

Greek and Turkish Perceptions of US Mediation Efforts for Conflict Resolution from 1950s to Mid-1990s

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Greece and Turkey emerged from the Second World War as solid members of the Western alliance with almost no bilateral territorial disputes between them. Conflicts dating back to Ottoman times seemed memories, fading into a new tradition of peace and friendship established in the early 1930s in the historic reconciliation of the powerful and charismatic leaders, Eleftherios Venizelos, and Kemal Atatürk. In the aftermath of the Second World War both were prepared to side with the free western world, and through their participation in European institutions (Council of Europe, NATO) they became “officially” part of the Western bloc led by the US against the Eastern bloc of Communist states.

In the difficult Cold War environment the three allies, Greece, Turkey and the US, seemed to have harmonious relations focusing on the external communist. This cordial era was, however, to come to an abrupt end in 1954 with the eruption of the Cyprus problem as a bilateral problem between Greece and Turkey, which would persist into the next decades with the emergence of the Aegean dispute. As the Cyprus conflict broke out, both states expected US involvement, aiding one against the other. The US appeared to be quite unwilling to get involved though it was almost impossible for Washington to turn a blind eye to it. It became a “mediator” between them, a task that has continued all along.

The present study summarizes the historical background of the Greek-Turkish relations during the interwar years, the political and security challenges the two states faced at the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the alliance ties among the US, Greece and Turkey. It examines the most serious Cyprus and Aegean crises along with the American mediation and solution efforts. The last part is devoted to the US involvement in the post-Cold War era.

Greek-Turkish relations at the end of the Second World War

The Lausanne treaty (July 24, 1923), signed after the Greek-Turkish war (1919-1922)¹ resolved the territorial and minority issues and laid the foundation for peaceful relations between Greece and Turkey. Exhausted by many years of wars, both faced

¹ In Lausanne, Turkey's boundary with Greece was set at the Evros (Maritsa-Meriç) river, which separates Western and Eastern Thrace. Greece retained her sovereignty over the Aegean islands except for

enormous problems of domestic reconstruction. They were prepared to develop good and stabilized relations, and they pursued these goals during the interwar years. An additional factor in the development of eventual détente between Greece and Turkey, which gained ground in the late 1920s, was a growing perception of common defense interests. While Greece and Turkey still mistrusted each other to some extent, both of them had serious concerns about Bulgaria's ambitions to gain access to the Aegean, as well as about Italy's intentions in the eastern Mediterranean.²

In 1930, Greece and Turkey signed an agreement that settled all the remaining disputes arising out of the exchange of populations and the value of properties left behind. Although some in Greece were critical of the terms of the agreement, saying that they were too favourable to Turkey, Venizelos attached high priority to a policy of reconciliation with the Turks. The mutual understanding between the two countries was to be further enhanced with the Treaty of Neutrality, Conciliation, and Arbitration, as well as with a protocol providing for parity of naval armaments, signed between Venizelos and İnönü.³

In September 1933, the two countries signed a Friendship Pact guaranteeing the inviolability of their borders. They undertook to consult each other on matters of common interest. They took a further step in collaboration when they helped set up the Balkan Entente in 1934 together with Yugoslavia and Romania. They thought that this would discourage potential pressures from Italy and Germany.⁴ However, neither this nor subsequent bilateral Greek-Turkish agreements deterred Italy and Germany from pursuing their ambitions to penetrate and control the Balkans. Greece and Turkey were unprepared to undertake obligations that might draw them in war with a great power. When German troops occupied Greece, following the unsuccessful Italian invasion in October 1940, Turkey remained neutral.⁵

Gökçeada (Imvros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos); these islands, which guard the entrance to the Straits, were restored to Turkey. The islands of eastern Aegean because of the Turkish security concerns would remain demilitarized. In addition, Lausanne Treaty arranged the fate of the Greek and Turkish minorities. The agreement reached by both sides at Lausanne provided for the compulsory exchange of the Greeks of Asia Minor and the Turks of Greece, with two exceptions – the Greeks of İstanbul and the Muslim Turks and Pomaks of Western Thrace in Greece. The Treaty safeguarded the cultural and educational rights of the minorities. For details see, A. *Alexandris*. The Greek Minority of İstanbul and Greek-Turkish relations 1918-1974, Athens 1983; I. *sinthiki tis Lozanis* (Lausanne Treaty). Athens, 45-50, 71-86; Ş. S. *Gürel*. Tarihsel Boyut içinde Türk Yunan İlişkileri (1821-1993) (Turkish-Greek Relations in a Historical Context). Ankara, 1993, 30-34; M. *Gönlübol, et. al.* Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1995) (Events of Turkish Foreign Policy). Ankara, 1996, 48-59; K. *Arı*. Büyük Mübadele: Türkiye'ye Zorunlu Göç 1923-1925 (The Great Exchange: The Forced Migration to Turkey). İstanbul, 1995.

² K. *Svolopoulos*. I Eliniki Exoteriki Politiki 1900-1945 (Greek Foreign Policy 1900-1945). Athens, 1994, 211-232.

³ A. *Tounta-Fergadi*. Themata Elinikis Diplomatikis Istorias (Issues in Greek Diplomatic History). Athens, 1986, 243-249; Ş. S. *Gürel*. Tarihsel Boyut içinde Türk Yunan İlişkileri (1821-1993)..., 35-52.

⁴ K. *Svolopoulos*. To Valkaniko Simfornon kai I Elliniki Exoteriki Politiki 1928-1934 (The Balkan Pact and the Greek Foreign Policy 1928-1934). Athens, 1974.

⁵ Turkey's decision to stay neutral during the Second World War disappointed Greece. Greek

Beginning of Triangular Relationship after the End of the Second World War

After the unconditional surrender of the Axis Powers in 1945, the need to fill the resulting power vacuum led to the appearance of diverging national interests inside the wartime alliance. The intentions of the Allies became diametrically opposed after the end of the Second World War. The USSR, for instance, which emerged militarily as a super power, wished to expand its influence and establish “friendly” regimes in all the states close to its borders. In contrast, the US, under President Truman’s leadership initially followed Roosevelt’s policy of holding the Alliance together within a system of collective security. But it soon realized that the wartime harmony had vanished.⁶

In southeastern Europe, upon liberation in late 1944, Greece was in the midst of a chaotic economic and political situation. Communist and anti-communist Greek resistance groups⁷ had been fighting fiercely for control of the country. In comparison, Turkey, having stayed out of the war, emerged from the war with its economy intact and without crisis in her domestic political institutions. The USSR in its effort to expand its influence in southeastern Europe indirectly provided support to the Greek communists in the civil war, on the one hand, and demanded of Turkey naval bases in the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and made claims over Kars and Ardahan, on the other.⁸

In the face of these revisionist attempts, Greece and Turkey sought to secure commitments from the west – and especially the US, to contain Soviet penetration. Various Greek cabinets did so with the utmost urgency and with no other options while successive Turkish governments sought US aid after a careful weighing. Meanwhile,

leaders felt that Turkey was under an obligation to come to Greece’s aid under the terms of the Balkan Entente and subsequent Turkish assurances to help Greece. But Turkey continued to recognize the Greek government in exile, and offered Greece help in terms of food and other relief items. One other issue that strained Greek-Turkish relations during the Second World War was Turkey’s imposition of an emergency capital levy called *varlık vergisi* on non-Muslim communities in Turkey, including the Greeks in November 1942. The Turkish government justified the tax on the grounds that it needed to raise revenue to finance Turkey’s growing military expenditures. However, the Greeks and members of their minorities complained that they were assessed higher levies than the Turks, and the Greek government in exile lodged protests to Ankara. The Turkish government removed the tax a year after its imposition. See, for details, A. Alexandris. *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918-1974*. Athens. 1983, 211-233.

⁶ J. L. Gaddis. *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. New York, 1997, 36-37.

⁷ Throughout the occupation years a significant resistance movements developed and carried out acts of sabotage and harassment against the Germans. The most important groups were EAM (National Liberation Front) and its military arm ELAS (National Popular Liberation Army) and EDES (National Republican Greek League). EAM and ELAS were dominated at the leadership level by members of the Communist party, however, other parties, agrarian and socialist groups, participated in EAM and the overwhelmingly majority of the rank and file were not communists. EDES was republican and anti-communist in orientation. See for details, G. Gianopoulos. *O Metapolemikos Kosmos: Elliniki kai Evropaiki Istoria 1945-1963 (The Postwar World: Greek and European History 1945-1963)*. Athens. 1992, 191-221.

⁸ See for details, S. Deringil. *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War: An “Active” Neutrality*. Cambridge, 1989, 71-116.

Britain had notified the US that it was unable to bolster up Turkey and Greece against the approaching Soviet danger. It did not take the US to become convinced that it was impossible to keep the wartime alliance, given the real intentions of Stalin, and finally extended a security commitment towards Greece and Turkey.⁹

On March 12, 1947, President Truman announced what later became known as the Truman Doctrine, declaring that the US was to support free peoples who were resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities (Greece) or by outside pressures (Turkey).¹⁰ If Greece had fallen under the control of an armed minority, its effect on Turkey would have been immediate and serious, and the ensuing confusion and disorder might well have spread throughout the Middle East. In order to forestall such a contingency, he asked for an allocation of four hundred million dollars of aid to be spent for supporting the shattered economy of Greece and provide military aid both to Turkey and Greece. America's institutional and structural presence in Greece and Turkey became strengthened in the early 1950s with the accession of both countries to the Council of Europe, NATO, and the signing of separate bilateral agreements regulating the status of US bases in both countries.

Greece and Turkey achieved their aims through full participation in these organizations. They could now "institutionalize" their relationship with other western states. Through formal participation on the basis of legal equality in these multilateral organizations, both countries gradually developed legal, political and psychological filters, muting direct intervention and maximizing perceptions of sovereignty and independence with predictable political benefits at home.

Community of interests on vital security matters could not fail to make a very positive impact upon Greek-Turkish relations. Ankara and Athens, who had smoothed over their differences during the time of Atatürk and Venizelos in the 1930s, became so close friends that, as part of the policy of containment, they discussed and set up a Balkan Pact together with Yugoslavia to deter the Soviet Union from a thrust into the Mediterranean. In February 1953 the three signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation Assistance in Ankara to be followed by the conclusion of a formal treaty of alliance among the three in August 1954 at Bled in Yugoslavia.¹¹ Turkish President, Celal Bayar, during a state visit to Greece in January 1954, described Greek-Turkish cooperation as "the best example of how the two countries who mistakenly mistrusted each other for centuries have agreed upon a close and loyal collaboration as a result of recognition of the realities of life".¹²

As long as Greek and Turkish interests coincided, as they did for nearly a decade

⁹ S. Bölükbaşı. "The Evolution of a Close Relationship: Turkish-American Relations Between 1917-1960", Foreign Policy. Ankara, 1990, 1-2, XVI, p. 83; G. Harris. *Troubled Alliance: Turkish-American Problems in Historical Perspective 1945-1971*. Washington, DC, 1972.

¹⁰ H. Kissinger. *Diplomacy...*, London, 1994, p. 453.

¹¹ M. Gönlübol. *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası...*, 237-244; M. Hatipoğlu. *Yakın Tarihte Türkiye ve Yunanistan 1923-1954 (Modern History of Greece and Turkey)*. Ankara, 1997, 287-289.

¹² F. Vali. *Bridge Across the Bosphorus...*, Baltimore and London, 1971, p. 228.

after the Second World War, there was no reason why their warming relationship could not have made further progress. This is what could reasonably have been expected in the early 1950s, given their fear of the Soviet Union and commitment to the Western Alliance. However, when the vital interests of one seemed to be threatened by the other, as it was the case with the Cyprus issue during 1954-1955, the progress attained in Greek-Turkish reconciliation and collaboration was to be lost.

Emergence of the Cyprus Conflict and Deteriorating Relations Between the Two NATO Allies

At the end of 1940s, with the decolonization pressures, the issue of Cyprus came up as the major bones of contention dividing the Greeks, British and finally, the Turks, all NATO members. Each felt that its vital interests were at stake, and all three soon entered into a dangerous collision course. The decision of Greece to internationalize the issue in 1954, coupled with the eruption of EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighter) violence, forced Britain to organize the London tripartite Conference with the participation of Turkey at the end of August 1955.¹³ At this stage, the task for the US was to carve out policies that would lead to peaceful settlement without risking a rupture in the strategic southern flank of NATO.

Meanwhile, as the conference commenced in London, unruly Turkish groups, with the backing of the Menderes government in Ankara (which proved later in the Menderes trial in 1961) attacked the property and persons of the Greek minority in Istanbul in September. The damage was considerable in blood and treasure.¹⁴ As a result of the 1955 events, a considerable number of prosperous Greeks left Istanbul for good.

The Papagos government in Athens was incensed and ordered back all the Greek officers who were serving in the mixed NATO regional command operating in İzmir. The Greek side expected a strong official US reaction. The US was to disappoint Athens because the American reaction was mild and hardly enough to satisfy the Greek public. The equal distance attitude towards the two countries that the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles adopted with his letter dated 18th of September 1955 added to the Greeks' frustration. Secretary Dulles sent two identical letters to the Prime Ministers of Greece and Turkey, deploring antagonism between the two countries and calling for restraint.¹⁵ A similar message was to be repeated many more times during the coming years. Washington obviously concluded that the Cyprus question and all other bilateral problems between the countries were relatively unimportant and

¹³ The Conference led nowhere as Greece insisted that self-government should not exclude enosis in the long run. Turkey preferred the continuation of the British rule on Cyprus, but if any change was to come in the island's status, Cyprus ought to revert to Turkey because of prior possession, geographic contiguity, and the presence of the Turkish Cypriot minority. Thus the only compromise Turkey appeared to be willing to make was based on the policy of *taksim*, the Greek-Turkish partition of Cyprus.

¹⁴ A. Alexandris. *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish relations 1918-1974*.

¹⁵ M. Stearns. *Entangled Allies: US Policy Toward Greece and Turkey, and Cyprus*. New York, 1992. 25-30.

had to be subordinated to the real danger, communist infiltration and exploitation of the weakness in southeastern European region.

Concentrating on the Cyprus problem during the 1950s, American efforts, throughout, were designed to prevent Cyprus from disrupting the smooth functioning of the southeastern flank of NATO. The US adopted a passive role towards Cyprus because it considered it within Britain's sphere of influence. It was mainly concerned that the Cyprus crisis would cause a deterioration of relations between the three of its allies, weakening NATO. It did not necessarily object to *enosis* or *taksim* in principle, provided that these solutions would come as a result of trilateral negotiations. Hence, the US opposed Greece's recourse to the UN and called for negotiations among interested parties. Thus the Zurich-London settlement between Greece and Turkey and the declaration of Cyprus' independence was a welcome development for the US. It was pleased with the compromise agreements, which seemed to eliminate a serious friction point in the relations of three of its allies.¹⁶

As communal dispute broke out almost two years after the independence of Cyprus, the US decided to get involved in order to stop the civil strife in the island and the risk of a Greek-Turkish war. In June 1964 as the intercommunal violence was continuing in the island, the Turkish government decided to intervene to protect its community and to be in a stronger position to negotiate for a better settlement.¹⁷ Immediately, President Johnson, in order to avoid a Turkish landing in Cyprus, which might have resulted in a Greek-Turkish war, sent a letter to the Turkish Premier, İsmet İnönü. Johnson declared in rather undiplomatic terms that the US would cease to support Turkey, should the Turkish intervention in Cyprus invite an attack by the Soviet Union on Turkey.¹⁸ As a result, Turkish landing did not take place. But this time Turkey was deeply hurt: she realized that the US was not as reliable an ally as she had thought, and she began to mend her relations with the Soviet Union.

Having prevented a war between the two countries, the US, being convinced that the "independence" solution did not work out, it jumped to the conclusion that union with Greece would have been the best outcome. However, this was only to be achieved in return for Greece's territorial concessions to Turkey, whom the US was determined not to humiliate. The US mediation efforts came up in the summer of 1964 in Geneva under Dean Acheson. The Acheson plans would have provided for dissolution of the state of Cyprus on the basis of a Greek-Turkish agreement, offering the annexation option to Greece while allowing, in compensation, a smaller, but sizeable, portion of

¹⁶ See for details *M. Alexandrakis, V. Theodoropoulos, and E. Lagakos*. To Kipriako 1950-1974 Mia Endoskopisi (Cyprus Problem 1950-1974 An Introspection). Athens, 1987, 21-22; *A. Heraclidis*. Kipriako: Sigrousi kai Epilisi (Cyprus Problem: Conflict and Resolution. Athens, 2002, 40-42; *C. M. Woodhouse*. Karamanlis. The Restorer of Greek Democracy. New York, 1982, p. 63; *Ş. S. Gürel*. Kıbrıs Tarihi..., vol.2, 65-69.

¹⁷ *A. Çay*. Kıbrıs'ta Kanlı Noel-1963 (Bloody Christmas in Cyprus - 1963). Ankara, 1989; *R. Denktas*. Kıbrıs: Elli Yılın Hikayesi (Cyprus: The Story of Fifty Years). İstanbul, 2000, 182-192.

¹⁸ "Document President Johnson and Prime Minister İnönü". - Middle East Journal, 1966, XX, p. 387.

Cyprus, to be administered by mainland Turkey.¹⁹

All the versions of the American plan could have been sold to the Greeks as *enosis* and to the Turks as *taksim*. The plan in the American eyes would have solved the problem of Cyprus permanently and to the Alliance's advantage. The island would have been retrieved from the status of a non-aligned state and placed under NATO orbit, apportioned among the three NATO allies (as the British presence would have continued in the sovereign base areas).²⁰

In order to achieve such a solution, Greece and Turkey should have agreed on the proposed terms (portion of the territory) and should have convinced their respective peoples in Cyprus. On the first issue, Greece could not even accept the idea of making territorial concession even if it was only a military base of the size of the current British base. Turkey, on the other hand, was trying to get a larger portion of the island for her military base, including space for as many Turkish Cypriot civilians as possible. On the second issue, the Turkish government did not face any problem as the Turkish Cypriot community fully approved Turkey's actions all along. However, the Greek government had to cooperate and convince the hard-to-control President Makarios who was in favor of *enosis*, and who had formulated his own non-aligned policy.

Greek Prime Minister, Papandreou²¹, faced an enormous problem: it was difficult for him to commit Makarios to Greek policy, and persuade the Americans at the same time to achieve the best agreement with the Turks. He soon became entrapped between Makarios policy and his own vague populist one. During the serious crisis of 1963-1964 the US administration became involved actively with some arrogance to contain the conflict and to effect a new settlement in Cyprus. But all its efforts came to no avail. The US handling of the Cyprus problem in 1964 was not so successful for three reasons: first, the US kept the problem within NATO family, perceived Greece and Turkey as being the countries which should decide on the fate of the island, and thus underestimated Makarios who refused to let those countries determine the future of Cyprus. Second, the US fought the symptoms rather than the roots of the problem, as it continued to see the Cyprus problem as a Greek-Turkish thorn in the southeastern flank of NATO. Third, it did not realize that both the Greeks and Turks considered Cyprus more important in their foreign policy priorities than NATO solidarity.

Three years later, in November 1967 a new crisis erupted on the island.²² The

¹⁹ S. Rizas. *Enosi, Dixotomisi, Anexartisia: Oi Inomenes Polities kai i Bretania stin Anazitisi Lisis gia to Kipriako 1963-1967* (Union, Division, Independence: United States and Britain Seeking for a Solution to Cyprus Problem 1963-1967). Athens, 2000. 127-129.

²⁰ Ibid; US Department of State. Vol. XVI, 94, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xvii/4765.htm>. D. Brinkley. The Cyprus Question: Dean Achenson as Mediator. – *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 1998, 24, 1, p. 13.

²¹ Yiorgos Papandreou, grandfather of former minister of Foreign Affairs and currently the leader of the main opposition party, PASOK, Yiorgos Papandreou. For his policy in the Cyprus issue, see P. Petridis. *O Georgios Papandreou kai to Kipriako Zitima 1954-1965* (Yiorgos Papandreou and the Cyprus Question 1954-1965). Thessaloniki, 1998.

²² M. Fırat. 1960-71 Arası Türk Dış Politikası ve Kıbrıs Sorunu..., p. 212; S. Bölükbaşı. The

Turkish government threatened to intervene militarily unless EOKA's chief, George Grivas, was removed from the island together with the 10,000 Greek mainland troops that had infiltrated into Cyprus since 1964. American diplomacy became activated again between Athens, Ankara and Nicosia, and Cyrus Vance, then President Johnson's special representative, convinced Papadopoulos -one of the leaders of the Junta regime in Athens in April 1967 – to remove Grivas and the Greek army division from Cyprus, a development that satisfied the Turks.²³ Having the unpleasant experience of the Geneva negotiations in 1967, the Americans only cared to manage the crisis, which was relatively an easy job as the Greek side accepted quickly the Turkish demands.²⁴

Once the split between Athens and Nicosia came to a head with the Coup d'Etat by the Greek colonels in Cyprus in the summer of 1974, US diplomacy became active again.²⁵ Its aim was similarly to keep Greece and Turkey from clashing over Cyprus and harming the NATO flank. This time, the US could not stop Turkey from intervening in the island but as a general war was avoided, the US and particularly the then Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, did not really care about the eventual outcome of the crisis. However, even if the US had acted more actively as it did in the 1963-64 and 1967 crises, it is not clear whether it would have been able to prevent the outcome that we know today, taking into account the nature of the Cyprus conflict in 1974.

The Greek military regime orchestrated plans behind the scene against Makarios in an effort to achieve the long-standing desire of Greece, *enosis*. Athens junta was convinced that the US would not allow Turkey to make a landing in the island. Turkey would utter verbal threats but would have to accept the verdict of the coup under Washington's pressure. As it turned out, Athens's junta had miscalculated this time because public opinion in Turkey had already become extremely sensitive and emotional, and what Turkey expected to stomach was a bit too much. Indeed, Turkey intervened in 1974 as Ankara was determined to protect its vital interests in the island, which brought about the downfall of the military junta in Athens.²⁶

After the collapse of the military regime, the new civil government under Karamanlis could not really act effectively either diplomatically or militarily. At the diplomatic level, during the Geneva conference, the decision should be approved by Makarios who, at

Superpowers and the Third World: Turkish-American Relations... p. 129; *M. Sarica*. Kıbrıs Sounu..., 136-143; *D. Kısıkis*. İstoria tou Elinotourkikou Xorou apo ton Venizelo eos ton Papadopoulos... p. 304.

²³ *C. Nicolet*. United States Policy towards Cyprus, 1954-1974: Removing the Greek-Turkish Bone of Contention, 2001. 361-363; *B. O'Malley*, and *I. Craig*. The Cyprus Conspiracy: America, Espionage and the Turkish Invasion. London, 1999, 92-93.

²⁴ US Department of State : Vol XVI: 340, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xvi/4761.htm>.

²⁵ See, for details *I. Slengesol*. A Bad Show? The United States and the 1974 Cyprus Crisis. – Mediterranean Quarterly, 2001, 1:2, 96-129; *C. Nicolet*. United States Policy towards Cyprus, 1954-1974..., 414-429; *S. Rizas*. Oi Inomenes Polities, I Diktatoria ton Sintamatarxon kai to Kipriako Zitima 1967-1974 (The United States, The Dictatorship of the Colonels and the Cyprus Problem 1967-1974). Athens, 2002, 175-192.

²⁶ *S. Bölükbaşı*. The Superpowers and the Third World: Turkish-American Relations and Cyprus. Lanham, 1988, p. 195.

that time, chose for himself the role of the victim from both sides (Greek and Turkish), and who even in face of the military defeat could not accept a compromise. In the military arena, Karamanlis did not undertake the high risk to declare war on Turkey without being aware of the real capabilities of the Greek forces. And at that particular time it was impossible to trust the high military officials. The only thing he could do was to withdraw from the military wing of NATO in protest to US inaction to stop Turkey.

Meanwhile the strong Greek-American lobby in the US Congress began to put pressure on Ankara. In February 1975 Congress imposed arms embargo on Turkey, on the grounds that American equipment had been misused in the Cyprus landing. The embargo stopped the delivery of arms already purchased by Turkey, and the disbursement of 200 million dollars in grants. The action was vigorously opposed by the US administration, particularly by the Secretary of State, Kissinger, who argued that it would seriously weaken Turkey's defensive capability and damage the Alliance.²⁷ Turkey's reaction to the US-imposed arms embargo came almost five months later. On 26 July 1975, Turkey suspended US operations at all military installations within Turkey. Eventually, the US arms embargo was lifted three years later in 1978.²⁸

The results of the 1974 crisis were crucial for both Greece and Turkey. Both states realized that their vital ally was motivated by its strategic considerations without taking into account the vital interests of each country. The American role in the Cyprus conflict during the decade 1964-1974 significantly altered the Greek and Turkish perceptions of US in Greek and Turkish national security. Both realized that NATO membership was not a panacea for all their security contingencies. Both strove to decrease their dependency on the US. Greece shifted its foreign policy to Western Europe and Turkey improved its relations with the Soviet Union and other regional states.

Emergence of the Aegean Dispute since 1974 and the US

In the second half of the 1970s,²⁹ the center of the Greek-Turkish conflict shifted

²⁷ R. McDonald. Alliance problems in the eastern Mediterranean – Greece, Turkey and Cyprus: Part II Prospects for security in the Mediterranean. – *Adelphi Papers*, 1988, № 229, p. 61.

²⁸ B. Kuniholm. Turkey and the West Since World War II. – In: V. Mastny, *Nation and Craig*. (eds). Turkey between East and West. Boulder, 1996. 57-58.

²⁹ In late 1973, following the discovery of oil deposits off the southern shore of the island of Thasos in northeastern part of the Aegean Sea, a number of jurisdictional issues were added to the already emotionally heavy Greek-Turkish agenda. The Aegean Dispute is a composite term covering three separate but related issues between Greece and Turkey:

1. The dispute about sovereign rights over the Aegean continental shelf.
2. The question of the territorial sea limits claimed by each country.
3. A dispute over military and civil air traffic control zones in the Aegean area.

Three other questions are intimately involved and must be considered in connection with the Aegean dispute: the remilitarization of the Greek islands of the eastern Aegean, whose demilitarization was ordered by the Treaties of Lausanne (1923) and Paris (1947); the problem of minorities (the Greek orthodox minority of Istanbul and on the islands of Gökçeada (Imvros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos), and the Muslim (mainly Turkish origin) minority in Western Thrace. Greece recognizes as the only problem the

from Cyprus to the Aegean. In the light of the Cyprus experience, the Athens government was afraid that Ankara might be tempted to employ military force in this area as well. In order to deter Turkey, Greece sought political and military assistance from the US. Greek strategy was designed to firstly get the US to guarantee the territorial status quo in the Aegean, and secondly to allocate its military aid to Greece and Turkey in a manner that would not disrupt the regional balance of power.

As to the US guarantees for the territorial status quo, Greek diplomatic efforts did not produce the desired effect at all. Nevertheless, in 1976 the Karamanlis government obtained an official commitment from the then US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, “that the United States would actively and unequivocally oppose either side seeking a military solution and will make major efforts to prevent such a course of action”³⁰. This was the closest the Greeks ever got to an official guarantee for their borders with Turkey. In 1981³¹ the new Prime Minister, Andreas Papandreou, went further by asking NATO to guarantee Greece’s eastern borders.³² The Greek demand for border guarantees was to be repeated for some years but then shelved, because no-one was prepared to accept it.

Regarding the maintenance of the regional balance, the Greeks seem to have been more successful. Since 1978 it became an accepted practice for the US Congress to allocate military aid for Greece and Turkey in the ratio of 7:10. In other words, the US gave the Greeks 70 percent of the military assistance attributed to the considerably larger Turkish armed forces despite Turkish protests and the occasional unwillingness of the US administration.³³

Turkey, too, tried to forward its position in the bilateral dispute via NATO. It constantly blocked the Greek re-entry to NATO until 1980 and internationalized the

delineation of the Continental Shelf, and she is in favor of a legal solution via the International Court of Justice, while Turkey prefers a political solution through bilateral negotiation. See for details, *T. Bahçeli*. Greek-Turkish Relations since 1955. Boulder, 1990, 129-169; *C. Rozakis*. To Diethes Nomiko Kathestos tou Ageou kai I Elinotourkiki Krisi (The International Legal Status of the Aegean and the Greek-Turkish Crisis). – In: *A. Alexandris*, (ed.) *Oi Elinotourkikes Sxesis 1923-1987* (Greek-Turkish Relations 1923-1987). Athens, 1988, 269-492.

³⁰ *D. Bitsios*. *Pera Apo ta Sinora* (Beyond the Borders). Athens, 1983, p. 254.

³¹ In October 1981, PASOK under Andreas Papandreou came to power after having warned the Greek electorate in numerous speeches of what he called the “Turkish threat”. The search for allies against “Turkish expansionism” became the prime goal of Greek foreign policy. In December 1981 – only a few weeks after his triumphant election victory – Papandreou attended a NATO defense ministers’ meeting, where he stubbornly insisted on a guarantee by the alliance to shield Greece from aggression by Turkey. As NATO members were not willing to agree to this demand, the entire meeting ended in failure. For the first time in NATO’s thirty-year history no joint communiqué was issued. This was the most spectacular example of Papandreou’s internationalization strategy in NATO. See, for details, *V. Coufoudakis*. 1993. PASOK and Greek-Turkish Relations. – In: *R. Clogg*. Greece, 1981-8. The Populist Decade. New York, 1993, 172-173.

³² *R. Clogg*. Greek-Turkish Relations in the Post-1974 Period. – In: *D. Konstas*, (ed.) *The Greek-Turkish Conflict in the 1990s: Domestic and External Influences*. London, 1991, p. 18; *Ş. S.Gürel*. *Tarihsel Boyut içinde Türk Yunan İlişkileri...*, p. 92.

³³ *C. Migdalovitz*. Greece and Turkey: Current Foreign Aid Issues. – CRS Issue Brief, 1995, p.2.

“Lemnos problem”³⁴. Athens has maintained that this strategically important island close to Dardanelles may be militarized, thus stationing air force and army units on the island. Turkey quotes the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and argues that this island must remain demilitarized. The Lemnos problem is part of the overall Greek-Turkish dispute pertaining to the military status of the Greek islands of the eastern Aegean.³⁵ Ankara has successfully internationalized and NATOised this bilateral problem by preventing – to the dislike of the Greeks – an inclusion of Lemnos in all NATO exercises.

The disputed areas of the continental shelf caused serious tensions in the Aegean twice in 1976 and 1987 and worsened deeply the relations between Greece and Turkey. During the 1976 crisis, neither side attempted to involve the US. After the ending of the crisis, the Greek government launched two separate appeals, one at the Security Council³⁶ and, the other, at the International Court of Justice in an effort to internationalize the issue as much as possible and to involve as many international players as possible. On the other hand, Turkish side asked for bilateral negotiations, a proposal that Greece rejected.

For the next six years, the Aegean continental shelf dispute remained a categorical problem in Turkish-Greek relations: no real crisis, but no effort to solve it, either. Then in 1987, the issue of the Aegean continental shelf brought Turkey and Greece once again to the brink of an armed clash. This time Greece tried to mobilize NATO in an effort to resolve the crisis. Papandreou went further by holding the US responsible for the crisis. In an effort to pressurize the US, Papandreou ordered the suspension of communications facilities at the American base in Nea Makri and promptly dispatched his foreign minister, Karolos Papoulias, to Sofia to brief the Bulgarian leader, Todor Zivkov. In a calculated snub, the ambassadors of Warsaw Pact countries in Athens were briefed on the crisis in advance of their NATO counterparts.³⁷ Eventually with the mediation efforts of NATO Secretary General tension subsided.

The Aegean dispute, as we analyzed, has become the primary source of tension between the two allies over the last three decades. Each side has well developed and structured arguments over the Aegean issues with no real intention or will to move even slightly towards a peaceful solution. Under these circumstances, the US has followed a hands-off policy, intended to project the Alliance impartiality and encouraged both nations to settle their own disputes bilaterally. The US has not attempted to take a more active role as a mediator, nor has it tried to take public positions on the dispute.

³⁴ *N. Barbarousis*. I Stratikopoiisi tis Limnou (The militarization of Limnos). – *Tetradia*, 21, 79-87.

³⁵ *J. Brown*. Delicately Poised Allies: Greece and Turkey... 13-14; *A. Gündüz*. Limni Adasının Hukuki Statüsü Üzerinde: Türk-Yunan Uyuşmazlığı..., İstanbul, 1985; *S. Ligeros*. I natoiki ptixi tis elinotourkikis dienexis (The NATO dimension of the Greek-Turkish dispute. – *Tetradia*, 1989, 25, 53-62.

³⁶ Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs asked the American Ambassador in Greece, Jack Kioubitz, that the US applies “fair play” and does not act behind the scenes in favor of Turkey during the discussions of the Security Council in the UN See *D. Bitsios*. Pera apo ta Sinora..., p. 82.

³⁷ *R. Clogg*. Greek-Turkish Relations in the Post-1974 Periode..., 12-26; Ptisi (Flight), Aigaio kai Tourkiki Proklitikotita (Aegean and Turkish provocativeness). May-June, 1987, p. 4.

New Phase: Greek-Turkish Dispute in the post-Cold War Era

The end of the Cold War brought about significant changes in the foreign policy priorities and challenges for Greece and Turkey, as well as the US. However, the bilateral problems between the two allies as well as the Cyprus issue remained unsolved and relations further deteriorated during the last decade of the 20th century. The US policy towards the dispute did not change substantially after the end of the Cold War. The US has continued to preserve stability in Eastern Mediterranean, a region bordered with conflict zones, and to prevent NATO from being embroiled in local controversies. To this end, the US has tried to remain “neutral” and worked to resolve disputes between the two NATO members, Greece and Turkey. Comparing with the 1974-1989 period, the US has been more active between the two parties.

The eruption of the Imia/Kardak crisis was stopped only by the American intervention and the deployment of the Russian S-300 missiles in Cyprus did not take place after intensive American mediation. A new important parameter in this triangular relationship in the 1990s was the EU, whose initiatives were welcomed by the American side. All the countries involved in the dispute have political links to the EU. Greece and Cyprus are full members while Turkey seeks membership. A search for a solution to the Cyprus problem and the Aegean dispute through EU diplomatic channels and ideas was, until recently, under discussion and consideration.

Focusing on the dispute, the Imia/Kardak crisis was the first “hot” incident in the Aegean in the post-Cold War era.³⁸ A small Turkish cargo ship went aground in late December 1995 less than four miles off the Turkish coast on an uninhabited rocky islet group, called Imia by the Greeks and Kardak by the Turks. The Turkish captain refused to have his vessel rescued by Greek authorities, claiming that he was in Turkish territorial waters.³⁹ The two foreign ministries exchanged information, holding to differing positions on the islets’ sovereignty but refraining from making confrontational demands or going public.

Some weeks later this event created more publicity as the local Greek mayor raised the Greek flag over the islet. Turkish news reporters took to the scene from a helicopter and hoisted a Turkish flag in place of the Greek one. Media in each country exaggerated the issue. Both governments dispatched warships and the Greek government asked the Greek armed forces to guard the islets from a potential Turkish act.

³⁸ It is true that the issue came up just after the accidental grounding of the Turkish ship. According to the Greek side, there was no doubt about the sovereignty of these islets until then, which according to a Turkish-Italian document dated 1932 specifically listed these islets as belonging at the time to the Italians, whose sovereignty must have transferred from Italy to Greece after World War II under the terms of the 1947 Paris Treaty. See for details, Borders Sovereignty Stability. The Imia Incident and Turkey’s Violations of International Law: The Citizen’s Movement & ELIAMEP (Athens 1996). The Turkish government, however, asserted that this Italo-Turkish protocol had never entered into force, and that the rocks themselves had been “registered” by the onshore Turkish province of Muğla. See, for details, *Y. İnan, and B. Sertaç Başeren*. Status of Kardak Rocks. Ankara, 1997.

³⁹ *F. Aksu*. Turkish-Greek Relations from Conflict to Détente the Last Decade. · Turkish Review of Balkan Studies. İstanbul, 2001, ISIS: 6, p. 172.

However, the Turks managed to land a detachment of marines in one of the islets, which had not been guarded by Greek soldiers.⁴⁰ At midnight, 31st of January 1996, it seemed as if a war was about to break out.

It fell to Washington once again to act, and it quickly moved to defuse tension. President Clinton placed calls for a peaceful outcome, and Ambassador Richard Holbrooke initiated intense mediation. American diplomatic efforts targeted to bring the situation back to its former status (*status quo ante*) and succeeded in its endeavor.⁴¹ The US position was that “in case of not opening fire to the Turkish soldiers and if the Greek military force withdraws its presence and the Greek flag, the Turkish military forces will do the same”, the statement from the US emphasizing: “the party that shoots the first bullet will find the US against it”⁴². Finally, both sides withdrew and a return to the *status quo ante* was achieved.⁴³

In the period that followed, the Turkish government did not just refuse to concede on this issue but also insisted that there were “gray zones” in the Aegean and numerous small islets or rocks whose sovereignty was unclear despite Greek claims to the contrary.⁴⁴ Ankara did not provide specifics, nor did it abandon its position, which garnered broad public credence in Turkey.⁴⁵ This aftermath angered Greek public opinion enormously. The Turkish government was seen to have embarked on a new and more aggressive course, threatening to redraw boundaries throughout the Aegean at Greece’s expense.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ C. Migdalovitz. *Greece and Turkey: Aegean Issues – Background and Recent Developments*. – CRS Issue Brief, 1997, p. 4; A. Kourkoulas. *Imia Kritiki Prosegisi tis tourkikis politikis (Imia A Critical Approach of Turkish policy)*. Athens, 1997; C. Liberis. *Ethniki Stratigiki kai Xeirismos Kriseon (National Strategy and Crises Management)*. Athens, 1997.

⁴¹ F. Aksu. *Turkish-Greek relations from Conflict to Détente the Last Decade...*, p. 174; K. Ioannou. *A tale of two islets The Imia incident between Greece and Turkey*. – Thesis, 1. I. Athens, 1997. 1-7.

⁴² F. Aksu. *Turkish-Greek relations from Conflict to Détente the Last Decade...*, p. 174. J. Wilkinson. 2000 *The United States, Turkey and Greece – Three’s a Crowd*. – In: M. Abramovitz, (ed). *Turkey’s Transformation and American Policy*. New York, 2000, 185-218.

⁴³ As the crisis broke out, Kostas Simitis had just taken office as the new Prime Minister after the resignation of the ill Andreas Papandreou. Simitis, at that time, did not have the full control of the government and in a certain degree there was lack of coordination. On the other hand, in Turkey then Prime Minister Tansu Çiller ruled a coalition government with the CHP and was in a middle of an effort to form a new government after the elections of December 1995. The above statement does not argue that the crisis would not have taken place if in both states there had been more stable governments but the domestic instability might have a part in the escalation of the crisis. See, for details, Greek newspapers. *Ta Nea*, “*Nea Sinora Zitoun sto Agaio: Apeili Thermou Episodiou*” (New Borders Asking in the Aegean: Threat of a new Hot Incident). 30.01.1996, p. 10; *Elepherotipia*, “*Telos Tholo: Hmiselinos sto Nisaki mas*” (Unclear End: The Crescent in our Small Island). 31.01.1996, 7-9; *Elepherotipia*, “*To Sxedio tou Polemou*” (The Plan of the War). 4.02.1996, p. 7; *Ta Nea*, “*Ti Kanoume an xana Ktipisei i Tourkia*” (What we do if Turkey attacks?). 1.02.1996, p. 10. Also see, *Turkish Daily News*, 31.01.1996, p.4; 1.02.1996, 6-8.

⁴⁴ M. Fırat. *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Yunanistan Dış Politikası (Greek Foreign Policy in the post-Cold War Era)*. – In: M. Türkerş, and İ. Uzgel, (eds). *Türkiye’nin Komşuları (The Neighbours of Turkey)*. Ankara, 2002, 56-59.

⁴⁵ *Elepherotipia*, “*Me Polemo mas Fovizei i Tourkia*” (Turkey Threatens us with War). 5.02.1996, p. 2.

⁴⁶ *Elepherotipia*, “*Neo Thema Vazi i Tourkia*” (Turkey Raises New Issue). 6.02.1996, p. 2.

The Greek-Turkish crisis showed that when the situation escalated the Greek and the Turkish governments were unable or unwilling to deal directly with each other and the mission fell to the Americans. During the crisis both sides followed an adamant position not to lose face, even if the consequence would have been war. Afterwards and when the worst was avoided, both decided in favor of a peaceful resolution, recognizing that a war was not in either's national interest.

It was a similar situation when the Cypriot government ordered in January 1997 the purchase from Russia of S-300 missiles, an anti-aircraft system similar to the American Patriot ones.⁴⁷ The Turks reacted strongly. They denounced the missile buy as unwarranted escalation and denied that there was any threat from Turkish planes, and described the S-300 missiles as jeopardizing not only Turkish Cypriots but also the security of Turkey itself.⁴⁸ Ankara said it would "not tolerate" the deployment and the General Staff were directed to take "additional military measures". Washington decried both the deployment and the threat of military action in response.⁴⁹

President Clerides postponed implementation twice in 1998, and in December of that year announced a decision taken in consultation with Athens to cancel the deployment – the missiles were instead to be sent to Crete. The Clerides government, which backed down despite strong domestic calls, had come under intense pressure from the US and the EU. It also had to take into account possible adverse effects of the deployment on Cyprus's application for EU membership. Although statements from Athens were carefully phrased to maintain the credibility of the "joint defense doctrine"⁵⁰, the Greeks did not oppose transfer of the missiles to Crete presumably

⁴⁷ The purchase of the missiles was part of the implementation of a military modernization program designed to produce quantitative and qualitative improvements in the country's defense capabilities vis-à-vis Turkey. In addition to a deterrence strategy, based on a military cooperation agreement and common defense doctrine instituted with Greece in 1993; Greek-Cypriots opened an air base at Paphos, and completed a \$425 million purchase agreement for 30 Russian S-300 medium-range surface-to-air missiles. According to the Greek-Cypriots, this military strategy would reinforce their position in the intercommunal talks and put some pressure in the international community to achieve the withdrawal or even a serious reduction of the Turkish troops. It would also guarantee the security of the Greek-Cypriot population: as they were under a shadow of permanent menace. To Vima, "S-300: To Thriller Sinexizetai" (S-300: Thriller Carries on), 29.11.1998, p. A32; To Vima, "S-300: To Xroniko mias Proanagelthisas Egatastasis" (S-300: The Events for a Preannounced Deployment), 29.3.1998, p. 24; To Vima, "Tous S-300 Tous Xehasate?" (Did you Forget the S-300?), 15.11.1998, p. A32; Eletherotipia, "S-300: O Telikos Giros" (S-300: The Final Round), 8.11.1998, p. 17; Turkish Probe, 6.11.1998, p. 4; Turkish Probe, 8.12.1998), 3-4.

⁴⁸ H. Kramer, *The Cyprus Problem and European Security*. – *Survival*, 39:3, 1997, p.19; H. Ünal, *Missiles off to Crete, is peace any nearer?* – *The Strategist*, February-March 1999, 35-37; G. Ayman, *A case of brinkmanship: S-300 Missile Crisis*. – *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies*, İstanbul, 2002, ISIS: 7, 5-34.

⁴⁹ Washington had additional concerns. Possible deployment of Russian weapons in the already overly-militarized island was undesirable for the Americans. See, Interview with Nicholas Burns, the US Ambassador to Athens: <http://www.ana.gr/hermes/1998/sep/interview/htm>

⁵⁰ To Vima, *Eniaio Amintiko Dogma: Ti Kerdisame?* (Joint Defence Doctrine: What have we gained?), 6.09.1998, p. A4; To Vima, *As tous Egatastisoume stin Kriti* (Lets Deploy Them in Crete), 25.12.1998, p. A16.

because it would have been nearly impossible to defend them effectively against Turkish military action.

To sum up, during the post Cold War era, the US was successful in its crisis management role. That preserved the stability of NATO in southeastern Europe and avoided the unthinkable, the two allies going to war. But, US efforts to mediate for a solution proved fruitless. Washington put itself forth as the prime honest broker, used special envoys as its primary weapons, and focused principally on kick-off negotiations. However, despite its activism, it did not achieve its stated goal. The relative ineffectiveness of the world's only superpower in this specific peacekeeping enterprise stems, to a large extent, from the US political considerations. This is always a disadvantage in the US mediating efforts in the Greek-Turkish dispute.

On the other side, both Greece and Turkey have developed a certain perception for the US, which is completely different from the intended efforts of Washington. The Greeks always turn to Washington for support and advice for their problems; the Turks, on the other hand, think that they can deal with the Greeks by themselves. The common perception for Greece and Turkey is that both think that the US is in favour of the other.

Additionally, the US has a certain degree of putting pressure on the two parties but there are certain limits to that. The whole history of the dispute and the American role in it has shown that whatever the Americans propose, it is the two governments that should have the political courage and will to decide and commit. The search for a more effective US role in the Greek-Turkish dispute might continue for the American decision makers. At least keeping and strengthening Greek-Turkish detente is a positive element. Furthermore, the involvement of the EU may give the chance for the US to disengage itself, to a certain extent, from the bilateral dispute.

Though, at first sight, it may look as if the US efforts for a peaceful solution between Turkey and Greece have fallen through, since Ankara and Athens attach more priority to their bilateral disputes, it is safe to say that Washington has succeeded in containing the crisis. From the US vantage point, what took precedence over everything else was the maintenance of NATO solidarity. It is also safe to say that but for the continuous US mediation and Washington's close monitoring of the situation, Turkey and Greece would have come to blows with each other.⁵¹ That both countries were NATO members made it imperative that the conflict was contained within the walls of the Alliance. Indeed, many experts suggest that, in addition to containing the Soviet danger, one of the successes of NATO was to prevent a Turco-Greek war.

⁵¹ *J. Wilkinson*. The United States, Turkey and Greece-Three's a Crowd. – In: *M. Abramovitz* (ed.). Turkey's Transformation and American Policy. New York, 2000, 187-192.