

Prologue: A First-Year Writing Journal

Volume 5

Article 4

2013

The Origin of America's Greek Problem Post-9/11

Constantine Politis
Denison University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/prologue>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Politis, Constantine (2013) "The Origin of America's Greek Problem Post-9/11," *Prologue: A First-Year Writing Journal*: Vol. 5 , Article 4.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/prologue/vol5/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Prologue: A First-Year Writing Journal by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

The Origin of America's Greek Problem Post-9/11 by Constantine Politis

Americans have never been hesitant to trace their western democratic heritage back to ancient Greece. Greek history, particularly the birth of democracy and the heroism at the Battle of Thermopylae has been celebrated in American culture and politics. Yet America's historical reverence for Greece has failed to translate into a positive modern relationship between the two nations. The evidence for disapproval of America amongst Greeks is overwhelming in the post-9/11 world; Greece is an ally of America only in theory. The source of the strained relations between Greece and America dates back to U. S. Cold war policy in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1967, relations were first damaged when America in the name of anti-communism supported the brutal Greek military dictatorship, or junta. The second blow came in 1974 when public opinion held America culpable for the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. These two events, cultivated the Greek populace's anti-American sentiment.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America, the Greek people's inherent dislike of the U.S. manifested into a belief that 9/11 was justified along with an outright condemnation of U. S. foreign policy. Although the Greek government's original response, in unison with the vast majority of the world, was to condemn the attacks, the Greek people and even some officials began to exhibit a resurgence in anti-Americanism. The profound disdain for America after 9/11 was also related to the pressure the United States and NATO exerted on Greece to adhere to lofty security standards during the preparation for the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics. Many Greeks were outraged at both the enormous price the Greek government had to pay for the security, and also the loss of sovereignty that accompanied the international pressure. Thus, Greece's response to the 9/11 attacks was derived from U.S. Cold

War policy and was exacerbated by American pressure during the preparation for the 2004 Summer Olympics. Their response was a testament to the prevalence of anti-Americanism in Greece. I contend that this volatile relationship is on the verge of further alienating Greece, which only enhances the difficulty for the United States to combat a global war on terror.

The influence of ancient Greece on western culture is all but undeniable. Prominent Americans for years have expressed ideological and cultural affinity toward Greece, the land that is considered to be "the birthplace of western civilization." During the Greek civil war in the 1940s, which pitted the nationalist army against the communist rebels, Presidential candidate Thomas Dewey issued a proclamation equating the fight against Communism in Greece to the battle of Thermopylae (Levene 384). After the nationalist victory in 1950, President Truman sent a message to Greece observing that "the heroic struggle of the Greek people has retained for all Greeks the workings of the ancient heritage of democracy" (Levene 384). President Eisenhower even went as far as to address the Greek Parliament. His speech praised Greece as the birthplace of democracy and qualified America as its cultural heir (Levene 384). Politicians whose rhetoric focused on the democratic principles founded in ancient Greece were able to deliberately show their stark contrast with totalitarian communism (Levene 383-384).

While America culturally allied herself with the Greece of antiquity, relations with modern Greece would deteriorate from 1967 to 1974. The hostile Greek attitude toward America in the wake of 9/11 was largely rooted in American foreign policy from this time period. The first sign of resentment toward America began during the 1967 military coup that resulted in seven brutal years of junta dictatorship and effective martial law. The junta leaders dissolved political parties, curtailed civil liberties, and

arrested all opposition. Due to fear of the revival of communism in Greece, the U.S. backed the ultra right-wing government with light weapons and advised other Western allies not to impose sanctions on the military regime (Curtis 256). Research from the Library of Congress supports the idea of a brewing anti-American attitude amongst the populace. "Many Greeks believed that a more forceful United States reaction against the colonel's takeover could have prevented the seven years of military dictatorship that followed" (Curtis 256). Only the political fallout from the botched junta-lead assassination attempt on the President of Cyprus and subsequent Turkish invasion of the island would collapse the dictatorship in 1974 (Kyriaku and Kaya 10). To the Greek people's ire, America's support for the dictatorship most likely increased its longevity.

The second blow to the Greek-American relationship, the Cyprus crisis of 1974, was also a product of U.S. Cold War foreign policy. Since 1960, Cyprus was an independent nation consisting of an ethnic Greek majority and an ethnic Turkish minority (Kyriakou and Kaya 9). The President of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, was not seen as a supporter of *enosis*, the political unification of Cyprus and Greece. After the junta-led the assassination attempt on his life, Makarios fled Cyprus (Wenzke and Lindley 44). The new President, Nikos Sampson, was fanatically anti-Turkish and a zealous supporter of *enosis*. Under the pretext of protecting the rights of the ethnic Turkish minority, Turkey invaded Cyprus in July of 1974 (Kyriakou and Kaya 10). The United States was caught in a difficult international crisis between dueling NATO members; Greece and Turkey. Eventually, the U.S. discouraged the Turkish aggression but did nothing to force a withdrawal. The Turkish army, vastly superior to the Greek coalition, quickly conquered forty percent of the island and displaced thousands of Greek Cypriots (Kriakou and Kaya 10). As in 1967, most Greeks felt that stronger

United States pressure would have also prevented the Cyprus crisis (Curtis 256). To this day the island remains a bitterly divided bipolar state. The international community considers the Republic of Cyprus, composed of ethnic Greeks in the south, the official government. In the north however, the ethnic Turks, with the lone support of Turkey, are able to exist as a separate political entity. According to current research from the University of Notre Dame, Greeks still hold America responsible for the ongoing problems between the Greeks and Turks in Cyprus. "The U.S. is allegedly further responsible for the continued division of the island because it does not put enough pressure on Turkey to agree to a solution" (Wenzke and Lindley 78). In accordance with the other research, Dr. Stelios Stavridis conducted dozens of interviews with other Greek academicians on the issue of anti-Americanism in Greece. He concluded that most academicians believe that Greece is a fundamentally anti-American country, mainly for the American support for the junta and its role in the conflict over Cyprus (Stavridis 13). These two events, planted the seeds of anti-Americanism in the current Greek populace. The inherent disdain for America would be displayed in its entirety in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

In the days following the unprecedented terrorist attacks on the United States, there was near universal condemnation of the attacks. In his first address to the American people following the attacks, President Bush decried the acts as "evil," and "the very worst of human nature" (Bush Remarks) He also alluded to a key stance that would have a lasting impact on U.S. foreign policy: "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbored them." In a speech on foreign policy, the President boldly declared "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror" (Bush foreign

policy speech). Through his rhetoric, Bush pressured the international community to join a global crusade against terrorism. International governments and media offered their sympathy and quickly established they were on the side of Bush and America. In Britain, Prime Minister Tony Blair almost immediately called Bush and offered “declarations of solidarity and sympathy” (McNair 35). The day after the attack, an article in *Le Monde*, a liberal French paper was titled “We Are All Americans” (Colombani). Even the Middle East, a region synonymous with anti-Americanism, offered condolences to the grief stricken nation. The *An-Nahar* newspaper in Lebanon captured the shock and grief of the catastrophe with a chilling front-page image of Ground Zero (Fung). Ralph Berenger, a writer who was in the Middle East on 9/11 wrote “Most heads of state in the Middle East, including Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdallah Hussein of Jordan, expressed shock and condemnation over the terrorist attack and officially offered condolences” (Berenger 272). The first official Greek response was no less supportive for America than the rest of the world. In an *Athens News* article titled “Greece united in sympathy,” the Prime Minister of Greece, Costas Simitis, stated, “The attacks on the United States of America constitute a heinous crime, whichever the flag the terrorists may carry. It is a crime against the ideals of free and humane society” (qtd in Gilson). The Greek government’s response, characterized by the apparent political correctness in denouncing the attacks, was in accord with the rest of the world.

While the Greek government condemned the attacks, the revival of the anti-American sentiment in the Greek populace garnered strength in the aftermath of 9/11. I conducted an interview with my aunt, Lottie Apóstolos, an American of Greek descent who in 2001 resided on a small Greek island called Icaria. In the days following the

alleged terrorists attacks, she explained to me that the Greek people were immediately suspicious. “Some of my cousins asked me why the United States wouldn’t say how many people died. They demanded to know the specific details of the attacks. They were convinced the U.S. was purposefully withholding information. Then, when the attacks were linked to al Qaeda, the Greeks found it hard to believe that a bunch of terrorists could carry out an attack like that” (Apóstolos). She also informed me that the Greek media exhibited anti-American attitude in reacting to 9/11. “I heard this joke when I was listening to a radio station in Athens. They said ‘Why are terrorists better at math than Americans? Because they can turn the Pentagon into a square.’ I was disgusted when I heard that” (Apóstolos).

My aunt’s firsthand experience of anti-Americanism in Greece would be validated by the actions and opinions of citizens studied by Greek academics. As the War on Terror commenced, public opinion in Greece became overwhelmingly anti-American. In one dramatic display, a moment of silence for the victims of 9/11 at a Greek soccer game was interrupted by shouts in favor of Bin Laden (Stavridis, 5-6). Stavridis, compiling research for *The Hellenic Observatory*, concluded that public opinion considered the 9/11 attacks justified. In Greece, the renewed anti-American attitudes were more prevalent than in the vast majority of the world. Only 25 percent of Greeks considered the attacks to be *totally unjustified*. The number is strikingly lower than even Iran at 51 percent, and Pakistan at 40 percent (8). In addition, Greeks did not welcome the war in Afghanistan (12). Greece is the only member of NATO whose public polling results offered no support for U.S. military action against the Taliban regime (6). Politicians and prominent citizens were not hesitant to express disapproval for America as well. One year after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Margarita Papanderou,

the wife of a former Greek Prime Minister and a member of the Center for Research and Action on Peace, offered a strong anti-war message to America. In her "Letter to America" published in *Athens News*, she argued that using war to combat terrorism was like "killing a mosquito with a baseball bat" (1). Instead of resisting violence with violence, she advocated for the building of 3,000 schools in Afghanistan, which would undermine the terrorist rationale that "the West doesn't care about us" (2). The leader of the left-wing historically anti American SYN party of Greece, joked that the New York stock exchange elite now feel like the Cypriots (Stavridis 8). The dislike of America, however, was bi-partisan in nature. In a poll taken after 9/11, 50 percent of conservative voters in Greece defined themselves as anti-American (Stavridis 14). The profound condemnation of America and its foreign policy exhibited by the Greek people after 9/11 was an indication of the profound prevalence of anti-Americanism in Greece. The Greek reaction, far more critical of America than the majority of the world, can be attributed in large part to the generally anti-American ideology ingrained in the populace.

Anti-Americanism in Greece after 9/11 was rooted in unpopular U.S. Cold War policy, but the issues surrounding the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics exacerbated the Greek populace's disdain for America. In 2000, an official U.S. State department report concluded that Greece had a history of "not cooperating fully on counterterrorism," and suggested that the President should consider sanctioning the nation (2). After 9/11, the fear of future al Qaeda attacks dominated international discourse and led to mounting concern that Greece, considering their weak counter-terrorism record, was not fit to host the Olympics. In addition, Bin Laden's ultimatum that all European troops withdraw from Muslim nations ended just a few weeks before the Olympics were scheduled to start (Congressional Research Service 3). A CNN journalist

even acknowledged that he anticipated seeing "three or four terrorists" at every street corner, while U.S. newspapers claimed America "did not exclude the possibility of withdrawing some athletes" (Samatas 107-108). The United States in particular, was worried about a possible terrorist attack at the Olympics and put enormous pressure on Greece to conform to improved security standards. Greece had little choice but to surrender sovereignty to a multinational Olympic Security Advisory Group, accepting foreign and U.S. interference in security matters (119). The expensive security mandated and the overall loss of sovereignty resulting from the Olympics would further the divide between Greece and America.

Frustration over foreign interference and the extraordinary cost of security furthered the Greek opposition to the War on Terror. For Greece, the nation heralded as the ancient founder of the Olympics, hosting the games was a source of national pride (Samatas 105). The Congressional Research Service made it clear that "Greeks are extremely sensitive about their national sovereignty, so international assistance could be 'politically explosive' (5). Unfortunately, hosting the 2004 Olympics proved to be detrimental for Greece and their relationship with America. Most of the Greek counter-terrorism training was delegated to the hundreds of U.S. agents that came to Athens from the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Defense, and Justice (Samatas 109). Prior to the games, the CIA reportedly made fifteen secret flights to Greece (110). While the Greeks had little to do with their own security, they were however, forced to pay for the brunt of the security, including an expensive surveillance system. The surveillance system allowed the United States to examine what methods of surveillance were most effective, while in the process, disregarded Greek civil liberties (103-04). The total cost of security, 1.5 billion euros, was more than three times what was originally projected, and more

than six times the cost of the 2000 Olympics (121). The cost of the entire Olympics rose to a staggering 15 billion, which has been implicated as the trigger point in the current Greek debt crisis estimated to be around 400 billion Euros (125). The fiscal crises threaten the economic security and livelihood of Greeks.

The Greek public's displeasure over the Olympic operation was most likely related to Greece's extreme resistance to the American occupation of Iraq. Anti-Americanism in Greece grew even stronger during the preparation for the Olympics. In a country with a population of 10 million, 100 thousand Iraq war protesters took to the streets of Athens. Opposition to the war in Iraq almost reached a consensus, with 90.7 percent of the population totally disagreeing with the war. Incredibly, 77.5 percent of the population now had an unfavorable view of the U.S (Stavridis 17). The economic problems and wounded national identity from the Olympics has only furthered the anti-Americanism that emerged after 9/11.

The division between America and Greece is not something that can be underestimated. It is an anomaly how America has claimed its ideological roots in ancient Greece, yet, American foreign policy simply does not consider modern Greece on the same diplomatic level with Western Europe. Terrorism is not just an American problem; it affects the security of the world. To fight a global War on Terror, we must have international cooperation, which has been stressed by both President Bush and Obama. The United States must be sensitive to the opinions of the Greeks; we should not ignore the dissent from the land of our democratic ancestors. America is in danger of forever alienating a democratic nation, which would distance the possibility of a united world against terror. To resurrect America's image in Greece, the United States must stop dictating to the nation and consider it on equal terms with the rest of the world.

Our politicians should stop blasting the Greek debt crisis for political gain and start proposing to the U.N. meaningful solutions to the Cyprus problem. Instead of extolling the Greece of the past, America must support the Greece of the present.

Works Cited

- Apposotos, Lottie. Personal Interview. 22 November 2012
 "Bush Remarks to the Nation on the Terrorist Attacks."
New York Times 12 September 2001. A4. Consort
 Library Catalog. Web. 22 November 2012.
- Berenger, Ralph D. "Impact of 9/11 on the Middle East
 Personal Reflections," from Tomasz Pludowski ,
 "How the World's News Media Reacted to 9/11."
 Spokane, Washington: Marquette Books LLC,
 (2007) Print.
- Colombani, Jean-Marie. "We Are All Americans" Le Monde.
 September 12 2001. Web. November 23 2012.
- Congressional Research Service Report for Congress.
 "Greece Threat of Terrorism and Security at the
 Olympics" (April 30, 2004) 3,5.
 <<http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RS21833.pdf>> Web.
 November 23, 2012.
- Curtis, Glen E. Ed. "Greece: a Country Study" Federal
 Research Division, Library of Congress, ISSN
 1057-5294 (December 1994 4th Ed.) Print.
- Fung Katherine. "Newspaper Front Pages From The Day
 After the Attacks." Huffington Post. 9 September
 2011. Web. November 23 2012.
- Gilson, George. "Greece united in sympathy," Athens
 News 12 Sept. 2001. <> Web. November 23,
 2012.
- Kyrialou, Nikolas And Nurcan Kaya. "Minority rights:
 Solutions to the Cyprus Conflict" Minority Rights
 Group International (2011) 9-10.
 <<http://www.minorityrights.org>> Web. December 12,

2012

- Levene, D.S. "Xerxes Goes to Hollywood." *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*. Eds. Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P.J. Rhodes. Oxford University Press, (2007). 383-403. Print.
- McNair, Brian. "UK Media coverage of September 11. Tomasz Pludowski , *How the World's News Media Reacted to 9/11*. Spokane, Washington: Marquette Books LLC, (2007) 35. Print
- Papandreou, Margarita. "Letter to America," *Athens News*, (13 December 2002) 1. <> Web. November 23, 2012.
- Samatas, Minas. "Sureveiling the 2004 Olympics in the Aftermath of 9/11: International Pressures and Domestic Implications. " University of Crete Department of Sociology 103-105,107-110,121,125. Web. <<http://www.soc.uoc.gr>> December 04, 2012.
- Stavridis, Stelios. "Anti-Americanism in Greece: reactions to 9-11 Afghanistan and Iraq" *Hellenic Observatory*/London School of Economics and Political Science September (2007) Web. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/5626/> December 04.
- Wenzke, Caroline And Dan Lindley "Dismantling the Cyprus Conspiracy: The US role in the Cypriot Crises of 1963, 1967, and 1974" www.nd.edu University of Notre Dame, Draft. (May 16, 2008) 78. Web. December 03, 2012.
- "You are either with or against us." *CNN.Com* 6 November 2001. <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/> Web. April 30 2013