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THE UNITED NATIONS' APPROACH TO THE CYPRUS ISSUE AND UNFICYP

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To properly understand the world organisation's approach to any issue, including Cyprus, it is necessary to understand its structure, the composition of its membership and the power balances within it. One question that arises in this context is whether the UN is merely the total sum of its parts or whether the world organisation, whose mission, in the most general sense, is the pursuit of world peace, has an identity of its own.

The supreme organ of the United Nations, which includes all its members, is the General Assembly. The number of its members currently stands at 189.¹ However, in practice, executive power lies in the Security Council, which is composed of fifteen members: five permanent and ten non-permanent. The Permanent Members enjoy a special and, indeed, a privileged position, by virtue of their having the right of veto over the decisions or resolutions of the Council. This has led to criticism that the world organisation is merely a club of nations in which some are more equal than others. There have been recent attempts to restructure the Security Council to make it more of a balanced and equitable body, but these efforts have so far produced no result.

Among the members of the Security Council that concern themselves with the Cyprus issue are primarily the Permanent Members. And, among them, those that are closely concerned with the issue are the United Kingdom, as the ex-colonial power in Cyprus, and the United States of America, as the only remaining superpower. The Russian Federation, which hasn't quite abandoned its old habit of using the Cyprus issue to drive a wedge between two NATO allies, Turkey and Greece, also makes its influence felt in various ways. It sometimes does so to remind the world that it is still a major power to be reckoned with. It is interesting that the first time it used its veto in the post-Cold War era was on the Cyprus issue. France's interest has been ambivalent and the Peoples' Republic of China has remained largely detached. But all of the Permanent Members and, in fact, the Non-Permanent Members have been driven by the same concern in their approach to the Cyprus issue: national self-interest. This is the case in all other issues of international concern.

It would, therefore, be safe to state that, on the Cyprus issue, what is often described as 'the will of the international community' is none other than the views of the major Permanent Members of the Security Council, acting on their real or perceived national interests. And the rest simply follows.

It is true that the Greek Cypriot side has also used its so-called 'non-aligned' status to bring into play the sheer weight of numbers of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), particularly in extracting one-sided resolutions from the General Assembly. However, with the NAM's waning influence, this has been less possible. In fact, the General Assembly has not adopted a resolution on Cyprus since 1983 (Resolution 37/253).²

Another relevant body in this context is the UN Secretariat, headed by the Secretary-General. Although past secretaries-general have adopted slightly different attitudes towards the two parties to the dispute, their influence has hardly been the deciding factor. They all claim that the mandate the Security Council gave them limited them. However, one could argue that the Secretary-General has the authority to make a difference, if he so wishes, by the sheer prestige and moral authority of his high office. Whether he wants to use it or not is another matter.

In the final analysis, the UN stands as little more than the total sum of its parts. Its ability to act is subject to the concurrence, particularly, of the Permanent Members of the Security Council, and the willingness of its major members to back their words with deeds. In our age, this has been called diplomacy backed by force, which is the true test of the UN's effectiveness.

Going back a little in history, to the pre-independence period in the UN's involvement in the Cyprus issue, we see that Greece was the first to attempt to bring the subject before the United Nations in 1950 under the banner of self-determination.³ The purpose, however, was anything but self-determination. Behind the façade of independence, stood the long-standing Greek ambition to annex the island to Greece, enosis. This was a time when the West's influence within the UN system was strong and it was deemed against the interests of the major Western countries to allow the issue to be debated in the world organisation. Thus, Greece's attempt was unsuccessful.

From then on, Greece continued its attempts to use the UN platform to propagate and promote the cause of enosis under the banner of self-determination. In 1950, Makarios, in collusion with Greece, presented the UN with the results of the 'plebiscite'.⁴ Ironically, the 'plebiscite' was on enosis and not on self-determination. In 1954, Greece's request was finally taken up at the Ninth Session of the General Assembly. The result was a resolution rejecting the consideration of the Cyprus issue in the manner Greece proposed.⁵ Having failed in their diplomatic endeavours, the Greek Cypriots, with the support of Greece, launched a campaign in Cyprus in 1955, through the underground terrorist organisation EOKA. The purpose was to force the colonial power, Britain, to accept Greek Cypriot demands for enosis. In the face of this campaign of violence, in 1956, the United Kingdom asked that the issue of Greek terrorism in Cyprus be placed on the agenda of the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly. It was this British demand that enabled the recourse by Greece to be discussed, for the second time, at the same Session as a single issue under the heading 'the Cyprus Problem'.

Then came the compromise of 1960. The Turkish Cypriot opposition to enosis, or re-colonisation, bore fruit and the independent partnership Republic of Cyprus was established, only for the enosis-bound Greek Cypriot leadership to destroy it three years later. The events that followed the Greek Cypriot wilful destruction of the 1960 Republic, namely the ethnic cleansing campaign against the Turkish Cypriots, is a matter of historical record and is registered in detail in the annals of the United Nations. However insufficient, this is one of the most valuable services that UNFICYP has rendered to the cause of peace in the island.

In the post-independence period in Cyprus, the basis of the UN's approach to the Cyprus issue is Resolution 186 adopted by the Security Council on 4 March 1964. In that Resolution, reference was made to the 'Government of Cyprus' against the protestations of the Turkish side. That government had become non-existent because of the Greek Cypriot side's destruction of the 1960 Constitution and its armed onslaught on the Turkish Cypriots. However, this mattered very little to the West, which was more interested in maintaining stability in the Cold War era, than protecting Turkish Cypriot rights and the rule of law. The UN was used merely as an instrument to get international

approval for this policy. It should also be noted that what was then regarded as stability in the short term, proved to be instability in the mid- and long-term.

The United Kingdom was only interested in maintaining the British bases on the island and the United States was preoccupied with appeasing ethnic Greek lobbies operating within that country, and, ostensibly confronting the Soviet threat by preventing Cyprus becoming a Mediterranean Cuba. Makarios was constantly using the Soviet card in his machinations to achieve enosis.⁶ Turkey was reassured that what was meant by the expression ‘Government of Cyprus’ in resolution 186, was the legitimate bi-national Government of Cyprus, composed of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot partners. However, these verbal assurances were soon forgotten, and even the telegram sent by the Permanent Mission of the UK to London in 1964, stating “Makarios is not the government of the whole island”,⁷ did not suffice to change this Greek Cypriot fait accompli and the world’s response to it.

Thus, the Turkish Cypriots gave their own response: putting up resistance to Greek Cypriot aggression, on the one hand, and developing their own administration in areas under their control, on the other. Small as these areas may have been (just three percent of the island), Makarios’ writ did not run in these areas.

The Turkish Cypriot people declared their independence on 15 November 1983, twenty years after being thrown out of the state set up by the 1960 Constitution and Treaties. The Turkish Cypriots wanted to tell the world that they also existed as a sovereign equal in the island of Cyprus. By doing so, the Turkish Cypriots gave the world a golden opportunity to settle the Cyprus issue on the basis of genuine equality, but to no avail.

The United Nations’ response was resolution 541 (1983) adopted by the Security Council, which declared the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) illegal and called on all countries not to recognise it. The Council’s arrogation to itself of the role of a court, acting like a judge and a jury was amazing. The Turkish Cypriots were appalled by the call for non-recognition, when the Charter of the United Nations calls for respect for the principle of equal rights and the self-determination of peoples. The cost of this political shortsightedness has been immense for Cyprus, as it caused the perpetuation of the conflict.

Then came resolution 550 (1984), which added insult to injury, by criticising the exchange of ambassadors between the TRNC and Turkey. The mentality of resolution 186 would continue to dominate the UN’s one-sided and mistaken approach to the issue in the years to come.

As far as the UN approach is concerned, the situation does not appear to have changed at all. The mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force, which is renewed every six months, requires a Security Council resolution that keeps repeating the same mistake that it had made 37 years ago. It refers to the ‘Government of Cyprus’, thereby maintaining a myth and ignoring reality. This begs the question as to who lives in the past.

It is true that the world has changed, that the Cold War is over and that Cyprus itself has changed radically, with the emergence of two independent and sovereign states on the island. Yet the United Nations’ fundamental approach to the Cyprus issue has remained the same: it still insists on treating the Greek Cypriot side as the government of Cyprus, feeding Greek Cypriot intransigence and obsession with a usurped title.

Who else do we have to tell us that there are two centres of power in Cyprus, in the form of two independent states, when the leader of the Greek Cypriot administration of southern Cyprus, Glafcos Clerides, himself makes the following compelling observation in his memoirs, *Cyprus: My Deposition*:

“In the years that followed, a steady, stage by stage development is noted in the Turkish Cypriot administration, with the separation in its Legislative, Executive and Judicial powers. An administrative organisation is created, as well as a police force and an army. The increase of the financial resources of the Turkish Cypriots through economic aid from Turkey permitted the functioning of their administration on a more permanent basis, a fact which they made clear, by renaming their ‘Temporary Turkish Cypriot Administration’. Thus there exists today in Cyprus two poles of power on a separate geographical basis, i.e. the Government of the Cyprus Republic, controlling the largest section of the territory of the state and internationally recognised, and the Turkish Cypriot Administration, which controls a very limited area and is not internationally recognised, but has already taken almost all characteristics of a small state.”⁸

This small state is currently the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). It is the concrete manifestation of the inherent right of the Turkish Cypriots to self-determination. It was declared on 15 November 1983, twenty years after the Turkish Cypriots’ former partners, the Greek Cypriots, left them stateless.

In view of the foregoing, the Turkish Cypriot side believes that it is time to rethink the entire role of the United Nations in Cyprus, both in terms of peacekeeping and peacemaking. As far as the Turkish Cypriot side is concerned, these two functions of the UN’s involvement in Cyprus, which are supposed to go hand in hand, both suffer from the same malady: their failure to adapt to the changed circumstances on the island, and the inability or unwillingness to treat the two parties to the Cyprus dispute on a fair and equal basis.

Let alone addressing the basic issue of status for the commencement of fruitful negotiations, the United Nations is unfortunately avoiding any signal that would indicate or imply the recognition, or at least the acknowledgement, of the realities in Cyprus. This is obvious from the Secretary-General’s latest report to the Security Council on the UN operation in Cyprus.

While the report makes various references to the ‘Government of Cyprus’ and to its organs, such as the ‘National Guard’ or ‘Cyprus Police’, the Turkish Cypriot side is merely referred to as ‘The Turkish Cypriot authorities’. For the third time since 1999, an Addendum to the report, indicating that the Turkish Cypriot consent is also needed for UNFICYP to effectively function in both parts or both states on the island, was not published. This is in contradiction with the fundamental principles of consent and impartiality, which lie at the heart of all UN peacekeeping operations around the world.

A high-level panel, which convened in March 2000 under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, published a report on this subject describing ‘consent’ as one of the bedrock principles of any UN peacekeeping operation. Impartiality, on the other hand, is also an indispensable element if a peacekeeping operation is to have the co-operation of the parties involved. However, the question is raised whether a peacekeeping force, half of whose annual expenses are covered by the Greek Cypriot administration and Greece, can function impartially.

Since 1975, or even before, the Turkish Cypriot side has been demanding that, to put UNFICYP's presence and activities in the TRNC on a sound footing, an agreement needs to be signed with the Turkish Cypriot side also. The work done for the conclusion of such an agreement with the Turkish Cypriot side reached an advanced stage but could not go further when the issue came to who would sign the agreement and in what capacity.

With the Addendum that was issued to the Secretary-General's report in December 1999, the UN seemed to be taking a step forward in meeting the Turkish Cypriots' demand for the conclusion of a separate agreement between them and the United Nations. However, history has repeated itself and, although discussions took place between the TRNC side and UNFICYP, and broad agreement was reached on the text of an agreement, an invisible hand seems to have interfered and stopped the process. We were simply told that some major members of the Security Council were opposed to any idea that would be interpreted as recognition, or at least acknowledgement, of the TRNC. Thus, in the following two instances involving the renewal of the mandate of UNFICYP, no Addendum was published and no reference was made to the need for obtaining the consent of the Turkish Cypriot party.

In response, on 30 June 2000, the TRNC instituted a number of measures against UNFICYP, and these measures were criticised in the Secretary-General's recent reports, including the latest. However, no mention is made of the fact that these were the direct result of UNFICYP's failure to fulfil one of the basic requirements of peacekeeping: the equal treatment of the two parties to the dispute.

A draft resolution is currently being prepared in the corridors of the United Nations (or, more correctly, Washington or London) repeating the original mistake of the organisation of treating one side as a government and the other as a community or minority.

Encouraged by its recognition as the government of the whole of Cyprus, the Greek Cypriot administration:

- a) Enjoys all the fruits of diplomatic recognition;
- b) Has built an economy with a per capita income in excess of \$15,000; and
- c) Keeps the North under an inhuman economic, political and cultural embargo aimed at bringing about its collapse.

The net result of this Greek Cypriot policy of isolation and confrontation towards the Turkish Cypriots has been the widening of the economic, political and psychological gap between the two peoples and States on the island. The possibility of establishing a new partnership between a recognised and prosperous South and an isolated and struggling North are diminishing by the day and reaching a point of no return.

The five rounds of proximity talks, which lasted from December 1999 to November 2000, produced no result. The main reason was that the process deviated from its stated purpose of "preparing the ground" and turned into a vehicle to force the Turkish Cypriot side into a settlement in accordance with what seemed like a pre-conceived scenario.

This is evident from the UN Secretary-General's Oral Remarks of 8 November 2000, which were put

on the table as the final product of five rounds of proximity talks. With their preoccupation with “one sovereign indissoluble common state”, “ a single international legal personality” and a “common state”, the Oral Remarks stood as a diplomatic straightjacket into which the Turkish Cypriot party and Cyprus as a whole would be pushed.

On the question of EU membership, the Oral Remarks decreed that “the provisions of the comprehensive settlement should not represent an obstacle to such membership.” This is an approach that puts EU membership ahead of a settlement. In other words, it puts the cart before the horse, and constitutes a precondition.

These and other elements have made the UN ideas a fundamentally Greek Cypriot-oriented endeavour. Why has the Turkish Cypriot party not tried to change them? The fact is that it has. Only to be told that it should not present its own proposals or repeat itself, but work on the non-papers that the UN handed out. Thus, the year-long proximity process, which started with high hopes of leading to direct negotiations, turned into an instrument of imposition against the diplomatically disadvantaged Turkish Cypriot party.

The latest strategy of the Greek Cypriot administration, in its bid to join the EU before a settlement, is to bring the EU into confrontation with Turkey over Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriots hope the EU will not allow the Greek Cypriots to play this potentially dangerous game, which would also harm the interests of the Union itself in this region of the world. If peace and stability are to prevail in the region, the balance between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus must be maintained.

As for the Turkish Cypriots, they have made it clear that they continue to support the efforts of the Secretary-General for a settlement and that they would be prepared to start negotiations once new parameters for negotiations have been established. These cannot be other than the acknowledgement that there are two sovereign independent states on the island and that neither one has the right or competence to represent the other or the island as a whole.

The UN took a small step forward with the Secretary-General’s 12 September 2000 statement acknowledging this reality. But he was made to back down in the face of strong negative Greek Cypriot reaction. Yet, the way forward clearly lies in the acknowledgement of the reality.

Will the UN, with its jigsaw puzzle of national interests and often conflicting inter-plays of power, be able to rise to the challenge? Only time will show.

1 UN Press Release ORG/1317, 26 September 2000, updated 18 December 2000.

2 UN document A/RES/37/253, 16 May 1983.

3 Faruk Sönmezoğlu, Türkiye-Yunanistan İlişkileri ve Büyük Güçler, Köbrös, Ege ve Diğer Sorunlar, Der Yayınlar, İstanbul, 2000, p. 43.

4 Ibid., p. 43.

5 Ibid., pp. 44-49.

6 For a broad overview of the circumstances and considerations surrounding Resolution 186, see Salahi Sonyel, *Cyprus: the Destruction of a Republic*, Cambridgeshire, Eothen Press, 1997, pp., 69-84.

7 Foreign Office and Whitehall Distribution, CIPHER/OTP, Sir P. Dixon, Telegram No. 911, 30 April 1964, confidential.

8 Glafcos Clerides, *Cyprus: My Deposition*, Vol. III, Alithia Publishing, 1990, pp., 236-237.
