

ISSN (online): 2547-8702

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN POLICY NOTE

July 2024, No. 100d

50 YEARS OF TURKISH OCCUPATION
An Assessment of the Period and the Day After

Andreas Theophanous

Dramatic events that significantly altered Cyprus's historical path marked the summer of 1974. Since then, the realities of occupation have solidified and deepened, while it is evident that Turkey is not satisfied with partition. Ankara aspires to have the entire island under its strategic control. The policies pursued over the last 50 years by the Republic of Cyprus have not led to any results. Turkey has maintained its expansionist plans at no significant cost.

The crisis of 1974

The coup by the Greek junta against President Makarios on July 15, 1974, provided Turkey with a unique opportunity to invade Cyprus five days later, on July 20. Assessing the record, it is evident that, on the one hand, Cyprus did not receive vital support and, on the other hand, there was tolerance toward the Turkish aggression. The United States could have prevented the coup, but they did not. Furthermore, when Turkey invaded Cyprus, Kissinger's only goal was to prevent a Greco-Turkish war.

With the restoration of democracy in Greece, the priority of the Karamanlis government was stability and national recovery. It soon became apparent that Greece had no intention to engage in war with Turkey over Cyprus. The lack of any reaction from Athens facilitated the Turkish plans on the island. Britain, one of three guarantor countries, did not respond either. London considered that a dynamic reaction could only take place in cooperation with the United States. It would have been possible for Greece and Great Britain, as guarantor powers, to act independently to protect the Republic of Cyprus, but they did not do so.

Professor Andreas Theophanous is the President of the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs and Head of the Department of Politics and Governance of the University of Nicosia.

The Soviet Union strongly condemned the coup by the Junta against Makarios. However, its reaction to the Turkish invasion was neither as strong nor as influential as the stance it took during the 1964 crisis. Moreover, it is not an exaggeration to argue that even the United Nations Security Council's response to the Turkish invasion was lukewarm. To this day, the UN refuses to employ terms such as "invasion" and "occupation" to describe the situation in Cyprus. Above all, the Cyprus issue is perceived as an intercommunal conflict; thus allowing Turkey to project itself as a third party to the problem. The tolerance shown toward Turkish expansionism is unprecedented. An illustrative example of this is the UN's persistent policy of equidistance from the positions of "the two sides in Cyprus," as reflected in the relevant UN reports, even when Turkish positions violate UN resolutions. Indeed, it is important to compare and contrast the stance of the West toward Russian aggression in Ukraine with that of Turkey in Cyprus.

In 1974, Cyprus suffered a destruction of immense proportions. Turkey occupied 37% of the country's territory and carried out ethnic cleansing. The record includes thousands of displaced people, numerous casualties and injuries and persons still missing. A significant portion of infrastructure and economic activity was in the occupied areas. Insecurity, unemployment, and the search for prospects abroad marked the predicament of thousands of Greek Cypriots. Yet, despite the devastating effects of the Turkish invasion and the setbacks caused by numerous other adversities, the small island Republic of Cyprus survived. To this day, Turkey views the Republic of Cyprus as "defunct" and continues efforts to undermine it.

The acceptance of federation and the long-term struggle

In early November 1974, in a speech at the Argo Gallery in Nicosia, acting President Glafkos Clerides emphasized that under the circumstances, the only feasible solution was a bi-communal, bi-regional federation. This position was largely in line with the recommendations of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Greece. On November 30 and December 1, 1974, at a meeting of the leaderships of Greece and Cyprus in Athens, federation was accepted as the basis for resolving the Cyprus issue. However, this acceptance occurred without a prior study and understanding of its implications. Archbishop Makarios had reservations, but at some point, he stated that a multiregional bi-communal federation would be acceptable. On February 12, 1977, a high-level agreement was reached between Makarios and Denktash. Polys Polyviou, a Greek Cypriot lawyer and analyst, criticized both Makarios and Clerides for accepting the federal arrangement without fully understanding its implications.

Makarios considered the acceptance of a federal settlement and the submission of a map delineating the boundaries of the two regions as the ultimate painful concessions of the Greek Cypriot side. It is worth noting that he had received promises from various countries, primarily the United States, that these bold concessions would pave the way for a final settlement of the Cyprus issue. However, the Turkish side did not reciprocate. Makarios expressed great disappointment and in his final speech on July 20, 1977, he declared that the response to Turkish intransigence would be a long struggle.

The continuation of the policy of historical compromise and the domestic front

Spyros Kyprianou, who succeeded Makarios, declared that he would continue the policy of his predecessor. However, he adhered to the policy of a historical compromise rather than the long struggle that Makarios had proclaimed shortly before his death.

On May 19, 1979, a high-level agreement was reached between Kyprianou and Denktash. The Cypriot President worked systematically to improve the Makarios-Denktash agreement. Kyprianou attached great importance to the respect and implementation of basic freedoms and sought to ensure the continuity of the Republic of Cyprus. Nevertheless, the gap between the two sides remained huge.

Among the Greek Cypriots, three tendencies emerged. The first supported what eventually prevailed over time and is known as the “bi-zonal bi-communal federation with the correct content.” The second was much more flexible and, among other things, bypassed issues relating to a rotating presidency and a break between the Republic of Cyprus and the new federal state. The aim was to reach an agreement as soon as possible. The third approach rejected the idea of a federation altogether as the basis for resolving the Cyprus issue.

Various initiatives and their impact

All the plans and ideas proposed after 1974 for resolving the Cyprus issue were based on the principle of a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation. Initially, there was the American-British-Canadian Plan (1978), the Guellar Indicators (1984-85), the Ghali Set of Ideas (1992), the Annan Plan (2002-04), and the Guterres Framework (2017). The key pillars of these plans were consociational democracy, bi-communality, bi-zonality and political equality. It has been argued that the Turkish requirement for a break between the old and new Republic was also embedded in these proposals. Additionally, colonization of the occupied part of Cyprus by Anatolian settlers was largely legitimized by the Annan Plan, while foreign

guarantees were maintained. Furthermore, the constitutional structure and the new tripartite state formation would undoubtedly have negative implications for governance and the economy.

Considering the record, it would not be an exaggeration to say that there was no missed opportunity for a settlement after 1974. Furthermore, given Turkey's control at all levels of governance and of the society in the occupied territories, an agreement for a federation between the two communities could essentially amount to a federation of the areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey. The consequences of such an agreement would range from painful to catastrophic.

The way forward

It is crucial for the Republic of Cyprus to fully understand the current context of challenging realities and develop a comprehensive strategy. There is no doubt that Turkey aims to undermine the state entity of the Republic of Cyprus and achieve strategic control over the island. The minimum goal for the Republic of Cyprus is to defend the government-controlled areas and avoid worsening of the *status quo*, while the maximum goal is to restore the country's territorial integrity within the framework of a normal federal state. Toward this direction, it is essential to work consistently. The Republic of Cyprus can submit specific suggestions for a normal federal state and adopt an evolutionary approach to achieve its objectives. I have submitted specific suggestions toward this direction.

In the current context, a continuous enhancement of the various factors of power that the small island Republic could realistically command is imperative: deterrence force, economy, demography, advancing a narrative, knowledge utilization, effective participation in the EU and in other cooperation networks, as well as effective leadership. Additionally, a pragmatic foreign policy remains a priority. Finally, it is crucial for the Republic of Cyprus to become a model state, as such a development will significantly contribute to the overarching goal of national survival.