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Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis speaks to the press, next to U.S. President Donald Trump | Alex Wong/Getty Images

By [Nektaria Stamouli](#)

Donald Trump snubs Greece's diplomatic overtures

The US president praised Greek economic progress but refrained from denouncing Ankara.

*Дональд Трамп ігнорує дипломатичні ініціативи Греції
Президент США високо оцінив економічний прогрес Греції, але утримався
від того, щоб звинуватити Анкару*

Греція хоче, щоб Дональд Трамп надавав їй країні американську підтримку у суперечці з Туреччиною щодо доступу до природного газу в Середземномор'ї - але президент США не прийняв її сторону. Прем'єр-міністр Греції Кіріакос Міцотакіс здійснює дипломатичну поїздку до Вашингтону, щоб підсилити підтримку того, що його уряд вважає порушенням суверенітету Греції з боку Туреччини. Але, незважаючи на посилення дипломатичної напруженості у Східному Середземномор'ї та заяв американських чиновників, що відносини з Афінами "знаходяться на високому рівні", Трамп ухилився від звинувачення Анкари. Афіни були здивовані, коли наприкінці листопада Туреччина заявила, що підписала угоду з одним із ворогуючих лівійських урядів - адміністрацією, підтримувану США - про демаркацію нових морських кордонів між двома країнами. Запропонована лінія кордону між Лівією та Туреччиною проходить поблизу грецького острова Крит. Грецький уряд розцінює захоплення моря як незаконне - як гру для доступу до ресурсів дна Середземного моря. Це позиція, яку підтримують ЄС, США та країни регіону. Але якщо він очікував публічної

підтримки від президента США та засудження кроку, що, за словами К. Міцотакіса, "розпалює пристрасті" і не "сприяє регіональному миру та безпеці", то він цього не отримав.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-snubs-greece-kyriakos-mitsotakis-diplomatic-overture/>

ATHENS — Greece wants Donald Trump to lend American weight to the country's dispute with Turkey over access to natural gas under the Mediterranean — but the U.S. president isn't taking sides. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis is on a diplomatic tour of Washington to drum up support for what his government views as breaches of Greece's sovereignty by Turkey. But despite rising diplomatic tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and one U.S. official insisting that relations with Athens are “at a high-water mark,” Trump steered clear of denouncing Ankara.

Athens was caught by surprise when, in late November, Turkey announced it had signed a deal with one of Libya's feuding governments — the U.N.-backed administration — demarcating new maritime boundaries between the two countries. The proposed line between Libya and Turkey runs close to the Greek island of Crete.

The Greek government regards the sea-grab — [a play for access to resources under the Mediterranean Sea](#) — as an illegal move: a position backed up by the EU, the U.S. and countries in the region.

“The agreement signed between Turkey and Libya infringes upon Greece's sovereign rights and essentially causes great concern and instability in a region which is already highly problematic,”

Mitsotakis said Tuesday, ahead of his meeting with Trump. “So we'll be very much looking to your support to make sure that these types of provocative agreements are not being put into place.”

“We have close relations with the Arab world, but we do not forget who our allies are.” — *Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Greek prime minister*

But if he expected a public denouncement from the U.S. president of a move which Mitsotakis said “inflames passions” and does not “promote regional peace and security,” he didn't get it.

Asked by journalists if he would demand that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan pull back from the provocative move, Trump replied, “When you're talking about Libya, we're discussing with President Erdoğan, we're discussing [with] many other countries. I just spoke with the chancellor of Germany, with Angela [Merkel], and we talked about that subject specifically — Libya and what's going on. We'll be talking to Russia: they're involved. A lot of countries are involved with respect to Libya. And it's, right now, a mess.”

Trump's relationship with the Turkish strongman is complex. Despite threatening to “destroy” the Turkish economy (in a letter to Erdoğan that the Turkish leader said he [threw in the bin](#)), Trump later said he was a [“big fan.”](#)

A senior U.S. administration official reinforced the message that the U.S. president would not be taking sides, saying that all parties should work together to resolve their differences. “President Trump has an excellent relationship with President Erdoğan, as well as with Prime Minister Mitsotakis, and so we prefer to focus on the things that we have in common and pursuing the common interests we have in security in the Eastern Mediterranean region, rather than to look at where there might be provocation.”



U.S. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis speak to members of the media during a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House January 7, 2020 in Washington, DC | Alex Wong/Getty Images

That's a markedly less definitive stance than Washington took in December when the State Department called the Turkey-Libya deal “unhelpful and provocative.”

Greece's main opposition Syriza party called the Trump snub an “unprecedented fiasco.”

Beefing up security

Mitsotakis may well have hoped for more from his White House audience than the praise he received from Trump for Greece's economic progress.

The Greek prime minister did his part by offering strong backing to Washington over the killing of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike last week — even as other European capitals were reluctantly offering more qualified support.

“We have close relations with the Arab world, but we do not forget who our allies are,” Mitsotakis said while speaking at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington. “We are allies with the U.S. So we stand by our allies through difficult times and I understand that this particular decision was taking into consideration what is the U.S. national interest and we stand by this decision.”

But the overall thrust of U.S. diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean is in Greece's favor.

In December, Trump signed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act into law, which foresees increased energy and defense cooperation between the United States, Greece, Cyprus and Israel.

And Washington backs the EastMed pipeline agreement signed last week between the three countries that will transfer gas from the region to Europe — a deal that has irked Ankara.

The U.S. military is also growing its presence in Greece even as it reduces its footprint in Turkey. In October, during a visit to Athens by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the U.S. and Greece signed a defense cooperation agreement.

The country is also currently upgrading its U.S.-made F-16 fighters and Mitsotakis discussed with Trump the possibility of buying F-35 fighters, as well as a possible joint project to manufacture military drones.



U.S. President Donald Trump with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis outside the Oval Office as they arrive for meetings at the White House in Washington, DC, January 7, 2020 | Saul Loeb /AFP via Getty Images

“Greece has long been a pillar of stability and prudence in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. This is even more valuable now when they are in the midst of profound changes since the end of the Cold War,” the senior administration official said. Athens also “shares a common approach on the security of 5G wireless technology,” a reference to Washington's antipathy to its allies using kit provided by Chinese firm Huawei.

The Greek government played down Trump's reluctance to go into bat for the country. "As the situation is escalating in the Middle East and given that Turkey is talking to Iran, was there anyone who was realistically expecting a public statement from the U.S. president against Turkey? Anyone who was expecting this was wrong," said Greek Migration Minister George Koumoutsakos.

Mitsotakis himself said after the meeting that he had left Trump in no doubt about Athens' position. "It became very clear to the American side that we will not tolerate any violation of our sovereign rights," he said.

But the Libya "mess," as Trump called it, is getting worse. With much diplomatic attention at the weekend focussed on expected retaliation by Iran on U.S. forces in the region, Erdoğan announced that [Turkish military units were moving to Tripoli](#) to support Libya's internationally recognized government. It's a move that was denounced by the EU and risks an escalation in the civil war in the country.

The foreign ministers of Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, France and Italy met in Cairo on Wednesday, with the aim of coming up with a coordinated action plan.

In a joint draft communique, the foreign ministers of Egypt, France, Greece and Cyprus “affirmed that a comprehensive political solution is the only way to resolve the Libyan crisis and regain stability in Libya.” (Italy's Foreign Minister attended the meeting as an observer and didn't sign the statement, diplomats said.)

They also stressed their total commitment to work towards a political solution to the Libyan crisis and their keenness to avoid escalation. The ministers called the Turkish-Libyan memorandums “null and void” that “further undermined regional stability” and “cannot produce any legal consequences.”

With its attention on Iran, the White House looks reluctant to help out.

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