

Erdogan's two-state demand puts the jinx on planned UN-led Cyprus meeting

Sun, 2021-02-14 00:54

RIYADH/LONDON: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent assertion that the only way to resolve the Cyprus dispute is a two-state solution may have just muddied the waters further, rather than helping resolve Europe's longest-running frozen conflict.

By rejecting the reunification of Cyprus under a two-zone federal umbrella, long favored by Greece and the UN, the Turkish leader has purposely raised the stakes in the run-up to a UN-led meeting to assess the possibility of resuming talks.

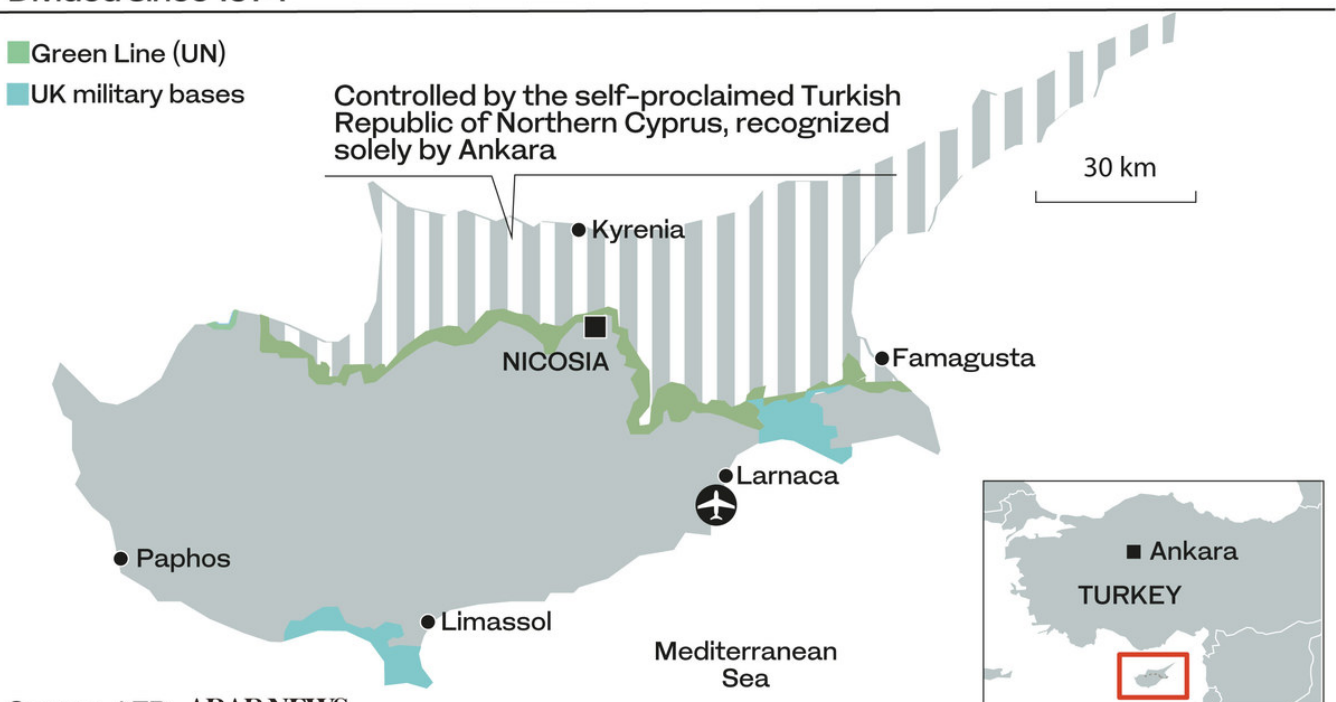
Erdogan's comments also came shortly after the leaders of Greece and Cyprus said they would only accept a peace deal based on UN resolutions, rejecting the two-state formula supported by his government and the Turkish Cypriot leadership.

Greek Cypriots, who make up the EU member's internationally recognized government, refuse to discuss proposals for a two-state union as it implies Turkish Cypriot sovereign authority.

UN initiatives have failed to break the deadlock since the eastern Mediterranean island underwent a de-facto partition into Greek- and Turkish-speaking zones in 1974, when Turkey invaded and occupied its northern third in response to a coup in Nicosia engineered by the Greek junta.

CYPRUS

Divided since 1974



Source: AFP ARAB NEWS

The last UN-sponsored negotiations at the Swiss ski resort of Crans Montana came to naught in July 2017, going the way of the talks brokered by then UN chief Kofi Annan in 2004. For the March meeting, the UN is expected to invite Cyprus' two communities as well as foreign ministers from the three guarantor nations – Greece, Turkey and Britain – to discuss how to move forward on the issue.

“Cyprus has been a quagmire for every UN secretary-general since the 1970s and (current UN Secretary-General Antonio) Guterres will be no exception,” Dimitris Tsarouhas, professor of international relations at Turkey's Bilkent University, told Arab News.

“The parameters of a solution are known to all parties involved: a bi-zonal, bi-communal state that will incorporate international law provisions for the protection of the rights of all, and be functional enough to make it all work. Maximalist positions on both sides meant that golden opportunities were lost at Crans Montana in 2017 and during the Annan Plan in 2004.”



But then again, the rivalry runs deep. Greek Cypriots reject granting veto powers to Turkish Cypriots, and oppose both permanent troop presence and the continuation of military intervention rights by Turkey.

For its part, Turkey not only rejects suggestions of a federation between the two zones, it is also asking for hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean to be shared. Last month, Greek and Turkish officials met in Istanbul after a five-year gap for exploratory talks on a raft of long-standing issues, including the status of Cyprus.

Conflicting claims to Cyprus' political status and natural resources go back more than a century. Cyprus was annexed by Britain in 1914 at the conclusion of the First World War, following more than 300 years of Ottoman rule, and officially became a British colony in 1925.

Then, in the mid-1950s, Greek Cypriots launched a guerrilla war against British rule, demanding unification with Greece.

Independence was won in 1960 and a constitution agreed on by the island's Greek and Turkish communities. Under the Treaty of Guarantee, the UK, Greece and Turkey each retained the right to intervene in Cypriot affairs, while British kept hold of two military bases.

INNUMBER

1.28 million Total population of Cyprus.

\$35 billion GDP (purchasing power parity).

Harmony was short-lived, however. Inter-communal violence erupted in 1963 when the president, the clergyman cum politician Archbishop Makarios, suggested changes to the island's power-sharing arrangements. The following year, a UN peace-keeping force arrived and delineated the "Green Line."

Events moved quickly in 1974 when Greece's military junta orchestrated a coup against Makarios in an attempt to annex Cyprus. The consequent deployment of Turkish troops on the island's north effectively partitioned the island along the UN-policed Green Line.

While an estimated 165,000 Greek Cypriots fled south, about 45,000 Turkish Cypriots relocated to the north, where they established their own independent administration with Rauf Denktash as president. Despite a unanimous UN Security Council resolution, Turkey has refused to withdraw its troops from Cyprus.

Fresh attempts at UN-sponsored talks in the early 1980s were dashed when Denktash proclaimed an independent "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" – an entity recognized only by Turkey to date.

Open conflict loomed in the 1990s when the Greek Cypriot government considered purchasing a Russian-made S-300 missile defense system – a move quickly dropped when Turkey threatened military action.

Repeated failures of diplomacy and the rhetoric of ethnic nationalism have taught political analysts to manage their expectations.

"Recent electoral results in northern Cyprus have strengthened hardliners there – and they are themselves benefiting from Erdogan's material and ideological support," Tsarouhas told Arab News. "For the first time, Turkish Cypriots now claim that a two-state solution is the only way forward, and

Erdogan echoes that. This means the partition of the island.

“On the other hand, it is equally true that Greek Cypriots have missed their opportunities to push for a successful resolution of the problem in the past, so they are not in a hurry. They have never been, since 1974.”

Stavros Avgoustides, ambassador of Cyprus to Saudi Arabia, rejects the claim that the Greek Cypriot side has also mishandled the issue and places the blame squarely on Turkey.



“The failure of successive efforts to achieve a solution was fundamentally due to Turkey’s insistence to maintain Cyprus as a protectorate through the obsolete post-colonial system of guarantees and the presence of Turkish troops on Cyprus’ soil,” Avgoustides told Arab News.

“Cyprus has ended up being ‘ethnically divided’ as a result of the 1974 Turkish military invasion and occupation and the policy of ethnic cleansing executed by Turkey against the people of Cyprus.”

Judging by the statements coming from Ankara, it is obvious that ruling party politicians have nothing to lose by adopting a harder line ahead of the UN-led meeting. “There is no longer any solution but a two-state solution,” Erdogan told a meeting of his Justice and Development Party (AKP) last week. “Whether you accept it or not, there is no federation anymore.”

A day later, in an interview with TRT Haber, Ibrahim Kalin, the presidential spokesman, expanded on his boss’s statement. “We cannot discuss the things we discussed for 40 years for another 40 years,” he said.

“Now, this issue will be discussed under the UN’s roof. It will be discussed at the 5+1 talks. We will now be discussing a two-state solution.”

The remarks by Erdogan and Kalin came shortly after Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the Greek prime minister of Greece, said that “significant” talks to reunify Cyprus could not be resumed if Turkey insists on a two-state accord that disregards the UN and EU framework for a peace deal.

Even if next month’s meeting goes ahead as planned, a successful outcome is far from guaranteed. After all, with the new millennium had come renewed impetus to resolve the dispute, led by Annan. The 2002 road map – known as the Annan Plan – envisaged a federation with two constituent parts, presided over by a rotating presidency.

If the Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides agreed to the plan, Cyprus was to be offered EU membership. If they failed, only the internationally recognized Greek Cypriot south would be permitted to join.

The Annan Plan was put to the Cypriot public in twin referendums in 2004. Although it won support among Turkish Cypriots, it was overwhelmingly rejected by Greek Cypriots, thus compounding the situation.

Animosity between the two sides deepened in 2011 when Cyprus began exploratory drilling for oil and gas. Turkey responded the following year with its own drilling onshore in northern Cyprus despite protests from the Cypriot government. In a parallel development, UN-sponsored reunification talks launched in 2015 again ended inconclusively in July 2017.



Then, in Oct. 2020, anti-reunification nationalist Ersin Tatar narrowly won the Turkish Cypriot presidency, making the UN-backed vision for peace seem even more impractical. With the Turkish side backing Ankara's demand for a two-state formula, expectations of a deal based on the UN resolutions being reached are low.

As far as the Greek Cypriots are concerned, the terms have not changed, according to Ambassador Avgoustides. "We are committed to the continuation of negotiations with the aim of achieving a solution of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation as provided in the relevant UN resolutions," he told Arab News.

"We earnestly hope that the same level of commitment will be displayed by all involved."

A solution must "fully respect the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of all Cypriots, that will free Cyprus from foreign guarantors and from the presence of foreign troops, and will render it fully able to exercise its role as a beacon of peace and stability in the eastern Mediterranean."

As things stand, whether the two competing visions for the future of Cyprus can be reconciled in the near future is an open question.

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Egypt, Cyprus and Greece demand respect for maritime sovereignty
Ankara rejects federation solution for divided Cyprus

[French-speaking university in Turkey faces government regulation](#)

Sun, 2021-02-14 00:16

ANKARA: While student protests continue over the appointment of a loyalist rector to Turkey's prestigious Bogazici University, another institution known for its independent academic line is also under the spotlight.

The French-speaking University of Galatasaray, located along the Bosphorus just kilometers-away from Bogazici University, has made headlines due to a new official instruction given to its academic staff.

French teachers at the university are now required to have relatively high-level Turkish proficiency following an instruction by the Council of Higher Education. Those who do not meet this requirement will not receive work permits or have their permits extended, making their stay "illegal" – although several of them have been living in Turkey for decades.

About 30 teachers at the university are nominated by France.

Opened by presidents Francois Mitterand and his Turkish counterpart Turgut Ozal in 1992 to boost bilateral relations between the two countries, Galatasaray University is a French-speaking institution welcoming thousands of students.

They are mostly employed in elite circles after their graduation due to the high-class bilingual education they receive.

Experts say that the move might be in retaliation for educational changes introduced by French President Emmanuel Macron last year.

These require all Turkish teachers in France to know the French language, to preserve social cohesion and fight against the segregation that feeds extremism.

However, while the changes in the French system were announced a year before, giving sufficient time for teachers to gain a decent knowledge of the language, the sudden requirement put forward unilaterally by Ankara has been harshly criticized, turning several prominent French scholars into illegal residents.

BACKGROUND

French teachers at the university are now required to have relatively high-

Level Turkish proficiency following an instruction by the Council of Higher Education.

Those who do not have a residence or work permit in Turkey cannot open a bank account or hold an electricity account for their apartments.

Guclu Akyurek, a law professor at MEF University in Istanbul, said that although countries can adopt measures affecting foreigners in line with the sovereignty principle, such restrictive procedures do not have a legal basis. "Galatasaray University is a university that was founded with an international agreement with France. Therefore, Turkey has to respect international deals according to the norm hierarchy. A regulation cannot change the status of such an established university," he told Arab News. Akyurek, who is himself a graduate of Galatasaray University, said that the European Court of Human Rights has urged all countries to protect the private lives of their residents. This applies to French teachers at Galatasaray University who have married Turks, he said.



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Global body criticizes Turkey over pressure against critical media
Biden starts off tough on Turkey, with rocky path ahead

Couple's suicide highlights rising Turkish poverty levels

Sun, 2021-02-14 00:11

ANKARA: The suicide of a young Istanbul couple who faced serious financial struggles caused by coronavirus restrictions has raised fears about growing poverty levels in Turkey.

The pair committed suicide on Feb. 9 after leaving their 1-year-old child with a neighbor. It is believed they were struggling with financial hardships as a result of anti-coronavirus policies that have caused growing disillusionment across the country.

The incident has become a symbol of the country's new economic reality and growing income inequality. The same day, Turkey controversially announced the launch of a new space program to land on the moon by 2023.

"Those who say there is no poverty and hunger – should we be upset for that little child, or those young people who died suddenly?" Canan Kaftancioglu, the Republican People's Party Istanbul chair, said.

A recent report by the Public Services Employees Union found that seven in 10 Turkish people hold significant personal debts, with poverty rates higher among women and one in two children facing a life of poverty.

A fifth of Turkey's 81 million people is believed to live below the poverty line.

The Gini coefficient, a commonly used measure of income inequality, among EU member states is 0.307. In Turkey, however, the figure stands at 0.417, according to Eurostat data that also showed that the country's wealthiest people earned more than eight times the average wage in 2019.

A recent study by Turkish academics found that the number of impoverished Turks could double this year, rising to 20 million people.

Another report by the World Bank revealed that the coronavirus pandemic could force 1.6 million more people below the poverty line.

FASTFACT

A report by the World Bank has revealed that the coronavirus pandemic could force 1.6 million new people under the poverty line in Turkey.

"In Turkey, the poor and the vulnerable (those above the poverty line, but with high levels of economic insecurity), representing the bottom 40 percent of the income distribution, account for six out of 10 jobs that vanished

during the crisis,” the report said.

Experts have warned that government efforts to alleviate economic hardship caused by the pandemic, such as unemployment insurance benefits, have not been proportional to the scale of growing poverty in the country, because the aid scheme included only registered employees, ignoring the millions of “informal” workers who make up one-third of the labor market.

“Although Turkey has never been a perfect democracy or used rule of law in the past, the recent deterioration of checks and balances in the country and the wrong economic policies have had immediate repercussions on economic dynamics and hit the most vulnerable households on an unprecedented scale,” Serkan Ozcan, an economist and founding member of the breakaway Future Party, told Arab News.

Ozcan said that a “significant share” of society lives below the poverty line, despite working normal jobs.

According to the latest income survey by the state-run statistics agency TUIK, one-third of the population cannot afford to buy meat regularly, while 37 percent of respondents said they could not afford to heat their homes.

“Every time there is acute poverty in the country, the government brings about similar plans, like landing on the moon or initiating infrastructure megaprojects, to distract people from their immediate needs. It is a recurrent pattern,” Ozcan said.

On top of the economic damage caused by the pandemic, a government ban on layoffs is expected to be lifted later this year, likely resulting in a sharp increase in unemployment.

Large crowds of restaurant owners and staff have staged protests around the country in recent weeks to raise awareness of their financial struggles.

A new survey from Bahcesehir University revealed that the pay of one-third of the country decreased in the pandemic, while half of the Turkish population expects a sharp decline in their income in the coming period.

The same survey showed that one-third of people face difficulty in buying food amid Turkey’s double-digit inflation rate.

Employment figures among young people in the country also show an alarming 40 percent jobless rate.



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[Egypt, Cyprus and Greece demand respect for maritime sovereignty](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-02-13 23:37

CAIRO: Egypt, Cyprus and Greece have demanded respect for the sovereignty and sovereign rights of states in their maritime areas in the eastern Mediterranean.

The demand came in a joint statement from the three countries' foreign ministers during their meeting in Athens, where they discussed cooperation to deepen their political and economic commitment, regional challenges and delivering a clear message that the region had the potential to be peaceful and stable.

They said this cooperation system was in the interest of promoting regional

prosperity, which laid the basis for a positive agenda, and they expressed their commitment to intensifying coordination and cooperation opportunities.

They welcomed the preparations for the establishment of a Tripartite Secretariat, based in Nicosia, Cyprus, that launches later this year, and for the founding charter of the EastMed Gas Forum that enters into force on March 1.

The charter establishes the forum as a regional organization based in Cairo. The forum is open to all countries that share the same values and goals and have the desire to cooperate for regional security and prosperity.

The joint statement reaffirmed the three countries' commitment to international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UN Charter, as well as the principles stipulated as foundations for peace and security, neighborly relations and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

They stressed the importance of respecting the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction of each state over its maritime areas in accordance with international law, while condemning any activities that violated international law.

The joint statement said that resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-state solution was an indispensable requirement for comprehensive peace and stability in the region, in addition to the importance of ensuring the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state on the lines of June 4, 1967 agreement, which has Palestinians living side-by-side with Israel.

It also said it was important to preserve the composition, character and status of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the renewed implementation of UN Security Council resolutions that provided for a complete and immediate cessation of all settlement activities, including those in East Jerusalem.

The ministers welcomed the agreement by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum to choose a unified transitional executive authority for Libya, considering it a major achievement in the political process and an important step toward ensuring the holding of fair and inclusive elections this December.

They said there was a need for the effective implementation of the cease-fire agreement, respect for the UN arms embargo and the complete withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from the country.

The ministers stressed the importance of the full implementation of the outputs of the Joint Military Committee (5+5), especially the exit of all foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libyan territory.

They affirmed their strong support for a wholly Libyan political solution to the crisis, considering any foreign intervention as unacceptable, and said all agreements concluded in violation of international law were null.

They called on the new Libyan government to consider the memoranda of

understanding signed by Turkey and Fayed Al-Sarraj in Nov. 2019 as null.

The joint statement reaffirmed the three countries' commitment to the unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and their support for a permanent political settlement of the Syrian crisis in full accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

They reaffirmed the urgent necessity for the withdrawal of all foreign and mercenary forces from the country.



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[Egyptian foreign minister on new US administration: No grounds for concern or optimism](#)

Author:
Sat, 2021-02-13 22:18

CAIRO: Egyptian-US relations have been close and strategic for four decades and display many aspects of cooperation, according to Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry.

"Egypt is in constant contact with the American administration through consulates and at the ministerial level," Shoukry said.

In televised statements, Shoukry said that the new US administration had not clarified its position on many regional issues.

"When they address their positions, we can evaluate them and work together to achieve common interests, and I do not see any room for any concern or any optimism," Shoukry said.

The foreign minister said that the relationship between Egypt and the US continued whether an administration was Democrat or Republican, and the two countries would always have different views on some issues.

This did not mean that there was complete divergence as there was always a point of agreement.

Shoukry confirmed that contacts at the level of the Egyptian Embassy in Washington or the US Embassy in Cairo were continuing and communication was made with officials, whether in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the National Security Council.

He said that there was constant discussion of the bilateral relationship and the development of mechanisms for the future, as there were talks about all regional issues that were in Egypt and the US's interest.

Shoukry said that Egypt never compromised on the rights of its people, and was working to prevent harm to Egyptians from the issue of the Renaissance Dam.

He said that Egypt was looking for a legal and binding agreement on filling and operating the Renaissance Dam that took into account the interests of the three countries concerned – Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia – on an equal basis.

"We seek to achieve reconciliation in generating electricity, as long as water conservation is taken into account. We are open and we do not have any problem, and we see that the Egyptian position bears development since the beginning of the negotiations, as long as there is consideration for common interests," he said.

Shoukry said that the Egyptian side had presented an objective and fair proposal, and had shown flexibility to reach a result at the beginning of the negotiations. Egypt had confirmed its determination and commitment to reach an agreement in this issue, he said.

Egypt adhered to and respected any document it signed. "Egypt has restored diplomatic relations with Qatar and canceled the flight ban," he said.

"We sought to hold bilateral committees with Qatar to discuss specific steps to activate the commitments made in the Al-Ula Summit and conference in Saudi Arabia."

Shoukry said that Egypt was in the process of setting a date for the meetings

of the bilateral committees to review all the commitments of both parties, as well as making an assessment of the extent to which there was a commitment to the pledges and their implementation.



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