters, North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command Director of Intelligence, has noted NATO's shortage of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.⁴ Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, Commander, U.S. Army Europe, has admitted the U.S. does not have the ability to identify and track movements as in the past.⁵ A stronger focus should be placed on gathering and sharing intelligence by the European Commission, as supported by the Research Institute for European and American Studies,

which could then be incorporated with NATO through information sharing agreements to identify, process and solve threats.

A greater range of options for response would include increasing the capability and capacity of NATO Special Operations Forces to function in the maritime environment along with the permanent basing of an aircraft carrier, destroyers, and amphibious warships in the region. In addition, NATO allies should work closely with one another to manage the influx of refugees coming to Europe. The U.S. Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues has called for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help Europe improve the collection of fingerprints, tracking of migrants, and other protocols to prevent terrorists from hiding among refugees.

Increasing conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean calls for a stronger U.S. Sixth Fleet which is headquartered in Naples, Italy with 900 total personnel shared with U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa. While more people and ships are needed in the region, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral John Richardson, has stated there is no plan to increase naval resources already stretched across the globe. This means NATO must boost existing military power relationships to deter aggression and protect the region. Greece is one example of a dedicated NATO member that already hosts U.S. forces and several NATO facilities and regularly participates in military exercises with alliance members and partners. According to Admiral James Stavridis, Supreme Allied Commander at NATO 2009-2013 and Dean, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, “Greece occupies a remarkable geopolitical position as a solid southeastern anchor to the NATO Alliance. The bases on Crete are particularly critical when looking at the instability in the Levant. NATO should work with Greece, the United States, and other Allies to strengthen the bases and increase their utility to NATO and the EU [European Union].”⁶ Hence, the natural next step is to find more common synergies to strengthen Greece’s contributions to protect the southern flank and boost NATO military power.

Greece: A Loyal NATO Member

Greece has a long history of collective defense and collaboration with Western democracies, and is located in a key geopolitical area. Americans helped Greeks win independence from the Ottoman Empire, and provided political and military assistance during the Greek civil war by implementing the Truman Doctrine to support Greece’s self-defense.⁷ The victory of the pro-Western forces in the Greek civil war marked a gateway for Athens’ alignment with the West. NATO was created in April 1949 as a system of collective defense, and Greece became a member of NATO in 1952. The Hellenic Republic signed an agreement to install U.S. bases in the country in 1953 that not only benefited America with a strategic presence, but also provided Greeks with the protection of U.S. air power and a perceived guarantee that America would help in future wars.

Athens is a symbol of the beneficial effects of American determination to stand firm against communist expansionism. Greece demonstrated solidarity with the allies in the Korean War as the fifth largest troop contributor to United Nations (UN) Forces in Korea. Athens provided a Special Expeditionary Force of ground and air forces with a branch of officers that served as the liaison of the UN General Command-Headquarters for the Far East in Japan. This force comprised of a reinforced Army infantry battalion and seven transport planes. The resourcefulness of Greek soldiers in the Korean War was recognized by South Koreans, allied forces and the UN. Athens also supported allied forces in World War I, the Russian Civil War, World War II, the Somali Civil War, and the Gulf War.

In response to the Ukraine crisis, Greece has contributed naval units such as frigates and mine hunters, and staff officers at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe and Joint Force Command in Naples.

Aktion Air Force Base in Preveza on the west coast of Greece is used as a Forward Operating Base for NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft assigned to Poland and Romania. In the NATO security mission International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, Greece contributed C-130 aircraft with troops, M60A3 battle tanks and AK-47 submachine guns. Greek troops were assigned to ISAF headquarters, the Regional Command Capital, and took control of the Kabul airport. A Hellenic Mobile Field Surgical Hospital was deployed in Kabul and provided training for Afghan doctors.

Furthermore, Greece routinely participates in NATO maritime operations, such as NATO's Ocean Shield and the European Union's Atalanta mission, to deter piracy, armed robbery and protect vulnerable vessels carrying aid to countries receiving assistance from the UN World Food Program.⁸ Today, the Hellenic Republic promotes stability by contributing troops to the NATO Kosovo Force, supporting hundreds of reconnaissance missions and traffic security in the Balkans, and has supported recent conflicts such as Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Global War on Terrorism, and Operation Inherent Resolve. To keep up with evolving threats, the Hellenic Armed Forces regularly updates its operational doctrine and capabilities, infrastructure and training and warfare concepts.

Even during tough economic times, Greece is one of five NATO members that consistently meets the minimum alliance goal of spending two percent of gross domestic product on defense. Athens' key geopolitical location is valuable to NATO as it forms the alliance's southern tip. The country will increase in importance as conflicts unfold in North Africa and the Middle East. Admiral Evangelos Apostolakis, Chief, Hellenic National Defence General Staff, confirmed that the current financial crisis has not affected the readiness and capabilities of the Hellenic Armed Forces: Greece maintains its military power and is ready to fight when needed, and military relations and cooperation with the U.S. Armed Forces have been and will remain a top priority for Greece.⁹

Several American and NATO leaders have publicly expressed their appreciation of Greece's strong role in NATO. President Barack Obama has highlighted Greece as America's closest NATO ally and his appreciation of Athens' role in defending the security of people around the world from the Balkans to Afghanistan.¹⁰ Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel expressed gratitude for America and Greece's strong military relationship, specifically noting appreciation for Athens' hospitality to U.S. forces and its contributions in the Balkans and the Middle East.¹¹ NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg thanked Greece for its unwavering support to the alliance despite difficult times, emphasizing it has remained an active and effective member of NATO for over 60 years and that NATO is committed to keeping Greece safe,¹² and Commander, U.S. Transportation Command, General Paul J. Selva, has stated the importance of the close bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Greece, and America's appreciation of the Hellenic Republic's contributions to NATO.¹³ Bruce S. Lemkin, Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force has shared that Greece has remained a committed NATO ally from World War II, the Cold War, until today by providing Greek air space, offering assets to combat terrorism and extremism, including the deployment of a Greek frigate to the Arabian Sea for almost two years, and the use of Souda Bay air field as a landing base, unrestricted overflights, and providing a continuous rotation of personnel to Afghanistan.¹⁴ Captain J. Stephen Hoefel, former Commanding Officer, U.S. Navy Support Activity (NSA) Souda Bay, has shared, "I feel strongly about the strategic value of Greece today and in the future... Greece is the finest strategic partner the U.S. could ever have...Greece stands beside it [the United States] even when it hurts [Greece]."¹⁵

Souda Bay: Critical to NATO's Response

The Greek island Crete is strategically located in the Eastern Mediterranean with superb access to Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf. Souda Bay is a natural harbor on the northwest coast of the island, near the town of Souda, and has supported naval forces and operations since ancient times. The U.S. Navy's presence began in 1958 when an advance aviation base ship was stationed to support forward-deployed U.S. Navy Sixth Fleet units in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. In 1969, the U.S. Naval Detachment, Souda Bay was created¹⁶ to manage facilities in support of U.S. naval forces, and several task forces were established.¹⁷

In 1990, the Hellenic Navy provided its naval base to the United States, creating NSA Souda Bay, which occupies about 110 acres and shares a home with the Hellenic Air Force's 115th Combat Wing and a Greek F-16 base. Hellenic Naval Bases are located on the north and south coasts of the Souda Bay harbor, and there is a civilian airport nearby in the city of Chania. NSA Souda Bay has supported U.S. Air Force and Navy reconnaissance aircraft missions and other joint American and multinational operations.

Today, Souda Bay is the southernmost fighter base in NATO with one runway at the Hellenic Air Force's 115th Combat Wing, 31 Theater Air Base Vulnerability shelters and munitions storage. NSA Souda Bay is a designated Forward Operating Site, providing sustained support for deployed air and maritime operations to the United States, allies and partners. The U.S. Air Force and Navy perform the following functions at NSA Souda Bay: a Naval Operating Base, Naval Air Station, Naval Fueling Station, and a Naval Weapons Station. Facilities at Souda Bay carry, arm, deploy and recover aircraft, and can anchor an aircraft carrier pier-side – it has three anchorages, the deepest running between 390 to 490 feet. The Greek and U.S. navies are working to develop a degaussing range on the island so the magnetic field can be neutralized or removed from vessels, preventing ships from triggering underwater mines thus decreasing undersea warfare threat in hostile waters.

*The guided-missile frigate
USS Simpson pier-side at Souda Bay
with international ships during
exercise Phoenix Express 2012.*

(Retrieved from U.S. Navy)



Souda Bay Peninsula



Admiral Ferguson has confirmed that “NSA Souda Bay is a strategic logistics and maintenance point that supports both allied and U.S. ships and aircraft conducting the full range of operations in the Mediterranean Sea. Our forces rely on the strategic location and support capabilities of Souda Bay to sustain our forward presence and respond to crises in the eastern Mediterranean.”¹⁸ In 2015, over 2,830 U.S. and NATO planes used the 115th Combat Wing,¹⁹ and over 70 U.S. and NATO ships made port visits to NSA Souda Bay. Over 4,500 U.S. and NATO planes used the 115th Combat Wing in 2014 and 147 U.S. and NATO naval units visited NSA Souda Bay. In 2013, over 2,350 U.S. and NATO planes used the 115th Combat Wing and over 250 U.S. and NATO ships stopped at NSA Souda Bay.²⁰ About 2,750 U.S. and NATO planes are expected to utilize the 115th Combat Wing in 2016.²¹

NSA Souda Bay is home to several tenant commands²² such as the Naval Computer and Telecom Area Master Station. This center assists real-world operations and exercises with secure and reliable, classified, voice, data, and Navy Regional Enterprise Messaging services to support command, control, computer, communications and information to NSA Souda Bay, U.S. Navy and Air Force commands, Department of Defense agencies, and NATO units operating within the European, Central and African Commands. Detachment 1, 95th Reconnaissance Squadron provides operations, logistics, intelligence,

and administrative support so the 55th Wing, a U.S. Air Force unit assigned to Air Combat Command, is able to conduct sensitive reconnaissance and contingency operations in the European theater.

The U.S. Air Force, Naval Munitions Command Detachment operates and maintains explosive artillery facilities, provides fleet ordnance support to U.S. Naval Forces Europe, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and other U.S. Fleet Forces Commands. The Supply/Fleet Industrial Supply Center provides logistics and support services to the Navy, Coast Guard, Military Sealift Command and other joint and allied forces. All the benefits of facilities at and near Souda Bay have motivated American military leaders to thank Greece for its consistent support.²³

Greek NATO Facilities at Souda Bay

While NATO members agree to mutually defend one another in response to an attack by an external party, it is important for members to conduct exercises and have access to facilities that sharpen and strengthen the cohesiveness of their skills. NATO facilities located in the northern section of the peninsula include the NATO Maritime Interdiction Operations Training Center and the NATO Fleet Operational Readiness Accuracy Check Site Greece with the NATO Missile Firing Installation nearby. These three sites are assets that allow allies and partners to work together to boost capabilities.

The NATO Maritime Interdiction Operations Training Center (NMIOTC) is responsible for educating NATO member naval units on conducting naval deterrence, and is the only accredited alliance training complex leading maritime security. The training facility provides certification in surface, sub-surface, aerial surveillance and special operations activities in support of safe and successful maritime interdiction operations that aim to delay, disrupt, or destroy enemy forces or supplies imported or exported from a defined maritime area. Such operations include changing the route of vessels or taking control of ships that violate economic or military sanctions. Construction of the NMIOTC was funded by Greece, and the Hellenic Navy covers ongoing operational and maintenance costs. The center is in close proximity to vital maritime communication lines and is conveniently located near the Hellenic Naval and Air Force bases and the civilian airport in Chania.

To enhance training, NMIOTC has tall stacks of containers to practice inspections, a tower for helicopter insertion and extraction, and even confiscated pirate boats. For member nations whose ships are not able to sail to the training complex in Crete, mobile training teams are deployed worldwide to provide knowledge and expertise tailored to mission requirements and operational constraints. NMIOTC's past accomplishments include educating maritime law enforcement officers from over 18 nations, and conducting courses on best practices for criminal investigations of piracy and armed robbery at sea, such as how to negotiate with, and interrogate suspects and how to collect, handle and preserve evidence. The training facility also helps nations that are not affiliates of NATO but are considered partners, such as members of the Partnership for Peace, Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. The complex also hosts an annual course on Maritime Operational Language to inform non-NATO personnel of necessary terminology for combined participation of maritime operations and exercises according to NATO framework. In 2013, 260 U.S. ships received training from NMIOTC with over 100 U.S. ships utilizing the center in 2014 and over 65 in 2015. The United Kingdom, France, Italy and other countries received training on about 18 ships in 2013, 14 ships in 2014, and 11 ships in 2015.²⁴ Seventy-six countries have trained at NMIOTC, with over 1,200 trainees in 2015 and over 1,700 in 2014. Furthermore, more than 25 countries have participated in over 250 training events at the center.

Baseline assessments that ensure U.S. and allied surface ships, mine hunters, submarines, helicopters and aircraft can operate together and complete critical missions and tasks are provided by NATO Fleet Operational Readiness Accuracy Check Site (FORACS) Greece (NFG). The facility supports acquisition

and fleet readiness by measuring the full combat system (the bearing, range, heading and positional errors of sensors) onboard surface ships, submarines and helicopters, that allow NATO ships to pass accurate information to each other. The NFG tests design specifications of new and upgraded systems, validates performance after new construction and overhaul, and assesses real-time operational capability. NFG also performs precision dynamic calibration measurements to ensure the accuracy of target and navigation sensors, and compares them to geographical references to meet national and NATO readiness standards.

If a ship has a problem with sensor accuracy, performance or interoperability, NFG can design a test specifically tailored to that issue to investigate and restore or improve combat system performance. In most cases, the FORACS test results are provided in real time. This means that if an error is found corrective action can begin immediately. Portable worldwide testing teams are also deployed by NFG to assess system functioning after repairs or defects. The U.S. receives a high return on investment from NATO FORACS as it allows interoperability for joint-service and multinational operations. NFG served 17 U.S. and NATO units in 2015, 22 in 2014, 18 in 2013 and 20 units are planned for 2016.²⁵ America should ensure its ships are tested by NFG to enhance and increase shared asset cohesion among allies.

The only place in Europe where missiles can be test fired is the NATO Missile Firing Installation (NAMFI),²⁶ one of the few ranges on earth that can host almost every type of activity on the ground, surface and air. NAMFI can host ground-to-air, ground-to-surface, surface-to-surface, air-to-surface, and torpedo firings along with experimental firing activities, joint live fire exercises, certifications of airborne and seaborne target drones, and personnel and units. Six airborne targets can be used simultaneously to practice for complex threats, good weather conditions allow for year-round operations, and the orientation and size of the facility allows for the maximum range of weapon systems. The Hellenic Air Force wing and NMIOTC are located close by, allowing troops returning from war zones or participating in NATO operations to combine multidimensional exercises with missile firing practice. NAMFI has served over 400,000 trainees and more than 70,000 visitors.



The Hellenic Army conducting Multiple Launch Rocket System firings at NAMFI.

(Retrieved from the NATO Missile Firing Installation)

U.S. and NATO Activity at Souda Bay

2015

- More than 2,830 U.S. and NATO planes utilized the 115th Combat Wing
- Over 70 U.S. and NATO ship port visits at NSA Souda Bay
- Over 65 U.S. ships and more than 1,200 trainees utilized NMIOTC
- 17 U.S. and NATO units serviced by NFG

2014

- More than 4,500 U.S. and NATO planes utilized the 115th Combat Wing
- Over 145 U.S. and NATO ship port visits at NSA Souda Bay
- Over 100 U.S. ships and more than 1,700 trainees utilized NMIOTC
- 22 U.S. and NATO units serviced by NFG

2013

- More than 2,350 U.S. and NATO planes utilized the 115th Combat Wing
- Over 250 U.S. and NATO ship port visits at NSA Souda Bay
- 260 U.S. ships trained at NMIOTC
- 18 U.S. and NATO units serviced by NFG

During a visit to NAMFI, U.S. Army Europe Lieutenant General Hodges emphasized that missile firing practices build confidence among the alliance, as ballistic missiles from multiple directions are a major threat to the European population.²⁷ Most soldiers do not get the opportunity to see, practice and prepare for launching missiles because they involve complex equipment transported from several locations, and the computation of difficult algorithms – NAMFI provides a rare opportunity for troops to become familiar with these complicated steps. In 2015, the Italian Army fired Stinger missiles for air-to-air engagements, the German and Greek navies fired surface-to-surface missiles against targets, and the German Air Force fired the Patriot Air and Missile Defense System to practice countering tactical ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, drones and advanced aircraft threats at NAMFI.

The S-300 air defense system was recently activated at NAMFI during joint drills between Greek and Israeli air forces last spring²⁸ and as far back as White Eagle 2013, allowing Israeli warplanes to test the S-300's lock-on system and gather data on its tracking radar to identify how it may be blinded. Russia has sold the S-300 air defense system to Tehran which could limit Israel's ability to strike in Syria or Iran. An Israeli Air Force captain confirmed that the exercise helps Tel Aviv deal with the unknown. Israeli pilots utilize Crete to practice bombing drills and aerial refueling with tactical planes and tankers needed for a distance strike. Israel and Crete are about 870 miles away from each other, equal to the distance that separates Israel from Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment facility.

Other Valuable Greek Bases

While NSA Souda Bay serves as NATO's military gem in the Mediterranean, Greece is also home to many useful military bases that should be better utilized in the future. Salamis Naval Base on the northeastern part of Salamis Island is the largest naval facility in Greece where most Hellenic naval ships are centered. The base provides administrative, training and support services with over 10,000 personnel. The Mine Warfare Command, located on the island, is tasked with maintaining presence in the Aegean Sea, Eastern Mediterranean and other locations. The facility also participates in allied exercises, NATO operations, training and readiness levels, and updates technical and tactical instructions to preserve national peace.²⁹ NATO and Greek leaders have visited the base to observe joint exercises that demonstrate Greece's maritime and rapid reaction capabilities.³⁰

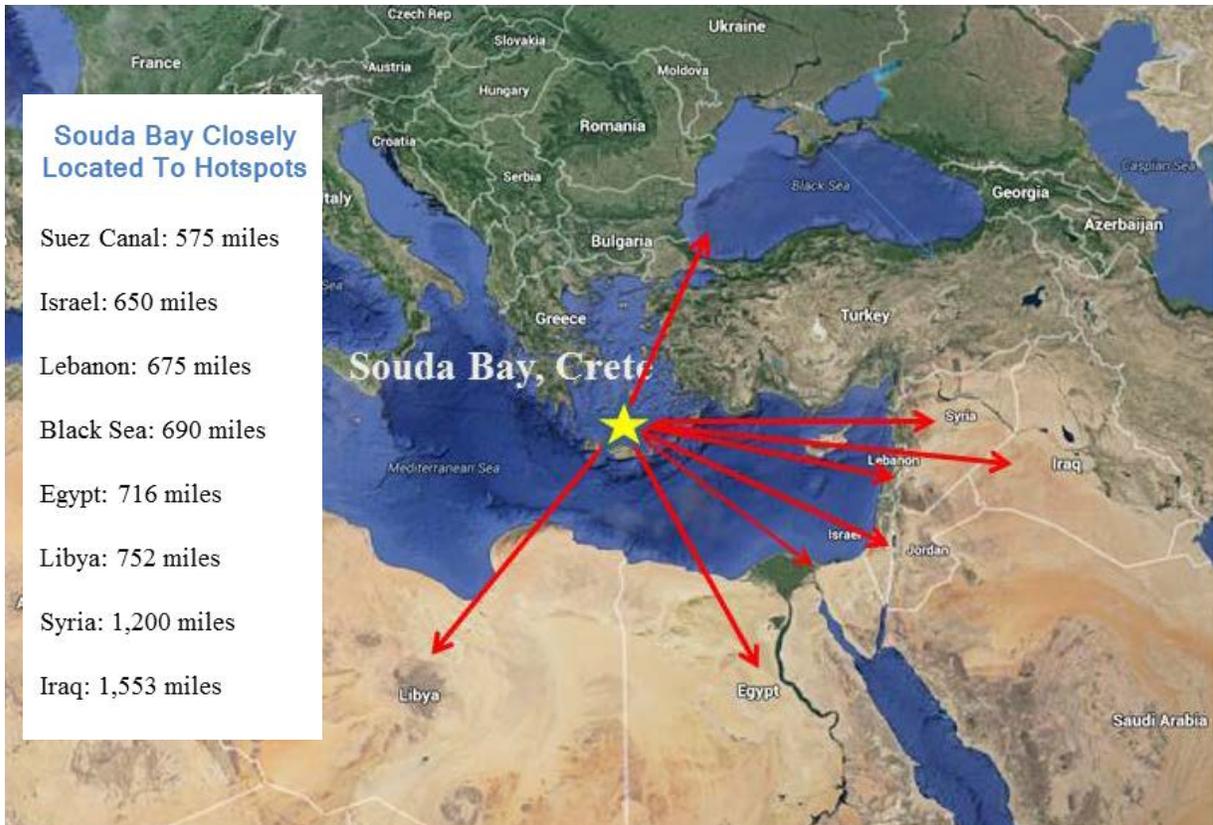
Several active Greek air bases have been helpful over the years. For instance, Hellenic Araxos Air Base, home to the 116th Combat Wing, stored U.S. B61 nuclear bombs, intended for delivery by Hellenic Air Force aircraft, inside the base's hardened aircraft shelters. In addition, Andravida Air Base is home to the 117th Combat Wing and to a center that provides advanced courses on air tactics and electronic warfare. Greece also has several other military bases including a training wing located in Tripolis that could be utilized to strengthen its support to NATO.

Recent Operations Supported By Souda Bay

Greece was one of the first countries to respond to Washington's request for a coalition to combat terrorism, Operation Enduring Freedom, after the 9-11 terrorist attacks. Souda Bay served as a forward logistics site with the highest degree of readiness, and the Souda Air Base provided support to allied aircraft. Greece delivered a warship with a helicopter, and deployed a SEAL team in the Arabian Sea to support Combined Task Force 150 that promotes maritime security to counter illegal activities by terrorists to fund or conceal movement. Greek paratroopers enhanced the security of NATO and U.S. military facilities, and Greece's C-130 aircraft transported humanitarian assistance and equipment for the Afghan National Army. In addition, three staff officers from the Hellenic Army, Navy and Air Force were assigned to U.S. Central Command Headquarters in Tampa, Florida.

To support Operation Iraqi Freedom, Greece activated the naval base at Souda Bay as a forward logistics site and allowed the use of Hellenic airspace, granting over-flight and landing clearance support at all major Greek airports. Greek Special Operations Forces, paratroopers and naval patrols increased the security of NATO and U.S. military installations, and supplied allied units and aircraft at Souda naval and air bases by loading, arming, and storing aircraft weapons and ammunitions. Athens also provided armored vehicles, and donated engineering and communications equipment, ammunition, tanks, and small arms. Furthermore, Iraqi Security Forces were taught by a Greek mobile training team provided by the Multinational Peace Support Operations Training Center,³¹ and the Hellenic Republic provided medical services at the Naval Hospital and trained Iraqi military doctors in Greek military hospitals.

In Operation Active Endeavour, NATO's immediate response to 9-11, Greece contributed the Souda Naval Forward Logistics Site along with C-130 aircraft equipped with an automatic identification system, a submarine, and a fast patrol boat to deter, defend, and disrupt terrorists and weapons of mass destruction in the Mediterranean Sea. In Operation Odyssey Dawn, U.S. President Barack Obama posted hundreds of Marines at NSA Souda Bay while ordering Gadhafi to leave during the Libyan Civil War in 2011. U.S. Marines provided the president with a full range of options including U.S. Special Operations planes and C-130 aircraft flown from Souda Bay to pick up stranded Egyptians in Tunisia. Furthermore, Souda Bay hosted United Arab Emirates Mirage 2000 fighter jets, Norwegian fighter jets,



and French C-160s to support the coalition.³² Then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton expressed her gratitude for Greece’s willingness to host coalition military assets at Souda Bay and other sites close to Libya.³³

After the initial attack on the U.S. Embassy in Benghazi, Libya, General Carter F. Ham, Commander, AFRICOM, ordered the commander’s in-extremis force to move to Souda Bay, and a Marine Corps Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team platoon was stationed there to respond to additional unrest. In a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Senator John McCain pointed out that if aircraft and other military capabilities were located a short distance away at NSA Souda Bay, a faster response could have prevented American deaths at the U.S. Embassy.³⁴

In a recent interview, Admiral Apostolakis confirmed ISIS has caused a humanitarian crisis as well as a serious security issue in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Greece offers its full support to the fight against terrorism, highlighting that Greece’s good relations with the Arab community could be helpful. The Greek Foreign Ministry announced political and military support for Operation Inherent Resolve, the coalition against ISIS, in September 2014, and contributed humanitarian and military aid. The Hellenic Armed Forces provide patrol boats and other assets to the Hellenic Coast Guard to keep the refugee death toll to a minimum. Furthermore, the Hellenic Republic has increased screening in ports and airports to prevent people from leaving to join ISIS while serving as a staging point for fighters participating in airstrikes against the terrorist group and supplying Kurdish fighters with ammunition to help fight ISIS. In 2015, the Greek Minister of National Defence, Panos Kammenos, proposed the creation of a new NATO air base on an island in the Aegean in conjunction with the naval base at Souda Bay³⁵ to facilitate the battle against ISIS, and called for cooperation between Egypt, Cyprus, and other Middle Eastern countries to fight the terrorist group.

Admiral Ferguson has declared Souda Bay's importance, highlighting how it provides Hellenic naval and air bases to support joint U.S. Navy and Air Force reconnaissance missions, air refueling, and ballistic missile defense ships with logistics and maintenance.³⁶ In 2013, the USS San Antonio amphibious ship made a port call to Souda Bay on its way to support AFRICOM where it was unexpectedly ordered to remain in the area because its resources, several hundred Marines aboard with V-22 Osprey aircraft, could be useful in the region. In May 2014, the RC-135 Rivet Joint aircraft that supports near real-time intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination was also deployed to Souda Bay for one week. These examples demonstrate Souda Bay's convenient location to provide logistical support, collect critical information and respond to nearby danger.

Greek Participation in Military Exercises

NATO members must participate in rigorous peacetime training to ensure cohesion and cooperation, and to gain a better understanding of operational requirements should conflict occur. Partnering activities allow the enhancement of interoperability and readiness, and provide a better understanding of skills and how to operate as a team.³⁷ A brief overview of Greece's participation in military exercises will provide a deeper appreciation of Athens' commitment to the security of the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe.

In 2014, Greek, American, European, and North African naval forces participated in the eighth Phoenix Express exercise to increase maritime safety and security in the Mediterranean Sea. That same year, the Hellenic Navy and Air Force and the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group Two conducted a national exercise to upgrade operational cooperation of naval and air units, the U.S. and Hellenic Air Forces participated in NATO training at the Souda Bay air base to share tactics and procedures, and the Hellenic Navy and the Royal Task Force conducted Cougar 2014 in the Ionian Sea to practice technical exercises.



Israeli and Hellenic Apache helicopters fly together in a joint aerial exercise -- such drills are central to their military cooperation.

(Retrieved from Israeli Air Force)

In early 2015, the U.S. and Hellenic air forces conducted an exercise with over 300 personnel and practiced fighter maneuvers, dissimilar air combat tactics and maneuvers, and composite air operations.³⁸ The Hellenic and French navies conducted multiple trainings including anti-air and anti-surface warfare, and the U.S. and Greek air forces conducted bilateral training missions to bolster warfighting capabilities, combining air operations and maintaining joint readiness. In Exercise Breeze 2015, Greek, American, and other navies augmented interoperability, maintenance, and readiness with Black Sea allies.³⁹ Greece also participated in the Steadfast Noon exercise in Germany, the Blue Flag exercise in Israel, and fighter pilots from Greece, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries completed the NATO Tactical Leadership Program to improve combat and coordination skills.

To boost collective capabilities, NATO conducted Trident Juncture in 2015. The exercise included pilots from Greece, the United States and other countries, and focused on new threats such as defending against cyber-attacks, countering state-owned media propaganda, combating hybrid warfare, including state support of militant groups in another nation, and how to manage an influx of refugees and other humanitarian crises.⁴⁰ NATO demonstrated the capability to respond to threats from any direction with the exercise consisting of 36,000 personnel from more than 30 nations, with over 60 ships, 140 aircraft, and seven submarines.

Most recently, the Hellenic Air Force and the 480th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron conducted bilateral training at Souda Bay in January 2016. About 300 U.S. Air Force personnel assigned to the 52nd Fighter Wing, Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, evaluated aircraft and personnel capabilities with the Hellenic Air Force. Scenarios of focus were combined flying operations to help negate coordination concerns that may arise during a real event. Hellenic Air Force 115th Combat Wing pilots will work with U.S. counterparts to enhance capabilities of different flying roles including air-to-air combat, suppression of enemy air defense, air interdiction, counter-air and close air support.⁴¹

Israel, Greece and Cyprus have been working to advance common interests especially since Tel Aviv's alliance with Turkey broke down in 2010. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu noted that an immediate bond of friendship formed since the three countries are on a short list of democracies in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since 2011, American, Greek, and Israeli navies annually conduct Exercise Noble Dina to increase interoperability in the U.S. Sixth Fleet area of operations.⁴² Hellenic and Israeli navies practice several other mission areas in at-sea drills between air and surface assets,⁴³ and Israeli helicopter pilots recently conducted an eleven-day training exercise near Mount Olympus. The Hellenic Armed Forces aim to work closely with Israel's Defense Forces and to extend military cooperation, including defense industry initiatives.

In January 2016, the governments of Israel and Greece met to sign bilateral agreements to strengthen cooperation in foreign affairs, maritime relations, civil defense, terrorism, and other issues.⁴⁴ A trilateral meeting between Israel, Greece and Cyprus was also held to establish a permanent framework for countries that share similar security and peace values to strengthen stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and advance regional prosperity.⁴⁵ Other ways Israel, Greece, and Cyprus seek to increase cooperation is by creating a pipeline to transport common gas resources from Israel and Cyprus through Greece to Europe and by forming an interconnected underwater cable to produce a common electric grid. The meetings and goals of cooperation reflect the deep friendship of the three countries and their desire to empower bilateral strategic relations.

Recommendations: How to Further Enhance Cooperation

While the U.S. has forward deployed destroyers in Rota, Spain, Washington should consider permanently basing an aircraft carrier, destroyers and amphibious ships at Souda Bay to counter crises, reinforce allies' perception of American might, and provide more stability in the region. Crete is closer to the Middle East and North Africa, where threats are likely to unfold, than Rota. A Congressional Budget Office report states that basing more ships and crews abroad will boost overseas operations with a smaller budget, even after more money is spent on maintenance, personnel and operating additional ships to rotate crews.

America and NATO ought to consider deploying forces to Souda Bay to respond to crises in the area. Forces on the island could also increase alliance cohesiveness by training at the NATO Missile Firing Installation, the NATO Maritime Interdiction Operational Training Center, and other facilities on the island. NAMFI is capable of hosting Marine battalions which is very useful for accommodating personnel in the region. NATO should consider operating E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft out of Component Forward Operating Bases in Aktion, Greece. NATO currently has 12 of its 16 E-3 operating primarily out of NATO Air Base Geilenkirchen, Germany, limiting airborne surveillance, and command, control and communications functions for tactical and air defense forces.

Global Hawk unmanned systems at Souda Bay could boost NATO's real-time intelligence in theater and a combat search and rescue capability on Crete could provide for quick responses across Europe, Africa and the Levant. Other improvements to increase collaboration include ensuring NSA Souda Bay is constantly equipped with modern technology so that personnel and sensitive information are secure. The U.S. should send an official user national request to NAMFI – America withdrew from the facility in 1992. This will create a more stabilized relationship, and U.S. officials could be based onsite after America becomes an official member. Better utilizing Souda Bay should come naturally as it is located very close to key danger areas: 575 miles from the Suez Canal, 650 miles from Israel, 675 miles from Lebanon, 690 miles from the Black Sea, 716 miles from Egypt, 752 miles from Libya, 1,200 miles from Syria, and 1,533 miles from Iraq.

Identify More Synergies for Greece to Boost NATO Power

While NATO must make several improvements in response to growing threats in the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and North Africa, specifically Russian aggression and jihadist extremist groups, the alliance needs to enhance military power relationships with existing members to deter hostility in the region. Greece is one example of a NATO member that supports the alliance by spending over two percent of its gross domestic product on defense, hosting U.S. forces and several NATO facilities, and regularly participating in military exercises. The natural next step is to find more synergies that exploit Greece's contributions.

Greece has defended the West for over 100 years from World War I to the Global War on Terrorism to Operation Inherent Resolve. Facilities at Souda Bay and nearby on the Greek island of Crete project power into the Middle East and allow for a quicker response in the region. The United States, NATO, and Greece should discuss more ways to work together and protect peace and commerce in the Mediterranean Sea. Countries that stick together have more opportunities to defend themselves and shared interests against common threats.

Glossary of Terms

AFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command
FORACS	Fleet Operational Readiness Accuracy Check Site
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NAMFI	NATO Missile Firing Installation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFG	NATO Fleet Operational Readiness Accuracy Check Site Greece
NMIOTC	NATO Maritime Interdiction Operations Training Center
NSA Souda Bay	U.S. Navy Support Activity Souda Bay
UN	United Nations

End Notes

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The Los Angeles-class submarine USS Scranton departs Souda harbor after a routine port visit. It is headed for the Sixth Fleet Area of Responsibility as part of the Bataan Expeditionary Strike Group.

(Retrieved from U.S. Navy)



On the front cover: Guided-missile destroyer USS Stout arrives in Souda Bay. (U.S. Navy photo by Paul Farley/Released)



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