

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Cyprus Conflict: Implication on Greek-Turkish Relation and its effects on European Security

Imamah Ashraf ^a

Abstract: This article briefly explains the conflict in Cyprus between Turkish and Greek Cypriots and explores the European dimension of these crises along with the effects it has on building and promoting ethno-cultural identities. By looking at two heritage sites—one located north and the other south of the Buffer Zone—it suggests that heritage practices are actually more nuanced than commonly thought. In particular, it reveals how ethnic conflict has not only led to heritage destruction but has also, in some cases, inadvertently contributed to its preservation by halting development. Additionally, it discusses how ethnic groups and individuals might view their own heritage negatively, seeing it as a burdensome cultural aspect while trying to foster specific ideological or socially ‘progressive’ identities (Hatay, 2009).

Keywords: Geopolitics, Nationalism, Liberalism, Security, NATO, EU, UN, Ethnicity, Cypriots

Introduction

The Cyprus Conflict is one of the most unresolved disputes in the modern world since its independence. Since gaining independence in 1960 as the Republic of Cyprus, the island has not only faced ethnic conflicts but has also created the geopolitical tension between the two NATO members, Turkey and Greece. Their tension has not only blocked the regional cooperation in the Mediterranean but also has created bilateral and multilateral tension in the whole region which further has disrupted the EURO-Atlantic Security Structure deepening the conflict.

The island of Cyprus officially called Republic of Cyprus is present at the junction of Asia, Middle East and Europe which has very important strategic significance. Historically it was ruled by different empires like Persians, Romans, Egyptians, Assyrians, Arab Caliphate and by the Ottoman Empire until 1914. After 1914, it was placed under British colonial rule. As a result of violence in the 1950's, it gained independence in 1960 from Britain as per Zurich and London Agreement. The constitution which was implemented in 1960 led to dispute due to unequal distribution of power (Stavrinides, 1999) between Greek Cypriots which wanted to join Greece and supported for Enosis (union with Greece) and Turkish Cypriots which supported for Taksim (union with Turkey), which wanted to be the part of Turkey. The violence led to the death of 114 Greek Cypriots and 366 Turkish Cypriots also leading to the displacement of many Cypriots in the region. The peace was established by UN peacekeeping missions (UNFICYP) in 1964 in Cyprus. After almost a decade the situation became even more intense when Greek Cypriots nationalists lead a military coup backed by Greece aimed to achieve Enosis. This led to the intervention by Turkish military which resulted in the partition of island into two parts in 1983.

The de-facto partition of Cyprus The South which is controlled by Greek Cypriots also called The Republic of Cyprus recognized by the European Union and many other countries of the world whereas the north is controlled by Turkish Cypriots also called The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) only

^a Research Scholar, Department of International Relations, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

recognized by Turkey in the whole world has remained the long unresolved dispute. The island is 283 miles away from Turkey and 666 miles away from Greece. Different attempts have been made like Annan plan proposed in 2004 by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The plan was the process of integration (Demetriou, 2005) between both the parties. The survey or referendum was conducted between the north and south under UN proposed plan on the accession of both sides of the island which got rejection by 76% from the south and 65% from the north .and as a result of this referendum the green line which divided both sides of the islands was opened for the first time in 30 years. In 2008 the wall which separated south and north also called UN buffer zone was demolished and it was a very big achievement to European Union policy makers. In 2017 the Crans-Montana also called Cyprus Talks were started but were collapsed immediately. Cyprus joined European Union in 2004 and granted the citizenship to all Cypriots excluding all the population from north which further deepened the conflict.

The impact of this conflict has expanded beyond the Mediterranean. The rivalry between Greece and Turkey which both are active NATO members and European Union's failure to solve the conflict between them has questioned the credibility of its foreign policy in its neighborhood. The discovery of gas reserves in eastern Mediterranean of 345 trillion cubic meter has given a rise to a new dimension to this conflict. The discovery of these gas reserves has further led the tensions to the peak among Turkey, Greece and Cyprus as all of them are claiming their sovereignty over exclusive Maritimes economic zones (EEZ's) coinciding and overlapping the international maritime laws. Moreover, the forming of alliances between Greece, Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus on their energy and hydrocarbons reserves has further isolated Turkey creating regional polarization.

The concept of Europeanization (THHOOMMAASSDDIIEZZ, 2018)also emerges that says that Europe is Europeanizing the Cyprus for its own purposes by dictating everything and since Cyprus became the part of European Union it is acting against Turkey subsequently. Meanwhile the Cyprus conflict has also created challenges for European Security. The failure of EU-NATO countries to solve this crisis has given a rise to asylum seekers, irregular migration patterns and increased hybrid threats mainly from the Middle East. Furthermore, EU-NATO Relations are also damaged due to this conflict as Turkey and Cyprus blocks EU-NATO initiatives involving each other.

Having these many different sides and aspects the Cyprus conflict is not only a unilateral or a bilateral dispute but an international fault line geopolitically. The conflict has failed to solve because every party has their national or strategic interest whether they are international actors or regional actors in the whole region.

Literature Review

Research suggests (Evriviades, 1975) that the identities of Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots really started to take shape during British rule from 1878 to 1960. They went from seeing themselves mainly through religious lenses to more ethnic identities, thanks to changes in education and administration. These splits set the stage for the conflicts that popped up after independence. Both communities had their own nationalist goals—like Enosis for the Greek Cypriots and Taksim for the Turkish Cypriots—which became pretty solidified and ultimately led to violence and deeper divides. Things got even more complicated in the early 1960s when the constitution fell apart and Turkish enclaves were created, leading up to the traumatic events of 1974.

Scholars point to how strong ethno-nationalism and a zero-sum view of politics play huge roles here. Each side's nationalist story often portrays the other as a real threat. For Greek-Cypriots, the time after the war was all about a defensive mindset, which brought militarization into everyday life, like through things like conscription and national guard setups. This kind of thinking just keeps fueling distrust. Nationalist politics, education, and media have kept these stories alive, making it hard for people to see eye to eye.

Researchers who study conflict also talk about how deep-seated distrust and trauma make it tough to reconcile. Language and memories serve to keep people apart. For example, the bilingual signs in Nicosia's buffer zone highlight some rare points of connection, but overall, public spaces mostly keep out the other community's language, showing just how divided things still are.

When looking at outside influences, groups like the UN, the EU, and countries like Greece, Turkey, and the UK play key roles in keeping this conflict alive. Greek-Cypriot leaders, including President Christodoulides, are pushing for a bi-zonal, bicommunal federation under the UN's guidance, and they want more support from the EU. On the flip side, the Northern Cypriots and Turkey are leaning toward recognizing sovereignty and pushing for a two-state solution, with Turkey's involvement seen as crucial. Reports from Secretary-General Guterres point out that both sides have major issues with trust and militarization, which complicate things further, especially when narratives are often one-sided and blame is solely placed on one side.

To build peace and work towards reconciliation, both academic and policy research suggest approaches like transitional justice through truth commissions, bicommunal discussions, and including youth and women in the process, along with cooperation in education and economics. While some 'track-two' methods are in place, actual progress has been slow due to political stagnation. Ideas like youth committees, educational exchanges, and truth-telling are steps in the right direction, but they don't really tackle the bigger, long-standing issues of distrust.

All this literature paints the Cyprus conflict as having roots in colonial history, ethnic identities, and a focus on security. Although there are frameworks like EU integration and grassroots efforts to help, progress is often stalled due to old stories, mutual distrust, and the ongoing presence of external actors. To really find a lasting solution, we need to rethink identities, recognize each other, and make some solid changes in how we handle security, governance, and social narratives.

Theoretical Framework: Liberalism in Cyprus Conflict

Liberal school in International Relations focuses on how states can work together, and it analyzes the Cyprus Conflict by the lens of economic interdependence, diplomacy, international organizations and institutions. In contrast to realism, liberalism says that peace i.e. rule of law and order is possible through the creation and interaction of institutions, interdependency among states and by promoting the democratic values. Some of the core concepts of liberalism in Cyprus Conflict are:

Economic Interdependence: Liberalism says that by increasing the economic and trade ties there is very less chance of occurrence of a conflict. Considering the Cyprus situation, the Green Line which is considered as the UN buffer zone since 2003, and it also divides the island in northern and southern Cyprus has limited the movements between both the sides. Cyprus is considered as the major tourist destination but there is a lack of recognition, lack of trust and there is no cross-community business, no investment which is transforming the conflict dynamics. There is need to enhance the trade dependence of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey. According to some government registered data sources Cyprus major export and import destination country is Greece

Role of International Institutions: Liberalism also says that the non-state actors play major role in conflict resolution. The UN has been involved in sending peace keeping missions on the island. The European Union and different NGOs have also made efforts for peace in Cyprus. The different Cyprus related cases are ruled, and some are still going in European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Despite of all these efforts the limited authority of these institutions as they cannot enforce peace without political and peoples will.

Democratic Peace Theory: Democratic Peace Theory says that democracies will never go to war with each other. All Turkey, Greece and Republic of Cyprus are democratic states which shall grant peace and accountability but in case of Cyprus Greek Cypriots has aligned with Greece and Turkish Cypriots has aligned with Turkey and both of these parties are accepting power sharing between them.

Research Questions

Q1: How is the Cyprus Conflict affecting the working and consistency of NATO?

Ans: The Cyprus conflict really stirred things up for NATO back in 1963 when tensions started between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. For the first time, Greece and Turkey, both NATO members, found themselves on different sides of a conflict in Cyprus, which raised some serious concerns about stability in the region. NATO tried to step in with a peacekeeping proposal to send a combined Greek and Turkish force, but it didn't fly—Cypriot leaders weren't ready to give up sovereignty, even with UN help. That whole situation showed just how tricky it can be for NATO to mediate when member countries have competing interests.

Then in 1974, Turkey invaded, and Greece faced its own crisis, throwing NATO into chaos. The whole spat of normal and legitimate political positions (Turk, 2007) between these two allies really messed with the southern unity of NATO. You had troops moving around and navies flexing their muscles near Cyprus, exposing just how fragile things were within the alliance when conflicts popped up among its members.

The Cyprus conflict has also created an ongoing mess between NATO and the EU. Cyprus, which joined the EU in 2004, has the power to veto defense cooperation at the EU level, just like Turkey can within NATO. So, if Cyprus isn't part of NATO, it makes it harder for NATO to fully team up with the EU. And Turkey's objections complicate things for the EU's Common Security and defense Policy. NATO's secretary-general has highlighted the need for better cooperation between the EU and Turkey for regional security, recognizing that Turkey has key defense capabilities, despite its rocky relationship with Cyprus. But until Cyprus lets Turkey join the EU security fold, and Turkey stops blocking Cyprus from NATO, real collaboration is going to be tough.

Cyprus is in a weird spot—it's an EU member but isn't in NATO or the Partnership for Peace program. Back in 2011, the Cypriot Parliament gave the nod to join Partner for peace program, but then President Christofias vetoed it because he thought it could hurt reunification efforts. More recently, President Christodoulides came up with a phased plan to eventually join NATO, but he's tied that to figuring out the Cyprus issue and improving EU-Turkey relations.

Turkey's veto is still a huge hurdle. Unless Greek and Turkish Cypriots can negotiate a settlement and Turkey eases its stance, it looks like Cyprus will remain on the sidelines of NATO. This situation keeps Cyprus out of important Western defense discussions, which isn't great for NATO's understanding of security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus is in a key location, close to the Levant and central to energy-rich areas. Some NATO folks think Cyprus could really boost the alliance's response capabilities—think maritime surveillance and logistics support.

The Cyprus conflict continues to be a significant and ongoing challenge for NATO, impacting its internal cohesion, operational readiness, and strategic consistency. This issue is very relevant because it directly involving the two very important member Turkey and Greece. The tensions between both of them regarding Cyprus have continuously threatened the unity, effectiveness and alliances. Furthermore, we are going to discuss the historical background , contemporary mobility and how these factors are effecting the NATO coherence and functionality and will also be discussing the wider effects on EU-NATO regional security and co-operation.

The beginning of this Cyprus issue emerged and can be back in the mid of 20th century. The ethnic division between Greek Cypriots which were in majority and Turkish Cypriots which were in minority. It was under the British crown rule till 1960 when it gained independence. The implementation of the constitution was created to create balance between majority and minority communities on the island, but the violence erupted between both communities in 1963 soon after its independence. The Greeks supported ENOSIS which means (union with Greece), and Turkish were sidelined because they were in minority.

Very recently, the USA has supported Cyprus with providing defensive improvements and NATO has also been seen paying attention on this issue. This attention has increased the American and western influence in the region and Turkey is very concerned and adopted very sensitive behavior and there can be an increase in the tensions. Some of the implications on NATO strategy by this conflict are:

1. The presence of NATO in Cyprus geographical position can boost the energy resources.
2. The tactical and strategic capabilities can enhance partnership of NATO states with Cyprus .
3. Turkey pivot towards Russia and Cyprus affinity towards USA has also complicated the internal dynamics of NATO.

Finding the solution to this conflict is very important. Some suggest that there should be permanent peace agreement between both the sides and one of the first world country should supervise this agreement so that there is very less chance of arising conflict. Others suggest that there should be joint training exercises so that it might ease tensions. The mediating role can be played by NATO by listening to the concerns of both sides and helping to solve the issues between them.

As of now Cyprus is not a NATO member but the roles played by Turkey and Greece has directly affected the functionality of NATO. The Cyprus is not only restricted to the Mediterranean but has expanded to the Aegean Sea which has given a rise to issues like claiming over airspace and water bodies and the military deployments and exercises near the disputed areas. The Mediterranean especially eastern Mediterranean is very important for NATO because of traditional security objectives and Russia's increasing influence in Libya, Yemen, Syria etc. has created strategic vacuum between Turkey and Greece. As also discussed earlier different initiatives regarding each other being blocked by both of the countries which has created a 'deadlock diplomacy' (a term in International Relations) that is preventing the coordination between both the states.

Conclusion

The Cyprus Conflict is an unresolved issue till now and it is affecting the whole Mediterranean but also has implications on European security. The European Union and other international actors are unable to solve these crises between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. EU's failure to implement its credible foreign policy and as long as Cyprus remains divided the ability of EU to promote liberal democracy and human rights remains questionable. This conflict has also had broader implications on the regional security. The discovery of hydrocarbons in eastern Mediterranean has further made the disputes complicated because all three countries Cyprus, Greece and Turkey are not negotiating on resource sharing of these discovered reserves. Only a peaceful resolution can reduce the tensions in the region and in the Europe.

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