The Greek Reaction to the American Intervention in the Cyprus Crisis of 1964

GURHAN YELLICE

Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences

This work deals with the Cyprus crises of 1964, the results of which not only affected the 1967 and 1974 Cyprus crises but also still affects the current deadlock. In particular, the study concentrates on the Greek political reaction to the U.S. mediation efforts during the crisis. By examining this historical process, I propose to analyze the parameters that made Greece not accepting the US proposals to come to an agreement with Turkey. Working on this will help reveal why the Cyprus issue remained unresolved in 1964 and how the Cyprus crisis of 1964 affected the relations between Greece and the US.

Gurhan Yellice

Post Doctoral Researcher

Political Science and History

Panteion University

Greece

gyellice@hotmail.com

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Introduction

This paper is a part of an ongoing Post PhD research project which deals with the Cyprus crises of 1964, 1967 and 1974. The paper looks at Greek-American relations during the Cyprus crisis of 1964 and aims in particular at analyzing the Greek political reaction to the American intervention in the Cyprus crisis. In the following pages I will attempt to analyze how and why the US became involved in the Cyprus crisis, what kind of solution they proposed to the crisis, how Greece reacted to these proposals and finally why the Cyprus issue remained unresolved at the end of this process.

Background to the Us Intervention

Beginning as an anti-colonial struggle of the Greek Cypriots against British rule following the Second World War, the Cyprus issue entered the international agenda in 1954. Greece and Turkey soon became entangled and it evolved into a conflict between Turkey, Greece and the UK which threatened both the stability of NATO and the security of the Eastern Mediterranean region. In 1959, with the Zurich and London agreements, under the pressing need to find a solution, all three parties came to an agreement on Cypriot independence. In doing so, Britain sacrificed its sovereignty (but kept two sovereign bases), Greece its Enosis (Unification with Greece), and Turkey its Taksim (Partition) while keeping their rights as warrantors intact. Consequently, the tension between the parties appeared to have faded and, so far as the US was concerned, a crisis that would have become international had been averted.

However the republic was reluctant (Xydis 1973; Soulioti 2006). Disagreements, particularly concerning the work on the constitution soon came to the fore. At that point, President Makarios, claiming that the constitution was unworkable, proposed to revise it in favor of the Greek Cypriots. Taking the proposals as a step to achieve Enosis, Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots rejected it firmly. Rapidly thereafter, national sentiments rose, the island became as tense and as volatile as ever and civil war broke out (Packard, 2008; Salih 1978:31).

Following this, Turkey announced that if the violence did not stop it would take military action and Greece declared that in the case of a Turkish intervention that it would respond.
In order to prevent a Turkish move on the island, Britain intervened and succeeded in establishing a neutral zone (Green Line) on 30 December 1964 (Soulioti, 2006:735). With the dispute continuing, a conference was held in London on January 15, 1964 but no agreements between the parties seemed possible. Towards the end of the conference, Britain suggested to the US that an international force should be established on Cyprus. This force would have to include US troops as part of an allied force to Cyprus if it was to be kept under NATO framework. Otherwise the issue would be internationalized through the UN (FRUS 2000:39). Thus, Britain placed the bomb into US hands and that is exactly when the US was officially faced with a dilemma: to get involved or not to get involved?

**Nato-fication**

According to Under-Secretary of State George Ball the US should involve in the crisis. First of all Turkey was on the verge of intervening and a war between Turkey and Greece was imminent (Ball, 1983). And secondly, if the issue was taken to the UN Makarios would ask the UN to come in and a UN peacekeeping force would have Communist elements in it. (FRUS 2000:42). To prevent war between Turkey and Greece and keep the issue under NATO control the State Department accepted the British proposal and agreed to provide a “token contribution” of 1200 men (FRUS, 2000:40). The total peacekeeping force was to be 10,000 men.

The Anglo-American NATO peace plan was accepted by Greece and Turkey (FRUS, 2000:62; Joseph, 1997:103) but it completely rejected by Cyprus President Makarios. Trying to convince Makarios, Ball revised the plan twice and even held a series of talks with him in Nicosia. However, in the end, he failed to persuade him (FRUS 2000:56-64). Following this, on 15 February 1964, the British Government requested a Security Council meeting to discuss the Cyprus issue.

On 4 March, 1964, the UN Security Council issued a resolution which gave the responsibility to the Government of Cyprus to restore law and order, invited all members to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Cyprus, approved the formation of a United Nations peace-keeping force and appointed a mediator (UN Security Council Resolution 186; Richmond, 1988:91-92; Bitsios 1975: 147-157).
Enosis

The resolution marked the failure of US efforts to keep the issue under NATO framework. Following this the State Department increased its pressure on the newly elected Georgios Papandreou government to do something towards a solution, to get Makarios in hand, and to fight the communist danger on the island (FRUS, 2000:71-72). According to the American ambassador to Greece, Labouisse, unlike the previous Paraskevopoulos caretaker government “the overwhelming electoral victory [of] Papandreou would be the key to Greece playing a constructive and decisive role in the Cyprus question; his election could well prove a turning point in history as he was probably the only man who could move the problem toward solution”. (FRUS 2000:71).

Although Papandreou agreed with the State Department on those points but achieving it he had his own agenda. Papandreou was of the opinion that the London and Zurich agreements were a “crime” against the nation, that the Cyprus crisis was the “tragic result” of these agreements (Μπήτου 1998:134; Τελεξη, 1971:407). Thus his new policy towards Cyprus was to get rid of these agreements and achieve Enosis (Κρανιδιώτη 1985:254). And Papandreou was convinced that the UN resolution would be a perfect opportunity to achieve this. (Παπαγεωργίου, 1980:325; Ριζας, 1997:50-51; Ρηζας, 2000). The resolution would help Makarios to dispose of the London and Zurich agreements and achieve full independence. Afterwards Enosis would be announced (FRUS 2000:102-103).

In a meeting which was held in Athens on 11-12 April 1964, Makarios and Papandreou completely agreed on Enosis policy. They also agreed that solution to the Cyprus issue will only be sought under the framework of the UN and for the protection of Cyprus Greek troops would be deployed. (Παπανδρέου, 1988:195-196; Παπαγεωργίου, 1980:325-327; Κασκάνης 1998:32-33). Within this framework, by July 1964, nearly 1000 soldiers were to be sent to Cyprus (Γαρουφαλάς, 1982). Following the agreement with Makarios Papandreou proposed enosis as the best option to resolve the Cyprus issue to the State Department.

Papandreou’s new approach “healthy sign” (FRUS, 2000:129) and was taken seriously into account by the State Department, given the ethnic crisis in Cyprus as well as Makarios’ actions which threatened the stability of NATO and acted as a provocation to Turkey to intervene in the
island. According to the American ambassador to Cyprus, Belcher: “Enosis would tie Cyprus firmly to West; eliminate the security concerns of Britain, Turkey, Greece and the US; reduce the danger of the growth of communism on the island, end the Makarios’ “neutralist” foreign policy maneuvering and give the US a friendly government with which to negotiate a satisfactory status for the American communications facilities”. (FRUS, 2000:97-98).

The Johnson Letter

But Turkey strongly disagreed with this new approach. After the three months from the UN resolution Turkey concluded that every passing day its position in Cyprus weakening. Therefore Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonu, who was of the opinion that Enosis was just around the corner and that the US was not willing to prevent, decided to move. On 4 June, 1964, the decision was notified to the US. (Ball, 1988:350; Bölükbaşı, 1993:505-525). Fearing that Turkey was serious to intervene and the decision would spark a war between Turkey and Greece, the State Department wrote a letter to Inonu in an attempt to dissuade Turkey from intervening in the island. In his powerful diplomatic note Johnson threatened Inonu saying that “if unilateral Turkish action on the island invited a Soviet attack, then NATO was not obligated to defend Turkey” (FRUS, 2000:152-154). According to Ball the letter was “the diplomatic equivalent of an atomic bomb” (Ball, 350).

Enosis with a compensation to Turkey

The letter worked and Ankara stepped back. But following the letter, The State Department concluded that Turkey cannot be prevented at all time and “their influence would rapidly dissipate and consequences could be terrifying” (FRUS, 2000:206). Therefore, Turkey and Greece had to come to the negotiating table and search for a permanent solution to end the Cyprus crisis on the basis of Enosis.

This new approach was explained to Inonu and Papandreou in Washington. Talks with Inonu resulted in full agreement (FRUS, 2000: 211). But Papandreou saw no point in discussing the issue with Ankara. He argued that “On the legal side, the right of intervention was lost when
Cyprus entered the UN.... There was no longer any basis for intervention. A century ago, it [Turkey] sold Cyprus, so what valid right does it have?” (FRUS, 2000:205).

The Washington talks brought no consensus but the US pressure continued increasingly. On 1 July, 1964 President Johnson, wrote to Papandreou: “The pressure on Turkey for action is extremely strong and they too derive from a deep conviction that Turkish rights are at stake… If there is not such a negotiation, none of us can prevent a disaster for which all of us will be held accountable” FRUS (2000: 219-220). The message was very clear: either “negotiations for a final solution” or “the Turkish military intervention”. Disappointed by the letter (FRUS 2000:225), Papandreou said to Labouisse that “….Greece cannot act under pressure of ultimatum. We did not accept an ultimatum from our enemies in 1940 and it is very difficult for us to accept an ultimatum today from our friends” (FRUS 2000:221).

But seeing no other option Papandreou unwillingly accepted the US proposal. Negotiations between the parties began on 9 July, 1964. On 14 July, 1964 The US mediator, Dean Acheson proposed: Cyprus would be unified with Greece and Greece would cede to Turkey a full sovereign area in the Karpas Peninsula. Turkey accepted the proposal but seeing the Turkish sovereign base area as a form of partition Greece rejected. Instead, Papandreou suggested that the island Kastellorizon or a sharing one of the British base areas (FRUS, 2000:242) would be negotiable. (FRUS, 2000: 238-242).

Following the Greek rejection, on 20 August 1964, Acheson came up with a revised version of the plan: A base area in the Karpas Peninsula nearly 200 square miles could be leased to Turkey for 50 years. On 20 August, 1964, Acheson wrote to Papandreou attempting to convince him: “I am prepared to apply the utmost pressure and persuasion to get the Turks to give up any claim for sovereign territory on Cyprus, to reduce the dimensions of their requirements for a military base on the Karpas Peninsula… Specifically, I would urge the Turks to limit their plan to a lease for 50 years for that part of the Karpas Peninsula… (FRUS, 2000:326-327)”. Ball instructed Labouisse to tell Papandreou that he just had 48 hours to reach a decision (FRUS 2000:328-329)

During these 48 hours, Papandreou made a risky undertaking. He dispatched the Minister of Defence, Garoufalias to Nicosia and tried to see if “instant Enosis” was possible (Γαρουφαλιάς 1982; Μπήτου 1998: 135; Χατζηαντωνίου, 2007:144). But Garoufalias failed to convince
Makarios. He insisted on unconditional enosis (αδέσμευτης ανεξαρτησίας) (Παπαγεωργίου, 1983:249). He was of the opinion that this action would be a “stupid heroism” (Αλεχανδρακης, Θεοδοροπούλος, Λαγακος, 1987:38-39).

Failing to persuade Makarios, Papandreou proposed 99 square miles on the Karpas peninsula claiming that Makarios could not be convinced if he agreed on giving Turkey double area of the British bases (FRUS 2000:330; Παπαδοπούλος 1999:180-182). But this proposal was rejected by the State Department. Ball said “So far as the United States Government is concerned, this is a last major effort and we do not intend to see it fail”. (FRUS, 2000: 342-343). Finally on 22 August, 1964 Papandreou gave his official answer: He rejected the proposals arguing that: “he was not master over the Greek Cypriot community as Inonu is over Turk Cypriots…. [the]Acheson proposal is acceptable to [the] gov[ernment] as [a] way to avoid war and resolve Cyprus question, but that he is helpless because he could not impose this solution on the island…. He finds himself in a serious impasse and does not know where to turn” (FRUS, 2000:344).

Following the “Geneva Failure” on 25 August Papandreou one more time asked the US “he was in death struggle with Makarios and he would be more than delighted if coup d’etat for unconditional enosis would be achieved in which case Makairos would be his captive”. But Ball’s answer was certain:“You can be assured that I have no intention of giving USG agreement to instant enosis without prior agreement with Turks. We are definitely off that ticket” (FRUS, 2000:359)

The leased base idea was also rejected by Turkey and the US decided not to propose any other solution and thus it was with this “Geneva failure” that the “bargaining process” and the six months of US involvement came to an end.

**Conclusions**

The main American concern during this process was to avoid a war between Greece and Turkey achieving enosis with sufficient compensations to Turkey. Having achieved to avoid a war, the US failed to end the crisis in Cyprus and convince the parties to reach an agreement. Greece insisted on unconditional *Enosis* and Turkey on a territorial concession.
The Acheson proposals, as far as Greece concerned, were perhaps the most important “missed opportunity” to achieve Enosis. Papandreou was of the opinion that the advantage was on the Greek side; that the UN supported the Greek position and that the US also would finally come to agree with the Greek thesis. And finally the US would always block the Turkish military intervention on the island and even not Greece had a military buildup on the island which would prevent the Turkish intervention (FRUS 2000:239), In a nutshell, Enosis would somehow be achieved, Papandreou believed. But in the end things did not happen the way Papandreou believed.

After the Cyprus crisis of 1964 the unsolved Cyprus issue continued to be main bone of contention between Turkey and Greece and in 1967 and 1974 brought the two countries into the brink of war. At the end of this process the island was divided into two parts. Since then countless negotiations and plans were tried out but none of them was enough to reunite the island. Today, Cyprus as the biggest diving line of Europe continues to be the most important foreign policy issue of both countries, keeping their relations in chain.

Notes

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