

Greece – Turkey – Israel Conflict Escalates

The conflict between Greece, Turkey and Israel appears to be escalating.

Military tension is building up among Greece, Turkey and Israel as Cyprus prepares to start exploratory drilling for gas offshore Monday, Sept. 19 in the face of threats from Ankara. All three have placed their air and sea forces in a state of preparedness along with the Cypriot army.

From Wednesday, Sept 14, Turkish warplanes and fighters kept watch on the Homer Ferrington rig belonging to Houston-based Noble Energy as it moved from Israel's offshore field Noa opposite Ashdod to Cyprus's Aphrodite (Block 12) field ready to start work.

It was the first time since the Mavis Marmara episode of May 2010 that Turkish warships came less than 80 kilometers from Israel's territorial waters. Debkafile's military sources report that Israeli missile ships and drones kept watch from afar on the Noble rig's movement and tracked Turkish surveillance. (<http://www.debka.com/article/21311/>)

This information is backed up by Greek Prime Minister Georg Papandreou's cancellation of his trip to the UN General Assembly.

Greece's prime minister canceled his trip to the U.S. because of the gravity of his country's financial crisis, officials said Saturday.

George Papandreou, who had left for London en route to New York, will return to Greece on Saturday night, officials said. Papandreou had been scheduled to attend the U.N. General Assembly and then the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund, where he was to meet Managing Director Christine Lagarde and U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner.

"The prime minister...decided to postpone his scheduled visit to the U.S. because the coming week is especially critical for the implementation of the eurozone's decision of July 21 and the initiatives (Greece) must undertake," according to a statement released by Papandreou's office. (<http://www.athensnews.gr/portal/8/47572>)

In addition, the Secretary General of the UN is asking for calm.

The United Nations on Friday called for a peaceful resolution to a growing dispute between Turkey and Greek Cyprus over offshore gas and oil exploration, saying any finds should benefit both sides of the divided island.

"It should be understood that natural resources, if they are discovered, would be for the benefit of all Cypriots – Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots – under the framework of a federal united Cyprus," said Lisa Buttenheim, special representative of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who heads the U.N. peacekeeping mission on the island.

"The United Nations would appeal to all involved to resolve this matter in a peaceful manner," she said

(<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=un-calls-for-calm-in-cyprus-drill-standoff-2011-09-16>)

Analysis. The idea that Papandreou would return to Greece to deal with its financial crisis and skip a meeting with the very people who hold a lot of power in that crisis is not logical. I believe it is a cover

story to get Papandreou back to Greece without alarming the populace that another war with Turkey is a distinct possibility. It would be incredulous to believe that the Greek cabinet cannot handle the problem while the Prime Minister is away for a week.

It may also be that Papandreou does not want to be in the same room with Erdogan and Netanyahu while they get lectured and cajoled by Ban Ki-Moon to solve an insoluble problem. Compared to the Mavi Marmara incident, the problem of Cyprus is orders of magnitude more significant to both Greece and Turkey. Cyprus is a *causus belli* for both sides.

Erdogan may be convinced to back away from the Mavi Marmara incident. He cannot back away from what are obvious slights to the Turkish part of Cyprus. The idea that Greek Cyprus can divide its Exclusive Economic zone with Israel, or anybody, without the participation of Turkish Cyprus will not hold with the Turks. In addition, the Turks are incensed that Greek Cyprus will become the rotating President of the EU without Cyprus being unified.

The drilling rig is predicted to enter its designated area for exploration sometime on the 19th. That part of the World is ten hours ahead of us (Pacific Daylight Time). We may well wake up to a glorious mess.