



## PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

# Another Attempt to Solve the Cyprus Problem Ends in Failure

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Another round of talks attempting to solve the Cyprus problem has ended in resounding failure. This round was described as an historic opportunity. Its collapse demonstrates the international community's inability to settle regional disputes.**

In an attempt to resolve the long-running conflict in Cyprus and reunite the island, marathon talks between Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci were recently held in the resort town of Crans-Montana in the Swiss Alps.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres; the foreign ministers of Greece, Turkey and the UK; and representatives from the EU all participated in the UN-sponsored talks, which lasted nine days.

The conflict in Cyprus began in July 1974, when a Greek extremist organization that sought to annex the island launched a military coup there. In response, the Turkish military invaded Cyprus and established a Turkish-controlled corridor from the island's northern coast to its capital of Nicosia. A few years later, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognized only by Turkey, was established. In the south, the Republic of Cyprus, where the Greeks live and rule, continued to exist. Around 250,000 Turks, some of whom arrived after the Turkish invasion, reside in the north of the island.

There have been numerous attempts to unify the island. In recent years, the likelihood of a solution being found has increased with the rise to power of

Anastasiades and Akinci. Both of these relatively moderate leaders have repeatedly declared their desire for unification.

And yet, in the current round of talks, which was initially described as historic, differences of opinion once again came to the fore.

The UN has suggested uniting the two sections of the island within the framework of a federation, but several central issues contributed to the failure of the talks: first, Turkey's demand that there be a rotating presidency between the two ethnicities (a condition opposed by the Greeks, who constitute 80% of Cyprus's 1.2 million residents); and second, the Greek demand that the Turks end their military presence and withdraw their 35,000 soldiers from Cyprus. The Turks argue that these soldiers are essential to ensuring security on the island.

Another major problem centers around the three countries designated as guarantors by the 1960 treaty granting Cyprus independence from Great Britain. The Greeks demand a change in the guarantor agreements to prevent any of the three states (Greece, Turkey, and Great Britain) from legally interfering in Cypriot affairs, as the Turks did in their military invasion in 1974.

Israel has an interest in what transpires in Cyprus. Geographically, it is the closest non-Arab state to Israel, and a resolution to the conflict could have repercussions for Israel. In recent years, both Israel-Cyprus and Israel-Greece relations have grown stronger. Prominent Israelis visit the island, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Anastasiades, and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras recently participated in a summit in Thessaloniki.

Israel's improving relations with Cyprus and Greece is partly a result of the deterioration of its relations with Turkey following the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010 (in which Israeli commandos clashed with Turkish activists aboard the aid ship Mavi Marmara and 10 activists were killed). The most important ties are in the security sector and include the countries' respective air and naval forces. For the past three years, Israel has stationed a military attaché in Greece who is also responsible for Cyprus. Recently, the commando unit of the IDF held a large maneuver in Cyprus with the participation of IDF helicopters and the Cypriot army.

Many Israeli tourists travel to Cyprus, including to the Turkish north of the island, despite the fact that Israel does not recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In addition to the relatively large-scale bilateral trade, estimated at around \$1 billion, talks are underway on cooperation between Israel and Cyprus in the export of Israeli and Cypriot natural gas.

Early on the morning of July 7, 2017, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres announced the collapse of the talks and admitted that this round had also closed without an agreement. A last-minute phone call from Mike Pence, the US vice president, to the Greek and Turkish leaders in Cyprus produced no results.

The collapse of yet another round of discussions proves that the Greeks and Turks in Cyprus, and their patrons in Athens and Ankara, are incapable of overcoming their disagreements and cannot solve this long-lasting dispute. A long time may pass before another serious effort is made to reunify the island.

This failure demonstrates the difficulties the international community faces in solving regional and violent disputes that are much more complex, such as the events in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, South Sudan, Libya, and the Korean peninsula, not to mention the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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