

CYPRUS, GLOBAL GRAND STRATEGY, AND THE CONFLICT IN THE LEVANT

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Nodes of institutional flexibility in the international system are difficult to locate. Geopolitical locations where overlapping institutional arrangements make for possibilities of dynamic coordination are fortuitous but require nimble diplomatic maneuvering and long-term foresight among foreign ministers, international agencies, and policy advisers. Cyprus occupies such a location in the construction of global grand strategy in the Levant. It does so because of its unique geopolitical and institutional place in international society. It is a divided frontier at the edge of the European Union. It exists at the confluence of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, as well as Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. It is in the EU but out of NATO. It is a sovereign member of international society, yet burdened by (mis)use of its territory by regional and global powers.¹ It is one of few states in the region with a pragmatic and non-aligned approach to both the United States and Russia. A solution to its divided status offers an uncommon opportunity to unite not only the two communities on the island, but also regional actors, in a coordinated strategy for the greater Levant.² In the discussion that follows, I briefly explore four key relationships in the foreign policy of Cyprus. Then, I explain how re-imagining these relationships makes Cyprus a node of institutional flexibility in the construction of a global grand strategy for the greater Levant.

First, Cypriot membership in the EU affords it an institutional shield that other states in the region cannot claim. As a member of the EU, it has an opportunity to act as a forum for a more robust and coordinated common foreign and security policy. To date, EU policy has been a reaction to UNSC policy and the individual actions of EU member states. It remains broadly traditional in its orientation around the isolation of the recalcitrant Assad regime and the destruction of ISIL. The complex of Council decisions and regulations, as well as subsequent revisions and amendments, are meant to restrict interactions across all sectors of state policymaking, isolate key individuals from participation in international society, and signal to regional and international actors who and what

¹ While the most obvious 'mis-use' of Cypriot sovereign territory is the occupation by Turkey, equally problematic is the use of the island by the UK through its complex of SBA sites. See, Petros Savvides, "The Geostrategic Position of Cyprus: Israel's Prospect for Strategic Depth in the Eastern Mediterranean," *Eastern Mediterranean Geopolitical Review* 1 (Fall 2015), 6-20 (8-12).

² Any discussion of Cyprus as a node of institutional flexibility would necessarily exist on the understanding that a solution to the division of the island is at hand.

counts as members of international society.³ To argue, however, that implementation of these actions has led to a common foreign and security policy with respect to Syria, or to make the more substantive claim that such directives and regulations provide evidence of EU grand strategy is misleading. At best, these policies represent patterns of behavior meant to discipline EU actors in their interactions with others deemed beyond the boundaries of international society. Still, the EU, as an actor in international society, has an important institutional role to play. And, its most southeastern member state could act as a centre of coordination for that role.

Second, few states in the eastern Mediterranean have strong, positive bilateral relationships with *both* the United States and Russia. Given the Russian bond with the Assad regime in Syria and US hegemonic influence and interest in the region, Cyprus could play an important role in coordinating the common interests of these two states. Russia has tied its foreign policy goals to a crumbling regime whose legitimacy, authority, and control of the state are tenuous at best. Few analysts believe that Russia has the long-term stamina (military and financial) to support Assad's Syria and Russian overtures to Cyprus suggest that even Russia recognizes that new options are necessary.⁴ Moreover, once other important actors in international society accepted the necessity of regime change, Russia became the only actor available to rebuild the infrastructure in a post-conflict Syria headed by Assad. Given its internal economic woes, it seems unlikely that Russia will be able to function as a primary donor for such a highly unlikely reconstruction. Cyprus, however, may provide an alternative vehicle for Russian interests in the region. The island is outside of NATO and (institutionally) separate from the US security alliance. Britain, seeking a somewhat independent post-WWII grand strategy and wishing to retain some freedom of action in the Middle East, declared Cyprus (and after independence, the SBA) to be outside of NATO.⁵ Because the island is beyond the NATO umbrella, Cyprus has unique standing in the region.

With careful agreement and a clear understanding of limitations, Cyprus could serve its own interests by coordinating the common interests of the United States and Russia. The foundations of this complex relationship are already in place. Cypriot negotiations with Russia for use of the Andreas Papandreu Airbase in Paphos for humanitarian purposes are a

³ EU Council Directive 2013/255/CFSP Concerning Restrictive Measures Against Syria, *Official Journal of the European Union* 147/14 (1.6.2013).

⁴ Masis Der Parthogh, "Russia keen to use military bases in Cyprus," *Cyprus Mail* 21 January 2015, <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/01/21/russia-keen-to-use-military-bases-in-cyprus> [accessed 7 April 2016].

⁵ Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, "Cold War Pressures, Regional Strategies, and Relative Decline: British Military and Strategic Planning for Cyprus, 1950-1960," *The Journal of Military History* 73 (October 2009), 1143-1166 (1160).

beginning.⁶ So too, was the decision by the GoC to limit that agreement to non-military purposes.⁷ Cyprus plays a unique role in coordinating US, Russian, and other actors' military and humanitarian interests in the region.

Third, one of the most complex bilateral relationships that Cyprus must navigate is its relationship with the United Kingdom. Cyprus must deal with the complex of SBA installations maintained by its former colonizer. The manner in which this legal restriction infringes upon the full sovereignty and foreign policy maneuvering of Cyprus should not be dismissed. Consistently, these installations complicate its own foreign and security policies, its bilateral relationships, and its institutional commitments. Use of RAF Akrotiri to launch bombing sorties over Syrian airspace and the more clandestine use of the SBA to support surveillance activity for more states than just the UK undermine perceptions of Cypriot sovereignty and invoke images of neo-colonial influence on a full-fledged member of international society.⁸ The conflict in the Levant provides Cyprus with an opportunity to seek a new legal relationship with Britain regarding the SBA. The new relationship could improve GoC freedom of action and re-construct the sovereign relationship between former colony and colonizer.

Fourth, perhaps the most important relationship with Cyprus is that which exists among the various communities that make up its collective *self*. This is not the place to examine the origins of the Cyprus problem or the associated identity constructs that grew and reified as a result of that problem.⁹ Nor is it the place to explore how those identities continue to limit the diplomatic and societal imagination. However, the potential that the current negotiations provide an opening to re-imagine what counts as Cypriot, what it means to be part of Cyprus, and what such a common narrative would mean for international society should not be underestimated. No solution to the division of the island is possible without a re-imagined identity. To assume such is to misunderstand the concept of security and its necessary role in the formation and maintenance of the state.¹⁰

⁶ Masis Der Parthogh, "Russia keen to use military bases in Cyprus."

⁷ Jean Christou, "No question of Russian bases on Cyprus," *Cyprus Mail* 9 February 2015, <http://cyprus-mail.com/2015/02/09/no-question-of-russian-bases-on-cyprus/> [accessed on 7 April 2016]

⁸ Gareth Jennings, "UK debuts 'bunker buster' bombs against the Islamic State," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 26 April 2016, <http://www.janes.com/article/59799/uk-debuts-bunker-buster-bombs-against-the-islamic-state> [accessed 21 May 2016].

⁹ Stella Soulioti, *Fettered Independence: Cyprus, 1878-1964* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Rebecca Bryant and Yiannis Papadakis, eds, *Cyprus and the Politics of Memory: history, community and conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

¹⁰ See, Anthony D. Lott, *Creating Insecurity*, 56-64.

As important as a common narrative is to the future of a unified Cyprus, it is just as important to international society. The conflicting identities in Cyprus are not unique to the island but representative of a larger conflict between and among regional and global actors. Few locations around the world offer opportunities to re-envision the relationship between Christianity and Islam, the west and the east, and Europe and its Moslem neighbors. Identities are stable constructions in which actors operate and make sense of the world.¹¹ They cannot be re-imagined quickly and made to work as tools for ordering choices and making decisions. Yet, civil society in Cyprus has had decades to build stable identity constructs inclusive of otherness.¹²

¹¹ Badredine Arfi, "Ethnic Fear: The Social Construction of Insecurity," *Security Studies* 8 (Autumn 1998), 151-203, (152).

¹² See, for instance, Marios Epaminondas, et. al., "Home for Cooperation (H4C)," *The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research* (Nicosia, Cyprus: K&L Lithofit Ltd, 2011).