

As Achilles' Shield Moves Forward, It Is Time for Washington to Step Up

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On August 31, Israel and Greece [signed](#) the largest defense export deal in the history of their bilateral relationship and one of the largest in Israel's history. Per the \$3.5 billion (€3 billion) contract, Israel will build the air and missile defense core of "Achilles' Shield," the multi-layered, multi-domain architecture Greece unveiled in 2025 to protect its territory and the centerpiece of a broader military modernization running through 2036. It will mark the first time Israel will deliver a partner a single integrated architecture to counter the full range of modern aerial threats, from ballistic missiles and aircraft to drones.

The agreement makes important progress toward translating Greece's ambitious Achilles' Shield idea into a funded program. The signing moves it from approval into implementation, with Greek Defense Minister Nikos Dendias stating the architecture should be [operational in 2029](#). The United States should encourage further cooperation between Greece and Israel that reinforces their roles as model partners willing to shoulder greater burdens for regional defense.

Achilles' Shield – Layered Systems Overview



Layer	Currently Fielded Systems	Israeli Systems
Missile Defense	Patriot PAC-III variant S-300 PMU-1	David's Sling
Anti-Aircraft	Patriot IRIS-T SLM HAWK Crotale Soviet-origin short/medium systems	David's Sling Barak MX
Counter-Drone	Kentavros (indigenous C-UAS) Short-range guns and missiles Electronic warfare systems Point-defense systems	SPYDER Drone Dome
Anti-Ship	Harpoon coastal defense batteries F-16 w/ AGM-84 Harpoon Mirage 2000-5 & Rafale w/ AM39 Exocet Hydra-class (MEKO 200HN) frigates	PULS long-range rocket artillery*
Subsurface Protection	Type-214 AIP submarines Upgraded Type-209 submarines P-3B Orion Shipborne anti-submarine helicopters	No major Israeli system discussed yet

*Under Consideration but Not Part of Initial Contract

A Real Architecture, Not Just Another Arms Sale

With Achilles' Shield receiving the necessary political approval when the Government Council for Foreign Affairs and Defense [authorized it](#) in July, the new contract commits Greece to purchase the specific [Israeli systems](#) Greece spent the past year evaluating. Rafael's David's Sling will anchor the shield's upper tier against ballistic and cruise missiles; Israel Aerospace Industries' BARAK MX will cover the medium-range layer countering aircraft and cruise missiles; Rafael's SPYDER will handle shorter-range air defense, with batteries slated for Greek islands; ELTA's multi-mission radars will provide detection and surveillance—which provides for the tracking of incoming threats and the acquisition of targeting data that can be passed to the interceptors; and a supplementary \$30 million (€26 million) contract will add Rafael's Drone Dome for point defense against drones.

The most consequential element is the new national command-and-control system that Rafael will construct, which will consolidate every layer into a single operational picture. When JINSA [assessed Achilles' Shield in February](#), the central potential risk was that arms sales and co-production, on their own, do not produce integrated defense. To be truly effective, sensors, command-and-control, and interceptors must operate within a shared framework that can assign the right interceptor to each threat. Greece's decision to purchase a unified national command system is thus crucial to building genuinely integrated air and missile defense.

Why the Shield Matters for Greece

Greece and increasingly important energy and shipping interests in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea face pressure from several directions at once, in a theater where threats seldom respect national boundaries, and a layered, networked defense therefore outperforms a scattered set of standalone batteries. From the south and east, Turkey has sustained a [campaign of air](#) and [maritime coercion](#) in which its forces routinely deploy into contested waters and press energy-exploration operations across disputed boundaries. From the north, Russian [drone incursions](#) and [cyberattacks](#) on critical infrastructure target Greece's fellow North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members. In addition, Russian [naval operations](#) in the Black Sea all threaten the alliance's southeastern flank. From the east, Iran and its proxies have demonstrated both the intent and the reach to project force through Eastern Mediterranean waters and airspace by routing one-way attack drones over international waters toward [Israel](#) and [Cyprus](#) and threatening [offshore energy infrastructure](#), converting Middle Eastern conflicts into direct threats to Eastern Mediterranean security.

A Burden-Sharing Model Washington Should Support

The deal aligns squarely with the Trump administration's call in the 2025 [National Security Strategy](#) and 2026 [National Defense Strategy](#) for partners to increase burden-sharing. Now, two U.S. partners are, on their own initiative, pursuing better burden-sharing by working together. Greece is spending its own money on defenses that a fellow partner will build, taking on more responsibility for its own security and for regional stability while reducing demands on U.S. forces rather than adding to them. For Greece, expanding its sensor and intercept capacity through additional Israeli systems would give it a broader reach to better detect and defeat threats from Turkey or Iran, making it a NATO ally more capable of both defending itself and contributing to the broader alliance.

The timing is also important given the strained nature of the U.S. industrial base. American production of interceptors and other critical munitions [cannot keep pace](#) with demand from U.S. forces and partners

alike. A capable partner like Israel equipping other democratic nations such as Greece is a net strategic gain for Washington by freeing its own limited output for itself and other partners.

The Israeli systems Greece is buying are combat-proven and inexpensive to field. Israel's layered defenses have [proven themselves](#) time and again against a variety of projectiles, from Hezbollah's rockets to Iran's ballistic missiles. Israeli interceptors are built to be inexpensive enough to field across a territory as large and dispersed as Greece's, whose mainland, territorial waters, and over 200 inhabited islands stretch across the Aegean and Ionian seas. These Israeli ground-based platforms are far more economical than scrambling fighters to meet every incursion, with F-16 operations costing an estimated [\\$27,000 per flight hour](#) and F-35 operations costing an estimated [\\$33,000 to \\$42,000 per flight hour](#). They will also be cheaper per shot than the systems already in Greece's arsenal. The David's Sling interceptor costs roughly [\\$1 million per round](#), about a quarter of the cost of the roughly [\\$4 million per round](#) Patriot interceptors Greece [currently fields](#).

Integrating the Architecture

The national command system will knit Greece's own layers together, but it will not automatically link Greek defenses to Israel's or to U.S. forces in the region. The wider integration needed for a shared air picture and coordinated engagement framework must be built deliberately. This will require resolving hard questions about data-sharing, cybersecurity, intellectual property, and engagement authority when threats cross borders. It also means addressing coverage gaps created by Greece's decision to keep Cyprus outside the shield to avoid escalation with Turkey, since Cyprus sits along many of the same drone and missile approaches the architecture is meant to defeat.

What Washington Should Do

The United States is positioned to convert this deal into an enduring, interoperable framework, and a handful of moves would maximize its value. The starting point is to treat the Eastern Mediterranean as a single strategic theater rather than a bureaucratic seam between commands. Aligning State Department and Defense Department planning across the EUCOM, CENTCOM, and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) boundary, including through a standing EUCOM-led joint planning cell, would reduce vulnerabilities from threats that cut across European, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and African boundaries.

Washington should also drive interoperability and industrial cooperation, because the sensor fusion that real integration depends on runs through the United States. Many Israeli systems contain U.S.-origin components and technology, so their export, and any deeper Greek-Israeli integration, would hinge on U.S. export-control and third-party-transfer approvals. Slow or uncertain releases could stall the program or block the very data-sharing that would tie the systems together. Washington can grant those approvals quickly and predictably, and it can convene Greece and Israel to resolve the intellectual-property and technical-disclosure questions that arise when two partners link sensitive command-and-control and sensor systems.

U.S. military posture and multilateral structures should reinforce that diplomatic groundwork. Additional U.S. air and maritime sensors in Cyprus could extend regional early warning and feed the Achilles' Shield picture, allowing Greece to operate the architecture while an American presence reinforces it. The existing U.S.-Greece-Israel trilateral and the 3+1 framework with Cyprus can grow into standing joint planning groups and integrated exercises, folding Greek and Israeli systems into major U.S.-run drills so they align with U.S. operational concepts. The same coalition should then deepen cooperation on energy and infrastructure security, building a shared plan to protect the undersea cables, offshore natural gas fields, and key ports across the region, backed by joint exercises and information-sharing.

The value of Achilles' Shield extends beyond Greek airspace. It shows how capable partners can shoulder more of their own regional defense by fielding integrated architectures, co-producing systems, and adopting common operational concepts, an approach that bolsters deterrence even as it eases the demands placed on American forces. Greece and Israel have done the hard part and put real money behind it. Washington should meet the moment, back the shield, and help make it strong.