

THE MILITARY SITUATION IN CYPRUS 1974 – 2015

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It is over forty years since the invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the de-facto partition of the island by the Turkish military forces, which still maintain their presence on the island. On the other hand, the Cypriot National Guard (NG) has completed fifty years since its establishment in 1964, and four decades since its reorganization that aimed to address the threat posed by the de-facto partition and the powerful Turkish military presence on the island.

When it comes to the Cyprus problem as a whole, military force has been a substantial element. This article aims to evaluate the current military situation in Cyprus. We shall first outline developments in this field since 1974. After that, we shall proceed to analyse and compare the military forces on the island as they stand today. The data used is drawn from the Cyprus Centre for Strategic Studies, the IISS and other relevant sources.

Developments since 1974

Over the years between 1974 - 2015, developments in the N.G, on the one hand, and the Turkish occupying forces, on the other, followed a pattern of "action - reaction" behaviour. Thus, there was a period of 13 years of strengthening of the National Guard and the Turkish occupation forces (1989 - 2002), followed by another 13 years (2002 to today) without any real change in the overall strength of the rival camps in Cyprus.

During these years, the 'arms race' between the rival camps included Battle Tanks, Armored Personnel Carriers (APC) and Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Artillery, Multiple Rocket Launchers, Mortars, Anti-tank Missiles, Anti-aircraft, Radar Systems and Helicopters. As a result of these developments, the ratio of manpower and hardware between the two sides has changed by 2002 as compared to that of 1984 and 1974, but the Turkish supremacy in all fields remains unchallenged.

The data summarized in the attached table makes clear that any movement of N.G. to improve its capabilities led to a reaction by the Turkish side, which took similar steps to increase quantitatively and qualitatively its forces and maintain its superior position. Thus, while in 1974 the ratio of tanks was 15 Turkish for every N.G. tank (15: 1), by 2002 it decreased to 3: 1 but it still remained favorable for Turkey. The same trend is evident in the APC where the difference in favour of Turkey decreased from 5.4: 1 in 1974 to 2.2:1 by 2002, but with corresponding

increases in armoured vehicles the Turkish superiority in the field remained unaffected.

However, from 2002 - 2015, with the exception of the purchase of a small number of tanks and two search and rescue helicopters by the National Guard in 2011, no other changes in the arsenal of the two sides has been recorded.

Comparison of Forces 2015

The comparison of military forces in Cyprus in 2015 is as follows:

Human Resources: In terms of military personnel the N.G. numbers 12,500 and 50,000 reservists. The entire human military force of the Republic of Cyprus, including the Greek contingency ELDYK (950), is calculated to be 63,450.

The strength of the Turkish troops in Cyprus is about 43,000. Added 3,500 Turkish Cypriots under arms and 26,000 reservists, the total number of this force stands at 72,500. In other words:

- For every Cypriot National Guardsman there are 3.4 Turkish soldiers.
- Given the total number of forces on both sides, the numerical ratio is almost one Guardsman for every 1.1 Turkish soldiers (1: 1.1).

Main Battle Tanks: Following the withdrawal of obsolete and operationally inadequate AMX-30, the National Guard currently has 164 tanks, compared to 179 in 2011. The corresponding Turkish main battle tanks are also reduced by 101, and the total number reaches 348 compared to 449 during the last twelve years.

It follows that:

- For each tank of the National Guard, the Turks have 2.1 tanks, compared to 1 : 2.8 in 2012, 5.7 : 1 in 1994 and 15 : 1 in 1974.
- Taking into account the 61 M-48 possessed by ELDYK, the ratio decreases slightly to the benefit of the Republic, thus for every N.G tank there are 1.5 Turkish.
- **APC:** The N.G. has a total of 395 APCs whilst the Turkish forces have 627.
- For each APC possessed by the National Guard there are 1.4 Turkish.

Navy - Air Force: Despite improvements in the NG during the last 40 years in all the above areas, the country is still facing unanswered critical threats and challenges by the Turkish Air Force and Navy in the air and the sea.

Economy and Defense

Finally, some details regarding the economics of defense. During the 1990's the Cypriot government used to spend 4-5% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on Defense. However, since 2002 military expenditure dropped significantly to roughly 2 – 3 % of the GDP. It is interesting to note that in recent years, due to the financial crisis, defense budgets have shrunk even more (below 2%), thus affecting the already limited armament programs of the Republic as well as the processes of maintenance and the availability of spare parts.

This pressure is expected to continue in the foreseeable future, so it is very unlikely that there will be any substantial reinforcement of the N.G., either in terms of military personnel or in advanced weapon systems and technology. This will have a negative impact not only on the effectiveness of the force but also on the length of the military service.

Comparison of Military Forces in Cyprus 1974 – 2014/15						
Section	TURKISH OCCUPATION FORCES (T.F.)	2014/ 15	2004	1994	1984	1974
	NATIONAL GUARD (N.G.) ----- Ratio (T.F. : N.G.)					
Military Personnel	T.F.	43.000	36.000	30.000	25.000	25.000
	N.G..	12.500	12.000	10.000	9.000	8.500
	1T.F. : 1N.G..	3.4 : 1	3 : 1	3 : 1	3.7 : 1	2.9 : 1
Main Battle Tanks	T.F.	348	449	300	150	150
	N.G..	164	145	52	10	10
	1T.F. : 1N.G..	2.1 : 1	3 : 1	5.7 : 1	15 : 1	15 : 1
APC & AIFV	T.F.	627	627	200	200	200
	N.G.	395	395	271	37	37
	1T.F. : 1N.G.	2.2 : 1	2.2 : 1	1 : 1.3	5.4 : 1	5.4 : 1
Artillery	T.F.	232+	232+	194+	212+	212+
	N.G..	164	164	138	36+	36+
	1T.F. : 1N.G.	1.4 : 1	1.4 : 1	1.4 : 1	5.8 : 1	5.8 : 1
MRL	T.F.	6+	6+	-		
	N.G.	22	22	18		
	1T.F. : 1N.G..	1 : 3.6	1 : 3.6	1 : 18		
Mortars	T.F.	450	450	114 +		
	N.G.	372 +	372+	278		
	1T.F. : 1N.G..	1.2 : 1	1.2 : 1	1 : 2.4		
SP	T.F.	192 +	192 +			
	N.G.	153	184			
	1T.F. : 1N.G..	1.2 : 1	1 : 1			
Anti –tank Weapons	T.F.	114	114			
	N.G.	115	67	42		
	1T.F. : 1N.G.	1 : 1	1.7 : 1	1 : 42		
Anti – aircraft	T.F.	134 +	134 +	84 +		
	N.G..	108 +	144	8		
	1T.F. : 1N.G.	1.2 : 1	1.2 : 1	10.5 : 1		