



## Resolving the Situation in Cyprus

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### Introduction

The Cyprus dispute is nothing new. The seemingly insolvable conflict as poisoned relations between two NATO allies, Greece and Turkey, greatly complicating diplomacy with the NATO alliance, and threatening renewed war in

the Eastern Mediterranean. The United Nations has been there from the start, with a peacekeeping force that inhibits renewed war, but also is seen as a barrier to solving the conflict. Cyprus has long been recognized as a test-case for the UN. Can the UN Security Council actually solve international conflicts, or can it only slow the march toward renewed war?



The roots of contemporary controversy go back 46 years, when a coup on Cyprus, led by Greek-Cypriots, promoted Turkey to invade and seize the northern third of the island. The Republic of Cyprus is an independent country, a Member State of the UN. Its population of 1.2 million is divided roughly 3-to-1, ethnic Greeks and Turks,

with some 900,000 Greek Cypriots and 300,000 Turkish Cypriots.

Today the government of the Republic of Cyprus in Nicosia speaks only for the Greek-speaking majority in the south, although it claims sovereignty over the entire territory of the island. Northern Cyprus claims to be an



independent state, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), also sovereign over the entire island. Unlike the Nicosia government, though, its legitimacy is not widely recognized. Only Turkey recognizes its independence, but the Turkish Cypriot government is widely seen as controlled entirely by Turkey. As recently as 1984, the UN has tended to side with Cyprus on issues of sovereign control.<sup>1</sup>

Enormous political pressures in the Greek capital of Athens and the Turkish capital of Ankara leave both countries compelled to support their fellow ethnic group in Cyprus. Major war scares occur with some regularity, most recently in September 2020 when Turkey began military exercises in northern Cyprus, which would challenge the independence of the rest of the island.<sup>2</sup>

Years of political uncertainty on the island reveal the need for international intervention. The UN Security Council has repeatedly tried to break through the controversy. Initiatives from the UN Secretary-General have sought to end the dispute through an island-wide referendum. This has been resisted mostly by Turkish-speakers and the government of Turkey, fearful because they are less numerous. Proposals for a unified government have been resisted by Greek-speakers in the south, fearful this would lead to Turkish domination.

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<sup>1</sup> *United Nations Security Council resolution 550*, adopted on 11 May 1984, condemned as the illegal and secessionist activities in the occupied part of the Republic of Cyprus from Turkey, in violation of the previous UN Security Council resolutions. See the document at <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/cyprus-sres550.php>

<sup>2</sup> Yiannis Baboulias, 'Turkey Is hungry for war with Cyprus', *Foreign Policy*, 21 May 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/21/turkey-is-hungry-for-war-with-cyprus-erdogan/>; and Stéphanie Fillion, 'The moment to end Turkey's

The UN Security Council has taken a side, which is unusual and reflects the international condemnation of the Turkish invasion of 1974. The Security Council also mandates a peacekeeping operation (PKO). This mission, The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus is a United Nations was created in 1964 under United Nations Security Council Resolution 186 to prevent a recurrence of fighting. Although it failed in 1974, the operation continues. The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) currently has 1,009 personnel and costs approximately USD 56 million annually.<sup>3</sup> Renewing the mandate is an annual task of the Security Council, an opportunity to reevaluate its work.<sup>4</sup>



The peacekeeping operation UNFICYP has been working on a mission to prevent any further

other war, in Cyprus, is fading fast', *Pass Blue*, 24 October 2019,

<https://www.passblue.com/2019/10/24/the-moment-to-end-turkeys-other-war-in-cyprus-is-fading-fast/>

<sup>3</sup> 'UNFICYP Fact sheet', *United Nations Peacekeeping* (n.d, 2019),

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unficyp>

<sup>4</sup> 'United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus', *Wikipedia* (n.d.),

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Peacekeeping\\_Force\\_in\\_Cyprus#Fatalities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Peacekeeping_Force_in_Cyprus#Fatalities)



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fighting, and to keep the status quo so that the humanitarian activities can be maintained. Meetings have been held to try to negotiate but have failed to come to a consensus. Today, the argument for further action is a strong one because despite years of negotiation hostilities remain high.

The conflict also threatens stability and unity in Europe as the dispute not only divides the

people on the island but also countries on the continent. Can peace prevail or will Cyprus fall victim to sectarian division? The reputation of United Nations as well as the security of Turkey, Cyprus, and Greece are at stake.



### Background

Under the leadership of the previous UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, aggressive diplomacy tried to steer leaders on both sides toward peace. Although the conflict began in 1974, the push towards peace is a recent phenomenon.

In 1974, the Turks wanted to claim Cyprus through what was called Operation Atilla. There were several attacks and attempts of invasion, but the first time, 3% of land was claimed. Not satisfied, Operation Atilla tried a second time, claiming 40% of land, before a ceasefire could be achieved. The ceasefire reflects the current line dividing Cyprus into two, now known as the UN buffer zone, or the *green line*. The line and

invasion caused a major displacement of people, and with this, families with split apart. As a result of the instability, thousands of people went missing. In 2007, the UN worked organized a Committee of Missing Persons (CMP) to identify everyone that has been misplaced.



## Current Situation



Being an Eastern Mediterranean island, Cyprus is surrounded by Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, Turkey and Greece. These are crucial nations and are all indirectly affected by the situation. To date, no effective compromise has been reached. However, the current state of the economic system has improved since the invasion, with Cyprus now being a main economic hub for investing.

Russia and other eastern European countries have already invested in Cyprus for its tourism and manufacturing facilities. As for progress toward peace and resolution, inroads are being made and reunification talks are in the making. Cyprus is still divided, but their levels of optimism and hope are high. The only way Cyprus can reunify is if Turkey cooperates.

## Role of the United Nations on This Issue

The UN has always focused on maintaining peace and stability for countries. The priority of diplomacy, peace and stability extends to Cyprus. The UNFICYP are charged with securing the border. Without them, tensions would be a lot worse.

Before the UN, the British took the lead working on peacekeeping efforts. Once the UN came, the organization was formally invited to the Cypriot government which is where the Secretary General was able to support intercommunal talks, which according to the SG, is the solution to this issue. The Greek Cypriots want unity, and the Turks want a bi-zonal arrangement to preserve their separate status.

Cyprus will not be allowed to unite with any other country (Greece or Turkey) under the UN Security Council, and the UN is aware that the views of political equality from both sides are different. Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, said that “A unified Cyprus will not be accepted until the TNRC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) is recognized in the international area”. But opposition to this—which would mean acknowledging Turkish military conquest—does not currently seem possible.



**Landmark UN Resolutions:** Many resolutions have been created by the UN about this crisis. At the most recent meeting in July of 2019, Security Council resolution 2483 notes that progress has been made since 2017 and is going in a good direction. The resolution calls for a decrease in tensions and a stable police force working with preventative measures. It also calls for women to take a bigger stand with UNFICYP in order to expand the role that they



have towards unification. Past resolutions have the same goal as well, noting that tensions were a lot worse and the situation more desperate. Arguably, the UN is the closest to achieving peace than they ever have been, and the Security Council has a huge role with this.



### Country and Bloc Positions

**China:** China has been a strong supporter of the Greek Cypriots, a result of China's insistence that all international diplomacy stresses the rule of international law and the indivisibility of each Member States. In other words, crisis in Cyprus resonates with China's fears about Taiwan and Taiwanese separatism. A precedent that suggests Taiwan separatism is legitimate, will be opposed by Beijing. China and Cyprus have a joint economic business called the Cyprus China Business Association, which aims to increase the relationship for trade and investment. As for political relationships, China and Cyprus have been a middle ground and have maintained a strong connection.

**European Union (EU):** Only the southern part of Cyprus, the Republic of Cyprus is a member of the EU. Turkey and Northern part of the island are not EU members. This fact gives Cyprus a veto over EU initiatives and limits the flexibility of other EU Member States. The EU badly needs the conflict resolved. It needs excellent relations with both Greece and Turkey, but overcoming resistance from Nicosia is a problem.

**Non-Aligned Movement (NAM):** Cyprus was with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the UN's largest voting bloc, which includes virtually all the former colonial states of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It left the NAM once it joined the European Union in 2004. Cyprus tries to be a bridge between the two. But rising Turkish influence limits its ability to persuade some African and Asian countries especially. Other NAM states, which have major border conflicts of lost territory to conquest, are sympathetic to the plight of the Greek Cypriots.

**Russia:** Cyprus has excellent relations with Russia. Russia tourism and investment have long favored Cyprus, due to its easy entrance requirements and limited financial oversight. This makes it especially appealing for wealthy Russians looks for way to shift money, and sometimes their national identity to the West. Cyprus sells passports—citizenship—to wealthy people and Russians are especially involved. This can cause tensions with Moscow, but so far those have been managed successfully.

**United States:** The US was a strong supporter of peace efforts under previous UN Secretaries-General. That support appears to have changed in 2017 when President Donald Trump signaled the US would not try to mediate. The major American priority is limiting spending on peacekeeping, and minimizing the role of the UN in international diplomacy. If other countries can be persuaded to take more of an interest, such as Turkey, Washington might be agreeable.



### Proposals for Action

**While the Security Council hopes** to come up a compromise, this may not be possible. Only careful bargaining and possibly broadening talks to include ostensibly unrelated issues like economic subsidies, cultural rights, or broader resolution of Greek-Turkish disputes might gain traction.

**Establish a fact-finding mission:** authorized by the Security Council, this would not resolve the issue, but might persuade all sides they are being taken seriously, and delay pressure that could lead to new fighting. The key to a successful fact-finding mission is its mandate and composition. What is it supported to do? Possibilities include paths for negotiation, listening to the claims of individual Cypriots who have lost property or rights due to the division of the island, or listen to the willingness of the Cypriot leaders to accept foreign

mediation or other conflict resolution techniques. Who will be on the mission? Both sides might insist on the most independent diplomatic experts possible, but they might insist on a certain number of officials from friendly states.

**Demand that Turkey withdraw** from North Cyprus: this would be consistent with older Security Council resolutions, but it is unlikely to be taken seriously in Turkey. To be meaningfully effective, such a resolution would need to include incentives to encourage Turkish acceptance. But with national identity and populist anger at stake, the Security Council would have to offer Turkey a lot.

**Bring in outside actors** to help resolve the conflict, such as the United States, which is friendly with both sides, or other organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), where both sides are members.



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