

LEXINGTON LUNCHEON

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a true honor to be here with all these eminent figures of USA, people who believe in the prospects of the relations between USA and Greece.

I am grateful for this opportunity to share our concerns in Greece and its Armed Forces and the relations with USA.

Mr Carey, from Lexington Institute, and Mr Larigakis from American Hellenic Institute, thank you for this initiative and pulling this meeting together.

I give to both, the "*Lexington Institute*" and the "*American Hellenic Institute*" the credit for their successful efforts to build a special bond of partnership and friendship between the United States and Greece.

Mr Larigakis is a close friend and we have a long and very good cooperation so far. I had the opportunity to meet him and delegations of AHI in Athens and in the States several times, and also facilitate the Institute's college student trips in Greece. Mr Larigakis has been very active with his initiatives and he has really helped promoting our bilateral relations.

As for the Lexington Institute, I congratulate all involved on your successful work to educate public opinion and share your valuable insight on major topics like national security or energy policy. I am glad I had the pleasure to share my thoughts with you in 2015, in an interesting interview. Moreover, I was much impressed by the release of the Souda Bay White paper last March. It is an excellent work that summarizes in a very understandable way the essence of the strategic value of Greece and specifically Souda bay.

Before we initiate our discussion, I feel it imperative to set the general scene, from my stand point of view.

First of all, there are the main values of the ancient Greek civilization, namely humanism and democracy, which shaped the west societies, the United States of America included.

In the same respect, lie the powerful Greek language and the Olympic spirit in world sports.

But I don't mean to be overwhelmed by our past history. Modern Greece has also other assets, for which we all feel proud of.

The pillar of those assets is the Greek diaspora, which you know better than me. In a spirit of national unity and solidarity, Greek diaspora has always provided great help, through its contribution in promoting Greece's national rights, culture, education and history across the globe.

In a nutshell, the country's very large soft power rests in all these individual domains.

Besides the current fiscal circumstances, that by the way are getting better and better, I insist that Greece remains a very powerful brand name.

This brand name has also been enhanced through the military.

Greece has been consistent ally to the West in both World Wars, while other countries kept ambiguous posture.

In World War II, the Greek fight against Mousolini in 1940 was the first victory on land of the Allies against the Axis.

The heritage of the Hellenic Armed Forces measures up to the heritage of our ancestors, contributing in its way to the soft power of modern Greece.

Taking all the above account,

I am proud to be the Chief of **these** Armed Forces,

I am proud to be the Chief of Armed Forces of **this** country.

Let me now tell you that, the strategic area where Greece is located can be regarded, for the time being, as one of the most sensitive areas in the planet.

Our close neighborhood is full of challenges that are interlinked. You are perfectly aware of the situation in Syria and Libya, as well as how much the East Med is affected by the terrorist threat and refugee flows.

My country is placed at the center of this volatile region and we remain very concerned about the security issues.

Greece, being a stable country and maintaining competent Armed Forces, plays a crucial role as stability and security provider.

We are the oldest member of NATO and European Union in our region, which makes us confident to undertake initiatives and activate the countries in the broader area.

In that respect, we act together with partners and allies in order to effectively confront threats and challenges. We are promoting synergies and defense cooperation with key countries in East Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Gulf, like Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Bulgaria and Romania.

Especially with Israel, we recognize its unique ability to act as a force of stability and security. Our military cooperation is closer than ever before and our bilateral relations have culminated to a strategic level. My visit to DC for the Conference is an occasion to meet the Israeli Chief of Defence, General Eizenkot, and reaffirm our tight bonds.

In the Balkans, we can play a significant role in the developments, due to our proximity and the historical bonds.

Moreover, we have traditional good relations with the “healthy” Arabic World. I believe this is one of the key issues because that allows us to act as the facilitator in whatever rapprochement with USA, NATO, or even Israel.

In a nutshell, Greece and its Armed Forces have excellent relations with almost all the countries in the area and are widely accepted and appreciated.

In our bilateral relations, Greece and USA share very tight bonds across the path of history. Our strong military, cultural and political ties, based on a common western heritage and the democratic values, have forged our steadfast alliance. We have always fought alongside together in all instances – World Wars, Korean War, Cold War, War on Terrorism.

The military relations between United States and Greece have reached an outstanding level. I have excellent cooperation with General DUNFORD, the US Ambassador PYATT, and all military officials in our region.

The Greek Prime Minister’s visit to USA last week and his meeting with President TRUMP underscores the significant momentum of our partnership.

Greece has been supporting USA, and we are willing to do more. We have a very good defense cooperation which is continuously enhancing through numerous activities.

We respect the burden sharing in the Alliance, and we are fulfilling our financial obligations, while remaining one of the five countries in NATO that spend more than 2% of GDP for the Armed Forces.

Speaking about the Greek contribution, I want to refer to SOUDA Air and Naval Base in Crete and its strategic position. However, your Institute's White Paper about Souda Bay as "*NATO's Military Gem in the Eastern Mediterranean*" has left very little for me. I am content with the fact that the US is participating in projects to upgrade the facilities of SOUDA. This is going to be a win-win situation as both Armed Forces will take advantage of the expanded capabilities.

We seek the enhancement of our interaction with the US Armed Forces, and we want this interaction to be beneficial for both.

There are several areas where we can do more things together. Cooperation of defense industry, defense acquisition and the field of regional situational awareness, to name some important.

Hellenic Armed Forces are competent, capable of carrying out their mission and maintain their role as a crucial security provider. Beside the high level of our effectiveness and readiness, we do not rest. We are exploring ways to improve our abilities. We are upgrading our weapon systems, and we are in the process of reorganizing the structure of our Forces.

Projecting though to the future, we are working with the US side in order to acquire surplus equipment of US Armed Forces of aircrafts, helos and anti-air warfare vessels.

I am much confident about the future of the cooperation and the US-Greek relations, especially in the field of our Armed Forces.

My **main messages** to you is:

Greece is a most credible ally, strategically located in the heart of a very challenging environment.

We have a solid advantage in the significant role we can play in promoting stability and assist the counter terrorism campaign, based on:

- The strategic location of Greece
- Important infrastructure in Souda

- The excellent relations with Israel and Arab countries,
We welcome any support to invest and improve Souda Facilities.

Being both trusted NATO Allies as well, gives added value to our partnership.

We can send a coherent message of strong partnership and cooperation which promotes peace and stability in the region.

The existence of competent Hellenic Armed Forces serves the interests of Greece, and US as well. It is a WIN-WIN Scenario.

When US support Greece and its Armed Forces, they essentially support a most credible ally who respects its obligations, and is dedicated to promoting stability in the region.