

# United States Policy Towards Cyprus, 1954 - 1974: Removing the Greek - Turkish Bone of Contention.

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In 1930, less than ten years after the Greeks had been routed by Turkish armies, Venizelos and Mustapha Kemal led their countries into a period of peaceful relations which lasted into the early 1950s. Greeks remained critical of Turkish neutrality in the second world war, but when they were starving, Ankara sent food, and accepted partisans escaping the Nazis. Greece and Turkey joined NATO because of common security anxieties about the Soviets. It took the clash of Greek and Turkish nationalists in Cyprus to put their "good neighbour" relationships under strain, and to test them to near-destruction. [Bahcheli: 1990:13-16] Since 1955, six crises brought them close to war.

The desire of Greek Cypriot nationalists for a **political** Union with Greece became a dominant issue early in the period of British colonial rule. The cultural identification of Greek Cypriots with Greek civilisation was evident, but the millenarian character of the Enosis enthusiasm was based on a simple-minded exclusionist axiom: "Cyprus is a **Greek** island". If decolonisation meant democracy, and democracy meant majority rule, Greek nationalists could not see why Turkish Cypriots should have had a voice in the future of the island. Turkey, visible from Kyrenia on a clear day was geopolitically invisible to them - to see is not always to perceive. Ankara, and Turkish Cypriot nationalists had made it clear years before the start of EOKA's armed struggle that they would oppose a **political** incorporation of Cyprus into the Greek state. British Conservative Prime Minister Eden, anxious to preserve British rule by blocking Enosis, encouraged Ankara to put its views more strongly. More strongly became more violently - anti-Greek riots in Istanbul. Zorlu and Menderes, the instigators were later executed for dishonouring the Turkish Army, but the damage to relations between Greece and Turkey, to Turkey's international image, and to relations between two island communities, had already been done.

This is the background to Claude Nicolet's major scholarly study, which starts

the clock in 1954. The British were seeking to disengage from twilight imperium, the restive Greek and Turkish Cypriot nationalists were about to make a mess of an independence which looked like second best to both camps. Nicolet's book is a study in diplomacy, dealing exhaustively with the many proposals, plans, initiatives and interventions made by five US governments, force-fed into the power and policy flux of the Eastern Mediterranean. Nicolet relies wherever possible on documents, – diplomatic memos, telephone conversations routinely and overtly recorded, a oral history interviews made later. The United States is probably in a class of its own on the right of inquirers to access government records. Not all key documents have been declassified, and documents become fewer as we approach 1974. Nicolet himself is responsible for many documents becoming public. State, Department and National Security Archives are most frequently cited.

Nicolet is concerned with the following issues in particular: What were successive US interests in and policies on Cyprus? How far did these policies succeed in their stated goals? What was their political character? What levels of knowledge, understanding and competence were shown by key officials and political actors? What were the implications for the Cypriot peoples?

The study is even-handed in its attention to the twenty year period: Greek Cypriot official history has treated 1974 much as earlier Greeks treated 1922, the year when everything went wrong, ignoring the fact that for Turkish Cypriots, things had gone wrong ten years earlier. The study stops in 1974 not to please Greek Cypriots, but because **it** was such a decisive change. Dr Nicolet's concern is with how and why things turned out as they did, and because a number of accounts have stressed the US role in shaping outcomes, he addresses those accounts as reviews rather more of the relevant evidence than anyone else has so far examined.

He describes how the United States, a state which had replaced Britain in Greece as adversary of communist revolution, watched with mounting concern as the British adopted ever more confrontational methods of dealing with EOKA and Makarios. At first, the US was inclined to side with Greece, and showed some support for Enosis as a solution. Dulles was concerned in 1956 that US bases globally were not well secured, and so it was the more important that military installations in Cyprus, close to the Arab oilfields, be in the hands of a reliable ally. Dulles also appreciated that neither Greece nor Turkey were as amenable to ordinary diplomatic pressures as were the UK and the USA. Partition was discussed by all the major players. At one point President Eisenhower [who spelled the island "cypress"] wondered if some form of partition might solve the problem. But Dulles, and informed US officials were hostile to this suggestion on the grounds of the many impracticalities involved. They reckoned the British had badly underestimated the

numbers of people who would have to move or be moved. Some Greek officials, including Averoff, were also considering forms of territorial division in this period, but ceding only a very small portion of the island to Turkey – more "Enosis with concessions" than partition.

A little later the US was pressing the British to bring back Makarios from exile. Preventing Greece and Turkey becoming further estranged became the dominant policy, and partition was not seen in this phase as a solution. The Zurich - London Agreements, power-sharing independence, seem to *have* been inspired by a US proposal, but the US was still merely an interested observer, and not yet a major player. Nor was there any American enthusiasm for Cyprus entering NATO as Independence approached, for two reasons – the Republic would have then had its own veto on NATO operations, and the existence of AKEL within the Alliance would have posed a danger of intelligence leaking to the Soviets. John F Kennedy was certainly worried about the possibility of AKEL coming to power, and contemplated covert operations to prevent this. So, both partition, and destabilisation had entered [some] American minds, but been deflected by others.

By mid-1964, Makarios and the Greek nationalist forces were becoming dominant in the island. Papandreou, a nationalist-populist was sending large numbers of men and arms covertly, and Turkey was supplying Turkish Cypriot nationalists. The British continued to seek ways to disengage, including threatening to pull out of the peacekeeping force. Makarios was adamant that as Cyprus was a sovereign country, he could not as Head of State be forced to accept proposals he did not like, and was seeking weapons from the Soviets. He and his diplomats were speaking as if the Treaty of Guarantee was invalid. *Eleftheria* ran an editorial on June 3rd 1964 which said "If Cyprus has to become a second Cuba in order to save its existence, then this should be done as soon as possible. If a world war is to break out as a result of Cyprus becoming a second Cuba, let it be so." [Nicolet: 239]. Now that we know how much closer to nuclear war the superpowers came in October 1962, the impact of this editorial in Washington can be better appreciated.

Turkey thus had, in its own eyes, a number of reasons to intervene to prevent Turkish Cypriots being worsted by superior forces and more successful policies. Her generals started military preparations, at which point President Johnson sent them a strongly worded letter to discourage this, including a threat to convene NATO's General Council, and the UN Security Council. Faced with diplomatic isolation, Turkey called off its invasion. The US had thereby used up considerable political capital with the Turks.

In November 1967, after four years of increasing strategic domination by the Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriot fighters blocked Greek Cypriot patrols in the mixed

village of Ayios Theodoros. The Makarios Cabinet decided to assert the authority of the Cyprus Government, [meaning, the Greek Cypriots] to drive through the village, and Grivas attacked so forcefully that more than 25 Turkish Cypriots were killed, for one Greek Cypriot. Once again, Turkish nationalists badly wanted to intervene. The Soviets were no longer backing the Greek Cypriots, and had been courting Turkey since late 1964. The hectic shuttle diplomacy of the US Vance mission barely prevented Turkey invading.

Makarios salvaged something: he levered his menacing rival Grivas out of Cyprus, and Greece was forced to withdraw its clandestine special forces from the island. Makarios had demonstrated once again that he would not back down easily and had to be tricked by US officials into believing there had been a key UN decision rather than an American brokered deal. He had again been ready to risk a Turkish invasion. But once again, the US had used up political capital with Turkey to prevent a war between NATO allies, and her relationship with Turkey had once again suffered. That was to be decisive in 1974. Did the Greek Cypriot leader understand the significance of 1967? Makarios did, up to a point, but not enough to close a negotiated settlement with the Turkish Cypriots. But Grivas, Sampson and the hard-line pro-Enosis 5% did not understand at all. Not only could they not see the writing on the wall - they couldn't even see the wall. It was a very tall wall, called Turkey.

From the 1967 crisis onwards, the US sought to disengage from front-line diplomacy on the Cyprus problem. It was not, as has been argued by some commentators, engaging more closely to impose partition and NATO membership. Makarios visited Washington to meet Nixon, which signalled that the fantasies of Rusk and Acheson about removing Makarios to finesse a Greco-Turkish agreement had given way to a realisation that he was an effective head of state, who could learn from experience. For he did not threaten the vital US intelligence activities in Cyprus, and there were no more attacks on Turkish Cypriots after Grivas' exit, but Makarios continued to exercise his veto over deals between either Clerides and Denktash, or Greece and Turkey over Cyprus.

When we get to 1974, Nicolet finds no evidence in his sources for a US partition plan, and the evidence he does find goes against such an idea – e.g. numerous warnings to Makarios about impending threats, and statements to Greece not to activate the threatened coup. It is worth quoting his overall judgement "It must finally be stated that the events of 1974 were more a consequence of the complicated situations and opportunities in the area, rather than of United States betrayal or conspiracy. It is probable that once the events were triggered with the Greek coup, all the US could do was to contain the conflict and keep the overall US interests in mind." Nicolet's summary judgement, a few lines later is 'The US simply

did too little, too late". But he makes it clear that at this point, doing nothing at Geneva, and telling Callaghan not to be a boy scout was the Kissinger policy. "There had not been an American conspiracy with the junta" [Nicolet: 422] Kissinger's later defence of non-intervention was "Makarios had undertaken one high-wire act too many".

The book shows from start to finish that the US was concerned with NATO solidarity and the strategic implications of this above all. It was prepared to tilt towards Greece, early on, to consider partition, to flirt with the idea of coup in the mid-1960s, to stand back and let the Greek dictatorship try to agree double enosis with Turkey, and finally, to tilt to Turkey - anything and everything was an option at one time or another, including from 1967 to 1974 letting Greek and Turkish Cypriots seek an agreement between themselves. If all states act in terms of their interests, the US was no different from any other state in how it approached Cyprus. It had an interest, it spent a lot of time and money seeking to promote it, **and it failed to get what it wanted**. For 1974 meant the disruption of NATO's eastern flank, and a significant degradation of relations between Greece and Turkey, from which it took them another 20 years to even start to recover. It also meant that as Greece turned to populist-socialist leadership [an inevitable consequence of the military dictatorship] the USA became Public Enemy No 1, blamed for both the home-grown Colonels **and** for Cyprus. Had the Soviet Union any imperial intentions in the region, the period 1974 to 1980 would have been an excellent window of opportunity.

Why then have Greek Cypriots inserted the US into the Cyprus drama as The Devil? There are a number of reasons. First, and most obviously, the US is the strongest power in the world, and dominance always attracts resentment. On top of this, the man in the coffeeshop knows that Cyprus is tiny and powerless, feels himself and his people to be vulnerable to Big Power interests, and not entirely unreasonably, believes that the Big Powers can do anything at all. He then makes an error of logic, and insists that Big Powers should set aside their own strategic interests to give Greek [or Turkish] Cypriots whatever they yearn for. But to be Strong is not to be All-Powerful. And if you believe that all individuals and all states act mainly from self-interest, why should a Big Power suddenly act any differently from everyone else? At this point the man in the coffeeshop argues that some heroic peoples are known to fight and die for Freedom, and their Native Land. And Greeks gave their lives in Crete for the British, so laying a burden of debt upon them. This train of popular thoughts binds the Western Allies to support Greeks in their hour of need, suspend the "self-interest" rule, and act idealistically.

Secondly, past US interventions against elected governments, e.g. in Central America in the 1950s, in Chile against Allende in the early 1970s, do not help

democrats focus on better US interventions – e.g. the two US interventions in Haiti; the Dayton Agreement.

Thirdly, the Greek left historically mistrusted initiatives "from the right", starting with US entry into the Greek civil war, later the cosy US relationship with the Greek Colonels, and lastly, Kissinger's standing on the touchlines in Geneva, 1974.

Fourthly, as Nicolet demonstrates, the minutiae of diplomatic history over a twenty-year period do not lend themselves to slogans, sound bites, or easily remembered Big Ideas. While he has done a fine job of drawing analytic meaning from the material, the reader's task in keeping the detail "in mind" is huge. For this sort of Empedoclean reason – the flux of political process – the ordinary citizen distracted by making a non-academic living finds it easier to rely on slogan and stereotype than master the facts. Newspapers and official propagandists are ready to fill the gaps with coarse, self-interested distortions, and factors 1-3 then feed in.

Last, and not least, Greek Cypriots [like many other societies] have been prone to violent internal antagonisms, **ethnikos dichasmos**, and having an External Devil allows Greeks to hold hands and forget their home-grown hatreds. The split between AKEL and the Right was an enduring feature of the period 1943 to 1974. To treat the USA as the betrayer of the Greek Cypriots suited the far right, because it diverted attention from their own leading role in the EOKA VITA insurgency. It suited other Greek nationalists because it was easier to blame NATO, than face the fact that once again Greek nationalists had pursued an impossible dream, and it suited AKEL because it drew attention away from the failure of the USSR to restrain Turkey.

In Greece after the evacuation of Asia Minor, six leading figures were executed by the Venizelists for "treason". In Nicosia in 1974, putting up posters of Kissinger "Wanted – Dead or Alive for the Murder of 6000 Cypriots" was a less painful way of dealing with disaster. Ioannides and Ecevit were the men who should have had the poster-treatment.

To juxtapose 1922 and 1974 is to wonder how far does Greco-Turkish history repeat itself? Consider the following: When Venizelos was possessed by his vision of a Greek Return to Asia Minor, Metaxas sought to dissuade him, on the grounds that it was "too difficult" – Asia Minor was ethnologically too mixed, and there was no clearly defensible boundary. His advice to Venizelos was to content himself with a European Greece, and consolidate "Greece as she now is." [Llewellyn-Smith, M. 1973: xv-xvii] This advice was disastrously ignored. Makarios, we can now see, badly needed advisors with deep understandings of Greco-Turkish history, and of How Great Powers Act. What had he learned in the Boston Seminary, apart from

theology? Who did he have to turn to for really good advice? Whether he got good advice or not, like Venizelos, he certainly didn't take it, or Cyprus might have had a negotiated settlement before it was too late. We are now waiting for the equivalent of the Venizelos-Ataturk Agreement of 1930. Will we get it?

Nicolet's superb study is essential reading for anyone seriously concerned with Cyprus, and her predicaments. We are deeply in his debt.

### **Peter Loizos**

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