

The EU and NATO vis-à-vis the Greek-Turkish Conflict

The Role of International Institutions in Managing or Resolving Interstate Conflicts

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Key Topics

I. Introduction: A Historical Overview of the Conflict

II. Cyprus

III. NATO Involvement

IV. European Union Involvement

V. Recent Developments and Future Prospects

VI. Conclusions

Theoretical Argument and Approach

NATO and the EU have the potential to manage, transform and/or resolve conflicts, however there needs to be a) a hands-on approach; b) mechanisms for the internalisation/ absorption of norms; c) incentives for cooperation and resolution.

Building a realistic narrative of a “collective security identity” requires strong, unified and credible institutions, that provide thorough socialisation by aligning the interests of their member states in order to promote cooperation and principled/pragmatic compromises.

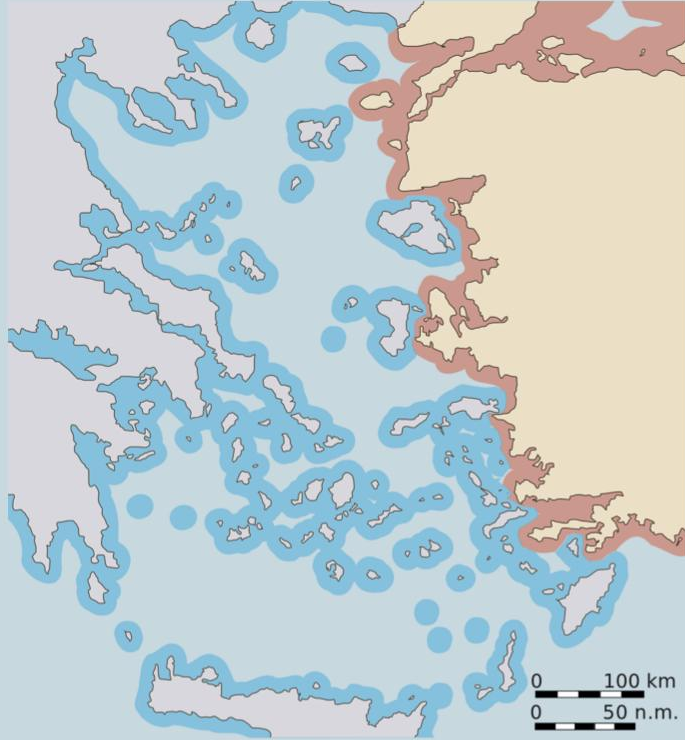
Brief Historical Overview

- Historical animosity between Greece and Turkey over a vast period spanning centuries
 - Ottoman Occupation of Greece
 - 1881-1913: Greek territorial gains, most eastern Aegean islands under Greek control
 - Treaty of Sèvres 1920: Greek presence in eastern Thrace and the western Anatolian coast; Smyrna plebiscite — rejected by the Turkish National Movement of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk
 - Replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne 1923: protection of Muslim and Christian minorities in Greece and Turkey alike; islands/islets of the Aegean Sea beyond 3 miles of the Turkish shore were ceded to Greece (Imvros and Tenedos given special administrative organisation)
 - Montreux Convention 1936
 - 1930s: Rapprochement by Venizelos and Atatürk through the Pact of Cordial Friendship and the Balkan Pact
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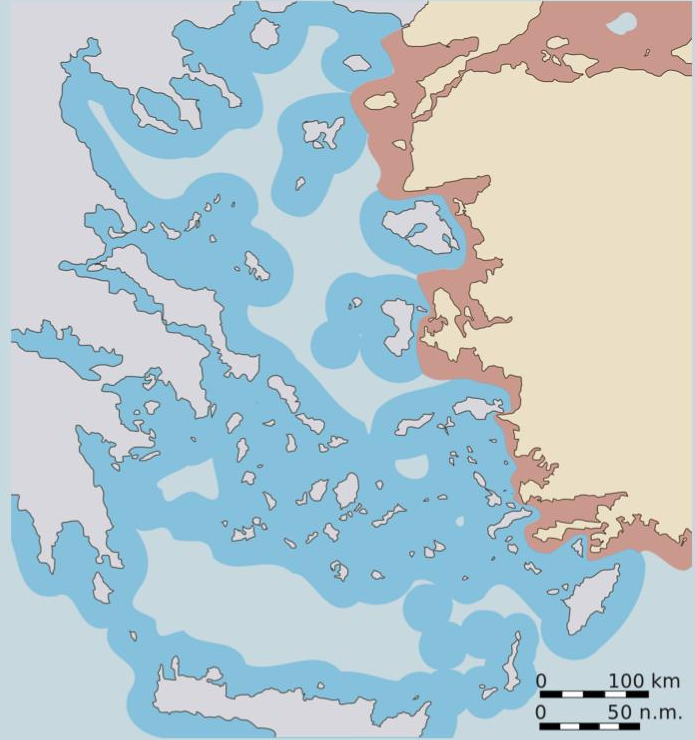
Evolution of the Conflict: 1950-2000

- 1952: Greece and Turkey join NATO, short period of relative stability
 - 1963: Inter-ethnic violence in Cyprus causes Turkish-Cypriot ministers to resign from government
 - From 1973, Greek-Turkish conflict morphs into a territorial dispute over the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean
 - July-August 1974: Turkish invasions of Cyprus (Attila I and Attila II)
 - 1976: Crisis in the Aegean— Conflict over the Aegean continental shelf and exploration rights
 - 1982: Convention for the Law of the Sea allowing for territorial sea at 12 nautical miles
 - 1995: Greek ratification and Turkish *casus belli*
 - 1983: Declaration of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus', rejected by the international community
 - 1987: Aegean Crisis, NATO Secretary-General Lord Carrington offers to act as a mediator
 - 1996: Imia/Kardak incident— aggressive U.S. mediation de-escalates conflict, 'Grey Zones' by Turkey
 - 1997-1998: Cypriot S-300 Crisis — Political standoff between Cyprus and Turkey, Greece involved
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6 nm, current situation



12 nm, as allowed by UNCLOS



Turkish continental shelf according to Greece (orange shading) and Turkey (intermittent line)



By the end of the 1990s, Greece and Turkey had come to the brink of war three times, **with the main points of the dispute being** the Cyprus question, the delimitation of the continental shelf, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), flight information region (FIR) and the demilitarisation of islands adjacent to the Turkish coasts.

Cyprus at the Epicentre

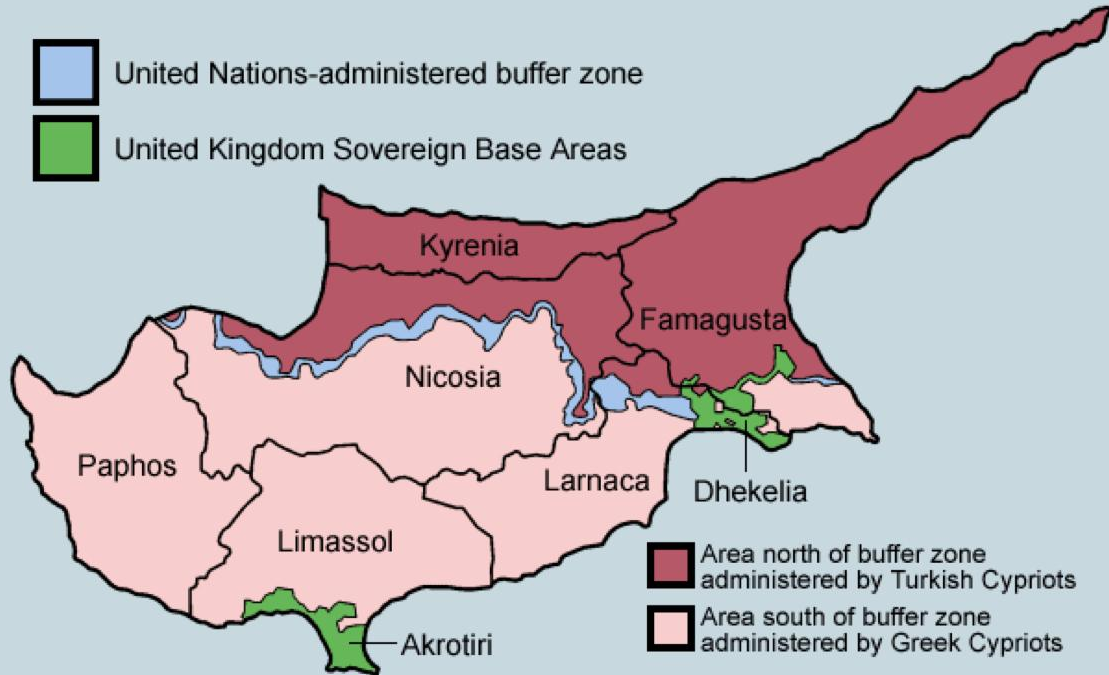
- **NATO involvement**

- Anglo-American proposals favour a NATO-led operation, limiting UN interference — Greek-Cypriots reject
- NATO's cohesion and Soviet plans in the Eastern Mediterranean major concerns for the US
- Western powers against Soviet interference (through the UN) in a dispute between NATO members, AKEL's presence intensified this fear (Syrigos, 2012)
 - Makarios seen as the new Fidel Castro and Cyprus as the 'Cuba of the Mediterranean' (T. Szulc, "Cyprus Concern Mounts; Status of Island as an Independent State May End As Renewed Fighting Stirs the Fear of War", *New York Times*, 21 July 1964.)
 - PM Papandreou to L.B. Johnson "...the Cypriot issue has ceased to be a Greco-Turkish matter. It is now a problem between the two worlds. The dilemma is 'NATOisation' or Cuba" — 15 June 1964



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- January 1964: NATO Secretary-General visits Greece and Turkey to ease tension
 - NATO Summit, Spring 1964: Secretary-General was tasked with observing Greek-Turkish relations, producing reports and offering his good offices (as was the case in 1965, 1967, 1974, 1987)
 - Lyndon B. Johnson letter to Ismet İnönü in 1964: NATO allies will not protect Turkey against Soviet Union — Turkish invasion deterred
 - Post-1974: PM Karamanlis withdraws Greece from the alliance in protest of NATO inaction vis-à-vis the Turkish invasions
 - NATO-Greece relations strained; Karamanlis seeks return in the late 70s due to Turkish questioning of Greek sovereignty in the Aegean
 - ‘Rogers Plan’, Greece and Turkey co-exist as ‘uncomfortable allies’
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Cyprus after 1974



Further Involvement — What Can NATO Do?

- NATO's security framework a counterbalance to Turkish gunboat diplomacy, but ultimately fails to resolve the conflict
 - Can offer diplomatic support in order to defuse the tension but can it go further?
 - Weak internalisation of norms
 - Transparency: Security dilemma exacerbated
 - Lack of trust towards NATO by disputants — US main actor within the alliance
 - US '7 to 10' policy viewed unfavourably by both Greece and Turkey
 - Able to contain but not resolve: Settling territorial disputes between NATO members not a mandatory requirement for the continuation of their membership — no incentive
 - 1970s-onwards: increased negative perception of NATO in Greece; lack of trust; lack of credibility especially due to the Cyprus issue
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Role of the EU and the Road to Helsinki

- Ankara Agreement, 1963: Turkey seeks close relations to the European Community
 - 1981: Greece joins the EEC
 - 1987: Turkey applies for EEC membership
 - 1995: EU-Turkey Customs Union aiming to promote economic cooperation and liberalisation of trade
 - Weak involvement at first, more active interventions by the EC, the EP over the Imia incident 1996 and the S-300 crisis in Cyprus
 - August & September 1999 'Earthquake Diplomacy' — a historic opportunity seized
 - Helsinki Summit, December 1999:
 - Lifting of Greek veto on Turkey's EU candidacy
 - Prospect of Europeanisation for Turkey — a lifeline for Cyprus
 - Copenhagen Criteria key to dispute resolution
 - For the first time, the EU takes an *active* role in conflict resolution by providing a timeline (1999-2004)
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Recent Developments & Future Prospects

- Post-2004:
 - Failure of the Annan plan for Cyprus due to unwillingness of Greek and Cypriot government, Cyprus would become EU member without resolution, complicated Greek-Turkish relations
 - Greek government did not enforce Helsinki provision of ICJ referral
 - Cyprus EU member in 2004
 - Post-2010s: Erdogan's shift away from the West, rise of populism and anti-EU sentiments in both countries
 - Summer 2020: Tension in the Eastern Mediterranean with research vessel Oruç Reis, near Megisti (Kastellorizo)
 - October 2020 — NATO establishes a “military de-confliction mechanism” to ease tensions and promote space for diplomatic talks
 - 2022: EU issues statement condemning Çavuşoğlu's statements questioning Greek sovereignty over some islands
 - Vilnius 2023: Road map for cooperation on matters of 'low politics' — Tourism, trade, 'Athens Declaration'
 - Exploitation of positive momentum to increase collaboration, broadening of space for dialogue and negotiations
 - Use of the 'positive' or 'soft' agenda for promoting initiatives like G2G mechanisms, exchange programmes etc.
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ADDITIONAL CONCLUSIONS + CONSIDERATIONS

Even if an institution cannot resolve the conflict per se, it has the power to shape the *interests* of states and thus steer them in a direction of positive identification.

While NATO's capabilities go up to a certain point, the EU has the ability to combine its attractive economic leverage with security guarantees at the same time and, through its stronger norm absorption mechanisms, play an active role in conflict resolution.

How can Turkey be brought closer to Europe after the missed opportunity of 1999-2004?
