

IS THE CYPRUS PROBLEM UNSOLVABLE? THE GEOPOLITICAL TRAP OF THE WEAKEST STATE

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The analysis aims to show the difficulties that small, weak and occupied states face in conducting foreign policy, especially when their adversaries are important regional powers. More specifically, it seeks to shed light to their efforts to implement successful grand strategies that will help them solve their protracted conflicts. Using the Cyprus problem as a case study, we attempt to explore the domestic, regional and international factors that prevent the settlement of the conflict. In this regard, we aim to elaborate a new theory of conflict management that upon further research could lead to a new theory of conflict resolution.

Key words: the Cyprus problem, asymmetrical conflict, grand strategy, conflict resolution, neorealism

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to explore and shed light to the tremendous difficulties that small, weak, ethnically divided and occupied states face in their foreign policies, especially when they attempt to develop a successful grand strategy that will support their efforts to settle their protracted conflicts. For the purposes of the analysis, we coined a new phrase—the ‘geopolitical trap of the weakest state’ or ‘the syndrome of the geopolitically trapped state’. We will attempt to elaborate a new theory of conflict management based on geopolitics, which could lead to a new theory of conflict resolution, using the Cyprus problem as a case paradigm.



Although we do not totally reject pluralist-liberalist approaches, we firmly believe that they do not ascertain the root causes and therefore do not propose sufficient remedies for perplexed international questions such as the Cyprus problem.

More analytically, in this analysis, we will illustrate the lack of manoeuvre and options for small and weak states when they confront important regional powers that not only possess enhanced military capabilities but also retain great geopolitical influence because of their important geopolitical position. In this regard, their actions may affect the regional and the global distribution of power.

Focusing on the Cyprus question, we will provide the main parameters that render it so difficult to solve. At some points, we will juxtapose the Cyprus problem with another perplexed international question, the Palestinian-Israeli problem. Moreover, we will highlight the Irish question (Cochrane 2013), a problem that has been solved.¹ The Lebanon case is also another illustrative and useful paradigm for our analysis. However, a full comparative analysis of the aforementioned conflicts cannot be made, and it is beyond the scope of this article.

The Cyprus problem falls into the ‘asymmetrical conflicts’ (Mitchel 1995) category. Hence, its solution is impeded mainly by the imbalance of power (Bercovitch 1996, 22–23)² between Turkey and Turkish Cypriots on the one hand and Greece and Greek Cypriots on the other hand. Therefore, we will expound

1 We do not claim that the Cyprus problem and the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland are identical since many differences exist between the two conflicts. For example, as regards Cyprus, one of the main obstacles to peace is Turkish occupation, whilst in Northern Ireland, nationalists and unionists dwell in the same piece of land without any separation between them. However, as regards the psychological dimension of the conflict, many similarities are found: two rival factions with mutually incompatible ambitions and deep suspicions about others’ intentions.

2 According to various studies in the field of international mediation, a clear pattern emerged showing high mediation impact when power capabilities were evenly matched and low or no impact when power disparity was high.



our analysis using primarily systemic theories of international politics (neorealism), whilst at the same time, we will not underestimate the gap between the two sides that is provoked because of mistrust, fear, stereotypes³ and so on. We believe that all levels of analysis are important to understand the dynamics that shape the Cyprus problem.

As Kenneth Waltz (1954) has shown in his influential book *Man, the State, and War*, whilst the analysis of the third level (international system) is the most important, the analyst must not disregard the other levels to understand the causes of war/conflict in the international system. Moreover, neoclassical realism⁴, which incorporates unit and domestic decision-making factors to the analysis, could be a useful tool for the scope of this article.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Cyprus problem sparked in the 1950s as a colonial conflict against the colonial power, Great Britain. The Greek Cypriots (GCs) based their revolt against the colonisers on the principle of self-determination (Nirmal 1999). However, the whole issue was becoming more complicated as the revolt was occurring since there was a Turkish minority of 18% of the population on the island. The Turkish Cypriots (TCs) were deeply alarmed by the Greek Cypriots' demand for union (enosis), with Greece demanding for their part their own self-determination that, if applied, would lead to the division (taxim) of Cyprus. On their part, they could not imagine a bright future as a minority in the Greek Republic despite the assurances given to them that their human rights would be safeguarded.

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- 3 The hopeful thing is that all these psychological elements were more than present in the Irish question: thousands of deaths, hatred, mistrust and so on. Despite these aforementioned characteristics of the conflict, the problem has been solved, and despite some sporadic incidents of violence, there is peace in Northern Ireland.
 - 4 Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).



On its part, Great Britain, which wanted to perpetuate its influence on the island for strategic reasons, used ‘divide and rule’⁵ tactics (Breuly 2017, 394). A dwindling Pax Britannica identified the control of Cyprus with particular geostrategic interests in the Middle East—and particular geopolitical advantages in the Cold War context—and therefore considered the TCs’ objection to enosis as a useful tool for the perpetuation of the control of the island.

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According to the mainstream view in the GC community, Turkey undermined the hostility of the Turkish Cypriot minority towards GCs. Clashes erupted between the two communities and the colonial power.⁶ Britons tried to combine partition with local administration by making various constitutional proposals (Panayiotides 2014, 5–11). Those plans, in their majority, were rejected by both communities (Panayiotides 2014).

In December 1963, three years after Cyprus gained its independence, the constitutional order collapsed when President Makarios proposed to the Turkish Cypriot leadership several amendments on the constitution to become more functional. Deadly clashes erupted between the GC and the TC. Great Britain and the USA, the emerging superpower of the international system, intervened by proposing various plans that according to the GCs favoured the TCs, who demanded partition and broad self-administration (Panayiotides 2015).⁷ These plans

5 Great Britain, as the colonial power, managed anticolonial nationalism in many of its colonies alike. For example, in India, by 1914, the British had responded to Indian nationalists with the formation of communal electorates and local councils which classes Hindu and Muslim as distinct political identities. See John Breuly, ‘Nationalism, National Self-Determination, and International Relations’, in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by J. Baylis, S. Smith and P. Owens (2017), 394.

6 For the importance of ethnic and communal conflicts and their regional and international implications, see Michael Brown (1996).

7 For a comprehensive analysis for the various plans that the United States proposed in 1960s, see Nicos Panayiotides’ (2015) ‘The Cyprus Problem in International Politics: The Great Powers and the Multiple Faces of the Anglo-American Hegemonism.’



were not received with much enthusiasm by the TC community either, whilst the negotiating procedure manifested the divergent goals of the two sides.

The inter-communal talks, based on a unitary state, which started in 1968, in an effort to solve the constitutional issues, between the two sides were abruptly terminated in July 1974 when a Greek coup against President Makarios provoked the Turkish invasion. Turkish leadership regarded junta's coup against Makarios as an effort to alter the constitutional order and pursue the union of the island with Greece.

The utmost malaise for the fate of the beautiful island of Cyprus was sealed because of a particular article of the Treaty of Guarantee (1960) amongst Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom. In particular, article IV of the aforementioned treaty provided that '[i]n the event of a breach of the provisions of the present Treaty, Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom undertake to consult together with respect to the representations or measures necessary to ensure observance of those provisions. In so far as common or concerted action may not prove possible, each the three guaranteeing Powers reserves the right to take action with the sole aim of re-establishing the state of affairs created by the present Treaty'.⁸

Turkey exploited this particular provision and created a protracted international problem violating international law. Article 2(4) of the United Nations prohibits member states from using force in their international relations.⁹

Forty-five years after the Turkish invasion, there are thousands of Turkish soldiers on the island obstructing the prospects for peace and reunification of Cyprus.

8 See Treaty of Guarantee, signed in Nicosia on 16 August 1960, https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty_of_guarantee.pdf.

9 'The UN Charter and the Prohibition on the Use of Force', Public International Law, <https://ruwanthikagunaratne.wordpress.com/2011/04/11/lesson-5-1-prohibition-on-the-use-of-force-and-the-un-charter/>.



A very important issue is that in 1977, the Greek Cypriot leadership accepted the federal solution (Syrigos 2005, 93)¹⁰ as a basis for the settlement of the problem, thus rejecting its previous demand that the solution be based on a unitary state.

The talks that ensued in 1980s and 1990s and recent talks at Crans-Montana (Switzerland, 28 June–7 July 2017), based on the federal model, did not prosper because of the conflicting strategic goals of both sides. According to the GCs, the Turkish side was inching towards a confederal solution, instigating fears that this could lead to some sort of constitutional partition. Moreover, it insisted to retain what it considered as guarantee rights over the island.

IS THE CYPRUS PROBLEM UNSOLVABLE?

However, why is the Cyprus problem so difficult to be solved? We consider the main parameter as the imbalance of power between Turkey and Greece. Turkey is a regional power and member of NATO with a very important geopolitical position and a formidable army. Traditionally, especially during the Cold War, as well as afterwards, Turkey was one of the main countries that the United States based its regional strategy in the Middle East (Panayiotides 2014, 33–46).¹¹

10 The agreement did not clarify if the new state would be biregional or multiregional. However, in 1980, the secretary general said in his statement that the new state would be bizonal, a term adopted by the Security Council in resolutions 649/1990 and 716/1991. See Aggelos Syrigos's (2005, 93) work titled *Annan Plan: The Legacies of the Past and the Prospects of the Future*.

11 During the Cold War, Turkey was the main bastion for the containment of the Soviet influence in the Middle East. Indicatively, Turkey was one of the founding members of the Bagdad Pact (1955). When the Hashemite regime of Iraq was overthrown in July 1958, the headquarters of the pact were moved to Ankara. In 1961, NATO placed intermediate-range Jupiter missiles in Turkey to defend the West from the Soviet Union. Afterwards, Turkey was again placed in the epicentre of an American regional strategy in the Middle East, along with other countries, when the so-called Nixon Doctrine in November 1969 put primary reliance on security cooperation with regional states as a means of protecting US



The aforementioned reality renders extremely difficult to negotiate with Turkey on a fair basis. Additionally, many other issues involved in the discussion practically, ideologically and philosophically exist. Time is ruthless in creating geopolitical ‘fait accompli’ on the ground. For example, since 1974, Turkey is transferring settlers on the island violating the Fourth Geneva Convention (the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, Volume IV). As we know from the Israeli-Palestinian problem, the settling policy of Israel in occupied territories in the West Bank (Quiqley 2005, 174–182) is one of the main obstacles for peace. Moreover, there are dozens of UN resolutions (e.g., 242, 267, 271; see below) calling for the end Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories and rescind measures of annexation. However, the status quo remains unchangeable.

As regards the Cyprus problem, many of the settlers that Turkey transferred to Cyprus have been married with the TCs and have children. A lot of them live in Greek Cypriots’ houses. Although this constitutes a violation of international law, it is very difficult 45 years after the division of Cyprus to expel all settlers from the island. Consequently, one should be in a position to answer the question if an expansive military force used by revisionist powers can create law (Wight 1998).

SOLUTION, BUT WHAT SOLUTION? FEDERATION VS. CONFEDERATION AND THE UNITARY STATE

The solution that the two parts discuss is based on the High Level Agreements of 12 February 1977 between President Makarios and the Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Dectas. The GC

interests in the region. Moreover, after the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Carter administration coined the ‘Wohlstetter doctrine for Turkey’. After the Cold War, the ‘special relationship’ between the two countries continued. In particular, during the second Gulf War of 1991, Turkish President Özal acted in a way that favoured American interests during the crisis. The strategic utility of Turkey for the West was manifested again during the Bosnian Crisis (1992–1995), when the United States needed Ankara’s support to cement the Croatian-Muslim alliance in 1994. See Nicos Panayiotides (2014, 33–46).



leader Archbishop Makarios accepted the federal model as a basis for the solution of the problem. The devastating effects of the Turkish invasion and the subsequent occupation of Cyprus in 1974 forced President Makarios to do something he adamantly refused the previous years. From that point, the 'geopolitical trap of the weakest state' was put into force and started to yield its negative results.

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President Makarios made a maximum compromise, expecting the other side to display goodwill. However, contrary to Makarios's expectations, Rauf Dectas made in 1983 a unilateral declaration of independence declaring 'the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'.

His declaration, ratified by the Turkish Cypriot 'parliament', was condemned by the international community. The UN issued two resolutions (541 and 550) proclaiming that the Turkish Cypriot UDI was legally invalid and requesting that no other sovereign state should recognise the declaration and asked for its withdrawal.

President Makarios, a pragmatist politician, foresaw that Turkey and the TCs were unprepared to make a serious compromise to solve the problem. Even though he was ready to continue the talks, he adopted the strategy of 'enduring struggle' for the solution.¹²

According to this logic, the GCs would not accept the fait accompli that the Turkish army imposed on Cyprus and would not recognise an independent Turkish Cypriot state. Expounding his logic, he said that the Greek Cypriots would use any means and all international fora to reverse the status quo. However, international law is impracticable when the parties involved are unequal (Handel 1990) regarding their aggregate might.¹³

At this point, we must stress that until now, there are different interpretations between the TCs and the GCs regarding the content of this solution. Whilst the Greek side seems ready

12 President Makarios made the declaration in his last public speech (20 July 1977), 14 days before his death (3 August 1977).

13 For the most comprehensive analysis on the issue, see Michael Handel's (1990) *Weak States in the International System*.



to accept a federal state with a strong central government, the Turkish side embraces a new state with a loose central government with confederal constitutional characteristics. They seek to maintain vital responsibilities for the constituent states. For example, they demand that the TC constituent state be in a position to sign agreements with other states.¹⁴

Turkey's intentions are clear and straightforward. According to the former foreign minister of Greece, Mr Kotzias, at Crans-Montana (see above), his counterpart, Mr Cavusoglu, proposed a confederal model (confederation) for Cyprus. As he said, 'If this goes well we can proceed to a federation, if not to two states.' Then Mr Kotzias replied, 'When one moves from a unitary state to a confederation the end is always the same: The collapse of the state.'¹⁵

Moreover, the largest political parties in the Republic of Cyprus, the left-wing AKEL and the right-wing DISY, accept the federal solution for the Cyprus problem, whilst the centrist parties either reject it or face it with much scepticism. According to their arguments, a bizonal federation will constitute acceptance of a permanent separation of the two main communities of the island along ethnicist criteria, that is, racist solution and contrary to international law.¹⁶

14 For the main differences between federal and confederal states, see Preston King's (2007) *Federalism and Federation*. See also Burgess Michael and Pinder John's (2007) *Multinational Federations*.

15 Kotzias (2018) regarding Crans-Montana, NATO and Confederation, *Philenews*, available at <http://www.philenews.com/eidiseis/politiki/article/629834/kotzias-ston-f-ga-kran-montana-nato-synomospondia>.

16 As they argue, Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots demand that in any settlement of the conflict, they should have the majority of the land and the people in the Turkish constituent state/region. Moreover, the Turkish Cypriots demand political majorities in their region because in any different case, the Greek Cypriots will have a say to their politics, and consequently, they may be in a position to alter their political will. For a comprehensive analysis on all the parameters of this issue, see Stephanos Konstantinidis's (2017) *Cyprus: The Beginnings of a Racial Bizonal-Bicommunal Federation*, *Defend Democracy Press*, available at <http://www.defenddemocracy.press/cyprus-the-beginnings-of-a-racial-bizonal-bicommunal-federation/>.



Having noted the aforementioned observation, one may detect that the leadership level of analysis plays an important role in any discussion for the solution of the problem. Elaborating more, we may query, would the Greek Cypriot parties and the GC community accept in a referendum a solution that will not provide for Turkish guarantee rights over Cyprus but will offer the TCs the rotating presidency of the state as they demand? Putting it more clearly, it is uncertain that the GCs will accept in any future agreement the provision for a rotating presidency for the TCs even if Ankara abandoned its demand to retain guarantee rights over the island.

Moreover, would the GCs accept a solution that will safeguard the free movement and free settlement of people across the territory of the Republic of Cyprus whilst at the same time deprive those GC citizens residing in the Turkish constituent state their voting rights? These questions are very important as they may fall in the so-called redlines of the GCs.

In any case, the GC parties must consider very seriously what they can achieve on the negotiating table, the means at their disposal and the political strategies that will follow pursuing their political aim. We believe the absence of common line on the issue represents an important flaw on the grand strategy of the GCs.

Moreover, according to a poll, 51% of the Greek Cypriots are not well aware about the content of the solution (bizonal-bicommunal federation) that is discussed for over 40 years.¹⁷ It is useful to underline that as regards the Cyprus problem, there are no remarkable GC or TC 'peace and conflict resolution organizations' (P/CROs) or mixed organisations seeking to alter the status quo. On the contrary, there were dozens of P/CROs in Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine (Gidron-Katz 2002, 3)

17 Poll for the CyBC (state channel), performed by Saimar and Public (2017), <http://riknews.com.cy/index.php/news/politiki/item/59197-apopsesto-rik-i-proti-megali-dimoskopisi-gia-tis-proedrikes-ekloges-2018>.



that contributed to conciliation and to the conclusion of historic agreements.¹⁸

STRATEGIES FOR THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM

Generally speaking, there are many political strategies to solve a political problem. All of them are components of a grand strategy (Luttwak 1987). The ideal one is *diplomacy* and the various methods of negotiations for peaceful conflict resolution. Thus, through negotiations, the two parties seek to overcome the obstacles and reach a mutually accepted solution (Chila 2005, 119–205).¹⁹ However, for the two sides to engage in negotiations, they must acknowledge that the status quo is unsustainable for both of them.

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Consequently, they must be in a position to see the imminent benefits from a solution compared with the unacceptable costs that the continuation of the status quo brings about. Does the aforementioned reality apply to the Cyprus problem? We will examine below the motives of the parties involved.

Another strategy is *war*. Since war is the ‘continuation of politics with other means’, as Clausewitz (1984) has put it, we should not omit to mention this eventuality. However, in our case study, war is not realistic as a means for the settlement of the conflict. Specifically, even if Greece and the Republic of Cyprus could prevail over Turkey on the tactical-operational level in a war, that does not presupposes that they could impose their will on the TCs as regards the content of an ideal solution.

However, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus—and every state that suffers the syndrome of the geopolitically trapped state—must continue to develop reliable armed forces (*internal*

18 Benjamin Gidron, Stanley N. Katz and Yeheskel Hasenfled, *Mobilizing for Peace: Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and South Africa* (2002), 3.

19 The two parties in a particular conflict can engage in negotiations alone or with the intervention of a strong power (powerful mediation) or an international institution, for example, the EU or the UN (third-party intervention).



balancing) to create a credible strategy of deterrence over the island. At the same time, *external balancing*, which deals with the development of new alliances, will help the weakest side to counter/balance (Mearsheimer 2001) the Turkish threat. These two strategies will enhance the negotiating position of Cyprus against the occupying power.

Accordingly, the Greek side has chosen negotiations as a means to solve the problem. President Makarios engaged in talks with the Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş from 1968 to solve the constitutional fold of the problem (Dekleris 2003). However, so far, negotiations do not seem to yield any results, and the whole procedure remains at a standstill.

Turkey is viewing the Cyprus problem from a geopolitical and geostrategic perspective. Indicative of the aforementioned is former prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu's, who was Erdogan's main advisor, views (Davutoglu 2012, 540) on the issue: 'Even if neither one Muslim Turk existed in Cyprus, Turkey owed to maintain a Cypriot question. No one country can remain incurious for such an island, that it is found in the heart of her vital space.'²⁰

Turning our attention to the negotiations, although there was some progress in the negotiations that happened at Mont Pelerin in Switzerland (7 January 2017) and at Crans-Montana, Switzerland (28 June 2017), Turkey was unprepared to make a compromise on the issue of security and guarantees, thus instigating fears amongst the GCs that Ankara wants to safeguard a firm geostrategic role on to intervene in the internal affairs of the republic.

GCs are suspicious of Turkey's intentions, and they do not exclude that in the future, it may perform another military

20 Ahmet Davutoglu, in his book *Strategic Depth*, argued, 'Cyprus has a central position in the world continent as it is found in equal distance from Europe, Asia and Africa. It has the place of constant base and aircraft carrier that will touch the pulse of marine ways of Anten and Chormouz along with the basins of Gulf and Caspian Sea that is the most important ways of connection Eurasia-Africa. A country that ignores Cyprus cannot be active in the world and regional policies.'



intervention against the island. The chapter of security is of vital importance for GCs because it gives rise to their insecurity. Turkey intervened in Cyprus in July 1974, invoking rights arising from the Treaty of Guarantee of 1960 (see above). A wrong argumentation according to the majority of legal experts (Thomas 1979, 187–199)²¹ because even if we accept that Turkey had the right to intervene, it could do this only to restore the status quo. However, Turkey established a new status quo with the continuous illegal occupation of Cyprus that violates not only the human rights of the GCs but of the TCs as well.

Along with the negotiations, the GCs, in collaboration with Greece, sought and seek to exploit international and regional institutions to borrow security and force Turkey to make concessions on the issue.

Since Turkey is a candidate country to join the European Union (EU), a regional institution that Greece is an old member of and the Republic of Cyprus joined in 2004, the Greek side believed that it could find enough leverage on Turkey to change its behaviour and contribute to the solution. This was based on the strategy of *appeasement*, which was fulfilled in 1999 when Greece consented that Turkey should be given the chance to be a candidate country for accession in the European Union. The supporters of this view maintained that if Turkey joined the EU, it would become more peaceful and logical as regards the Greco-Turkish differences and therefore will make concessions on the Cyprus problem. Twenty years after Helsinki, this strategy did not yield any results, and the Cyprus problem remains unsolvable. At this point, it would be an omission not to mention the various resolutions of the United Nations that urge Turkey to withdraw its army or make concessions on various other dimensions of the problem.

More specifically, in the 353 resolution (Ioannou 1993, 15–17) of 20 July 1974, the day Turkey invaded Cyprus, the Security Council called upon Turkey to terminate its intervention in Cyprus and respect sovereignty, territorial integrity and

21 A. J. Thomas, *International Law and the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus* (1979), 187–199.



independence of Cyprus. At the same time, Turkey was urged to withdraw its army from the island. Moreover, resolution 3212 of 1 November 1974 urges for the rapid withdrawal of foreign troops from Cyprus and all the involved parties to take all the appropriate measures for the return of the refugees to their houses.

In addition to this, in the High Level Agreements of 1979 between President Kyprianou and the Turkish leader Rauf Denctas, point 5 stresses that it should be given priority for the return of refugees in Varosha (the abandoned fenced southern quarter of the occupied city of Famagusta).

However, as we have mentioned above, international law is a dependent variable in international politics, especially in cases where unequal parties are involved. Nonetheless, despite its limits, every weak state should invoke it to enhance its position against the most powerful states of the international system, especially when it is occupied by regional powers. As we have already noted, at Crans-Montana, Turkey did not display the appropriate political will to yield on the issues of security-guarantees and insisted that it should retain guarantee rights over the island. Moreover, Ankara demanded that the Greek Cypriots accept permanent Turkish troops on the islands. As the Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had put it, 'The Greek side and Greece expect that all guarantees will be lifted and no Turkish soldiers will be left on the island. This a dream. They should awake from this dream.'²²

The discovery of large quantities of natural gas in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Cyprus and expected new discoveries of hydrocarbons have created much optimism that natural gas can become the catalyst for the solution of the Cyprus problem. According to the theory of international relations, natural gas findings can help the interested countries create a regional regime (Little 2014, 289–300) of collaboration and harvest the economic benefits from it. However, until now, we did not notice

22 Greece, Greek Cyprus Dreaming: Turkish FM', *Hürriyet Daily News*, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/greece-greek-cyprus-dreaming-turkish-fm---114937>.



the Cypriot natural gas discoveries to lead the actors, especially as far as Turkey is concerned, to collaboration.

Turkey, which does not recognise Cyprus's maritime agreements with its neighbour countries (Egypt, Israel and Lebanon), has various times threatened to use force if the Republic of Cyprus does not terminate the research and drillings. Last February, Turkish warships blocked the gas exploration activities of ENI (specifically, the drillship *Saipem 1200*) in block 3 in the EEZ of Cyprus, claiming that the drilling activities infringe the rights of the TCs.²³

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Even worse, now that these lines are written, Ankara violates the EEZ of the Republic of Cyprus by advising the Turkish drillship *Fatih* to perform drilling operations in an area west of Paphos that will last until September 3.

By applying the strategy of coercive diplomacy, Turkey demands that any discovered quantities of natural gas must be equally shared between the two communities. On the other hand, the internationally recognised state, the Republic of Cyprus, proposes that any discovered quantities of natural gas will be given analogically to the TCs after the solution of the Cyprus problem. To support this end, the parliament of the Republic of Cyprus passed a bill to create a National Fund for the natural resources to manifest its political will that the natural gas will not be unilaterally exploited by the government of the Republic of Cyprus at the expense of the TCs. Therefore, we may revert again to the same question. Is the Cyprus problem unsolvable? Are there any other strategies that may give thrust to the talks and become a breakthrough?

Christos Yiangou (2014), a political scientist and former diplomat, proposes an *evolutionary approach* on the issue. As he rightly observes, 'The maximum concessions the one side is ready to make on the negotiating table on the current chapters of negotiation do not meet the minimum requirements the other side is ready to accept and vice versa.' As he argues, the

23 'ENI Drillship at Standstill, North Says Will Not Accept Activities in Block 3', Cyprus Mail, <http://cyprus-mail.com/2018/02/10/kasoulides-turkish-interference-expected-increase-cyprus-eez/>.



two sides are trapped because of the lack of fear and lack of confidence, and therefore, they are not ready for a comprehensive solution.

He maintains the two sides must make an interim agreement with a 5–10-year horizon or road map that should be approved at an international conference where all parties will participate (UN; the three guarantor powers—Greece, Turkey and the UK; and the two main communities of Cyprus). During the aforementioned timetable, the two sides must implement a series of confidence-building measures (CBMs) such as the return of Famagusta (Varosha) to the Greek Cypriots in return for a Cyprus Republic’s legitimate approval of the opening of the port of the said city and the Tymbou/Ercan Turkish airport via a commonly accepted implementation of the EU direct trade regulation. Moreover, Yianguou supports the notion that Ankara must implement the ‘Ankara Protocol’, whilst Nicosia will withdraw its veto and defreeze of the six negotiating chapters that have been blocked since 2009. Mr Yianguou’s proposal includes also the gradual reduction of all troops on the island and the creation by the UN of a bi-communal committee, under the auspices of the UN, which should discuss the future of hydrocarbon reserves recently discovered on the island, in return of Turkey’s refrain from actions that would violate the Cyprus Republic’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ).²⁴

The evolutionary approach has some drawbacks. For example, it is not yet clear if the GC parties accept the evolutionary approach instead of the overall settlement of the problem. There are some fears that this approach will lead to the consolidation of the status quo, a development that favours Turkey. Another question raised is if Turkey and the TCs are ready for a step-by-step solution. Apart from the evolutionary approach that has not been tested yet, we have provided the main approaches that have been tested since now but proved unsuccessful. The main question is, what is needed to be done to solve an intractable, long-lasting international problem such as the Cyprus problem?

24 Ibid.



IMPEDIMENTS TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Our focus should go deeper to analyse why the Cyprus problem is so difficult to be solved. Are the causes the deep mistrust between the two sides? Are they systemic/geopolitical or ethno-nationalist differences? According to the theory of conflict resolution, for an intractable protracted international problem to be solved, it has to be transformed from a 'zero-sum gain' to a 'mutual positive gain'. Can this be done? If no, why is this so difficult? Elaborating more on this point of view, in cases where unequal parties are involved and the one side occupies land for a long period, is very difficult for the strong party to make the necessary concessions to meet the minimum requirements of the other side. This is because of expansive agendas (settlement policies, hegemonic attitudes, etc.) (Lustick 1993, 7–57, 352–453).²⁵

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On the other hand, viewing the problem from the perspective of the weakest side, an ordinary citizen may pose a question: They took our land, they took our houses and they want us to make further concessions? What constitutes common ground amongst scholars of international relations is that great powers such as the United States and Russia are the shapers of international/global politics since they possess the greater capabilities in the anarchic international system. In this regard, they have an interest in keeping a stable international system. However, they have more incentives to intervene in a problem if they have something to gain (e.g., increase of their relative power/influence) or if their regional interests are threatened.

For example, the United States and the former Soviet Union in 1960s had intervened dozens of times in the Cyprus problem. However, they did so because their regional interests were threatened in the wider Cold War context. The escalation of a local crisis could trigger armed confrontation between the superpowers.

25 The Palestinian problem constitutes a similar paradigm to the Cyprus problem regarding the wider structure of power that renders its solution so difficult.



In addition to this, the United Kingdom and the United States identified the control of Cyprus and, in particular, Akrotiri and Dhekelia sovereign bases with the ability to monitor Russian nuclear activities during the Cold War (O'Malley and Craig 2002, 80–85). Russia, on its part, wanted to undermine this ability to its Western adversaries. We must underline, though, that in 1960s, the conflict did not take its current form with thousands of Turkish soldiers in Cyprus and the adverse consequences of the occupation of the island. Furthermore, as we have already underlined, the variable of the 'geopolitical trap of the weakest state' prevents or, putting it differently, does not create any incentives for the great powers to press Turkey to make any concessions on the issue.

At the same time, we should not underestimate some other domestic variables that prevent the settlement of the conflict. As Professor Mearsheimer (1994) has put it, 'Concerns about cheating hinder cooperation. States are reluctant to enter into cooperative agreements for fear that the other side will gain a relative advantage.' Whilst Mearsheimer is referring to interstate relations, the same logic applies to agreements between ethnic groups.

In particular, the GCs fear that any perpetuation of the current guarantee system may give Ankara the pretext to intervene again in Cyprus. The TCs, on the other hand, claim that the agreed political equality with the GCs means that they should have multilevel veto on all the levels of governance out of fear not to become a 'minority'²⁶ oppressed by the GC majority, which will control the state's governance.

Finally, in Cyprus, there are no remarkable nongovernmental/civil society organisations which advocate for peace as was the case for Northern Ireland or the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

26 The Turkish Cypriots have been recognised as a political community with the London-Zurich agreements of 1959 and the new constitutional order that had been established in 1960. However, they still have some stereotypes on the issue. In particular, TC leader Mustafa Akkinci declared in December 2018 that the TC will never accept to be a minority in a state governed by the GC (Riknews 2018).



In these two cases, historic agreements (Katz-Kidron 2002, 3, 39–69, 94–130, 175–202) such as the first ceasefire between the Protestant and Catholic paramilitaries (1993) or the Oslo Accords (1993) between Israel and Palestinians were preceded by the intense activities of ‘peace and conflict resolution organizations’ (P/CROs).

Perhaps the different structure of the occupation and separation in Cyprus which resulted in thousands of refugees and loss of individual property traumatised the GC community. In any case, the ‘occupation factor’ is an important element that prevents the settlement of the conflict. To clarify our argument, we will turn our attention to the example of Lebanon. Lebanon, another weak and small country with intense sectarian conflict, a civil war in 1958, a protracted civil war in 1975–1990 and intense sectarian and communal strife (Khalaf 2002, 23–38; 204–272), managed to survive and has a smooth political activity despite some setbacks.

We must bear in mind that Lebanon was occupied in the past by two regional powers, Israel (1982–2000) and Syria (1976–2005). However, despite the traumatic events of the past, the constituent communities of the confessional political system of Lebanon are collaborating at the parliament and the level of government.

In this regard, why are the TCs and the GCs unable to solve their problem? The answer lies in the fact that the Syrian and Israeli occupation of Lebanon had not so far reached consequences as the ongoing occupation of Cyprus. Moreover, Turkey’s hegemonic ambitions over the island prevent any genuine effort that will lead to a viable, comprehensive and lasting solution.

In conclusion and turning our attention to the individual and social level, it would be an omission not to mention that from 2004 onwards, free movement in the Republic of Cyprus from the occupied north part of the island to the south and vice versa occurs smoothly without any tension or friction between the two main communities of the island.



As we have mentioned above, great powers intervene in international problems under two conditions: First of all, according to the realist school of thought in international relations, a great power will intervene/mediate in the problem only if it will have a benefit (e.g., to maximise its relative power or to broaden its influence) or if its regional or global interests are threatened. In other words, mediation, especially powerful mediation, is an instrument of foreign policy that serves the interests of strong states (Chila 2005, 123).

This was manifested many times during the Cold War. For example, Henry Kissinger's mediation (shuttle diplomacy) after the October War of 1973 between Egypt and Israel ('Shuttle Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1974–1975', Office of the Historian) led to the de-escalation of the conflict and paved the way for a peace agreement between Cairo and Tel Aviv in 1978–1979. However, which benefited in terms of national interest for the United States? The answer is straightforward. Kissinger managed to increase the American influence in the Middle East, whilst at the same time, the Russian position in the region was undermined, and the Russian influence in the strongest Arab state was eliminated.

Turning our attention to the Cyprus problem, in June 1964, American president Johnson sent a letter to his Turkish counterpart, Inonu, warning him that if Turkey invaded Cyprus, Russia would not cede. The American president warned Inonu that the United States would not protect Turkey in any case. The second condition, as we have noted above, is if they have something to gain from the intervention.

Both conditions are absent in the Cyprus conflict. More specifically, the Cyprus problem is a frozen conflict that it does not endanger regional stability, let alone global stability. No armed clashes exist as there were in 1963–1964 or as it was the case in Northern Island during the 1960s and onwards with the 'troubles' (Cochrane 2002, 151–171), a situation that placed the problem in the epicentre of international concern leading to the Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement) of 1998.



The United States does not have any motive to intervene on behalf of the GCs because this may put into risk its special relationship with Turkey. American-Turkish relations have their ups and downs, especially in the era of Tagip Erdogan; however, this does not mean that the American government will risk losing the support of a regional power in a geopolitical-sensitive region. Turning our attention to Russia, we must admit that Moscow offered too much support to the GCs during the Cold War, especially in cases where important geopolitical actors sought to impose plans that were considered divisive by the GC leadership.

In 2004, Moscow put a veto at the Security Council of United Nations against the effort of Britain and the United States to support the Annan Plan. However, is this enough for the GCs to accomplish a compromised solution, let alone an ideal one? The answer is no. No signs from the historical record regarding the Cyprus problem that could lead us to such a conclusion exist. Therefore, if we try to summarise some elements for a new theory of conflict management/resolution, we may note the following three practical ways for an international problem to be solved:

1. The strong occupying power makes concessions that meet the requirements of the weakest side.
2. The weakest side concedes and accepts the demands of the occupying power by making further concessions.
3. A great power (with the status of a superpower, e.g., United States or Russia) or an international institution (UN or EU) exerts notable influence/pressure on the strong party to manifest conciliatory approach, make remarkable concessions and solve the problem.

As the historical record has shown, an occupying power does not make concessions easily, especially if the status quo furthers its interests. We have already made some mentions of the Palestine-Israeli conflict. At the same time, it is unrealistic for the international community to expect that the Greek side or, putting it differently, that the GCs will accept to make further concessions to Turkey or to the TCs. Even if the ruling political



party was ready to do so, popular objection may stop the intention of the ruling party. This was the case in 2004 with the United Nations proposal (Annan Plan). We must remember that any agreed plan between the leaders of the two communities must be ratified in two concurrent referenda that will happen in the Turkish and Greek community.

In 2004, the Annan Plan was approved by the TCs but rejected by the GCs. As mentioned by Christos Yiangou, ‘The maximum concessions the one side is ready to make on the negotiating table on the current chapters of negotiation do not meet the minimum requirements the other side is ready to accept and vice versa.’ Moreover, the GCs are undergoing extensive violations of their human rights because of the Turkish prolonged occupation, and therefore, Turkey is the side that must manifest its goodwill on the negotiating table.

What about the third choice? At first glance, the third choice seems to be the most appropriate, regardless of the difficulties. The strategy of forming alliances is a central feature in international politics. However, as mentioned earlier, great powers do not press regional powers to make concessions, especially when this endangers the wider interests of the hegemonic power.

Turkey is an important geopolitical pillar in Eurasia and in the Middle East. The same geopolitical equation applies in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Jewish state has developed over time a special relationship with the United States. Successive American governments have offered political, diplomatic and economic support to Israel. President Trump’s unilateral recognition in May of the occupied Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state in violation of various UN resolutions (476, 478, 242, 250, 267, 271, etc.)²⁷ shows how difficult it is for weak states/entities to launch a fair struggle that will lead to the solution of their conflict.

In other words, Cyprus is trapped in the patron-client relations of the United States with Turkey and to a lesser extent

27 Loureen Sayjeb, ‘President Trump’s Recognition of Jerusalem: A Legal Analysis’ (2017), <http://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/president-trumps-recognition-of-jerusalem-a-legal-analysis/>.



to the wider economic interdependence between Russia and Turkey. We will define this political reality as the ‘geopolitical trap of the weakest state’. The phrase denotes the position of the weakest side in a conflict, when it has to confront not only its strongest adversary but also the ability of the regional power to retain interdependent relations with the superpowers.

What about an international institution such as the UN or a regional organisation such as the EU? According to the realist school of thought, international organisations have limited influence on the behaviour of the states since they reflect the interests of the stronger parties of the system. The aforementioned political reality is supported by the historical record, especially in cases where the countries involved are strong regional powers. In this regard, which grand strategy the Republic of Cyprus must follow to escape from its peculiar geopolitical faith? Invoking realism again, states are sensitive to the imminent cost that other states are ready to inflict to their interests. Is the Republic of Cyprus able to provoke cost to Turkey alone? Is the Republic of Cyprus able to create formal alliances with the United States²⁸ and/or Russia and **buck bass** to them (Mearsheimer, 2001, 157–162) to compel Turkey to make the appropriate concessions? As we have mentioned above, the ‘geopolitical trap of the weakest side’ limits this choice.

At this point, it must be noted that the Republic of Cyprus has frozen six negotiating chapters of Turkey’s negotiation with EU in 2009, whilst the European Council has decided in December 2006 that EU’s negotiations with Turkey as regards eight negotiating chapters will not start until Turkey implements

28 This choice is limited by objective facts since Turkey, a regional power, is member of NATO, but the Republic of Cyprus is not. However, as we know from the international relations theory, even if Cyprus was a member of NATO, Ankara would have a greater say in coalitions’ goals and strategies since it would retain disproportionate influence in the affairs of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Even in this period, the American-Turkish relations are not so good, and Ankara is tilting towards Russia (see Ankara’s S-400 air defense system purchase from Russia). We do not believe that the USA will press Turkey to make concessions on the negotiating table.



the Ankara Protocol and recognise the Republic of Cyprus.²⁹ Regarding the latter, the European Union issued a declaration on 21 September 2005³⁰ following Ankara's declaration on July 2005 that it does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus. In this regard, the Republic of Cyprus was and is able to exert influence on Turkey through the European institutions. Therefore, as it is manifested, Cyprus can provoke some cost on Turkey. However, is this cost enough to make Turkey concede regarding the settlement of the conflict? As we have already illustrated in this paper, Turkey did not abandon its geostrategic ambitions on the island and continues to demand guarantee rights in an epoch that no other state has similar rights on other states.

In conclusion, there are three levels of 'resistance' that must be overcome for the Cyprus problem to be solved:

1. The first is the domestic impediment. That means that both communities, the GCs and the TCs, must be pro-solutional because they truly believe that a solution will overturn a status quo that does not support their wider interests and their vision for a better future for their children.
2. The second impediment is that in both communities, leaders must be ready to make a genuine compromise compatible with international and European law.
3. The last and most important impediment is the regional impediment (the geopolitical trap of the weakest state) in full connection with the geopolitical ambitions of Turkey for the island. Is Turkey ready to abandon them?

As one easily may observe, only this multilayer approach can yield results that can lead to the solution of the Cyprus problem. As we have shown in this paper, these preconditions are not present for the moment, and therefore, the prospects for a solution of the Cyprus problem are grim. What is left then?

29 'Parliament of Cyprus, Application for Entry in the European Communities', <http://www.parliament.cy/easyconsole.cfm/id/1113>.

30 'Declaration by the European Community and Its Member States' (2005), http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/d-tr20051123_13/d-tr20051123_13en.pdf.



As Thucydides would put it (Dunne-Schmitt 2014, 105), ‘The standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have to and the weak accept what they have to accept.’³¹ Thus, should Greek Cypriots accept their faith? Will the Cyprus problem remain an unsolvable problem?

Considering the geopolitical difficulties as shown in this article, we do not want to be pessimists. In this regard, the grand strategy of the Republic of Cyprus should continue to promote regional cooperation through alliances to enhance its bargaining power on the negotiating table. In other words, it must seek to minimise as much as possible the gap in the relative balance of power compared with its adversary because as we have argued in this paper, there is a large imbalance of power between Turkey (TCs) and Greece (GCs). The formation of trilateral alliances with states that face common threats and have common interests with Cyprus (Israel, Egypt, Greece) because they have bordering natural gas resources is supportive to this goal.

At the same time, it must work tirelessly to convince great powers, that is, to their interest, to compel Turkey to make concessions on the negotiating table. The solution of the Cyprus problem will send ambitious messages to the international community. This is very difficult as it is manifested in this paper, but unfortunately, there is no other choice. Otherwise, the problem will remain unsolvable, and no one can guarantee that stability will be safeguarded on the beautiful island of Cyprus.

On the other hand, Turkey must comprehend that a more moderate approach will enhance its prospects for joining EU and ripe multiple benefits. Such a development will help the GCs and the TCs live peacefully together under a common roof as it was the case for many centuries in the past. A multicultural and stable Cyprus can be a very good paradigm of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in a region torn apart by ethno-religious conflicts and instability.

31 ‘Realism’, in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (Dunne and Schmidt, 2014), 3.



CONCLUSION

The analysis in this article manifests the difficulties that small, weak and occupied states face when they deal with an adverse regional distribution of power that prevents the settlement of their conflicts. More specifically, it expounds the geopolitical obstacles put by stronger states/regional powers (negative balance of power) in their effort to liberate themselves from occupation, restore constitutional order and gain basic human rights.

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However, we believe the innovative element in the analysis is that it went a step further introducing a new phrase, the 'geopolitical trap of the weakest state' or the 'syndrome of the geopolitically trapped state'. The phrase refers to any weak state/entity that not only has to confront a stronger adversary, but also, it must consider that the regional power retains formidable might derived not only by its tangible assets of power (military power, strong economy, natural resources) but also by its ability to retain client relations with great powers because of its geopolitical position.

This results from its important geopolitical position and the negative consequences that its strategic behaviour may have on the regional and global balance of power as well, namely, on the interests of the great powers (e.g., USA and Russia). Turkey, as a traditional swing state, falls in the aforementioned paradigm. As mentioned earlier, the Israeli-Palestine conflict falls also in the same category/typology.

As far as the Cyprus problem is concerned, Turkey is not only an *important geopolitical axis* in the region of Eurasia but also an active *geostrategic actor* with an ambitious geopolitical agenda for the region. As Zbigniew Brzezinski (1998, 78–105) has argued, states that are geostrategic actors are in a position to project power beyond their borders. In the last 10 years, Turkey, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, elaborated an ambitious, vivid and expansive agenda for its region based on the theory of 'strategic depth', aspiring to be a pole of regional and global power.

To put it more concretely, in the last three years, Turkey intervened militarily in Syria (Operation Euphrates Shield, August



2016–March 2017) against the ‘Islamic state’ and in 2018 with Operation Olive Branch (January–March 2018), which resulted in the capture of the Kurdish canton of Afrin. Now that these lines are written, Turkey plans to intervene east of Euphrates River and crush the PYD/YPG, the main US ally in Syria on the ground against the jihadist threat of ISIS.

At the same time, despite the downing of a Russian jet in 2015, it mends its ties with Russia, creating some geopolitical concerns to the United States and to some other NATO members about its intentions. Moreover, what is noteworthy is that whilst US-Turkey relations move on a peculiar path, that of ‘neither friends, neither foes’, the USA does not seem ready to lose the support of Turkey in the sensitive region in the Middle East, let alone Turkey’s expulsion from NATO. This is more than clear with the US decision to provide Patriot missiles to Ankara.³²

One can easily understand from the aforementioned analysis how important is the strategic utility of Turkey for United States and Russia. In this regard, it is logical that the great powers (with a superpower status) will promote their interests, disregarding the ethical standards and the rights of small, weak states. This is a continuous pattern or a vicious circle in a volatile region characterised by intense strategic instability and fluidity of threats, changing interests and goals. This political constant automatically triggers the ‘geopolitical trap of the weakest state’. Will the Republic of Cyprus manage to escape from this geopolitical reality?

In conclusion, whilst our analysis encompasses domestic-level variables, it gives a prominent position to the geopolitical dimension as regards the Cyprus problem as well as other similar conflicts. We firmly believe that the pluralistic/liberal approach that does not differentiate on the one hand between hegemonic/expansive states and on the other hand between weak/small powers cannot address the root causes of the conflict and propose remedies to it (Heraclides, 2000). By proposing the division

32 Bobby Gosh, ‘Trump Gives Turkey a Double-Edged Gift’, Bloomberg (2018), <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-12-20/on-syria-and-patriots-trump-gives-turkey-double-edged-gift>.



of any differences or by seeking solutions based on the principle of 'common denominator', it has small explanatory power and, at the end of the day, is inapplicable, especially in cases where occupation and hegemonic ambitions are present as stables in a particular conflict.

From what has been cited in this analysis, one can easily discern that there is no any magic wand for the solution for any protracted international conflict. However, any effort to find remedies for the 'syndrome of the geopolitically trapped state' will be ineffective and fruitless if one cannot address the real causes that trap the weak state.

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