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## Allies Incur Dubious Risks to Gain Washington's Favor

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During my recent conversations in Athens with Greek officials, it was apparent that they were extremely anxious to demonstrate their country's valuable contributions to the policy objectives of the United States and NATO. In particular, several people stressed the importance of the large Greek air and [naval bases at Souda Bay](#)<sup>[3]</sup>, on the island of Crete. And they had a point, since U.S. and other NATO forces have access to those installations. Souda Bay has played a crucial logistical role in numerous missions, including the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s and the current U.S. operation in Iraq.

Indeed, when the administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton considered which NATO military bases could be closed once the Cold War ended, a top Pentagon official reportedly stated that he could live with most possible closures—as long as budget cutters kept their hands off Souda Bay.

The desire of the Greek government to emphasize the value of that facility—and other contributions to Western strategic goals—is understandable. In particular, officials fret that Washington persistently regards Turkey as a more important ally. They want to make the case that Greece is also important, and that it is more reliable than Turkey. Given Ankara's sometimes maverick behavior, such as the recent opposition to new economic sanctions against

Iran, Athens is gaining some traction with that argument.

Nevertheless, it was troubling that those same officials never seemed to consider the risks that their country is incurring by its high-profile assistance to the United States. The NATO operations out of Souda Bay, for example, are overwhelmingly geared to U.S.-led missions against Muslim adversaries in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. Countries and political movements that normally would have little cause to regard Greece as an enemy have ample reason to do so when Athens is aiding and abetting Washington's regional agenda. Greek officials thereby make their country a target.

Other allies seem equally casual about the risks they incur as America's junior security partners. Romania, for example, was positively eager not only to secure NATO membership earlier this decade, but was avid about serving as a platform for "out of area" <sup>[4]</sup> (i.e., Middle East) U.S. military operations. That decision may have made sense financially, since Washington was willing to pay generously for such access, and that largesse was beneficial to cash-strapped Romania. But again, did Bucharest acquire new (and, perhaps, unnecessary) enemies by taking that step?

Small allies understandably want to curry favor with their superpower protector, but they need to understand that such benefits are not risk free. Evidence of a more sober cost-benefit assessment would be advisable.

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