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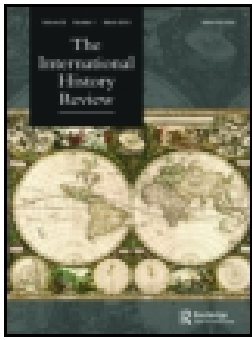
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## Negotiating the American Presence in Greece: Bases, Security and National Sovereignty

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# Negotiating the American Presence in Greece: Bases, Security and National Sovereignty

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## ABSTRACT

American military bases and the political and social reactions they have solicited have had a major impact on the Greek political life. This article offers a synthetic analysis of the base negotiations in the period of democratization and rising anti-Americanism that integrates diplomatic with social history to tell for the first time how both Washington and Athens framed, understood and negotiated the status of the bases on the Greek soil and what was the role of the Turkish factor. Newly available evidence shed light on the motives of both players and unveils a dynamic and complex interchange between international and domestic pressures, the Turkish threat, the role of political parties, congress, and civil society.

## KEYWORDS

Greece; USA; American bases; security; anti-Americanism; base studies

## 1. Introduction

Negotiating the existence of American bases on Greek soil was a major issue of Greek politics and public protest, an obstacle in Greek-United States (US) efforts to a harmonious relationship, and a constant thorn in Greek-Turkish relations with an impact on US security policy in the southern flank of NATO. The complex context in which base policy was developed in the US and Greece opened these bases to continued debate and conflict.

In essence, the base talks between Greece and the US in the 1980s were about how the countries renegotiated and materialised the status of military bases on the ground. It was part and parcel of a process that commenced in 1953 when the first bases agreement was reached. However, base rights were not simply about military operations; they were 'quickly tied up in larger debates about self-determination and sovereignty, economic aid, and the post-war order'.<sup>1</sup> Examining these talks unveils a dynamic interchange between international and domestic pressures, the role of political parties, and civil society. Base arrangements, as Christopher Sandars has proven in his comparative study, was 'critically dependant on America's political and historical relationship with the country concerned'. Therefore, the national historical and cultural peculiarities of each host nation are equally important to understanding these base politics.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Sebastian E. Bitar's work on US military bases in Latin America posits that 'the host country's domestic politics matter more than anything else'.<sup>3</sup> In theory, the bases offered defence and security for the respective ally. Yet, in Greece, as with other countries, these bases were the source of domestic anger and fear, political mobilisation, and deeper concerns about the fate of Greek national sovereignty. Foreign bases have often been seen as 'embattled garrisons' that offer strategic military roles, yet they are increasingly difficult to sustain politically. The

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renegotiation of the bases fostered widespread opposition that developed into large-scale demonstrations about the nature of the relationship with the US and its impact on the country's political, societal, and economic life.<sup>4</sup>

It's not a coincidence that the base negotiations of the early 1980s acted as the prime instigator behind a strong peace movement in Greece, which was part of the transnational phenomenon of mobilisation against Euromissiles.<sup>5</sup> The peace movement mostly however acquired local characteristics and framing. In Greece, peace protesters fortified their message by drawing on the experience of the recent dictatorship, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, US involvement in the form of NATO bases on Greek soil, as well as a craving for dignity that permeated the narrative of the transition to democracy after 1974. But most noticeably, the protest language centred on anti-American and anti-right rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> A cleavage in Greek political culture developed where the right was projected as representing the post-civil war system; one which lacked legitimacy and was associated with American infiltration.<sup>7</sup> Quickly, anti-American sentiment became a unifying factor that superseded the Cold War consensus of the pre-junta years and 'constituted a popular interpretive framework for the construction of meaning'.<sup>8</sup> The base talks and their framing adds to our understanding of why the bases became the epicentre of Greek anger, despair, and protest in the period under examination. Furthermore, the investigation of the talks reveals what (if any) the political consequences of persistent anti-Americanism within the public were.<sup>9</sup> Anti-Americanism, as expressed in protest or public opinion, 'rarely overthrows governments or does not usually alter foreign policy doctrines, but it mitigates the scope of action of leaders', and it is evident in the base talks here.<sup>10</sup>

This does not mean that the base negotiations should be told through the hegemonic lens of a patron-client relationship. In the vein of a new Cold War history, this article questions the conventional narratives of 'powerful versus weak' and sheds lights on the margins of manoeuvre of a small state in the late Cold War.<sup>11</sup> After the deterioration of Greek-Turkish relations in 1974 and the consolidation of a democratic regime, Greece – like other smaller states – began to profile itself as a critic of the Cold War. While the Greek-US relationship remained deeply asymmetrical, the US did not solely dictate base talks as Greek anxieties about the promotion of national sovereignty were equally important.<sup>12</sup> This period is an apt example of the challenges the US faced in its negotiations with host nations in the Mediterranean and its 'leasehold empire'. Arguably, southern European states – with the exception of Italy – were constantly ambivalent about playing host to the Americans.<sup>13</sup> Quarrels over levels of military aid were one of the main reasons for southern prickliness, with countries like Spain and Turkey seeing themselves as doing the US a grand favour by letting the bases operate on their ground. Greece was not an exception. Most importantly, the triangle relationship between Greece, Turkey and the USA introduced an unprecedented dimension in base talks where the omnipresent Turkish threat featured prominently in the Greek security calculations. Even when the Greeks wanted to distance themselves from American dependency, the Turkish factor rendered it extremely difficult to navigate such an independent foreign policy. The bargaining positions of all three parties was deeply influenced by the progression of the respective American-Turkish and American-Greek defence agreements, adding an extra level of complexity on the issue of military aid and the role of the bases in these host nations.<sup>14</sup> At every stage of the base negotiations with both Southern European countries, the Americans strove to maintain the so called 'Aegean Balance' that only made reaching a deal that much harder. With access for the first time to the Papandreou and Reagan archives, this article highlights how Greek and international press, alongside memoirs of the key protagonists, show a much more complicated picture where ideological and political concerns had to be reconciled with geopolitical realities.

## 2. The history of base negotiation in Greece

After the end of the Second World War, fourteen European countries hosted US bases.<sup>15</sup> The onset of war in Korea in June 1950 brought forward another function of US bases: strategic

deterrence. In the midst of this new doctrine, Washington concluded twenty-one strategic air base agreements with allied nations. The Greeks signed their bilateral agreement with the US several months after Greece's admission to NATO, on 12 October 1953. The agreement was seen as a significant Greek diplomatic success, as it secured the country from 'enemies in the North'.<sup>16</sup> The bases were welcomed by most political parties with the exception of the left-wing EDA (United Democratic Left) and some smaller parties. The text governing the operation and status of the facilities was short. It consisted of four articles but also included a secret annex which regulated the details of the agreement and was supplemented by a number of technical agreements that by the 1970s had reached more than 108 diverse texts.<sup>17</sup> This web of secret agreements had created a contractual labyrinth which was almost impossible to control and administer. There was also no date of possible withdrawal or a safeguard clause in case national interests were in peril.<sup>18</sup>

Three out of four agreed bases were constructed in the 1950s. Hellenikon Air Base was ready by May 1966 and became the headquarters for all US air activities in Greece. It employed 2,000 Americans in 1969 and 1,500 in 1981.<sup>19</sup> The Souda Bay was the third base, established in July 1959 and considered one of the most important American naval bases in Europe. The Heraklion Air Station on Crete, which was set up in October 1954, served as a control centre for communications, while Nea Makri's base acted as a naval communications complex that was connected to Naples, the headquarters of both the NATO Allied Forces Southern Europe and the US Sixth Fleet.<sup>20</sup>

The advent of dictatorship in 1967 did not hinder the US's base policy. On the contrary, it strengthened the presence of the bases, especially following the signing of the 1973 agreement on the homeporting facilities of the Sixth Fleet in the bay of Elefsina. Greece was hardly an exception to the pattern of US military collaboration with radical right authoritarian regimes.<sup>21</sup> As base scholar Catherine Lutz explains, 'gaining and maintaining access to US bases has often involved close collaboration' with repressive regimes.<sup>22</sup> The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations reported on this tendency: 'For a number of years, United States policy generally accepted the stability of right wing regimes in some Southern European countries as preferable to the possibility of political chaos.'<sup>23</sup> Such behaviour, however, reinforced the anti-American fever of the post-junta years, where the return to democracy saw the rise of Greek sensitivity about the status and operations of the bases.<sup>24</sup> Most people questioned the wisdom of continued military association with the US. The double Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, which transformed how the Greeks regarded their military balance with Turkey, led directly to the withdrawal from the NATO integrated military command structure and indirectly to Greece's request to revise the bases agreement. This period also commenced a strong anti-base movement that reached its peak in the 1980s.<sup>25</sup> It also led to Greek insistence on a balance in the ratio of military aid granted by the US to Turkey and Greece, and on some form of guarantee of Greek territorial integrity by the US. These two contradictory principles encapsulated the fundamental challenge for the Greek political elite navigating foreign policy matters. Greeks of all persuasions were quite ambivalent about the aims of the Alliance and the usefulness of a close relationship with the US. However, they also wanted to exploit both to confront Turkey, which was considered the most immediate and tangible threat to Greek security. Whilst Greeks were asking for help, they could not risk politically signing up to anything smacking of a US 'protectorate' or privileged positions.

Thus, in 1975, the newly elected government of Konstantinos Karamanlis, leader of the conservative Nea Dimokratia (ND) party, set out to revisit the issue of the bases in Greece. Its main purpose in doing so was to lift the secrecy of the previous decades and provide symmetry to the relationship with the US. With the return to democracy, the government swiftly closed down Elefsina's homeporting facilities and decided to shut down Hellenikon Air Base. This was, however, not implemented until 1991. Symbolically, the Hellenikon Air Base – because of its central location in the capital and its intense visibility – had become a thorny issue for successive Greek

governments. The declared policy was that the bases that solely served the Greek national interest would be allowed to operate and that the privileges enjoyed at the bases would be reduced to a minimum.<sup>26</sup> With the memory of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus fresh in people's minds, the pressing need to reinforce the Hellenic Armed Forces, and the anti-American wave sweeping across Greek society, Karamanlis felt the urgency to negotiate the bases. It was imperative to end the impression that the US had a free rein, and all facilities should be covered by agreements and leases of which both sides were aware.<sup>27</sup> Karamanlis also saw it as an opportune time, counting on the Americans being more sensitive to Greek concerns and fears. At the same time, the US Congress was becoming more assertive in foreign policy. Following the Watergate scandal, the Ford presidency no longer enjoyed the same flexibility in foreign affairs, and this development added an unexpected complexity in the conduct of the bilateral negotiations over the US bases on Greek soil.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the southern European crisis of the 1970s was an example of weak and at times mishandled management of the Ford-Kissinger duo.<sup>29</sup>

The negotiations for a new defence agreement began in February 1975 with the goal to establish a series of principles that would govern the operation of the bases in Greece and replace the 1953 agreements. The parallel negotiation and signing of a US-Turkish defence agreement in 1976 rang alarm bells in defence and security circles in Athens, with officials fearing that this development would disturb the balance of strength in the Aegean. Intense Greek lobbying behind closed doors brought about the exchanges between the Greek foreign minister, Dimitrios Bitsios, and the US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, where the US pledged to 'actively and unequivocally oppose either side's seeking a military solution to the Aegean and to make a major effort to prevent such a course of action'.<sup>30</sup> On top of this declaration, the Americans – through the conclusion of the 'principles agreement' – also committed to provide military aid to Greece and Turkey over a four-year period set at \$700 million and \$1 billion respectively. This all seemed to be part of Kissinger's 'spending spree in pledging money in return for keeping the bases', as it was the case in Spain and Turkey.<sup>31</sup> It also reflected decades-long practices where supply of economic and military aid to host nations was considered – albeit unspoken – as rent for the American use of bases.

The aid figures agreed in 1976 signalled the introduction of the seven-to-ten ratio in the consideration of any aid to the two Mediterranean countries.<sup>32</sup> In other words, a prospect of an 'Aegean balance' meant that Greece would expect to receive seventy per cent of whatever amount was approved for Turkey. This line of thinking was partly a result of the 1978 reform of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 in light of the lifting of the Turkish embargo that had been imposed in 1975. Congress specified that US aid to Greece and Turkey 'should be designed to ensure that the present balance of military strength among countries of the region ... is preserved'.<sup>33</sup> But the experience of those post-junta years also brought home the realisation that any agreement with Turkey or Greece should happen in parallel since the Greek-Turkish dispute complicated matters every step of the way. Indeed, the Greek-US agreement in principle was reached in July 1977 but was not put into effect owing to the delays in implementing a parallel agreement on US bases in Turkey. It was only in 1980, after the negotiations for the reintegration of Greece in the military structure of NATO were successfully concluded and the US and Turkey had signed a new agreement on defence and economic cooperation in March 1980, that the way was clear, and negotiations were set into motion. Despite the difficulties and dispute, agreement was almost reached in the last hectic days. But time ran out as the imminent general elections in Greece had set a time limit for an agreement. On 18 June 1981, the negotiations which had been under way for nearly five months were suspended but without rancour, and the Americas retained the use of the bases under the terms of the original 1953 agreement until after the elections.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Papandreou and the bases

When Andreas Papandreou took over in late 1981, there had already been two unsuccessful rounds of base-related talks since the country's return to democracy. Instead of amplifying the

terms of the 1977 and 1981 agreements, 'the US delegation made it clear that Washington did not consider itself bound by terms the Greeks had never fully accepted'.<sup>35</sup> However, all these successive renewal agreements – although they failed to be ratified – had created expectations, set precedents, and drew 'red lines', all of which featured prominently in the Papandreou talks. Both sides had a good idea of where the other stood and what the problems were. Indeed, the internal record of the Papandreou government reveals how extensively the diplomatic team in charge of the talks had consulted the documents and the paperwork of the previous rounds. On 12 July 1982, the Greek prime minister created a task force under the leadership of the deputy foreign minister, Giannis Kapsis, to produce a report on the current state of the base negotiations.<sup>36</sup> The negotiators were keenly aware that, to get a deal, both sides were going to need to pull a feat even more impressive than the one they originally thought would be needed. The root causes of the complexities were the ongoing Greek-Turkish disputes and the need to maintain the military balance (especially in the Aegean), a vibrant anti-Americanism within Greek society, and rising Greek sensitivity about national sovereignty that had produced new demands and expectations for foreign policy.

What is more, the sense of urgency that dominated the first round of talks in 1976 had been significantly reduced in the aftermath of Greece's reintegration into NATO's military command structure. While the talks were at an impasse, Americans continued enjoying uninterrupted privileges of the 1953 agreement. Simply put, for Washington there was no need to rush or press ahead. The Americans were also acutely aware of the fragility of Papandreou's condemnation of the existence of the bases. As Stearns confessed to his UK counterpart, 'a policy of neutrality for an eastern Mediterranean country with a coastline like Greece's makes no kind of sense; and he [Papandreou] knows that only the Turks would be gainers. The Greek economy also needs US help ... There's nowhere else for him to go'. Ousting the bases would deprive Greece from the means to face the Turkish military threat. From the onset of the talks, therefore, the discussion spun around the safeguards the Americans was willing to provide Greece to enhance its national security.<sup>37</sup>

When Papandreou took office, he was acutely aware of this unfortunate reality and the risks involved. His public comments on the issue of US bases suggested a distinction between ideological positioning and pragmatic thinking. In an interview to ABC News, the prime minister said that he was ideologically 'against the bases' but also recognised 'that it would be foolish to move toward a confrontation between Greece and the United States', so 'I think the first thing to clarify is that we do not intend to act unilaterally'. Despite his party platform of NATO withdrawal and the removal of US bases, he repeated on different occasions that 'we have no desire to take our country into any adventure'.<sup>38</sup> He did not share NATO's worry about Soviet strength, but he could also not escape the fact that eighty per cent of Greece's armed forces were equipped by the Americans, nor that the bases could be a useful bargaining chip in his country's perennial quarrel with Turkey.<sup>39</sup>

Several days later, Papandreou presented his seventy-one-page government programme in parliament, emphasising the close links between national defence and foreign policy. In his decision to resume negotiations with the Americans on the operation of the bases, he explained that his 'government will advance in stages, step by step, always taking all the facts into account and guided by the need to safeguard the necessary military preparedness and power in parallel with national defence planning and the proper deployment of forces'.<sup>40</sup> He may have wanted to denounce the US for its unfavourable attitude towards Greece, but the American military and economic support was essential in Greece's defence posturing against Turkey. During an official visit to Algeria, he confirmed this line of thinking, noting: 'Greece was still against large blocs, but consideration has to be given to strategic realities and balance of power problems in conjunction with our special national problems'.<sup>41</sup> This sense of insecurity from the perceived and at times real Turkish aggression had bedevilled the Greek relationship with NATO and the US, especially after 1974. In a private meeting with the US ambassador, Papandreou admitted that



'successive Greek governments had expressed this insecurity in different ways, however they have expressed it'.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, there was a difference of tone and style in foreign policymaking in the Papandreu years, but the Turkish factor remained the constant and undeniable variable in the Greek-US equation. At the same time, however, in a bid to put pressure on the Americans, Papandreu had concluded that threatening with withdrawal of the bases if national interests were not met might create some much-needed momentum. British commentary on his first days of premiership noted that he lost no time 'using every trick in his repertoire to squeeze the best possible deal out of the Americans'.<sup>43</sup> Naturally, such a politically charged strategy entailed other pitfalls that would appear during the negotiations. The press coverage consistently portrayed Greece as a David in a world of Goliaths.<sup>44</sup> Sensationalism did not allow much room for manoeuvre and trade-offs, all essential parts of any negotiations. Base negotiations were undeniably complex, with boring and incomprehensible details, and journalists focused on the idea of a ticking clock that was a powerful weapon for advocates of withdrawal.

#### 4. The talks begin

On 15 May 1982, the US secretary of state, Alexander Haig, visited Athens for two days to set the parameters for the ensuing discussions on the existence of US bases on Greek soil. On 27 October 1982, introductory talks commenced to discuss the future positioning of the bases. The initial Greek plan had nineteen points that mostly revolved around three main conditions. First, in no way should any agreement be lesser than the one agreed between Bitsios and Kissinger in 1976. Second, any agreement should ensure a balance of US aid towards Turkey and Greece both quantitatively and qualitatively. Finally, there should be control and supervision of US activities by Greece and the possibility of an annual review and abrogation of the relative agreements in order to safeguard national interests, as well as the potential for 'a suspension of base activities if Greece's national security interests were at stake or in the event that base activities could harm the nation's interest with friendly countries in our region'.<sup>45</sup> The latter condition was a reference to the socialist government's close ties to the Arab world and its insistence that the US refrain from using the bases to promote its own Middle Eastern policy. Rallis, the conservative former prime minister, responded that Papandreu's conditions were the same as those of his former government and added 'we believed and still do that keeping the bases here benefit our nation as well'.<sup>46</sup>

The Reagan administration chose Reginald Bartholomew as its chief negotiator. He was a foreign service officer who had served as a special assistant for Cyprus affairs to the former secretary of state, Haig. He was director of political and military affairs at the State Department under Carter. Bartholomew was a veteran diplomat, and the press reported doubts as to whether the Greek negotiator, Giannis Kapsis, would be able to match up to him.<sup>47</sup> Kapsis, a former journalist and editor of one of the most successful mainstream centre-left newspapers, *Ta Nea*, had limited negotiating and diplomatic experience. He was as inexperienced as most of the current members of the government.<sup>48</sup> Recognised as a hardliner on issues of Greek-US relations, however, he was deemed the right person to lead the talks, as he could not be accused of a predisposition to make concessions. He was also extremely close to the prime minister and willing to meet Papandreu's instructions and wishes. This was a vital parameter considering that the records leave no doubt that the important question of the bases and the proxy issues of relations with the US and Turkey were the exclusive prerogative of the prime minister.<sup>49</sup>

In the opening stages of the first round (1-11 November 1982), both sides met around eight times. During these meetings, the Greeks presented an aide-memoire discussing the main parameters of the ensuing negotiations. For them, it was vital that the Americans confirmed that their military activities on the bases did not, intentionally or unintentionally, benefit Turkey or



operate against Greece or its friends in the region. One of the main differences in Greek-US negotiations that characterised the talks was that the Americans felt that US facilities in Greece served the host country's security interests as well as those of the US. This message was one that Greece found hard to accept. The Papandreou government had been especially reluctant to admit that Greece derives important benefits from US facilities.<sup>50</sup>

From the first day, Greeks set out objectives that pertained to the question of command and control. The 1977 agreement – which was initialled but not brought into force – had an elaborate scheme for Greek participation in intelligence monitoring, including physical arrangements for Greeks to observe Americans through windows. The American delegation had confidentially described this scheme to the British 'as absurd and cosmetic but satisfying Greece's psychological needs'.<sup>51</sup> In the current discussion of the status of forces, Kapsis dwelled on what he called 'excessive' privileges and immunities that had been accorded to US forces and their dependents over the years, either as a consequence of one-sided agreements or, less often, abuses of agreement. Among the Greek concerns were tax exceptions for contactors, and the uncontrolled duty-free entry of both official and private goods. Bartholomew stressed that immunities and privileges were necessary in the interests of operations' effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the welfare of US forces and their dependents. Moving onto command and control, Kapsis said that Greek sovereignty and the need to safeguard Greek security interests dictated the requirement of a system to verify compliance to the terms of the prospective agreement through monitoring and inspection. A designated Greek officer at each US facility would have to have the right to verify that operations are conducted in accordance with agreed policy, and should therefore be given access to all areas. Bartholomew outlined the problems that insistence on verification and extensive access could introduce in the negotiations. In any event, both were deemed unnecessary 'since the GOG [Government of Greece] will in the final analysis both authorise and be aware of US activities by the very terms of the agreement to be negotiated and to supplement that, by means of various requirements to be established for notification'. He went on to say that 'the idea that a watchdog is required for monitoring compliance with the agreement is wholly inconsistent with the defence relationship'.<sup>52</sup> These initial talks already unearthed a big divide between the two sides. Another continuing difference was the duration of the agreement, with the Greeks insisting on limited duration with provision for revision after a period of time.<sup>53</sup> This was key for Athens to be able to publicly claim that there was a timetable for base closures.

The continuation of the operation of the American bases galvanised the Greek people, who were already mobilising on what they saw as an American threat to the country's national sovereignty. In a rally at Ioannina and amid chants of 'Out with the Bases of Death', Papandreou addressed the issue of the ongoing negotiations and added: 'We know Greece is small; and that we are negotiating with a giant. We do not seek a confrontation. But we demand respect for our sovereign rights'.<sup>54</sup> The rise of this kind of left-wing nationalism was evident in the anti-base protests that rattled Greece in 1982 and 1983. The protesters framed the continuation of the existence of the bases as a continuous threat to the security of the country.<sup>55</sup> In a rather contradictory manner, the protesters were rejecting the Cold War straitjacket as it was imposed by the Americans whilst at the same time demanding their financial and military aid against the primary threat posed by Turkey to the country's national interests.<sup>56</sup>

During the second round in early December 1982, the issue of economic assistance also came to play. There were three interconnected issues: the nuts and bolts of American access to bases and facilities; the price tag for such access; and the security guarantee against Turkey. Attempting to address all three, Giannis Papanicolaou, the finance counsellor to the prime minister, recognised the inseparability of defence and economic matters, noting that a sound defence rested on a sound economy.<sup>57</sup> Greece was eager to balance the military aid between itself and Turkey both quantitatively and qualitatively. Final sums of money alone were not telling the whole story. Indeed, with approval from Congress, the US government was providing different

kinds of economic aid such as direct credits where the interest rate was about 4%, and the president withheld the right to forgive part or the whole sum of credits. These were applied to Greece solely during the period of 1972-74 (namely, during the junta period), whereas the programme continued for Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Sudan. To make matters worse, Greece was also excluded from two extremely vital schemes. First, the Economic Support Fund designated to promote economic stability to volatile strategic areas where Turkey was a beneficiary, and the Military Assistance Program (MAP) grant funding 'assisting allies in finance procurement of defence articles and services to help strengthen their self-defence capabilities'.<sup>58</sup> Papanicolaou's main points revolved around easing the term of repayments, pointing to Greece's outstanding debt, partly accumulated from previous procurements. In a similar vein, he asked for the restoration of grant aid that had come to an end in 1979 as Greece no longer qualified because of the country's level of per capita income, whereas Turkey did. Since the termination of grant aid, foreign military sales and credits alone could be translated as 'Greece's aid to the American military-industrial complex', the Greek official noted.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Greece was a main recipient of the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credit programmes from the Federal Financing Bank for the acquisition of defence material and the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET) that provided a valuable channel for communication and training of military forces.<sup>60</sup> The Americans pointed out that the repayment terms for FMS to Greece (a ten-year grace period and a twenty-year repayment period) were equal to the best offered to any country.<sup>61</sup> During this round of talks, Bartholomew resisted Greek efforts to put financial demands ahead of substance.<sup>62</sup>

In the beginning of 1983, while Bartholomew went back to confer with the State and Defense Departments on the parameters of economic aid, Reagan threw a spanner in the works.<sup>63</sup> He tabled a budget for the 1984 fiscal year which meant that military financing programmes of grants and credits to Turkey would be almost doubled, from \$400 million to \$775 million. The military aid to Greece, on the other hand, would remain at \$280 million because of the continuing negotiations on the bases. If approved by Congress, this would upset the seven-to-ten ratio in military aid to Greece and Turkey observed by the US since 1978. Greeks predictably labelled the proposal as blackmail. Papandreou wrote a letter to Reagan on 4 February where he expressed 'grave concern' at the administration's proposals, in particular because they appeared to 'depart from the long-standing practice under the 1978 amendment concerning preserving the balance of the military strength in the Aegean region'. He stated that 'the already fragile balance will be upset with unpredictable consequences'.<sup>64</sup>

Along the same lines, while at dinner with Stearns, the US ambassador, Karamanlis – a pro-Western, respected figure in the US – insisted that 'the increased aid you have just announced for Turkey makes us think you are no longer interested in balance'. He went on to describe how the Greek-Turkish dispute had impacted his country's relationship with the US: 'whenever our relationships became troubled, the cause was the Turkish factor.' He continued by stating: 'Greece was not coming to you hand in hand begging for increased assistance because it could not pay its own bills.' The initiative to double assistance to Turkey could not be ignored; it risked upsetting the Aegean balance and therefore threatened vital Greek interests. Also aware of the nuisance that this dispute had provoked in American circles, Karamanlis eloquently explained the gist of the problem for the Greek people: 'You may not believe that we face the danger of Turkish attack. You may not even believe that we face the danger of expanding Turkish influence at our expense in the Aegean. All Greeks do believe these things, however, and because we believe them, you must take them into account.'<sup>65</sup> Clearly, both Papandreou and Karamanlis, with their public and private interventions, were trying to defend the Greek demands as much as possible whilst warding off domestic calls for precipitous actions (such as breaking off the talks or closing the US facilities abruptly, which would have been damaging to the country's quest for national security). Despite deep ideological divergences and chasm in their governing styles, the Greek prime minister and the president were in sync when it came to defending

Greek interests in the face of a Turkish threat. Papandreou himself admitted that the assumption of the presidency by Karamanlis was a form of insurance in the foreign policy arena.<sup>66</sup>

As in the past, the provision of American military assistance to both countries formed a bitter issue of discord. 'The annual military aid proposals by the executive branch and the hearings that accompany the congressional authorization and appropriation process have become almost as familiar to the Greek and Turkish government as they are to the Defence and State Department', Stearns commented.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the Aegean balance was the 'gut issue' for all Greeks.<sup>68</sup> The potential negative impact of this development on the Defence and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA)<sup>69</sup> negotiations and the relations between the two countries was recognised in a series of highly publicised meetings that Papandreou held with leaders of the opposition in the first week of February. In all of these meetings, leaders across the political spectrum pointed to the Turkish threat and how the base talks over military and economic aid could permit Greece to better prepare for deterrence and balance.<sup>70</sup> In no circumstances should the government allow the receipt of only \$280 million for 1984 and destroy the seven-to-ten ratio that had been so painstakingly practiced each year since the mid-1970s. The parties of the left, however, also demanded a declaration of intent to close down the bases. The briefing of party leaders coincided with the resumption of negotiations. Papandreou's purpose was clearly to provide a sense of national unity behind this important issue.

Leaks of the aid figures for Turkey to the press sparked the biggest peace demonstration in the centre of Athens in March 1983, one that condemned the presence of the bases, rejecting their usefulness for the country's security and claiming they solely served American imperialist interests. All three organised Greek peace movements, in cooperation with the Association of Workers in Greece (GSEE) and the Lawyers Association, organised a Panhellenic rise to express their anger against the brutal blackmail and pressure from the Americans. With banners reading 'No to Blackmails, National Independence' and 'Out with the Bases of Death', the activists called for people independent of party affiliation to join in their fight against the major national issue of the foreign bases and resist the American open provocation towards the proud and democratic Greek nation. Claims of provocation and blackmail referred to Congress's decision to increase military aid to Turkey disproportionately to that offered to Greece. All the banners, flags and posters were in white and blue to reflect the unified voice of the activists and the tens of thousands of people that had packed Athens' central Constitution Square in front of the parliament building. Joining the activists were 200,000 people from diverse bodies and associations, municipalities, popular artists and the Committee of Intellectuals and Artists for Peace. All the main streets around the Constitution Square were full of people who were protesting for peace, against the bases and the American policy that rattled the seven-to-ten balance in the sensitive region of the Mediterranean. One of the most prominent anti-base activists, Alkis Argyriadis, called the American bases a huge mistake of the past: 'In 1953 with the US-Greek agreement we gave the Americans the right to come in, move around our country, do whatever they want without asking anyone. We reached a point where in every ministry there would be an American consultant. The bases form a kind of dictatorship, a heavy web that is spreading throughout the country that is keeping Greece hostage.'<sup>71</sup>

Washington was not surprised by the Greek reaction, nor had it taken to the topic lightly. Internal discussions within the administration reveal a complicated story. The proposal for the aid package towards Turkey had resulted from a unique sequence of decisions in developing an overall security assistance programme towards the Eastern Mediterranean. There was an administration consensus on the US's strategic interest to enhance Turkey back in 1981 while the Americans were negotiating with the Greeks. The US Department of Defense had reported that the modernisation of Turkish forces required security assistance levels significantly above the previous years as Turkey needed to procure about thirty modern aircraft, its highest defence priority, and that alone would represent an almost fifty per cent increase over the FY-83 budget. This consensus resulted in a FY-84 state request that was expected to provoke both Greek fury

and that of Congress, which had consistently rooted for the maintenance of a seven-to-ten ratio. The American embassy in Athens had warned that 'the Greek lobby in the USA will explode, the Greek government may well break off the negotiations, and the Congress will end up cutting the Turkish aid levels'.<sup>72</sup> The administration was also concerned that Congress may unilaterally increase Greek funding in the middle of a delicate negotiation and hence deprive the Americans of a strong hand. Against these horrible odds, there was hope that the aid request for Turkey would expedite a positive outcome on the Greek base talks which would be accompanied by supplemented money to maintain the Aegean balance. In order for that strategy to work, the Reagan administration had made numerous overtures to congressional philhellenes members and the Greek government, informing them about the next steps. It was a fine line to substantially increase the aid to Turkey whilst not disturbing the base negotiations with the Greeks.

Indeed, in late December 1982, Bartholomew had handed Kapsis a 'personal non-paper', based on his discussions in Washington, on what would be a workable basis for the US and also satisfy some Greek political and security concerns. He provided the text to Kapsis for purposes of convenience and clarity only, reminding the Greek side that anything agreed in Athens would have to be reviewed and defended in Washington. He also hinted for the first time that there was a strong possibility that the Turkish aid figures for 1984 would be higher than usual. Kapsis was convinced that the announcement of such figures during the negotiations would provoke a strong reaction within Greek circles and public opinion.<sup>73</sup> 'I worry', he said, 'whether we will be able to proceed to a successful agreement under such criticism.' Equally problematic was the idea that the pressure of the increased Turkish aid would be interpreted in certain Greek political groups as a carrot-and-stick proposal: if Greeks behave and sign a base agreement, they will get the carrot (more money). Kapsis concluded the talks by reiterating 'how the publications of the figures will make both of our lives much more difficult'.<sup>74</sup>

It was not surprising, therefore, that the third round of talks that commenced on 18 January and lasted up until 2 February 1983 was the least productive, with most talks taking place off the record and the (mostly) Greek use of avoidance tactics on all other fronts until the final figures of economic aid for 1984 were settled.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, after an unofficial suspension following the official announcement of the Turkish figures, discussions resumed on 10 March when Bartholomew came back with more specific aid numbers for Greece in the aftermath of the Turkish offer. The Americans had realised the limits of their aggressive approach and were seriously concerned about the possibility of anti-American fever twisting Papandreou's arm in withdrawing from the talks. Bartholomew vouched that his administration would propose to Congress supplementary military aid of \$220 million to Greece so the overall support for 1984 would reach \$500 million.<sup>76</sup> He insisted that the increased offer reflected American commitment to preserving a balance of strength in the region, but that it should in no way lead to an automatic formula in determining relative levels of security assistance annually. Such an approach, Bartholomew contested, 'ignores the changing needs of recipient countries. Nor does it take into consideration either the requirements of the NATO alliance or a changing strategic situation'. Greeks were still not satisfied as, for them, the seven-to-ten ratio was not truly maintained in qualitative terms. In 1984, Turkey was expected to receive military support of \$755 million, out of which \$230 million would be for free through MAP, and \$525 million in FMS, with an additional \$175 million in EFS and supplemented loans of \$75 million.<sup>77</sup> Americans got impatient, warning that relations with Turkey were on the upswing while completely volatile with Greece. Adding insult to injury, they went on to state that the Greek bases were important but there was always an alternative. Threats aside, Greeks had scored an important victory in preserving a longstanding national goal of the seven-to-ten ratio of military aid, which would allow for better defence against the Turkish threat and aiding the balance of payment deficit.

The first months of negotiation were conducted in adversarial spirit, with almost zero social contact between the negotiators besides several formal dinners. There was hardly a sense of trust built nor chemistry between the two negotiators. Each stage of the talks brought home the

realisation that the Greek side was obsessed with the political nature of the agreement, with less interest in the military aspects. David Jones, Bartholomew's assistant, commented that 'there had been little difficulty over such issues as training and military cooperation which had been the subject of endless struggle in previous rounds of the negotiations'.<sup>78</sup> The Greek Right would no doubt be critical on the grounds that the terms were much less favourable than those on offer in 1981. But PASOK clearly did not want to be associated with American military activities in any way. Indeed, after the Aegean balance had been settled, the issue of the timetable for the removal of the bases became the epicentre. From the beginning, Greeks had insisted that these negotiations could be successfully concluded with a termination date in sight and not automatic renewal, as it had been the practice in the past.<sup>79</sup> Kapsis, on numerous occasions, reminded his counterpart of Greece's sense of American culpability in recent national disasters. According to public opinion polls, Greeks consistently held the most pronounced negative views of the US during this period. In 1982, 80.6% of Greek participants expressed unfavourable feelings towards the US, whereas the EU average was 45.21%. At its peak, this difference reached approximately 40% in the early 1980s.<sup>80</sup> The main preoccupation in the Greek political anti-American sentiment was the perceived threat posed by the foreign bases stationed in the country.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, PASOK's obsession with their termination reflected the overwhelming public mood.

The issue of termination was more a war of words than actions. In May 1983, an influential group of Greek politicians near Papandreou met privately to convey to him that the base renewal could not be presented either to the public or the parliament if there was not a formula entailing termination. The problem with this was that the Greeks desired automatic termination, whereas the Americans could only accept a formula entailing action by one or another side to end the agreement. Any mention of 'automatic' would set an impossible precedent for other similar agreements.<sup>82</sup> Even when agreement was reached, the two sides found it impossible to reconcile the Greek and English texts over the formula for termination of the agreement. The negotiations between Kapsis and Bartholomew took place on the basis of English texts, and it was one of these which was initialled on 14 July 1983. The Greeks subsequently produced a Greek text which was sent to Washington, which gave rise to a number of problems for the American side. Whilst most of these were resolved, one serious problem remained: the English text contained the point that the agreement was 'terminable' after five years upon written notice by either party, which was to be given five months prior to the date of termination. The Greek text, however, used the phrase 'must be terminated', thus reflecting the difference of interpretation between the two sides which surfaced with Papandreou's own statement about the agreement on 15 July 1983. He declared the agreement had a 'termination date, a timetable for the removal of bases and not for their continuation'.<sup>83</sup>

In the end, the agreement comprised of three documents. First, there was the basic agreement between the US and Greece on DECA, comprised of twelve articles. Second, there was an annex on procedural matters which listed in some details the US facilities, their missions, and their activities, which were authorised by the agreement. It also contained some substantive text on the status of forces and jurisdiction. Third, there was an exchange of letters on defence support which referred to how the administration would request up to £500 million for FY 1983-4, and that providing assistance the US will be guided by an effort to maintain the balance of military strength in the region. These three texts were of equal status and there was no provision for subsequent agreement that may negate the current one.<sup>84</sup>

The conclusion of the base agreement after long and difficult negotiations was a landmark moment for the government to reconcile its ideological parameters with geopolitical realities. In a private meeting between Papandreou and his ministers of foreign affairs, defence, and finance, the evaluation of the process had been positive. They noted that, as promised electorally, they had negotiated for the first time as an equal partner, putting aside imperialistic practices of the past and delivering an agreement that had engrained a termination date whilst not jeopardising national defence interests. They had secured transparency in the process, presenting the

agreement to the press and allowing public debate to take place. They believed that this kind of formula would satisfy the electorate, and felt secure with the American military assistance against the Turkish threat, as well as proud for the fight for ultimate termination of the bases. 'The Greek national interest was prioritised', Papandreou told his colleagues.<sup>85</sup> There was satisfaction for the preservation of the balance of forces in the Aegean, the safeguard clause that gave Greece the right to suspend US activities when national interest was in jeopardy, and the fact that there was finally no mention of NATO. Most of these provisions were rhetorical ploys to convince the public of the usefulness of the agreement and the successful negotiating tactics employed by PASOK. The only weakness spotted within the party's approach was the failure to gain more over the issue of command and control. In contrast to the Turkish agreement, the Greek had barely any jurisdiction to check US activities as they were forced to issue a twenty-four-hour warning before such an inspection took place. No matter the evaluation of the agreement, the reality was that after some years of attempting to revise what was considered an unfair base agreement, it was only when a left-wing anti-American government came to power that it had the electoral power and ideological standing to lend legitimacy to such an agreement.

## 5. Never say goodbye?

The Greek-US DECA was signed in Athens on 8 September 1983 by the Greek deputy minister of foreign affairs, Giannis Kapsis, and the US chargé d'affaires, Alan Berlind. The base agreement was, for the first time, presented and debated in both parliament and the public domain. This was a turning point for the country's previous treatment of such agreements, marking a new phase in the Greek-US relationship since a serious item of disaccord was removed from the public agenda. For some, the successful completion of the talks guaranteed the maintenance of the Greek defence posture, while others chose to see it as the beginning of the end, believing in the termination date that PASOK bragged about in its presentation of the Greek text of the agreement.<sup>86</sup> Papandreou coined a slogan: 'The struggle has been vindicated.'<sup>87</sup> The renewed agreement was presented as an agreement for withdrawal, and some peace protesters embraced the logic. Athens was plastered with slogans declaring 'at last an end of the dependence ... the struggle is being vindicated', while *Exsormisi*, the party's weekly magazine, trumpeted that the bases would close in 1988.<sup>88</sup> There was a little bit for everyone, and this was reflected in the parliamentary debate that followed the signature of the agreement. Even on the day of the signature, both Kapsis and Berlind were beaming with pride and joy, 'the one for signing an agreement that saw a withdrawal of the bases in December 1988 and the other that saw the maintenance of the bases until then', as one journalist mentioned.<sup>89</sup>

Kapsis, who negotiated the defence agreement, noted: 'Previous agreements resembled a pre-nuptial agreement for a happy marriage with the Americans [...] In contrast, our agreement bears the characteristics of a negotiated settlement following the filing of divorce proceedings.'<sup>90</sup> Along the same lines, Ioannis Charalampopoulos, the Greek minister of foreign affairs, underlined the completely different nature of the agreement. He declared that, in contrast to past practices of striking deals behind closed doors and secret protocols, the new defence agreements were openly negotiated and presented to the Greek people. 'This was a victory for democracy.'<sup>91</sup> ND lamented PASOK for negating its electoral promises but was satisfied that the agreement had gone forward, providing the necessary safeguards for the country's security. The president of ND, Evangelos Averoff, talked about the apparent contradiction in PASOK's US policy on the bases, stating that 'it must be a first in world history, where you have a government that signs an agreement that benefits the country's national security but at the same time organises voluminous protests against the same agreement.'<sup>92</sup> When pushed by the parties of the left-wing opposition on why withdrawal was not imminent, Papandreou responded by saying such a move



would be naïve. 'If we want to be truly independent, we need to build slowly but decisively our political, economic and military infrastructure. For now, given the geopolitical realities, we need the military support of the US to defend our national interests and time to diversify our resources.'<sup>93</sup>

Over the next few years, the relationship remained rocky, with Papandreou launching at times troubling speeches criticising US policy and pointing to the restrictive nature of the Cold War exigencies. What was new was a reframing of the relationship based on a framework of active equality. Addressing the 24<sup>th</sup> PASOK central committee meeting on the future of the bases in 1987, Papandreou said:

If you asked the Americans or if you listened to them from the beginning of the negotiations, they would be saying: 'we want the agreement as it stands: come, let us extend it.' To this we would reply: 'we are starting off as if you had nothing in Greece. Regarding whatever your intent to ask for, you must prove to us why this is in the interest of Greece; how will it contribute to the country's national security? If you prove it, then we will appeal to the people.'<sup>94</sup>

Both public opinion and the American counterpart knew that no matter how long and painful the experience of dealing with Papandreou, the Turkish dimension gave him no option.<sup>95</sup> He expressed an interest in keeping the bases only because of the economic and military benefit they provided for his country's security. A poll in 1987 showed that whilst virtually all PASOK supporters would accept the removal of the bases, 59% would agree to their retention if the government decided that this was in the national interests.<sup>96</sup> On 20 December 1987, the five-year agreement expired and the clock started ticking for the seventeen-month period in which the bases must be dismantled if no new agreement could be constructed.<sup>97</sup> PASOK did not deal with the issue, and as it lost the elections in June 1989, it became the next government's problem.

In essence, the crux of Greek demands regarding the American bases was similar across the political spectrum and in all three rounds. All parties seemed to lack an understanding of the institutional dynamics between Congress and the presidency in the US, which at times led to a flawed negotiating strategy. Moreover, the devil was – most of the time – in the technical details. Papandreou's government spent less time focusing on this than they should have. All governments, despite differences in their tone or approach, sought to establish a set of principles that would govern the relationship with the US for the protection of Greek national interests and in respect to the country's multidimensional foreign policy that had emerged in the post-dictatorship period.<sup>98</sup> And this was well understood within the American administration which during this period was struggling to maintain its leasehold empire, reframing its purposes, goals and *raison d'etre*. Greece was not alone amongst host nations, in demanding more and more equality and even at times manipulating the United States for domestic and national security purposes.

All leaders of democratised Greece were bitter about the US's favourable stance towards Turkey. The origins of this malaise were psychological: the Greeks needed to be convinced that they were not in danger, which was why they persisted in seeking a security guarantee and a balance in the aid provided to Greece and Turkey. The Turkish threat to Greek security interests dictated the country's foreign policy priorities and dominated the domestic public imagination. As such it bedevilled all the base negotiations and particularly the Greek Left, which was frustrated at the extent to which it depended on the US but also recognised that there was little it could do except act in such a way as to secure a better bargain from their American benefactors. Papandreou would argue that his tough public stance *vis-à-vis* the Americans achieved exactly this.<sup>99</sup> The strong wave of anti-Americanism that was registered within Greek public opinion during this period was instrumental in emboldening him and his party in their aggressive stance and electorally speaking, the Greek Left had the moral capital to negotiate and more leeway with the public than the conservative government. However, the limitations imposed by the



Turkish threat were always present, rendering the base talks another episode in the complex love- hate relationship between Greece and the United States.

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