

SOVIET POLICY TOWARD CYPRUS

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Abstract

Like imperial Russia, the Soviet Union followed a policy of slow but steady penetration into the Eastern Mediterranean countries, especially Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, mainly for geostrategic and economic reasons. However, this penetration was achieved by indirect methods. Rather than make territorial demands and send in their armed forces to annex, the Soviets, or the East Germans as their allies, supported various political groups and governments to weaken ties with the West and to extend Soviet influence southward. They also utilised Western countries' mishandling of the Cyprus problem to encourage the governments, directly or indirectly, to pursue a non-aligned policy. A very effective method of popularising their goals proved the forum of the United Nations.

Keywords: Soviet policy in Mediterranean, AKEL, Cold War, German Democratic Republic, Greek–Turkish relations, Northern Tier, NATO, US–Policy in Middle East, Soviet–Turkish relations, US–Greek relations

Introduction

Over recent decades, the fact that the Cyprus Problem is one of the oldest and most intractable conflicts within the UN¹ has attracted the interest of many researchers, political scientists, historians, and jurists worldwide. Almost every aspect of it has been commented on and analysed. However, no systematic study exists on a very significant dimension to the problem, although it is part of the so-called 'Northern-Tier issue' within the East–West conflict during the Cold War. The term 'Northern Tier' describes the northernmost Near and Middle Eastern countries on the border of or near the Soviet Union, i.e. the function fulfilled by Greece, Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan in attempts by the West to maintain its position in the balance of power in the Near East.

In this regard, crises and disputes arising in internal relations between these countries were welcomed by the Soviet Union. Moscow's strategy involved detaching the countries of the region from anti-communist alliances and bringing non-aligned countries into the Soviet camp, extending Soviet power and influence over the south-eastern Mediterranean area, spreading Marxist–Leninist ideology and strengthening Marxist–Leninist Parties, and gaining access to the natural

resources and airspace of countries in the region.² Around the Cyprus issue there emerged perhaps the most explosive dispute among the Western allies that escalated throughout the post-war era.

This paper examines the policy of the Soviet Union towards the Cyprus Conflict, the western powers and its political ally on the island, and the strongest party of Cyprus, the Communist Party – AKEL (The Progressive Party of the Working People). The thesis advanced here first and foremost is that the Soviet and Eastern bloc's policy towards Cyprus should be divided into three phases: (a) the period up to the establishment of the republic in 1960, (b) the period from 1960 until summer 1974 when the Turkish invasion of the island took place, and (c) the phase that began with the illegal occupation of the northern part of the island and ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The paper relies on Western sources from Greece, Cyprus, NATO, and Great Britain together with sources extracted from the archives of the former East German state, which played an important role in the overall policy of the Eastern bloc towards Cyprus.

The International Context in the 1950s

George F. Kennan noted in a memo when he was ambassador in Moscow that ever since the beginning of the revolution it had been orthodox Communist strategy not to solicit open and general military confrontation with a capitalist power, but to avoid such confrontation and instead conduct an attack on the capitalist world in a much more cautious manner, deploying what Lenin termed a 'state of partial war': the flexible and opportunistic use of a wide variety of tactics, primarily including such gambits as deception, concealed penetration and subversion, psychological warfare, and above all the efficient exploitation of every conceivable form of division in capitalist society, whether on an international scale or within the domestic framework of capitalist states.³

Great power rivalry in the Near East dates back to the nineteenth century. Russia's expansionist policies and her need for warm-water ports clashed with Britain's need to maintain her 'life line', i.e. the line of communication through the Eastern Mediterranean to India and her desire to protect a vast area which stretched eastward from the Persian Gulf. As a result, both Russia and Britain became heavily involved in Near East affairs.⁴

More specifically, in both the imperial and subsequent Soviet period, Russian foreign policy had maintained a remarkable continuity over the centuries as well as certain similarities. The most important of these was the attempt to gain direct

access to the Mediterranean Sea. This strategy consisted of two goals, a maximalistic and a minimalistic one. The maximalistic aim pointed to becoming a neighbouring state of the Mediterranean either by itself or through alliances with other states. The minimalistic aim was to secure the passage of warships from the Black Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean through the Dardanelles in times of peace and war.⁵

In order to achieve their aspirations, the Soviets created some incentives in the years following the Second World War. They made offers of economic and military aid, trade, military alliance, and help in resisting or pressuring regional rivals. They sought corroboration at international meetings, i.e. positive propaganda to endorse a regime, plus support against domestic opponents (except pro-Soviet Marxist–Leninists), and encouragement to bolster the local Communist Party to underpin the regime if it followed a policy in line with Moscow's interests.⁶

In this context, Cyprus was of great importance for the internal coherence of the western alliance, since the island represented a potential crisis centre between the two pillars of NATO's south-eastern flank, i.e. the Turkish and Greek allies.

As the Soviets increased their naval presence in the Mediterranean, cooperation between Greece and Turkey became essential for the West to function as a cornerstone of NATO. A serious dispute between the two countries could most of all damage Turkey's ability to control the only sea-connection between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, with its possession of the Dardanelles. This entrance from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean was judged by NATO officials to be the primary target of a potential Warsaw Pact attack against the south-eastern region of the Allied Command Europe. According to the same estimate, the Warsaw Pact could target the denial of oil to NATO member states, before trying to seize bases in order to cut NATO lines of communication. Finally, the enemy forces could split the Greek and Turkish forces. To counter this threat, NATO established a Mobile Force – a multinational, multi-service force – capable of rapid deployment on the flanks. Later, during the 1960s, a new command was created by the alliance: Maritime Air Forces Mediterranean at Naples, which increased surveillance capability in view of the Soviet naval presence.⁷

Indeed, various problems had emerged in Greek–Turkish cooperation within NATO since 1955 which destroyed the good relations the two countries had maintained since the bilateral agreement in 1930. Since the onset of the Cold War, the common fear of sliding into the post-war communist sphere of influence – a danger apparent in the interference of Eastern bloc countries in the Greek Civil War and in Moscow's policy towards Turkey – had cemented excellent collaboration between the two countries until that point. In the case of Greece, Soviet interference

manifested itself through the Eastern bloc proxies: countries that supported the communist guerrillas in their fight against the West oriented central government.⁸

In the case of Turkey, Stalin did not use satellite states to carry out his policy and he tried to revise the 1936 Montreaux convention by obtaining the renewal of the 1925 non-aggression pact on the Soviet acquisition of bases on the straits, as well as the north-eastern territories of Kars and Ardachan. According to the US Embassy in Turkey, these tactics were intended to 'soften up' Turkey in order to secure the control of the straits by the USSR and the termination of the Turkish-British alliance, thus putting an end to Western influence in Turkey and probably in the Middle East.⁹

In consequence, the post-World-War II governments of Greece and Turkey regarded the North Atlantic Treaty as the most effective measure to deter aggression and repeatedly made concerted efforts to be included in the western defence system. Both states, however, were originally left out of the 1949 Atlantic Defence Pact because other western countries were unwilling to accept the wide spread of American Defence assistance so distant from Western Europe. Despite the reluctance of many NATO member states to provide Greece and Turkey with adequate assurance and support for their full integration into the alliance, the North Atlantic Council after rigorous deliberation at its meeting in Ottawa in September 1951, adopted, the resolution to accept the accession of both countries to NATO.¹⁰

Greek and Turkish membership of NATO brought American bases and missiles to the immediate border of the Eastern bloc. Cyprus was even considered as a possible field for a NATO air base.¹¹ As the basic pillars of the NATO alliance in an important highly sensitive and judicious region, Greece and Turkey were considered to be two essential and stable strategic partners for the Western bloc. Even the British, who had opposed the accession of Greece to NATO, noted in their reports eighteen months later, in April 1953, that Greek participation in NATO had not thrown up any particular problems. In general, the Greeks had played a moderately active but not outstanding part since they joined the council. They had shown a certain interest in promoting counter-propaganda studies in NATO with a view to concerting NATO action against Communist propagandists within the NATO area and consequently silenced many Greek Communists who were still continuing their activities in an 'asylum' safety net in Western Europe.¹²

Greek-Turkish cooperation as well as Greece's 'loyal anticommunist' behaviour could not, however, be sustained for a long period. The struggle for self-determination against British rule which broke out on the island of Aphrodite in 1955 led to the resurgence of an old bitter conflict between the two countries and the two communities and undermined the notion of the North-Atlantic alliance as an

instrument of collective defence against common external enemies. The ground had been prepared for the Soviets.

Soviet Diplomacy and the Cypriot Conflict in the 1950s and 1960s

In the 1950s Britain's post-war policy of remaining a Middle Eastern power, came under threat when the former British geostrategic Life Line was put in utter jeopardy because the Greek Cypriots, who made up approximately 80 per cent of the population on the island, had confronted London asking for union with Greece (Enosis).¹³

In August 1954, despite preventive British reaction within the United Nations Organisation,¹⁴ Greece's UN representatives formally requested, under pressure during a Campaign for Union with Greece (Enosis) initiated by Cypriot Archbishop Makarios, that the request for self-determination for the people of Cyprus should be put on the agenda of the General Assembly's next session. The British cynically ignored the Greek desire for Enosis by publicly declaring Cyprus to be a non-discussible question. As a consequence the image of the traditional protective power of the Greek state was destroyed forever in the Greek collective consciousness.

France and West Germany considered the Cyprus question to be one of Britain's post-colonial problems and did not wish to become involved. The American government's attitude was also undecided towards the Cyprus issue, which in effect was tailor-made for exploitation against US policy, although it was obvious that the British had inadequately handled the problem.¹⁵ Needless to say, the whole attitude of mostly silence or neutrality from the Western camp towards the Cyprus problem proved to be the swiftest method of temporarily diminishing the pro-Western feeling of the Greek post-civil-war society.

In April 1955 the Greek population of the island transformed its anti-colonialist feelings into revolutionary action. The Greek-Cypriot armed revolt was led by right-wing EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) and took place between 1955 and 1959, intensifying the rivalry between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus. In contrast to NATO's fundamental goal of promoting collective security through political and military cooperation, Greece and Turkey, acting under ethnic constraints, overlooked their collective commitments and sought the promotion of their national goals. This jeopardised Western security interests in the region.¹⁶

In addition to the outbreak of the revolt in Cyprus in 1955, a pogrom against the Greek population living in Istanbul took place. This culminated in deteriorating relations between Greece and the Western countries and in Greek-Turkish

relations. Thereafter the Greek government recalled the Greek Ambassador in London and ordered the withdrawal of Greek personnel from the NATO South-Eastern European Command Headquarters in Izmir, Turkey. Moreover, the Greek Government did not consult NATO authorities prior to the event and made all arrangements directly with senior Greek officers in NATO, which was characterised by NATO as a 'shock Greek move'.¹⁷

Greek NATO staff gradually resumed activities in connection with responsibilities in Izmir two years later after some requests had been submitted: (a) the exchange of papers between Greek staff and NATO headquarters in Izmir would be resumed if Izmir papers were signed by NATO officers other than Turks, (b) the recalled Greek officers would be considered NATO officers and would perform NATO duties in Greece for Izmir headquarters, (c) Greek participation in NATO exercises would be conditional on no contact between Greek and Turkish officers, and (d) Greek officers would be prohibited from going to Turkey and request that no Turkish officers be ordered to Greece.¹⁸

The political strains and crises also caused discrepancies in the domestic politics of Greece. Since 1953 Soviet diplomacy in Athens had been directed by ambassador M.G. Sergejew. He was a very competent and active diplomat who very soon realised the importance of the Cyprus problem both for the coherence of the Western alliance and as an effective field for nurturing 'anti-imperialist' propaganda against NATO in Greek society.

Soviet diplomacy was exercised on two levels: The Soviet Embassy in Athens followed the so-called 'diplomacy of smiling'.¹⁹ In the cultural and economic fields, the USSR and her satellites – with the German Democratic Republic (GDR) occupying a prominent position among them – launched goodwill offensives towards the Greek public by exploiting the traditional left-wing bias of Greek artists. The GDR, which at the same time pursued its second principle aim, i.e. to seek ways to enhance its international non-existence status as an independent country, consistently exploited the impartial attitude of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) towards Cyprus in order to undermine Bonn's dominant political and economic position in Greece. Indeed, Greece was seen as the weakest link in the Western alliance because of its domestic, economic, and political instability. By exploiting the intra-NATO feud, East Berlin hoped to clear the ground for breaking the strict Greek adherence to NATO and West Germany.²⁰

During this period the Soviets could count on the Greek Communist and Left-wing parties (the illegal KKE and the legal EDA) to organise political agitation. The Greek-Cypriot demand for Enosis was an issue of major emotional force and rallied the unswerving support of the overwhelming majority of the Greek people. It offered

vast opportunities for rabble-rousing against Greece's NATO allies. Indeed, the campaign of the Greek Left had a wide appeal. It was wider than the electoral strength of left-wing parties, because it was clothed and decorated purely in patriotic phraseology.²¹

The United Nations formed the other level on which Soviet diplomacy was active. Indeed, in the 1950s the Soviet Union and Eastern European bloc countries supported with great determination Greece's efforts to internationalise the Cyprus Question in the UN General Assembly.²² The motives behind this tactic are obvious: Moscow was trying to hinder a NATO-inspired settlement of the problem which might have enhanced the influence of the Western camp in the region as well as to exploit and escalate possible tensions in it.

Soviet diplomacy was supported by other Warsaw Pact members, who were utilised depending on who Moscow considered appropriate to act in any particular situation. After the proclamation of the independence of Cyprus, the Republic of Cyprus became the focus of the Ministry for foreign relations of the GDR. In the context of Soviet policy towards Cyprus, the GDR pursued its own interests too. East Berlin considered those countries belonging to the non-aligned movement as eligible candidates to officially recognise East Germany because they were not obliged to follow NATO's discrimination against the Communist regime of the GDR.

As a result, the island assumed great importance for East German foreign policy in the Mediterranean. While Prague was the 'meeting point' for the GDR's contacts with Western countries, Cyprus became the point of contact for the Soviet bloc with Eastern countries, whatever this might mean in the legal or illegal context.²³ The GDR was predestined to this policy-making because it did not exist as a state for the Western state community and could not be officially reprimanded for its political practices. Hence, East Berlin adopted responsibilities towards the Republic of Cyprus on behalf of the whole communist alliance.

Another significant factor determining Soviet policy in the region was the increasing influence, since its foundation in 1941, of the Cypriot Communist Party, AKEL, on the Cypriot community. AKEL had always been ideologically and politically loyal to Moscow, without ever suffering a serious ideological split; its political line concerning the world scene was highly consistent with that of the Soviet Union, from its foundation until 1989. Although the Party did not participate in the anti-colonial struggle of 1955-1959, it was outlawed by the British in 1955 and was legalised shortly before the first presidential elections in late 1959.²⁴

This policy, however, conflicted with security interests of the USA in the region. The fact emerged that the Cyprus question equated great political risks for the

Greek government when American Jupiter Inter Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM) were supplied and installed with armed warheads in Greece. The decision to station Jupiter missiles inside NATO countries was taken on 16-19 December 1957 at NATO's half-yearly meeting, shortly after the successful 4th October launch of Sputnik. The lift-off created widespread fear among the American public and US allies that the Soviet Union had taken a significant lead in missile technology. While states like Italy and Turkey agreed to the stationing of the Jupiter missiles up to September 1959, the Greeks sent out mixed signals. The Karamanlis government declared its initial willingness to accept the missiles but at the same time was unwilling to install them during the period preceding Cyprus' independence. Although the Supreme Allied Commander of Europe (SACEUR) General Lauris Norstad, tried to force the installation of the missiles on the Greeks, the Karamanlis government was not prepared to take further political risks after its already unpopular acceptance of Cypriot independence. Karamanlis was unwilling to give left-wing propaganda another opportunity to accuse him of servility towards Western powers and the missiles were not installed in Greece until well into the 1960s.²⁵

Even in the period before independence there is a great deal of evidence that, AKEL worked closely with Moscow: Cypriot Communists made frequent trips to the USSR, Soviet propaganda was broadcast daily in Greek to Cyprus from Radio Budapest,²⁶ and Cypriot Communists empathised with the Castro revolution in Cuba. In October 1960 the General Secretary of AKEL, Ezekias Papaioannou, attended the 43rd anniversary of the Soviet Revolution in Moscow plus the Conference of eighty-one Communist parties the month after. In December of the same year an editorial in the Cypriot Communist paper, *Haravgi*, applauded the Moscow conference's declaration, and hailed the Communist Party of Russia as 'vanguard' of the Communist movement. According to the paper, the declaration 'constitutes a sermon and motive of brotherly struggle for peace all over the world'.²⁷

The year 1959 saw the end of the struggle for Enosis in Cyprus and the establishment of a constitution emanating from the notorious Zurich-London agreements.²⁸ The constitution was a complex power-sharing arrangement with a national legislature and two communal chambers, a cabinet, civil service, police force, and army in which Turkish Cypriots enjoyed representation at 30-40 per cent, which was a high level in proportion to their population (18 per cent). The newly-founded Republic of Cyprus had three Guarantor Powers, Greece, Turkey and Great Britain. In addition, Great Britain gained the right to maintain two sovereign military bases on the island. In 1960, when independence was secured, it was accepted conditionally on a temporary basis with major reservations by both communities. The Greek Cypriots still believed in enosis and the Turkish Cypriots in partition (*taksim*).

In the years following independence, AKEL developed into the strongest party of the island, with the greatest membership. The proportion of AKEL party members to population was second only to the Italian party among the non-ruling communist alliances. Their success was due to the organisational functions of the party, which had been based until today on the principle of democratic centralism. Thus, the party laid down explicit guidelines for the maintenance of party discipline. According to these guidelines, the members and organisations of AKEL were basically obliged to guard and strengthen the cohesion and unity of the party. The undermining of party unity and discipline, the creation of splinter groups and factions within the party, the conscious violation of any of the provisions of the Constitution and of Party Regulations was liable to disciplinary action.²⁹ Moreover, many members from AKEL studied in Communist bloc countries after independence with the aid of special scholarships, and later assumed the classic mentality of party cadres.³⁰

Up to 1959 the main opposition to the Church had come from the Cypriot Communist Party (officially the Progressive Party of the Working People: AKEL), which viewed itself as the alternative political voice to the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, and only conditionally accepted enosis, but a radical shift in its domestic policy took place in the period after independence.

The fact that Makarios, head of the Church and the Republic, had the backing of the majority of the Greek-Cypriot community urged AKEL to cooperate with him, to accept the Agreements of 1959-1960 and to direct its opposition to the existence of British military bases on the island and against the interference of the USA and NATO in Cypriot domestic politics. AKEL realised that the West would not tolerate a communist share of power in Cyprus, while a legal push for power by AKEL would unite the nationalist parties against the leftists.

It was known that AKEL represented about 30 per cent of the electorate but it had not been granted a corresponding number of seats because it was deemed necessary to control any communist danger.³¹ Hence, the party permanently accepted fewer seats in the House of Representatives than its real electoral strength and always supported candidates for the presidency election from outside the communist camp. This gave AKEL a good starting point for their long-term policy of increasing party influence without being too frightening for the Guarantor Powers and the USA. From this point on, Communists backed President Makarios, in his domestic and non-aligned foreign policy.³² At that time AKEL considered this policy to be in complete conformity with Moscow's interests, and presented it to their political clientele as Makarios' concession to the constant communist support on which the political supremacy of the Archbishop was largely based.³³ This same political course was concurrently followed by the mainland Turkish Communist Party (Türkiye komünist partisi).³⁴

The foundation of an independent Cyprus in 1960 did not, however, dispel American fears about Greek and Cypriot loyalty to the Western Camp. Makarios' various political manoeuvres in the island's relations with the Soviet bloc as well as the domestic political instability on Cyprus created new concerns. Washington was constantly perturbed about the so-called 'domino effect' on the possible expansion of Communism in the Mediterranean. In consequence the stronger the ties between Makarios, the non-aligned bloc and the USSR became, the more the US anxieties increased about the growing Soviet presence in the region.

The Zurich–London agreements not only contained some achievements for the Cypriot population but also some fatal flaws. After a few years the unworkable character of the constitution was dramatically proven. The elaborate system of checks and balances in practice enabled the Turkish minority to frustrate all administration³⁵ and friction between the two communities flared up again. At the end of 1963 Makarios announced his intention to amend the constitution unilaterally. The Turkish Cypriots perceived this as a first step by the Greeks to achieve Enosis. Communal violence broke out immediately and rumours of a Turkish invasion were widespread on the island, followed by Greek manoeuvres in nearby waters.³⁶

Lyndon Johnson's government was particularly worried about the situation on the island. The fears of the new administration were confirmed when fighting began in earnest on 22 December 1963 and casualties quickly mounted and ran into the hundreds in the coming year. On Christmas Day, Johnson sent a personal message to Makarios and the Turkish-Cypriot vice-president, Fazil Kutchuk, urging restraint. The appeal had little visible effect. While the violence continued, the Turkish government threatened military intervention. As an indication of its intentions, Ankara sent Turkish jets to over fly Nicosia at night. In response, Makarios turned to the UN to request an emergency meeting of the Security Council. In the weeks that followed, the United States and Britain managed to keep the UN in the background on Cyprus, as the British took the lead in the search for peace. Duncan Sandys, the British secretary of state for Commonwealth relations, persuaded the Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Greeks and Turks to attend a conference in London for the purpose of resolving the conflict. Within a short time, however, it was apparent to all concerned that the talks were going nowhere. The United States and Great Britain, therefore, considered the despatch of a NATO force to Cyprus.

In June 1964 General Grivas, the former EOKA leader, returned to Cyprus to take command of all Greek forces. The fact that – in the Turkish-Cypriot perception – Grivas was the personification of Greek hostility against them was another element that nourished the escalation of inter-communal violence. The situation in Cyprus continued to worsen, and Turkish warnings became more ominous than

ever before. Johnson's immediate reaction was to despatch General Lyman Lemnitzer, the American commander of NATO, to Ankara and Athens to remind his Turkish and Greek colleagues of their responsibilities to the alliance. After several consultations had taken place between British and American officials, Johnson decided to approve a plan for American participation in a peace force. This proposal, however, which called for an all-NATO force limited to three months on the island, was rejected by Makarios. The Cypriot president, who obviously resented the idea of his country becoming a NATO protectorate, insisted that any peace force should be sponsored by the UN. Despite a personal appeal from Johnson to reconsider, Makarios stood fast.³⁷

At the same time Makarios repeatedly called for Soviet military involvement in the event of a Turkish intervention. This fuelled the fears of US officials, gradually creating an image of Cyprus as 'the Mediterranean Cuba'.³⁸ Nevertheless, by looking carefully at statements made by the Soviet Government during the first month of this critical period it appears that the Cyprus Crisis was low on their agenda. In the months that followed, Moscow's tactics were somewhat contradictory and cautious. Furthermore, the Turkish-Cypriot side tried to exploit Makarios' appeals to the Soviets claiming that the Archbishop was working with the Soviet Union and had stated that once the Turks had been removed from Cyprus, there would be a communist coup in order to transform the island into a communist base.³⁹ On the other side, according to leading American policymakers, neutrality in the 'struggle of absolute good against absolute evil' was equivalent to immorality, while non-alignment, which included flirting with Moscow, was morally outrageous. The West demanded a publicly announced and implemented clear-cut policy of active anti-Communism but Makarios obviously did not regard such a policy as being in his interest, given the strong AKEL base of support in Cyprus and its consistent support for his policies after independence.

Two months later Turkish aircraft bombed Greek positions in the north of the island. A direct confrontation between Greece and Turkey was avoided at the last moment through mediation by US President L.B. Johnson in his notorious letter to Turkish President İnönü. Washington warned Ankara against military intervention by questioning the applicability of NATO's commitments to Turkey, if its involvement resulted in a Soviet attack against Turkey. President Johnson interceded and averted the crisis, but invasion and forceful partitioning from there on remained an option for Turkey – just waiting for an opportunity to arise.⁴⁰

Playing both sides simultaneously, Moscow intensified efforts to improve its image in Cypriot society. A very effective method of achieving this without risking its relationship with Ankara proved to be the humanitarian assistance provided by other socialist countries. During the bicomunal riots of 1963-1964 the GDR

immediately expressed its support for the Makarios government, and the East German government made certain gestures of goodwill. It provided humanitarian assistance in the form of equipment to the victims of Turkish bombardments (coverlets, blankets, etc.) plus construction material for the rebuilding of ruined villages.⁴¹ The various political and governmental bodies of the GDR (Parliament, Foreign Ministry, etc.) sent official statements to Makarios and foreign minister Kyprianou, condemning the intervention plans of NATO and West Germany and expressing 'solidarity with the struggle of the Cypriot people for self-determination'.⁴²

Czechoslovakia was another Eastern bloc country that played a significant role, not only at this time but during the whole period up to 1974. In the case of Cyprus, Czechoslovakia was regarded by some researchers as the most important Soviet satellite state. During the crises of 1963-1964, Czechoslovakia was a non-permanent member of the Security Council, and was directly involved in the deliberations over Cyprus in the Council in February and March 1964. In the years that followed, Czechoslovakia played an important part because, through the KGB, the Soviet Union provided the Republic of Cyprus with Czech weapons for the gendarme in order to enforce the bargaining leverage of AKEL in Cypriot political life. The Czechoslovak arms, however, were never used because of reactions from Grivas and the Greek Government who regarded this action as an attempt by Makarios to form a paramilitary group.⁴³

The growing level of violence led to concerns among NATO allies who ultimately agreed on UN involvement after a request by Makarios in March 1964 to establish a United Nations Force in Cyprus. The Soviet Union strongly supported Makarios' request and enabled the Security Council to adopt the resolution recommending the deployment of the United Nations Peace-Keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Although it was to be stationed in Cyprus for a three-month period, the force remains on the island to this day.⁴⁴

Since the Soviet Union was a member of the Security Council, the UN force had no option but to consult Moscow. The Soviet manoeuvre in the UN was an effective diplomatic move, because it demonstrated Moscow's solidarity with the Cypriot people while at the same time thwarting the US and Great Britain's plan to send a NATO peace-keeping force to the island, which had been explicitly condemned by the Soviets.⁴⁵

In actual fact, however, the UNFICYP served the interests of all the permanent members of the Security Council. Although, both the United States and Britain would have preferred a NATO solution, in its absence and given the explosive potential of the Cyprus situation UNFICYP was acceptable. To the French and the

Soviet Union UNFICYP both represented a way to avoid a dangerous crisis and an opportunity to seek a solution outside NATO. The force's limited mandate assured France and Russia that there would be some control over the actions of the Secretary-General and the direction of the peacekeeping operation itself.⁴⁶

Johnson's letter to the Turkish side had far-reaching consequences when it was published in the Turkish press, because it caused grief and frustration. İnönü felt personally hurt and initiated a shift in foreign policy towards greater independence from Washington. From then onwards Turkey's loyalty to NATO declined. Ankara began to flirt with Moscow, with incredible ramifications during the Cold War. A significant reverberation was Turkey's decision to permit the Soviets to move a complete fleet into the Mediterranean through the Bosphorus Straits in 1967.⁴⁷

In the wake of a Turkish Foreign Minister's visit to the Soviet Union in October 1964 following a twenty-year gap, several high-level official visits took place in the years after. Trade increased and even some military cooperation developed (allowing Soviet military over-flights carrying military equipment to the Middle East during 1973).⁴⁸ American official visitors were subsequently met with hostile demonstrations and difficulties prevailed over the presence of American personnel in the country. As a result, Turkey refused to increase the size of its armed forces committed to NATO, and the 800-man contingent of Turkish troops in South Korea was withdrawn.⁴⁹

The most immediate result of the Turkish opening towards the Soviets became apparent in 1965 when Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko talked of 'two national communities' in Cyprus which might choose federation as a form of government. At the time, this reflected the Turkish position on Cyprus, however, Soviet policy on the issue was slightly modified later and has remained ever since a passive one, essentially promoting Ankara's objectives.⁵⁰

The coup d'état that took place in Greece in 1967 marked another critical period in the relationship between the two communities and changed the existing geopolitical constellation. In November 1967, a major crisis in bi-communal relations broke out, which might have disrupted NATO's south-eastern flank. On the 15th of the same month, a pre-planned attack against Turkish Cypriots took place in the villages of Ayios Theodoros and Kophinou in the south of the island. The Greek-Cypriot National Guard and the Greek Police directed the whole operation.

In 1967 the USSR agreed to build a number of industrial plants in Turkey, including a steel mill, an aluminium smelter, and an oil refinery. Moreover in the same year, during the six-day-war, and in 1973, during the Yom Kippur war, Turkey

refused to facilitate American support for Israel in the two Arab-Israeli conflicts. More to the point, in October 1973, the US was left totally on its own when all other NATO member states, with the exception of Portugal, declined to facilitate any US out-of-area involvement.⁵¹

Following this flare up of bi-communal violence, the Turks threatened again to invade Cyprus, as in 1964, and issued an ultimatum demanding the withdrawal of mainland Greek forces and the dissolution of the Cypriot National Guard. Washington, in 1967, again intervened to prevent a Turkish incursion but it did not do so in 1974. An agreement acceding to Turkish demands was signed by Greece and Turkey and communicated to Nicosia by Cyrus Vance, then President Johnson's special envoy to Cyprus. Cyrus Vance managed to achieve a resolution to the crisis that left all parties, if not happy, then at least relieved at averting war. Despite Makarios' strong opposition to the removal of the Greek division which had been sent to the island by Greek Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou, the Greek Dictator Papadopoulos ordered his forces back to Greece.⁵²

During this period Soviet-Cypriot developments occurred as well. After an earlier agreement was signed on economic and military cooperation between the USSR and the Republic of Cyprus in September 1964, Makarios officially visited the Soviet Union in 1971. Moscow took the opportunity to reaffirm its full support for Cyprus against any foreign interference. The communiqué resulting from the visit talked of the Cypriot people rather than two communities and called for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cyprus.⁵³

These developments provoked some important remodelling in Soviet policy towards the Cyprus Question. Their change of policy could largely be attributed to two different reasons. First, the Soviets had improved their relations with Turkey in terms of political and economic issues. Secondly, the military Junta of Greece which was deemed to be supported by the CIA had thus improved its relations with the USA. In this capacity it was observed that the Soviets followed an anti-Greek policy, condemning the Greek junta and tilting its preference to Turkey with a view to disengaging Ankara from US influence.⁵⁴

These incidents also reflected the Soviet military policy in the Mediterranean. In the late sixties, Soviet ships began systematic combat service in the Mediterranean Sea. In 1967 it was decided to form a strong task force – the Mediterranean Squadron of the 5th operation squadron. The composition of the Mediterranean Squadron changed from time to time depending on the situation. In summer 1968 it included one cruiser and two light cruisers with long-range cruise missiles. Surface ships were sent from the Black Sea fleet and submarines were supplied mostly from the Northern fleet. On 24 November 1968 an official communication of TASS stated: The Soviet Union as a Black Sea and consequently

a Mediterranean state, realises its undeniable right of the presence in this region. Soviet naval ships are in the Mediterranean not to create a threat to any people or state. Their task is to render help to the cause of stability and peace in the Mediterranean region.⁵⁵

Makarios was confident that his small and weak country could gain leverage by placing itself in a line of dispute between opposing imperial powers. Hence, he sought the more secure environment of the United Nations to protect his country's sovereignty and bring forth revisions to the independence agreements.⁵⁶ He believed that the support of Eastern bloc countries together with those countries participating in the non-aligned movement could defuse actions which threatened the territorial integrity and independence of Cyprus.⁵⁷ Moreover, the other pillar of the Makarios government, the anti-Communist but democratic socialist party – Unified Democratic Centre Union, founded in 1970 (EDEK) – was also in favour of non-alignment, and Makarios needed the support of EDEK in his struggle to force a unitary form of governance upon the Turkish Cypriots.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Moscow's attempt to accommodate the Cyprus government's wishes (i.e. the continued recognition by the Soviets of the Cypriot People rather than the two communities on the island) provoked an immediate protest from the Turks and was effectively abandoned in 1972 when Soviet Foreign Minister Podgorny declared that there had been no change in Soviet policy.⁵⁹

The Athens-inspired coup against Makarios in 1974, which was planned and led by rebellious elements in the Greek-Cypriot National Guard (i.e. the regular Greek-Cypriot army under the command of Greek officers; a small contingent of military forces that remained on the island after the removal of the Greek Division), and which was under the control of a sworn enemy of Makarios – the Greek military junta – gave Ankara the long-awaited alibi to land troops on Cyprus in July and August 1974. In a series of massive military attacks, and in violation of successive United Nations Security Council resolutions, Turkey occupied approximately 37 per cent of the northern part of the island, while almost 50 per cent of the population became refugees. The move of the Turkish forces was initially aimed at restoring the constitutional order of 1960. The puppet regime of Sampson in Nicosia had provided Turkey with a reason to intervene militarily in Cyprus on 20 July 1974 in order to 'protect' the Republic from unilateral enosis with Greece. The Greek actions in Cyprus then provided Turkey for the first time in a decade with a weak legal case to intervene unilaterally in Cyprus under the terms of the controversial article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee.

The invasion of Cyprus by the Turkish army brought down the military regime in Athens, while war between Greece and Turkey looked imminent. In the midst of the crisis, the experienced politician, Karamanlis, was called back from his exile in

France to form a civilian government in Greece and to negotiate the end of the military operation of the Turkish army in Cyprus. However, Turkish reluctance to negotiate swiftly exposed Turkey's real intention to establish a permanent Turkish presence on the island.⁶⁰

A few hours after Turkey had commenced the occupation of northern Cyprus on 14 August, Karamanlis ordered Greek Troops out of the NATO command structure – a decision declared to be permanent. Before the elections were held on 17 November, Karamanlis had legalised the Communist Party, which had been outlawed since the period of the Civil War.

The Aftermath

During the summer 1974 crisis, the contradictory policy of the Soviet Union emerged once again. Despite declarations of its willingness to protect the Republic of Cyprus, Moscow was remarkably self-restrained. Meanwhile it became known that the Soviets had realised through intelligence satellites the Turkish preparations for invasion, but undertook no action to stop it.⁶¹ The Soviets obviously signalled non-opposition to intervention. Thus, the US Foreign Minister had no leverage to convince Turkish Prime Minister Ecevit, of a potential war on Turkey, as Johnson did in June 1964.

Furthermore, while making strong statements and accusations against Western imperialism and NATO 'behind-the-scenes diplomatic manoeuvres intended to dismember Cyprus and create a NATO stronghold in the Eastern Mediterranean', popularised by AKEL's propaganda,⁶² Moscow, anxious not to jeopardise good Turkish–Soviet relations, carefully avoided condemnation of the Turkish invasion.

Soviet inaction has been interpreted by some researchers⁶³ in the context of the emerging Soviet–American détente and the tacit acceptance that each superpower had a sphere of vital interests. The Soviets were not ready to undermine détente over an incident in a grey area of primary American interest. Other researchers argue that Soviet policy was dictated by the consideration that a military clash between Greece and Turkey would blow up the south-eastern flank of NATO and give great satisfaction to Moscow.⁶⁴ There is strong evidence that Turkey had informed Moscow of its invasion plans, maintaining that this operation would aim at restoring the independence of Cyprus. And an independent state, with whatever limitations, was preferable for the Soviets to its being united to a NATO member state.⁶⁵

In its attempt to keep all sides satisfied, the Soviets followed a contradictory policy in the Mediterranean. In time of peace this ambivalence was not apparent,

but when tensions came to a head, it was revealed in large measure that if Moscow were forced to choose sides, it would prefer to appease the Turks so as not to jeopardise the progress it had made in its relations with Turkey.

The 1974 transition also triggered a crisis in relations between Greece and the United States and with regard to NATO. Clearly hinting at the Greek–Turkish conflict in a letter dated 25 August 1974, Kissinger warned Karamanlis that the experience of the Arab world between 1967 and 1973 had demonstrated that the surge of anti-Americanism and its dependence on the Soviet Union made it impossible for the United States to play a positive role in the search for peace. In response to Turkey's invasion of Cyprus, Karamanlis re-militarised the Eastern Aegean islands in defiance of the Treaty of Lausanne, and declared that Greece's main security threat came from Turkey and not from the Communist Northern Balkans.⁶⁶

In the years following 1974, although the Soviet Union systematically condemned the 'attempt of the Western imperialist powers to destroy Cyprus as an independent state' and called for the withdrawal of all foreign military troops from the island⁶⁷ and a Cypriot resolution 'on the basis of respect for Cyprus's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and political nonalignment, with observance of the legitimate rights and interests of the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities',⁶⁸ in practice it had adopted a 'no crisis no solution' attitude which served the interests of Turkey. The Soviet Union did in fact accept the status quo which the Turkish occupation had brought about, by directing its attacks towards NATO and not to Ankara.

This policy was dictated by economic considerations. In the field of economic cooperation, Turkish–Soviet relations had made impressive strides in the preceding years. From the early seventies onwards, Turkey had been receiving the equivalent of over a billion dollars annually. Soviet aid was channelled into the construction of heavy industrial projects such as iron and steel plants, nuclear and hydroelectric construction plants, power transmission plants, and dam construction and aluminium works. The amount of trade had also quadrupled in the seventies, necessitating the opening of a Soviet bank in Ankara to handle the transactions.⁶⁹

At the same time, the Soviets tried to enforce the position of AKEL in Cypriot politics and constantly called for the convocation of an international conference incorporating all the states involved in the problem together with the immediate enforcement of UN resolutions. However, the Soviet proposal was rejected by Great Britain and the USA.⁷⁰ They were on no account, however, willing to take effective action to promote a viable solution to the Cyprus Question except for their offer of rhetorical support. While in the period leading up to 1974 Moscow had signalled a supposed opposition against a possible Turkish invasion, its support in this phase was limited to less important verbal attacks against NATO imperialism.

Turkish policy on the other hand exacerbated the complicated situation, making life more difficult for the Soviets. Since the de facto partition of the island in 1974, the Turkish side had adopted an intransigent attitude to the efforts of the UN to solve the Cyprus problem. Successive Turkish governments and the Turkish-Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, repeatedly declared that they considered the status quo to be the solution to the problem. Due to this intransigent political attitude, Moscow's policy of ignoring crucial aspects of the Cyprus issue and vague talk about imperialist interference in Cyprus affairs without any commitment on their part could not be deemed credible for long.

Moscow's attitude changed in the 1980s. In the context of a renewed Cold War, Soviet–Turkish relations deteriorated, while Greece's relations with the Communist bloc steadily improved under PASOK. Although Greece's Western orientation remained, PASOK's head and Greek Prime Minister Papandreu fuelled anti-American sentiment at home with occasional rhetorical outbursts, and many state visits took place between Greek and Eastern bloc's high officials.⁷¹

Other factors impacting on Soviet policy were firstly the unilateral declaration of the so-called 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' in 1983 by Turkey in order to impose de facto the permanent partition of the island, which might have brought about double enosis and the integration of the two parts into NATO. Secondly, it is worth noting the Soviet attempt to restore their prestige in Cyprus, following the heavy AKEL losses in the 1985 Cypriot elections. Thirdly, the Soviets were becoming increasingly concerned about US assertions of supremacy in the Mediterranean, particularly in its policies towards Libya and the possible use of British bases by the sixth fleet.⁷²

Accordingly, in the closing years of the eighties, Moscow made some gestures in favour of Athens and Cyprus. It explicitly condemned the founding of the 'TRNC', describing it as 'the direct result of imperialist interference in Cyprus domestic affairs'. In January 1986 Gorbachev reiterated the old Soviet proposal for an international conference and demilitarisation of the island, and this time the document was internationally released. In April 1986 Gromyko and Shevardnadze received a Cypriot Foreign Minister (Iakovou) for the first time in the Kremlin. In the years following, various high officials from the Soviet Union, Hungary and Czechoslovakia visited Cyprus and 'paid attention to promoting the idea of an international conference'. In February 1988 the AKEL-supported Cypriot President Kyprianou made his country's first state visit to Cuba,⁷³ and the revival of Soviet interest in the Cyprus problem was maintained in large measure until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.

Conclusions

During the Cold War, the roles of Greece and Turkey were quite clearly defined. Because of their position they constituted the Western bulwark in the south-eastern Mediterranean and helped to deter a Soviet attack on this NATO front. However, various causes in the domestic and foreign policy of Greece and Turkey enabled the Soviet bloc to extend remarkable political and economic influence over the region. The Cyprus problem, coupled with the deterioration in Greek–Turkish relations, was the most appropriate terrain.

Concurrently in Cyprus, the Soviet Union and its satellite-states, especially East Germany and Czechoslovakia, worked closely with the indigenous Communist Party (AKEL) in an attempt to exploit the unrest in and around Cyprus to undermine the position of western countries.

The United States and Britain were afraid of weakening NATO's vital eastern flank. Such concerns were enforced by the strong anti-NATO posture of AKEL and Makarios' ambiguous relationship to it. During the period when AKEL was outlawed as well as after it had regained its status as a legal political party following the foundation of the Republic of Cyprus, AKEL enjoyed Moscow's vigorous support. AKEL numbered some 10,000 members, or about 3 per cent of Cyprus' adult population. The party enjoyed support from its strong auxiliary organisations in Cyprus, an extensive network of farmers', women's, and youth organisations, which made up about 30 per cent of the total electorate, as well as support from the Pan-Cypriot Labour Federation (PEO); furthermore, many AKEL members were provided with tertiary education in Communist bloc countries.

On the other side, the Soviets simultaneously considered the impact of their pro-AKEL and Makarios policy on Turkey, which had gradually developed into a reliable partner of the Soviet Union. Thus, it sent signals to Ankara that it would not oppose Turkish military action, so long as the island's independence was not threatened. The incidents that ensued in Cyprus in the summer of 1974 proved that the Soviets were not able to sustain this contradictory strategy. The Soviets avoided condemning even the Turkish invasion and did not go beyond verbal accusation against the imperialist policy of NATO in the region.

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Notes

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4. For more information on this issue see L.E. Davis (1974) *The Cold War Begins*. Princeton/New Jersey, Princeton University Press.
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10. For the various phases of this hard diplomatic bargaining see some very significant documents in the Foreign Office Archives in Public Record Office (from this citation henceforth cited as FO): 371/78328, 'R 1844 FO minute Sir O. Sargent, 10th February 1949', and 'WU 11923/20, Telegram No 1448 to: Western Orgs. Dept. Southern Dept. Mr. Bowker – Sir P. Dixon, 11/4/51', and FO 371/96542: 'Telegram No. 188 of Foreign Office to the British Embassy in Athens 25 May 1951' and 'Telegram No. 2172 of the FO to the British Ambassador in Washington 23 May 1951'. FO 371/96543: 'Telegram of the British Deputy on NATO to Foreign Office 25 May 1951'. FO 371/96542: Telegram of Foreign Office to the British Embassy in Washington 29 May 1951, and FO 371/96551: 'Telegrams of the British Deputy on the NATO from Ottawa to Foreign Office 18 September 1951'.
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- From CINGUSAFE to SAC Offutt AFB 7th Air Div., Buckinghamshire USNMR SHAPE 12 December 1953'.
12. Foreign Office Archives: WG 1074/2, 'Brief for visit of Secretary of State to Greece on Greece and NATO 7 April 1953' (confidential).
 13. FO 476/8: Greece Annual Review for 1953 (50 years closed), p. 5.
 14. P. Terlexis (1971-2004), *Diplomatia Kai Politiki tou Kipriakou. Anatomia enos Lathous, [Diplomacy and Politics of the Cyprus Problem. Anatomy of a Mistake]*. Athens: Kedros Publisher, p. 129.
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 20. See for further information about this issue: A. Stergiou (2001) *Im Spagat zwischen Solidarität und Realpolitik. Die Beziehungen zwischen DDR und Griechenland und das Verhältnis der SED zur KKE [Between Solidarity and Realpolitik. The Relationship between GDR and Greece and SED and KKE]*. Monographien-Reihe Peleus, Bd. 13, Mannheim-Möhnesee: Bibliopolis.
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