

TURKEY AND NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR GREECE AND CYPRUS

Theodore A. Couloumbis

Professor emeritus at the University of Athens and vice president of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)

From the days of the treaty of Westphalia (1648) the concept of "national security" was limited to the values of state sovereignty and territorial integrity. After World War II and the realization of European integration, the concept was qualitatively broadened with additional values such as consolidated democracy, advanced economy, welfare state, and participation in the institutional entity of the European Community/Union.

After the tragic events of 1974 in Cyprus (Greek Junta coup, Turkish invasion and occupation), Turkey was placed at the top of the list of threats facing Hellenism. The post-junta governments in Greece and Cyprus crafted policies of war avoidance with Turkey. Simultaneously, however, they sought to reinforce their military capabilities so as to balance and deter the additional employment of Turkish force in Cyprus and the Aegean in pursuit of new faits accomplis. In their diplomatic tactics, Athens and Nicosia opted for the application of sanctions (supporting the US embargo on Turkey in the late 1970s and employing Greek pocket vetoes in the EC/EU) as long as Turkey insisted on maintaining its occupation of northern Cyprus and challenging Greece's sovereign rights in the Aegean. These policies were continued for some twenty five years with no impact on Turkish revisionist policies in the Aegean and Cyprus. However, they did manage to deter a Turkish temptation to use force (as in 1974) in the two fronts of Hellenism. Serious crises erupted in the Aegean in 1976, 1987 and 1996 that brought Greece and Turkey near the brink of war—with Cyprus remaining a strategic hostage of Turkey's superior air power and the United States consistently playing the role of fire fighter and final arbiter.

After the Imia crisis (1996), and the episode of Abdullah Ocalan's arrest in Kenya (1999), Athens and Nicosia began to revise their policies toward Ankara, abandoning "conditional sanctions" in favor of an approach of "conditional rewards." The "condition" for the reward (the lifting of Greek objections to Turkey's putative EU accession) was that Turkey would not only meet the EU's Copenhagen criteria but also agree to the peaceful settlement of the Aegean dispute and, of course, remove its occupation troops from Cyprus. In this post 1999 "win-win strategy," the gain for Turkey would be its eventual membership in the EU. The great achievement for Athens was Cyprus's EU membership (took place on May 1, 2004) by decoupling it from the prerequisite of a mutually acceptable settlement of the Cyprus problem. The dark shadow today is Europe's "enlargement fatigue," with countries such as France, Germany and Austria leading the list of Turco-skepticism. And should this skepticism lead to a postponement or an outright rejection of Turkey's candidacy, some fear that Ankara's policies will harden considerably in the issues of Cyprus and the Aegean. In Cyprus, the greatest danger will be the consolidation of the current partition on the ground, through the "Taiwanization" of the occupied territories and without compensation (on the issues of territory and properties, as well as the removal of occupation troops and a large number of late arriving settlers from the Turkish mainland).

Focusing on the future

For Cyprus what is urgently needed is a settlement plan (let us call it the Christofias-Talat plan) which will provide for the reunification of Cyprus in the form of a bizonal and bicomunal federation, and which will contain just provisions for the Greek Cypriots involving the return of occupied territories and related properties, compensation for properties of both communities not subject to return to their rightful owners, withdrawal of occupation troops, and resettlement back to their point of origin of a sizable number of Turkish settlers currently in the occupied territories. The question that still needs careful assessment is whether it is in the interest of the two putative component states of the proposed federation to function in a loose or a more centralized federation.

Clearly the security of the Republic of Cyprus in the future (security defined here both in the traditional and its wider sense) must be deeply anchored in the “hard core” of the European Union. If NATO, following France’s reentry into the military structures of the alliance, develops a genuine balance between its European and North American pillars, it would be well worth for Cypriot authorities to reexamine the option of joining Partnership for Peace (PFP). Needless to say, the excellent relations that Cyprus has forged over the decades with non aligned and developing nations offer it a solid foundation upon which it can cultivate dispute settlement facilitation in its wider region and join multinational forces earmarked for peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building objectives.

In the case of Greece, as with Cyprus, the top priority is remaining in the hard core of the EU (the Eurozone, Schengen, and a plethora of inter-member initiatives, such as cooperation in the reinforcement of EU border areas for the prevention of illegal immigration, the protection of the environment, and the combating of terrorism, narcotics trafficking and other forms of international criminal activity). Also continued membership in a variety of multinational peace-keeping forces is a sine qua non for Greek foreign policy objectives.

In Greek-Turkish relations, regardless of the duration and the final destination of Turkey’s trip toward Brussels, the Greek policies of a “functional bypass” in the Aegean must be continued. The classic example of the functional bypass approach in substance, was the convergence of policies between France and Germany after World War II. They began with the joint exploitation of coal and steel which gradually led to the creation of the European Union and its predecessors. Currently, a functional bypass approach in the Aegean calls for the continuation and acceleration of a climate of economic and energy interdependence, as well as the faithful execution of confidence building measures (CBM’s) for the reduction of tension in Greece’s Flight Information Region (FIR) which covers the Aegean archipelago. Turkish military aircraft violations and infractions could be reduced in frequency by mutual agreement, resulting in economic benefit for both countries that rely so heavily on the

industry of tourism. The numbers of tourists, of course, are directly correlated with a climate of détente and peaceful coexistence. Both countries, also, should reenergize the so called spirit of Helsinki (December 1999) and hasten talks designed to arrive at a compromis d'arbitrage for the referral of the Aegean continental shelf question to the International Court of Justice at the Hague.

The "name issue," currently poisoning the relations between Athens and Skopje, is in dire need of a friendly resolution based on the formula of a hyphenated name (with a geographic or other prefix) for each of the three political components of the geographic region of Macedonia. Thankfully, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) does not pose a military threat to Greece. Athens has accordingly every interest in seeing the maintenance of FYROM's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. Over time, in the 20th century, Greece's strategic nightmare was a two front war with Turkey and one or more of its northern neighbors. It is for this reason that the recent entry of Bulgaria and Romania (eventually the totality of the Balkans) is a positive development of historic proportions for both Greek and Bulgarian strategic planners.

Conclusions

The recent trip of President Barack Obama to Ankara and Istanbul has caused considerable consternation in Athens and Nicosia. In my opinion, it is time that we rethink this judgment carefully. Happily, we are no longer Turkey's strategic Siamese siblings. With Greece's entry in the EC/EU (1981) and Cyprus's entry (2004) this link has been practically and symbolically severed. It is not in our political and economic interest to be considered part of the unstable (unfortunately) region of the Middle East. We belong to Europe and our aspiration is to see all our immediate neighbors meeting the necessary conditions for membership in both the EU and NATO.

It is time for us to shed the protectorate syndrome and our tendency to participate in “strategic beauty contests,” mutually exaggerating our geographic locations so as to impress competing super/major powers. We must realize that together we can solve our own problems in our own neighborhood. We do not need balancers and third party arbiters. After all third parties, especially countries that sell high value sophisticated military equipment to Greece, Turkey and Cyprus (such as the US, the UK, France, Germany, Russia and others) do not have an interest in seeing lasting peace and friendship in our area. The perpetuation of managed tension (certainly not an all out war) suits the interests of the military-industrial complexes of such countries.

It is high time, indeed, for us to replace geopolitics –especially in the midst of a global depression- with geoeconomics!