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Greece's 'Achilles's Shield' Air Defense System And Relations With Israel

Ioannis E. Kotoulas

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Ju Weiwei

Kiadásért felelős személy: Feng Zhongping

1052 Budapest, Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

+36 1 5858 690

office@china-cee.eu

china-cee.eu

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Abstract

Greece and Israel, two focal states in the Eastern Mediterranean, share harmonious ties, especially over the last two decades. The relationship between Israel and Greece has evolved into a profound strategic alliance based on advanced defense cooperation and more importantly a shared vision for regional stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. Points of convergence are dominant; still there are issues of deviation. Now, the two countries upgraded their bilateral military ties signing an ambitious 3 billion euro deal in defense cooperation in August 2026. The landmark defense deal involves a multi-layered air defense system known as ''Achilles' Shield'', designed to protect Greek territory and population from diverse aerial threats. Greece's moves reflect both a dynamic regional environment and ongoing inadequacies of European security mechanisms that oblige Greece to adopt a more flexible stance in weapons procurement, often outside EU and NATO framework.

Achilles' Shield: an advanced air defense system

In August 2026, Greece and Israel signed an ambitious 3 billion-defense agreement, one of the biggest for both countries.[1] The agreement was widely promoted and discussed in Greek media, with analysts pointing out its importance for both bilateral relations and Greece's own industrial production capabilities. The agreement also highlights the ongoing problems the EU faces as an entity in guaranteeing security for its member-states; as a result, many states in unstable geopolitical environment -as Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean- look to external solutions for their security and defense needs. Greece faces multi-domain security challenges in its immediate neighborhood, the Eastern Mediterranean that cannot be covered by EU mechanisms.[2]

The Greek-Israeli defense deal includes the development of the so-called "Achilles' Shield" system, an advanced air defense nexus created by Israeli companies. "Achilles'

[1] 'Greece, Israel signed landmark 'Achilles Shield' air-defence deal', Euractiv, 1/9/2026, https://www.euractiv.com/news/greece-israel-signed-landmark-achilles-shield-air-defence-deal/.
[2] 'Achilles Shield: What Greece and Israel's defence deal means for the Middle East', The New Arab, 15/9/2026, https://www.newarab.com/analysis/what-greece-and-israels-defence-deal-means-middle-east.

Shield", named after the legendary hero Achilles of ancient Greek mythology, is an advanced multi-layered air-defense network, which will include anti-aircraft, anti-ballistic, and anti-drone capabilities, with the goal of protection against drones, cruise missiles, fighter jets, and ballistic missiles. Specifically, the "Achilles Shield" deal includes a series of advanced military systems:

1) The David's Sling system, developed by the Israeli Missile Defense Organization within the Ministry's DDR&D, with Rafael as prime developer.

2) The BARAK MX system, manufactured by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).

3) The SPYDER system, manufactured by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.

4) MMR multi-mission radars for air surveillance, manufactured by ELTA Systems, a subsidiary of IAI.

5) A new unifying national command and control network, which will consolidate the full range of air defense capabilities.[3]

In addition, a supplementary deal valued at €26 million was signed during the meeting for the sale of Rafael's Drone Dome systems, to defend strategic sites against UAVs and drones and to reinforce existing defenses. The air defense system develops in three tiers with defense ranges extending to 40, 150, and 300 kilometers and will integrate with the existing Patriot and S-300 air defense systems and the aircrafts of Greece, i.e. F-16s, Rafale and F-35s (from 2029). One of the most interesting aspects of the defense agreement has to do with long-term technical cooperation and sharing of expertise. In this context, the two countries have agreed to expand their industrial defense cooperation, including the transfer of knowledge and technology to the local Greek industry. Israeli defense expertise will be thus transferred to Greece under the umbrella of the Government-to-Government (G2G) activity between the relevant ministries of National Defense.

The plan to acquire the Israeli-made "Achilles' Shield'' system had been first announced in April 2025 by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and has now been materialized after a period of technical consultations and discussions.[4] This agreement of course is part of an ongoing cooperation with Israel in defense matters.[5] There were previous important

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[3] Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Israel and Greece sign "Achilles Shield" agreement', 31/8/2026, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/israel-and-greece-sign-achilles-shield-agreement-31-aug-2026.

[4] "Greece to Spend 25 Billion Euros as Part of Multi-Year Defence Plan," Reuters, 2/4/2025, https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/greece-spend-25-billion-euros-part-multi-year-defence-plan-2025-04-02/.

[5] "Greece Resumes Talks With Israel to Acquire Advanced Air Defence Systems Under Achilles Shield Programme," Defense Industry Europe, 12/11/2025, https://defence-industry.eu/greece-resumestalks-with-

agreements, although not of this size, including the creation of a flight training school in southern Greece under a $1.65 billion agreement and the sale of Israeli rocket launchers, anti-tank guided missiles and specialized drones.

Now, this new defense deal marks a milestone and an important upgrade in Greek-Israeli defense and technical cooperation. The ongoing close cooperation between the two countries gradually leads to the creation of a Greek-Israeli defense architecture that is getting increasingly sophisticated and complex.[6] Beyond simple procurement, the partnership aims to include the domestic manufacture of Israeli systems within Greece. This collaboration seeks to establish production facilities through cooperation between Israeli companies and Greek industry to create export opportunities for European and Middle Eastern markets,

One of the chronic deficiencies of the Greek defense sector –and the Greek economy in general- has been their dependence on external investments and solutions and the absence of indigenous production and solutions. Greece is now using these international agreements to slowly establish a localized industrial base. This goal is achieved by inserting provisions into the bilateral defense agreements that require a part of the production to come from Greek factories and production lines (at least 50%). In this way, a considerable part of the systems is produced in Greece itself. Greek production in defense systems is increasing in drones, satellite systems, and other areas. An additional positive result is the widening of expertise among Greek academics, technicians, and students, as well as among the state institutions and private companies that engage in aspects of these defense agreements.

Operational and technical characteristics of the Achilles' Shield system

The acquisition of the "Achilles' Shield" system marks a definitive landmark for Greek defense capabilities, as well as a new perception of long-term planning. The system reflects a new mentality in defense planning and strategic goals, one that substitutes isolated, fragmented initiatives of weapons acquisition to an integrated approach based on the combined action of weapons systems and operational doctrine.[7] The ultimate goal is the creation of a single,

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israel-to-acquire-advanced-air-defence-systems-under-achilles-shield-programme/; "Breaking News: Greece Approves Purchase of 36 Israeli-Made PULS Multiple Rocket Launcher Systems," Army Recognition, 9/12/2025, https://www.armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/2025/breaking-news-greece-approves-purchase-of-36-israeli-made-plus-multiple-rocket-launcher-systems#google_vignette.

[6] A. Cicurel & J. Bordy, The Shields of Achilles and David: A Greece–Israel Defense Architecture, JINSA, 2/2026.

[7] "Achilles' Shield": How Greece's new air defence umbrella is taking shape', Proto Thema, 18/9/2026, https://en.prototothema.gr/2026/09/18/achilles-shield-how-greeces-new-air-defence-umbrella-is-taking-shape/.

integrated system. “Achilles’ Shield” reflects a shift away from varied and often fragmented defenses towards an integrated approach. It integrates defenses against ballistic missiles, aircraft, and drones under a single national command structure. In this context, the new integrated system can prove to be quite transformative for Greece’s military capabilities overall. Greece is entering a new era of military capabilities with a general upgrade across all sectors of its military. Greece retains one of the strongest air force fleets in the world (15th in fighters, 16th overall), attempting to balance in the region.[8] There are modernizing projects in the navy and the land forces as well. Greece features mandatory military service for all male citizens and continues steadily to spend 3-3.5% of its GDP in defense, always above the 2% NATO limit, a point also used as a diplomatic asset.[9]

The “Achilles’ Shield” system incudes anti-missile, anti-aircraft, anti-drone, anti-ship, and anti-submarine capabilities. First, regarding missile defense, Achilles’ Shield integrates a range of anti-missile systems to address ballistic and cruise missile threats. Until now, the main long-range air defense systems of Greece were Patriot and S-300 systems, although the latter have been deactivated. These systems are suited mainly against aircraft and cruise missiles and secondarily against ballistic threats which have been upgraded internationally. Now Greece acquires the Israeli system David’s Sling modernizing its long-range air and missile defense systems. Second, regarding the anti-aircraft dimension, the new system combines and reorganizes existing diverse manned aircraft and cruise missiles systems, such as Patriot, IRIS-T SLM, HAWK batteries, and Crotale systems, into overlapping coverage zones interconnected by shared command-and-control sectors. Third, concerning the counter-drone dimension, “Achilles’ Shield” integrates existing systems, such as short-range guns, missiles, and electronic warfare systems into a comprehensive counter-drone network. The ultimate goal relates to a focal aspect of Greek security challenges. In a scenario of high tension, rival countries could flood the air with low-cost drones aiming to exhaust interceptors and disrupt both movements of Greek air force and air defense capabilities. Fourth, regarding the anti-ship dimension, “Achilles’ Shield” provides surface defense against hostile vessels, until now ensured by air-to-ship missile systems, such as F-16s armed with AGM-84 Harpoons and

[8] Global Firepower Index, 2026 Greece Military Strength, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=greece.

[9] Ioannis E. Kotoulas, New Greek Armed Forces in the Making, China-CEE Institute Weekly Briefing 78:1, 11/2024, https://china-cee.eu/2025/01/03/greece-political-briefing-new-greek-armed-forces-in-the-making/; D. Gatopoulos, “Greece Vows $27B on Defense Overhaul centered on high-tech warfare,” Defense News, 2/4/2025, https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/04/02/greece-vows-27b-on-defense-overhaulcentered-on-high-tech-warfare/.

Mirage 2000-5 and Rafale aircraft armed with AM39 Exocets, coastal defense systems, and naval patrols by advanced frigates. "Achilles' Shield" integrates these strike options with air-defense sensors and maritime surveillance. Fifth, the final dimension is subsurface protection with underwater operability. The new system integrates the submarines and boats of the Hellenic Navy with undersea surveillance, patrol aircrafts, sonar technologies and maritime patrol data in one unified nexus.

As the deal came to the forefront, there were some contradictory accounts circulating in media concerning whether Greece would have access to the source code.[10] As a result, the Israeli Ministry of Defense issued a clarifying statement that dispersed any such unfounded claims and rumors: "Under the 'Achilles Shield' agreement, the Israeli Ministry of Defense and the Greek Ministry of National Defense agreed on the transfer of Israeli know-how to the Greek companies participating in the program. This covers both the operational expertise accumulated over decades of developing and operating air-defense systems, as well as the technological support that will enable Greek companies to develop the core command-and-control software. Accordingly, the Greek source code developed as part of the program, together with any modifications and additions to it will remain under exclusive Greek control and will be tailored to Greek operational requirements".[11] The Greek leadership of the Ministry of Defense justified the need to upgrade the defense infrastructure in the light of new and emerging threats and a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. "Modern conflicts have already altered the parameters of military defense and deterrence," Greece's Defense Minister Nikos Dendias said in a statement after the agreement was signed. "Technology, ballistic missiles, satellite communications, unmanned systems, cyber threats, hybrid forms of warfare and the interconnection of fields of operations have long rendered preexisting defense doctrines completely unrealistic," he said.

Greece, Israel, and the geopolitical balance in the Eastern Mediterranean

The geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean remains focal due to the volatile environment, the existence of many state and non-state actors in the greater region and the

[10] 'Israel Confirms Greece Will Keep Exclusive Control of 'Achilles' Shield' Source Code', Iefimerida, 9/9/2026, https://www.iefimerida.gr/english/israel-confirms-greece-will-keep-exclusive-control-achilles-shield-source-code.

[11] 'Source code for the "Achilles Shield" to remain exclusively under Greek control, says Israeli Ministry of Defense', Proto Thema, 8/9/2026, https://en.protothema.gr/2026/09/08/source-code-for-the-achilles-shield-to-remain-exclusively-under-greek-control-says-israeli-ministry-of-defense/.

external interference of major powers. Greece and Israel in general share excellent ties, while at the same time Greece remains a trustworthy intermediate with Arab states according to its multilateral foreign policy. Over the last years, Greece has advanced its diplomatic, military, and energy cooperation with Israel. The armed forces of Greece and Israel participate in common joint exercises and drills in the Eastern Mediterranean; the latest of those took place in September 2026 and involved many advanced ships of the war navy of the two countries.[12] Greek-Israeli energy cooperation is primarily focused on enhancing regional energy security and diversifying energy markets. The "Great Sea Interconnector" project plans to link Israel's electrical grid to Europe via Cyprus and Greece. Concerning the Palestinian Issue, which remains focal for the greater regional stability, Greece promotes a solution both on a regional level and in the EU framework along the lines of the two states principle and based on international law and the relevant UN Resolutions. In general, Greece and Israel feature common, albeit not identical, geopolitical interests in various issues.

The threat that functions as the primary driver of Greece's decision to invest €3 billion in an integrated Israeli air-defense network is the security concerns over neighboring Turkey. Since 1995, Turkey has declared a casus belli against Greece, if the latter extends its territorial waters in the Aegean Sea to 12 nautical miles, as Greece has the right to do so under international law of the sea (UNCLOS, 1982). Since 1974, Turkey occupies the northern part of Cyprus, a state with ethnic Greek population. Greek security extends to Cyprus, since Greece is a guarantor state for Cyprus according to the establishing treaty. The threats from Iran are also a factor of concern, although evaluated as temporary. In the last period, after the US-Israel attack on Iran, Greece employed its Patriot air missile defense systems on its isles in southeastern Aegean.

Israel's battlefield experience and technical expertise, especially concerning air and missile defenses, is very important for Greece since the EU has not yet managed to develop similar levels of technical assistance and suffers from bureaucratic obstacles. The acquisition of the system is actually a fast way for Greece to obtain advanced defense capabilities. "Achilles Shield" is an important upgrade of Greek defense capabilities and functions as a factor of deterrence for any hegemonic regional aspirations. Greece promotes regional stability

[12] 'Greek, Israeli navies hold joint drills in east Med', Ekathimerini, 17/9/2026, https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1315612/greek-israeli-navies-hold-joint-drills-in-east-med/.

through its multilateral ties with overlapping networks, such as Greece-Cyprus-Israel, and Greece-Cyprus-Egypt.[13]

The broader geopolitical implications of Greece becoming one of Israel's most important defense partners in Europe extend beyond the bilateral Greek-Israeli relationship. The greater picture is that Greece along with Cyprus, a state with ethnic Greek population, are perceived in various analyses as the strategic depth of Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean. These are the only two non-Islamic states in the region and can function as gateways of support for Israel. Still, Greece employs a multilateral approach. Greece historically shares excellent relations with the Arab world, especially with Egypt, has been its most vocal supporter in the EU and was the first EU member-state to sign an extensive economic partnership with Egypt; it also functions as Egypt's economic gateway into the EU.[14]

Relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are also essential, even if they become part of the greater nexus of the Gulf countries special relationship, where Greece would not like to interfere. Despite the excellent ties with Israel, Greece on reasons of principle opposes the settlements in the West Bank and advocates for a solution to the Palestinian Issue.[15] Until the signing of the Turkey-Pakistan-Saudi defense deal, Greece was the only NATO country that had signed a defense agreement (with France) overlapping NATO defense clauses. Greece is actively using its membership into the EU (along with Cyprus) to promote its national interests and protect the regional equilibrium. For example, Greece vetoed Turkey's admission into the SAFE defense project of the EU, a decision not probable to change in the near future.

The elephant in the room is of course EU's continuing inadequacy in security matters. The development of an independent European defense framework is often portrayed as a strategic necessity by many sides, even by the EU itself, but always remains an unfulfilled project. If the EU means its perception of independence as a strategic actor in the international environment, then it should emphasize and develop its own military capabilities, to be able to claim an independent standing in international matters as well. Continuing hesitations and bureaucratic entanglements force many member-states, especially the ones located in frontier areas and volatile regions (such as Greece near the Middle East) to adopt a more autonomous

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[13] 'Greece, Cyprus, Egypt test war readiness', Ekathimerini, 19/9/2026, https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1315754/greece-cyprus-egypt-test-war-readiness/.

[14] Ioannis E. Kotoulas, 'Egypt and Greece, strategic partners', Al-Ahram Weekly, 15/5/2025, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/546162.aspx.

[15] Ioannis E. Kotoulas, 'Greece and the Safe Defense Project of the EU', China-CEE Institute Monthly Briefing 10:4, 11/2025, https://china-cee.eu/2025/12/31/greece-monthly-briefing-greece-and-the-safe-defense-project-of-the-european-union/.

foreign policy, even in weapons procurement and defense agreements. In essence, what we are noticing over the last years on a geopolitical level, are counter-balancing moves across western Eurasia, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the rise of regional multilateral networks. For Greece, cooperation with Israel is essential in obtaining advanced expertise and tuning into the latest developments in military technology. It also acts as an important diplomatic network in the Mediterranean and in international decision-making mechanisms. The agreement with Israel is this not just a technical, military framework; it forms the basis for greater autonomy and an emerging spirit of self-reliance in international matters.

Despite the excellent climate between the countries, challenges remain in the bilateral relationship and certain issues need to be addressed. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, an ancient institution of Christian hierarchy, is present in the region for thousands of years and evidently the most ancient institution with a continued presence. There have been incidents of illegal acquisition of properties belonging to the Patriarchate that undermine its ability to continue to contribute to inter-faith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Greece also opposes the idea of changing of borders or displacing persons, as is sometimes suggested by Israeli politicians; and finally, Greece opposes settlements in occupied territories as a matter of principle and as a violation of international law.

Conclusions

In the summer of 2026, Greece announced an important defense agreement with Israel, amounting to 3 billion Euros and regarding air defense. In terms of societal, “Achilles Shield” has been in general positively accepted by the Greek public. The defense cooperation between Greece and Israel is perceived as a fast and reliable way to quickly modernize the Greek armed forces and obtain tactical and operational experience. Access to latest technology equals to short-term modernization; at the same time, it creates the basis for Greece’s own industrial development in specialized defense issues. The diplomatic and military network with Israel is an essential part of Greek strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean and it works in overlapping aspects with the excellent Greek-Egyptian ties and in general with Greece’s intermediary role between the Arab world and the EU as a ‘bridge state’. In Greece’s perspective these are not mutually exclusive networks but complementary, contributing to regional balance. Greece will continue to seek an autonomous path in its foreign policy and defense agreements in crating concentric and overlapping networks of regional defense cooperation.

Note: The views expressed in this briefing are solely those of the author and do not represent the stance of the China-CEE Institute.