

Magill's Guide to Military History

Cypriot War

At Issue: Cypriot independence from Britain, union with Greece, and partition of the island between the Greeks and Turks

Date: 1955-1977

Location: Cyprus

Combatants: Cypriots vs. British; Greek Cypriots vs. Turkish Cypriots

Principal Commanders: Cypriot, Archbishop Michael Makarios, General George Grivas (1898-1974); Greek, General Gregorios Bonanos; Turkish, Bülent Ecevit (1925-)

Result: Initial unified independence of the island from Great Britain and then civil war influenced by Greece and Turkey, leading to the partition of the island

Background

For more than eight hundred years, the island of Cyprus remained under the control of foreign powers, with the British ruling the mixed population (20 percent Turks and 80 percent Greeks) since the late eighteenth century. The Greek majority wanted enosis, or union with Greece, but the British refused to relinquish power over the island. During World War I, when Turkey allied with Germany against the British, the British government reversed its position and offered enosis. The Greeks, led by General Gregorios Bonanos, failed to respond, and the offer was withdrawn. As the anticolonialism of the post-World War II period swept through the British Empire, Cypriots took up the cause of freedom. Fears that the Greeks would suppress the rights of the minority Turks, led by Bülent Ecevit, resulted in bitter opposition to the possibility of enosis. The situation remained tense as Greece and Turkey, both members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), threatened to attack each other.

Action

From 1954 to 1959, the Greek Cypriots, led by General George Grivas and supported by Archbishop Michael Makarios, initiated a policy of terrorism and guerrilla warfare aimed at both the British forces and the Turkish minority. In 1959, negotiations between Britain, Greece, and Turkey resulted in the establishment of the independent Republic of Cyprus. Along with the Zurich Agreement, the parties agreed to a treaty of guarantee and a treaty of alliance, which guaranteed the rights of all nationalities on the island and allowed the right of military intervention if the provisions were breached. Makarios was elected president, and a Turk was elected vice president.

After an initial period of goodwill, Greek agitation for enosis resumed, and hostilities broke out in December, 1963, when Makarios attempted to reform the constitution. British troops failed to halt the fighting. Britain and the United States offered to

establish NATO or United Nations peacekeeping troops to maintain control. Makarios rejected the offers, but the United Nations authorized the first peacekeeping troops, who landed in Cyprus in 1964 in spite of objections by the Cypriot government. Five months later, Greek Cypriots attacked Turkish villages on the island, and Turkey responded by bombing Greek areas. A cease-fire was arranged, but within two years, the Turkish government once again threatened to attack. Pressure on both sides from the United States resulted in the withdrawal of Greek troops from the island and a resumption of Turkish civil rights. Militant Greek Cypriots, assisted by the Greek military leaders, assumed control over the government, and Makarios fled the country.

Turkish fears that the country would soon establish enosis with Greece led to the seizure of a portion of the northern coast. When Greek efforts to mobilize forces against the Turks failed to receive the support of the Greek population, the military rulers turned the government back over to civilian leadership. By 1974, the Turks, in violation of a United Nations cease-fire, seized one-third of the island. In 1975, Turkey deployed 25,000 troops in Cyprus and declared the independence of the Cypriot Turkish Federal State. Two years later, the Turks returned control over some of the island in exchange for official recognition.

Aftermath

The unprecedented use of United Nations peacekeeping troops proved ineffective in Cyprus. The Turks successfully prevented enosis and established a permanent partition of the island. Through a series of diplomatic maneuvers, Henry A. Kissinger preserved the unity of the NATO alliance.

Resources

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Stearns, Monteagle. *Entangled Allies: U.S. Policy Toward Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus*. New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1992.

Stern, Laurence. *The Wrong Horse: The Policy of Intervention and the Failure of American Diplomacy*. New York: Times Books, 1977.

See Also

North American Treaty Organization; Religion and war; United Nations and conflict resolution.

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