

The Greek dilemma

Trump administration's gambling in the Middle East could cause much harm to Athens



Members of pro-communist union PAME raise their fists during a protest in Athens



NIKOS KONSTANDARAS

After eight years of being kept afloat by loans from its European Union partners and the International Monetary Fund, Greece suddenly risks being swamped by waves caused by President Donald Trump's unilateral stirring of the Middle East's caldron of tensions and conflicting interests.

Compared with the immediate danger of regional conflict and even greater bloodshed, the danger to Greece may seem secondary, but it illustrates the unforeseen consequences of impetuous American actions.

Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran and its decision to move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem could trigger a chain of events that would jeopardise Greece's fragile economic recovery. With the last of three international bailout agreements set to end in August, the government has been pressing the message that Greece will soon be a "normal" country, able to hold its own in the international economy. Turbulence in the region would create new threats to its economy, its

security, even its relations with its key partners — the United States and the European Union.

Greece already has problems with neighbouring Turkey. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is campaigning for re-election in snap polls on June 24 and has invested in stoking nationalist fervor — primarily against Kurds in Syria, Turkey and Iraq, but also against the United States and Greece.

Ankara's worsening relations with Washington and European capitals over a host of issues have led to more pressure on Greece: a sharp increase of immigrants and refugees crossing from Turkey in recent months, the ongoing detention in Turkey of two Greek soldiers who strayed across the border in early March and a series of confrontational military actions by Turkey. These all highlight the dangers that Greece faces as the European Union's frontier state in a turbulent region.

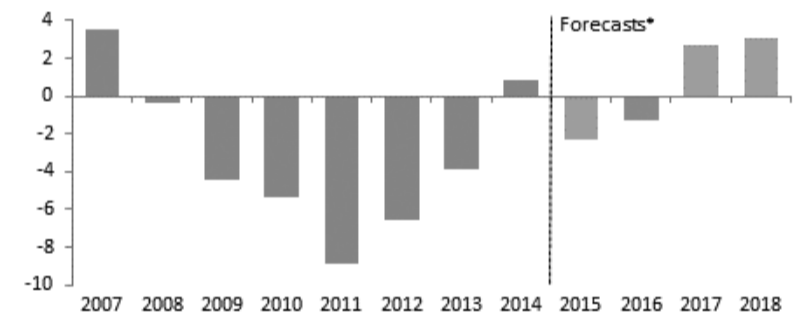
Erdogan presents himself as the victim of an attempted coup, allegedly by a United States-based former ally, Fethullah Gulen, and as the champion of Muslims everywhere, including the Palestinians. Lately, in the region's fluid network of rivalries and alliances, Turkey, a NATO member, has cultivated closer ties with Russia and Iran while chafing against American constraints on its occupation of part of northern Syria. The drawing of battle lines over Trump's recent actions could lead to greater tension among

Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran and its decision to move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem could trigger a chain of events that would jeopardise Greece's fragile economic recovery

Turkey, the United States and Israel. Meanwhile, Greece's relations with the United States and Israel have never been better. The US ambassador to Greece, Geoffrey Pyatt, refers to the country as a pillar of stability in the region and US officials make use of important air and naval facilities at the Souda Bay military base on Crete. The leaders of Greece, Cyprus and Israel held their latest trilateral meeting just last week, focusing on energy issues. Greece's increased strategic value could work in its favour, as the country seeks American and European backing to keep Turkey in check and to help its own economic revival. However, the more Washington and Brussels lose leverage with Ankara, and the more unilaterally Turkey acts, the greater the risks for Athens.

For Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, whose radical left-wing Syriza party

Greece - Annual GDP growth (%)



*forecasts from Eurozone bailout programme's debt sustainability analysis (leaked to Wall Street Journal)

is in a coalition with the far-right nationalist Independent Greeks, closer relations with the United States and Israel at this time could also create domestic complications. If the United States and Israel become embroiled in further bloodshed, such as that which attended the opening ceremony of the American Embassy in Jerusalem, the government will not want to appear too close to them. Several leftist groups are keen to prove they have greater "anti-imperialist" credentials than Syriza. Last month, after the United States, Britain and France carried out missile strikes against Syria in response to the regime's alleged use of chemical weapons, Communist Party demonstrators in Athens tried to pull down a statue of Harry Truman.

Even more ominous than the tension with Turkey is the possibility

that Trump's policy on Iran and Israel could drive a wedge between the United States and the European Union, especially if American officials carry out their threat to impose sanctions against European companies doing business with Tehran.

Athens would then face difficult and dangerous choices. Greece, a NATO member, has relied on the United States as its major ally since 1947, when Washington, through the Truman Doctrine, helped the government win a civil war against Communist forces.

But Greece is also a member of the European Union. Its partners in Europe pledged most of the 326 billion euros that, in three bailouts since 2010, have kept the country from bankruptcy. The United States has contributed only through its share of the 32.1 billion euros that the International Monetary Fund lent Greece.

CIVILIAN'S TRIBUNE

Email: mail@newsofbahrain.com

Street dog menace in Manama

Dear Editor,

I am an expat living in Manama for around six years and facing a serious issue of street dogs near Manama Gate and Zamil Tower.

Regarding this issue I have called the authorities like municipality (Baladiya) and also the police station but I

dint get any response.

The number of dogs have increased from 5 to 8 which is posing safety issues for anyone passing by the area and at night these dogs are becoming more dangerous.

It is to be noted that there is a bus stop as well in the area where kids

wait for the school bus.

It would be highly appreciated if the Daily Tribune publishes the grievance so that authorities will take some action.

Regards

Muhammad Ibrahim Shaikh

