

Scrap the Greece-Israel Defence Pact!

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While attention has been focussed, quite rightly, on the browbeating and bullying of the Greek government to agree to the terms of the EU ultimatum, another event of momentous importance has almost escaped notice. On 19 July, Greece's Defence Minister, Panos Kammenos, on a visit to Israel, signed a scandalous military cooperation treaty between the two countries, making Greece the only country other than the USA to have a formal military alliance with Israel.

At a time when Israel is facing growing international pressure and disdain over its continuing repression of the Palestinian people, this is a clear breach of the most minimal of the demands of the international movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS), for an end to arms sales and military cooperation. It is a slap in the face for the Palestinian people, and a deliberate snub to the international solidarity movement. Such a move would be shameful for any government.

For Syriza, which is nominally committed to internationalist principles and to solidarity with the Palestinians, this is virtually a betrayal of its commitments. Syriza's manifesto in the January election included a promise to end the previous governments' developing military links with Israel, and Syriza leaders, including Alexis Tsipras, were forthright in their condemnation of last summer's brutal Israeli attack on Gaza.

Kammenos himself is not a member of Syriza, but of the junior coalition partner, the right-wing nationalist Anel. But this doesn't let Syriza off the hook. He has acted on behalf of a government they lead. Further Kammenos is known to have antisemitic views; last December, he was widely criticised for his claim that Greek Jews did not pay tax. So it should have been perfectly possible to predict his aspirations.

We see here, not for the first time, an antisemite hostile to the presence of Jews in Europe lining up in support of the Zionist state.

From Israel's perspective, of course, there is nothing negative about this agreement, which enables Israeli pilots to train in Greece in preparation for their next bombing raid on Palestinian civilians. It also gives the Israeli military access to the latest NATO equipment and thinking.

In addition to the purely military benefits, this agreement has major economic and political implications. It gives a military framework for the growing cooperation between Israel, Greece and Cyprus in the exploitation of newly-discovered massive natural gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean. There is an ongoing discussion between the three about the construction of pipelines linking their countries, and bypassing Syria, Lebanon and Turkey.

The agreement is also a reflection of the deepening tension between Israel and Turkey, which was formerly a staunch ally but has become increasingly hostile since Erdogan assumed power. The relationship reached a new low after Israel's Foreign Minister deliberately humiliated the Turkish ambassador when he called to protest about the murder of Turkish human rights activists on the Mavi Marmara aid boat in 2010, and has never recovered.

Shifting alliances in the Syrian civil war have exacerbated this tension. Although both Israel and

Turkey have previously almost openly supported the al-Qaeeda aligned Jabhat al-Nusra, Turkey has recently sought to strengthen links with Iran. The prospect of the end of economic sanctions following the nuclear deal between Iran and the US has boosted Turkey's hopes of building its own natural gas pipeline from Iran to Europe. Israel, on the other hand, views the nuclear deal as an existential threat, and Netanyahu has stated that Israel is not bound by the deal, implying a unilateral Israeli strike against Iranian facilities.

Combined with continuing political disputes between the two halves of Cyprus, as well as ongoing disputes between Greece and Turkey over sovereignty in several Aegean islands and the further problems caused by Greece's attempts to exclude refugees from the Syrian civil war, this agreement represents a dangerous heightening of tension in the area.

Whether it was agreed by the whole government, or entered into by the Anel Defence Minister at a time when many Syriza members were concentrating elsewhere, the treaty is a rejection of the principles which Syriza professes to uphold. And, at a time when activists are striving to mobilise desperately-needed political and material solidarity for Greece, this alliance with the murderous Israeli regime risks alienating the very people who have been supporting Greece.

No to the Troika-imposed austerity deal!
Scrap the Greece-Israel defence pact!
Solidarity with the people of Greece!

Roland Rance

P.S.

* <http://socialistresistance.org/7637/scrap-the-greece-israel-defence-pact>