11 Greece and Nuclear Weapons

Kosta Tsipis

Introduction

Recently there has been considerable debate in Greece regarding the advisability of equipping the Greek defence forces with nuclear weapons. There has been much debate but little technical analysis of the costs, benefits and the scale of magnitude of the resources — natural, human, and manufacturing — required for such an effort.

This chapter will not address the advisability or not of nuclear weapons acquisition by Greece. It will only identify and discuss six technical and military issues involved in the process of accumulating a nuclear arsenal. First, the study will examine the circumstances under which Greece would want to acquire nuclear weapons. Secondly, it will deal with the methods of acquisition and their relative practicality. Thirdly, the study will identify the requirements in terms of manpower, facilities and materials implicit in some of the more realistic methods. Fourthly, the technical details of fabrication of nuclear warheads from uranium and plutonium will be examined. Fifthly, the costs, both direct and indirect, of such an effort will be estimated. Finally, the possible utility of nuclear warheads for Greece under several conditions will be examined.

Putative Circumstances favouring Acquisition

There are several possible reasons, some logically founded, some
not, for which Greece may want to accumulate a nuclear arsenal. These include:

1. deter a nuclear rival or neighbour from attacking Greece with conventional weapons;
2. deter an opponent from attacking Greece with nuclear weapons;
3. deter attempts of nuclear blackmail of Greece by an opponent that demands political, geographic or other concessions under the threat of nuclear attack;
4. use nuclear weapons to intimidate a non-nuclear rival or strengthen one's bargaining position in war or peace;
5. attempt to gain enhanced international status by exhibiting possession of nuclear weapons;
6. initiate a military–scientific technological base occasioned by the decision to acquire a nuclear arsenal;
7. follow the example of other nations of similar size and level of development;
8. create a nuclear deterrent following withdrawal from or collapse of existing military-alliance structures.

Although some of the circumstances listed here are dependent on external factors beyond the control of the Greek Government, and others are implicitly matters of internal political decision, this chapter does not seek to evaluate them or rank them in any order either of importance or of probability of occurrence. The occasion for such a decision may be triggered by a number of events including:

1. nuclearisation of neighbours or potential adversaries;
2. breakdown of international constraints of nuclear proliferation;
3. diminution or elimination of the technological and feasibility gap that separates use of nuclear energy for production of electric power from use in the manufacture of weapons;
4. reduction in perceived protection afforded by an alliance;
5. rise of hostile or imperialistic tendencies in neighbouring countries.

The rise of unforeseen circumstances that may add weight in domestic arguments in favour of the acquisition of nuclear weapons is an ever-present possibility that should not be neglected or overlooked.