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How the Twelve-Days War with Iran Tested the Strategic Alliance between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus

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Over the past fifteen years, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel have strengthened their ties through formal agreements, joint military exercises, and extensive multi-sector cooperation, making mutual support a given. Alliances, however, are inherently dynamic and constantly subject to testing. The twelve-day war between Israel and Iran served as an endurance test for this evolving trilateral partnership. The strategic triangle demonstrated a degree of resilience under pressure, but it still needs to navigate through challenges at a time when regional events carry global consequences.

A new security architecture is taking shape at the edge of the West. Greece, Cyprus, and Israel form what can be called the Mediterranean arc—a strategic partnership that constitutes a critical node within a larger geopolitical formation: the Indo-Mediterranean rim. This region has become a pivotal theatre in the intensifying geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China across and around Eurasia.

This article evaluates the Mediterranean arc's wartime performance drawing on available evidence, expert insights, and open-source reporting, while acknowledging the limitations imposed by the scarcity of official disclosures and the whims of ongoing diplomacy.¹ As Eurasia reshapes under great power competition, the resilience shown by Greece, Cyprus, and Israel during the twelve-day war signals the growing strategic relevance of the Mediterranean arc within the

emerging Indo-Mediterranean security order. However, its maturation and endurance will depend on increased policy coordination and shared strategic planning.

“Stepping up with actions”

In various critical ways, Greece and Cyprus extended a vital hand of support to Israel during its recent conflict with Iran. As an op-ed in *The Jerusalem Post* aptly noted, “in moments of crisis, Israel’s strongest allies in the Eastern Mediterranean have stepped up—not only with words, but with action.”²

In the lead-up to Operation Rising Lion, Greece and Cyprus served as pivotal civilian air hubs. Hours before Israel’s assault on Iran, its entire civil airline fleet was quietly relocated from Israeli to Greek and Cypriot airports. Designed by the Israeli defense ministry, this maneuver sought to protect the Ben-Gurion Airport from potential Iranian retaliation and to guarantee emergency evacuation routes in case of airspace closure.³ Though reportedly unaware of the full rationale behind the sudden influx, Athens and Nicosia permitted the landings and supported the operation—despite increasing their own exposure to the threat of retaliation, as indicated by the arrest of Iranian-linked operatives in both countries.⁴ Symbolically, the Israeli government’s official aircraft “The Wing of Zion” also landed in Athens, carrying Ambassador Noam Katz back from Tel Aviv.⁵

The perception that Greece and Cyprus could serve as civilian support bases in the event of an emergency has been around for several years. Recent developments appear to validate this perception — a form of confirmation crucial to the cultivation of trust. Although it is not unprecedented for neighboring countries to act as fallback points during regional conflicts, the operation carried clear political connotations, underlining their trusted status within Israel’s inner planning circle.

Beyond contingency plans, available indications suggest that Greek and Cypriot military infrastructure played a significant enabling role throughout the war. Available evidence remains fragmented and should be interpreted with caution. Aviation logs, heightened military activity, and operational logic suggest that Greek and Cypriot territory was utilized to facilitate long-range

power projection, although there has still been no official acknowledgement of this kind of support.⁶

To carry extended-range missions into Iran, Israel required aerial refueling—a requirement underscored after repeated exercises of Israeli F-15s and F-16s on Greek soil over the past fifteen years.⁷ In the early stages of Operation Rising Lion, reports indicated that multiple U.S. KC-135 and KC-46 aerial refueling tankers were redeployed from the U.S. to various European bases—including Souda Bay naval and air base—and conducted mission flights over Iraq.⁸ On June 16, even as the Greek Defense Minister was flying to Larnaca to meet his Cypriot counterpart, Greek Patriot missile systems were reportedly redeployed to Souda to augment anti-ballistic protection. The Greek Ministry of Defense declined to comment, stating that “such matters lie outside the scope of public discussion.”⁹ Furthermore, according to Greek media, several KC-135 tankers operated from Souda to support B-2 bombers taking part in Operation Midnight Hammer against Iranian nuclear facilities, before returning to base on June 23.¹⁰

Finally, Greece and Cyprus adopted the role of honest brokers, drawing on their trusted relationships with Israel—particularly as Turkey failed to assume this role despite its broader regional aspirations. As much of the international community distanced itself from Israel amid the Gaza and Iran conflicts, Athens and Nicosia sought to actively mediate, aiming to contain escalation without equivocation about Israel’s right to self-defense. On June 14, the Greek prime minister held a direct call with his Israeli counterpart, while the Cypriot president revealed that Iran had asked Cyprus to deliver a message to Israel.¹¹

Greece and Cyprus value the strategic relationship they have cultivated with Israel as a means to counterbalance Turkey. Yet, reconciling domestic concerns with regional alignment and international commitments requires delicate balancing.¹² The Gaza stalemate has led Athens and Nicosia to join some of their Western allies in voicing concerns for a ceasefire and increased humanitarian aid, while cautiously avoiding the impression of abandoning their strategic partner.¹³ For Israel, the quiet reliability of Greece and Cyprus validated the relevance of the trilateral alignment, signaling trust, a crucial currency in an age of geopolitical hedging. The consistency shown by Greece and Cyprus in supporting Israel under pressure lends substance to what might otherwise appear as rhetorical posture.

Israeli Ambassador to Greece, Noam Katz, captured this sentiment in an interview, underlining the broader extent of this relationship: “The Greece–Israel friendship is based on shared values and interests. We face common challenges and opportunities for the inter-connectedness of Indo-Pacific and Europe, and we maintain open channels of communication. Even where we may disagree, Greece is a friend. A very good friend.”¹⁴

Warfare is not limited to those who fire weapons. Those providing fuel, staging ground, and information networks can be just as consequential. Likewise, strategy extends beyond regional confines, as developments in one area reverberate across a geopolitically compressed world. The resilience of the trilateral alignment under pressure lends credibility to the Mediterranean arc—not merely as an alignment of convenience, but as a resilient partnership shaped by necessity, pragmatism, and wider geopolitical considerations.

The Strategic Triangle at the Crossroads of the New Silk and Golden Roads

The Greece-Cyprus-Israel alignment is both a response to regional disorder and an expression of broader systemic transition. It forms part of a wider geopolitical continuum: the Indo-Mediterranean rim—a strategic corridor connecting the Atlantic and Indian Oceans via the Mediterranean, Red and Arabian Seas. This strategic region is increasingly shaped by the gravitational pull of global power competition between the United States and China, forming a critical axis for securing maritime routes, trade and energy flows, and defense infrastructure. Within this wider framework, the strategic triangle of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel functions as a hinge point where China’s New Silk Road intersects with India’s revived Golden Road.¹⁵

The trilateral alignment is geopolitically significant because it responds to intertwined regional and global challenges. In *The Return of Marco Polo's World*, Robert Kaplan underscores the resurgence of imperial powers such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran, while Eurasia increasingly coheres into an integrated zone of commerce and contestation.¹⁶ Within this evolving configuration of spheres of influence, the alignment of forces across the Indo-Mediterranean rim enjoys the backing of the United States, serving as a geopolitical counterweight to China’s expanding network of partners in Asia and Africa. Hence, the strategic triangle of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel is framed in terms of economic, energy, and security cooperation.

While Greece, Cyprus, and Israel advocate for greater U.S. involvement to bolster their alignment,¹⁷ all three are also deepening their ties with India, as seen in initiatives such as the India-Greece-Cyprus Business and Investment Council and in growing Indian-Israeli cooperation in defense, technology, and diplomacy. India's engagement in the Mediterranean reflects a broader effort to offset the strategic convergence between Turkey and Pakistan. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's landmark visit to Cyprus—at the height Operation Rising Lion—was interpreted as a calibrated political message to Ankara.¹⁸

Turkey remains an evasive straddler—a NATO member yet a regional disruptor. Ankara's ambitious vision and assertive behavior—ranging from maritime claims to military interventions and drone diplomacy—has rendered it both a source of friction and a catalyst for deeper cooperation among its neighbors. While the Mediterranean arc may have coalesced in response to the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010, it essentially reflects a reaction to Turkey's expansive regional posture. Turkey's presence spans Syria, Iraq, Libya, Qatar, Somalia, and beyond. Ankara's vision of regional dominance stretches beyond the maritime doctrine of Mavi Vatan (“Blue Homeland”) to encompass Gök Vatan (the “Sky Homeland”) and Siber Vatan (the “Cyber Homeland”), reflecting a broadened and assertive projection of sovereignty over land, sea, air, and digital space.

Turkey's assertiveness has tightened the binding knots of the strategic triangle. Following Erdoğan's comparison of Benjamin Netanyahu to Hitler, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar accused Turkey of hypocrisy, citing its illegal occupation of northern Cyprus.¹⁹ Beyond political rhetoric, Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus is increasingly viewed by Israel as a strategic liability. As noted in *Israel Hayom* in the aftermath of the twelve-day war, it has become not only a potential military threat but also a hub for intelligence activity and coercive operations by Turkish security forces.²⁰

If security priorities continue to align, further momentum may gather behind ongoing initiatives such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gateway Act recently introduced in the U.S. Congress, Greece's *Achilles Shield* air defense system, and the *EuroAsia Interconnector*, which links Israel, Cyprus, and Greece via an electricity grid designed to enhance resilience and reduce energy dependency.²¹

The Challenges Ahead

The twelve-day war marked a significant moment in the consolidation of the strategic triangle. But in the long haul of diplomacy, states tend to reassess options, hedge against risks, and recalibrate national interests in response to realities on the ground. When tensions recede, pragmatism sinks in.

For Greece, the partnership with Israel is deemed strategic because Turkish revisionism, reflected in recent maritime maps claiming Greek island zones, remains an enduring concern. Nevertheless, the diplomacy of “calm waters” continues, and Athens appears intent on avoiding another cycle of tensions.²² Although U.S.-Turkey relations remain fraught, Washington would not like to see Turkey drifting further away from the Western alliance. In the event of a Greek-Turkish crisis, the United States is more likely to revert to its conventional posture of maintaining equal distance between its two NATO allies.

For Israel, Turkey’s alignment with Iran and support for Hamas constitutes a red line that undermines any potential for rapprochement. Still, neither side sees benefit in further escalation. Ankara has long pursued ambivalent policies: supporting Hamas rhetorically while continuing energy trade with Israel. While the possibility of a future thaw might now seem far-fetched, it cannot be ruled out—especially in a post-Gaza or post-Erdoğan context—including a return to previous plans for submarine pipelines or a tacit understanding in Syria.²³

Cyprus remains the arc’s most vulnerable point. Turkey’s apparent abandonment of the bi-zonal, bi-communal federation may lead to more endurance tests for the trilateral alignment. The Mediterranean arc’s durability will depend on whether it can withstand not just external threats, but internal fissures. The alignment of priorities, as well as the commitment to shared objectives, will determine its long-term resilience.

Conclusion

Strategic alignments may be drafted in offices, but they are forged—or shattered—in real crises. Mutual support cannot be taken for granted, and trust can erode quickly, especially in times of global transformation and ongoing regional stalemate. The twelve-day war between Israel and Iran served as a stress test for the Greece–Cyprus–Israel strategic triangle. The Mediterranean arc held

firm—both operationally and politically—demonstrating not only the partnership’s value under pressure but also a maturing strategic logic.

Greece, Cyprus, and Israel appear poised to build on this momentum, shifting from a logic of common threat to one of vested strategic interest. The Mediterranean arc is being shaped by the hammer of regional tensions and the anvil of global power dynamics. As new alignments take shape across Eurasia during this fluid phase in the international system, the Greece–Cyprus–Israel triangle may emerge as a critical building block within the evolving Indo-Mediterranean security order. Yet, in the long geopolitical marathon ahead, further tests are certain to follow. Whether this strategic coherence can be sustained through future shocks will define its relevance in the evolving regional order.

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Notes

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