

**The Democratic Peace Hypothesis and Greek Foreign Policy:
The 1974 Cyprus Dispute**

by

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Genesis

The “democratic peace” hypothesis encourages hope for a new age of international peace among nation-states that adopt democratic values and beliefs. It argues that democracies are more likely than non-democracies to resolve disputes among themselves in a peaceful manner. Its core assumption--that democracies do not fight wars with each other--constitutes the closest one can get to an “iron-clad law” in international relations. The policymaking world strongly adheres to this viewpoint, as demonstrated by U.S. Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama.

Contrary to the democratic peace hypothesis a dispute over the island of Cyprus led to a growing conflict between Greece and Turkey in 1974, despite the fact that both countries were democratizing and thus embodied democratic forms of government. The thesis is that, contrary to the literature devoted to the democratic peace hypothesis, countries in the process of democratizing (i.e., that in transition and therefore not consolidated democracies) may pursue conflictual relations with their neighbors as the result of weak institutions and domestic pressures (i.e. domestic politics) that ironically are the result of the democratization process.

In the case of Greece, the democratization process brought about a weak democratic regime unable to establish effective control and political order to populist demands. While this new regime was less repressive and permitted greater political freedom than its precursor (the military junta), it was also prone to political instability and was challenged by various ultra conservative and communist sociopolitical groups intent on seizing political power. This serious and precarious situation created the conditions for aggressive Greek foreign policy behavior during the Cypriot Crisis of 1974. Contrary to the democratic peace hypothesis, democratization actually contributed to severe conflict between two democracies (Greece and Turkey), leading both to the edge of war.

Democratic Peace Hypothesis and its Shortcomings

The democratic peace hypothesis--that democratic countries do not fight wars with each other and more likely than non-democracies to resolve disputes among themselves in a peaceful manner--has produced a great amount of research dealing with the issues of the democracy and war. One of the founding fathers of this intensive scholarly debate was Immanuel Kant. In his famous treatise, *Perpetual Peace*, Kant stated that "a republican form of government, exemplifying the rule of law, provides a feasible basis for states to overcome structural anarchy and secure peaceful relations among themselves." One of the main convictions of his book is that republics band together and create "pacific federations" (*foedus pacificum*). His foundation for his argument was an analysis of the Delian League alliance, created in the fifth century B.C. by Athens and other democratic city-states to deal with foreign military threats, most notably the menacing Persian Empire.

Karl Deutsch in his book *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area*, advance a similar notion, "pluralistic security communities," in which a study of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) clearly demonstrated that democracies tend to ally with each other to fight a common enemy. In the case of NATO alliance the Soviet Union was the threat. In short, the scholarly consensus is that democracies do not fight wars and are inclined to establish international institutions for the purpose of cooperation on common problems. NATO and the European Union (EU) are strong examples of how democratic nation-states work together.

Nonetheless, the democratic peace hypothesis has been critiqued on several grounds. The classic literature focuses on the extreme case of war and is largely correct in this regard (i.e., democracies do not go to war against each other). However, as one descends the "interventionist spectrum," the strength of the hypothesis becomes less evident. The historical record clearly indicates that the U.S. launched a large number of covert operations against democratically elected governments during the Cold War in order to protect its national interests, and in four cases--Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Greece (1967), and Chile (1973)--played a major role in their overthrow. The strength of the democratic peace hypothesis is also dependent on how one defines "democracy" during specific historical periods. For example, some argue that both Athens and Megara were democracies in 427 B.C., while others have argued that Megara was not a full-fledged democracy equal to Athens. The point that is critical to the democratic peace hypothesis is that Athens and Megara went to war in 427 B.C. As a result, there is a continuing debate about the proper definition of democracy, especially during earlier historical periods, with important ramifications for the democratic peace hypothesis.

A more significant critique, is that the democratic peace literature often sites, but fails to explore critical case studies in depth that are typically described as anomalies (e.g., the case of Greece and Turkey in the Cyprus dispute). In this regard, scholars have variously explained the Greek-Turkish "anomaly" by arguing that the conflict occurred due to deep historical and severe cultural differences. Bruce Russett contended that the Greek-Turkish dispute has its foundation in strong cultural differences emanating from the Byzantine and Ottoman historical periods. Keith Legg and John Roberts stated that Greek-Turkish

animosity is based on strong competing geostrategic views concerning the Aegean Sea. Both countries view the specific region as an integral part of their socio-economic and political survival. Finally, Samuel Huntington and Spencer Weart presented the argument that the Greek-Turkish conflict is based on deep religious differences between Orthodox-Christians and Muslims. Such arguments are ultimately unsatisfactory, however, in that if cultural, strategic, or religious reasons are the key to understanding this case, why not others, and what of the presumed applicability of the democratic peace hypothesis across culture and historical periods?

The most important failing of the democratic peace literature is that it has failed to adequately address the potentially destabilizing nature of democracies in transition. There are two critical points. First, evidence indicates while stable, well-consolidated democratic countries may not fight each other in a potential crisis, a process of democratization or transitions towards a democratic political system might create the sociopolitical conditions for a weak regime unable to establish effective control and maintain political order. Thus, a transition period could lead to the emergence of an unstable government prone to aggressive behavior in time of conflict. The case of the Romanian-Hungarian relationship in the 1990s vividly illustrates the historical phenomenon. Both countries faced a sociopolitical transition from communism to democracy. During that time, they exhibited weak democratic institutions unable to cope with potential crisis. Soon enough the issue of the social and political rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania appeared on the horizon. Unable to solve the specific problem in a peaceful manner, both countries engaged in a conflictual relationship that dragged on until NATO officials sought to resolve the dispute in 1997.

Second, transitional democratic regimes more often than not provide avenues for newly freed sociopolitical actors to push for aggressive policies in times of crisis. Historical evidence strongly illustrates that most of the time these new sociopolitical actors (e.g., media, interest groups), instead of pushing the government to act in a democratic manner, force the executive to pursue and adopt populist policies. These policies most often exhibit aggressive behavior in times of high-level crisis. Once again the contentious Romanian-Hungarian relationship in the 1990s demonstrates this phenomenon. In both countries media and interest groups pressed their governments to adopt aggressive postures in solving the Hungarian minority issue. Thus, the democratization process in actuality sometimes drives a nation-state to engage in war rather than seeking peaceful resolution of a crisis.

In short, it is evident that scholarship devoted to the democratic peace hypothesis has resulted in a plethora of evidence of how democracies do not fight each other. However, this scholarship has not adequately addressed the behavior of transitional democracies in time of crisis, and has completely failed to explore the so-called “anomaly” of Greek-Turkish conflict during Cyprus crisis 1974.

Resolving the Puzzle of Greek-Turkish Conflict over Cyprus

To address and explain the complex evolution of Greek foreign policy behavior during the Turkish invasion under the code name Attila operation in Cyprus in 1974 this research draws upon three bodies of theoretical literature. First and foremost is the “transitions” literature that focuses on the significance of domestic actors in establishing democratic political structures during transitions to democracy. This literature is very informative, because it focuses on how transitions from authoritarian regimes can lead to a wide array of political outcomes, including the emergence of weak democratic polities that are unable to establish effective control and political order. While these new regimes may be less repressive and permit greater political freedom than their predecessors, they are also more prone to political instability and attacks by opposition groups intent on seizing power. Armenia fits this profile. The Armenian post-communist regime has been weak due to its inability to institute an effective political system. In addition it has been challenged by opposition political groups with the intentions of seizing power. One can apply this theoretical view to the Cyprus crisis of 1974. During this period of political transition to democracy, a weak Greek regime was prone to political instability because of strong opposing political groups, most notable the extreme right-wing faction and the socialist and communist political parties.

Second, the theoretical literature of institutions (weak vs. strong) provides further understanding of Greece’s reaction to the Cyprus crisis. The importance of establishing effective institutions in a regime change (e.g., from an authoritarian regime to a democratic political system) has always been recognized as a vital element. Decisions related especially to the creation of executive institutions are significant in democracy building for a number of reasons. They are an obvious focal point of constitutional concern following authoritarian rule, stressing the need for control and accountability. At the same time, there is a link between the role of the executive, government performance, and ultimately the stability of the new regime (which obviously includes other institutional actors, such as the legislative). A transition process which might sustain weak institutions is often considered problematic because a weak executive is less likely to maintain effective control over domestic and foreign policies. Once more, Armenia in the post-cold war era is a vivid example. The Armenian executive is weak and therefore unable to cope with the massive sociopolitical problems in the internal and external political arenas.

Applying this second theoretical literature to the Greek case study clearly show that its democratically elected government had a weak executive prone to populist policies. This weakness appeared for two reasons. First, the Constantine Karamanlis administration faced political infighting among the conservative members of the cabinet regarding the democratization process and the Cyprus crisis. Second, the constitution of 1975 gave more powers to the parliament in relation to the executive. The constitution was designed to seriously reduce or eliminate the possibility of another military coup d’état. Thus, the document had a series of complex provisions specifically designed to prevent the arbitrary and illegal use of executive authority. In directing the transition to democracy, Karamanlis and his conservative political party *Nea Dimokratia*/New Democracy tried to adopt some populist policies concerning the Cyprus situation in order to pacify and placate opponents,

mainly Andreas Papandreou, the leader of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). The adoption of this approach indicated the weakness of the Karamanlis administration. Within a few months of becoming prime minister, Karamanlis adopted a strong stance regarding the Cyprus crisis. He openly declared, contrary to his earlier beliefs, that his government would defend the Greek national interest in the region. Also, the removal of Greece of the NATO's military branch was part of these populist policies. Eventually, NATO and the American government step in to avert a war between Greece and Turkey.

Finally, the theoretical literature devoted to domestic politics (emergence of new domestic actors) completes the picture of Greece's behavior during the Cyprus crisis. During a process of democratization, new domestic sociopolitical actors, such as political parties, the media, and various interest groups, emerge on the political scene and participate in the new political process, oftentimes promoting new ideologies approaches and contributing to severe political polarization. Extreme ideological polarization may be a doubled-edged sword with respect to consolidation. On one hand it may promote individual sociopolitical organizational development and identification and hence stabilization through feelings of solidarity. On the other, sociopolitical polarization can intensify and even radicalize within new democracies, and possibly cause systemic tension.

Historical evidence vividly indicates that, instead of pushing governments to act in democratic manner, these new actors typically pressure the executive to adopt populist policies. This kind of behavior can lead to the adoption of aggressive policies in time of crisis. The politico-historical example of Romania and Hungary clearly illustrates this specific historical phenomenon. In both countries the new era of sociopolitical freedom allowed the media and various interest groups to press their respective governments to adopt more aggressive foreign policy to "resolve" the Hungarian minority issue. As a result, the democratization process in Hungary and Romania led the countries to engage in a conflictual relationship--the exact opposite of what one would assume from the democratic peace hypothesis. When one applies this theoretical literature to the Greek case study, it becomes clear that newly emergent domestic actors, such as the Church, the socialist and communist parties, the media, and interest groups, pressed the government to adopt a conflictual policy towards Turkey.

In sum, the collapse of authoritarianism in Greece did not immediately establish a strong executive capable of defending democratic values and beliefs during times of crisis. The 1974 crisis over the island of Cyprus pressed the newly established democratic government of Karamanlis its political allies and opponents to take a stronger action against Turkey. Certain portions of the Greek sociopolitical elite believed that a military victory over the Turkish military could prove that Greece does not surrender her national interests. The Greek sociopolitical system perceived the resurgence of Turkish aggression as a serious menace for the survival of the Greek nation-state. Greece wanted to establish a Pax Hellenica in the Aegean sea and Cyprus and the Turkish government wanted to safeguard a Pax Turcana. Both policies were mutual exclusive.

In Greece, Prime Minister Karamanlis perceived by the Greek people as a national hero due to the restoration of democracy and his tough stand and approach regarding Cyprus.

He removed Greece from the military part of NATO and also start spending money for a new Greek defense policy. The focus was to establish coherent and strong Greek defense deterrence towards the Turkish military menace. Greece perceived that the main security threat for her survival was the Turkish armed forces. The Karamanlis administration reorganized the whole Hellenic military structure and bought new weapons for the Hellenic Army, Navy, and Air Force.

On the other side of the Aegean Sea, in Turkey Prime Minister Bulet Ecevit became a national hero immediately, and was compared with Kemal Attaturk, the creator of the modern Turkish Republic. In the Turkish Parliament he received standing ovations. To the ordinary Turkish citizen he had become an idolized leader. Moreover, the Turkish people expressed their gratitude to the Turkish armed forces. With the success of the Turkish invasion in Cyprus, the Turkish military had restored its prestige.

It is evident that the democratization process in Greece failed to promote a peaceful posture. Rather, it prompted Greece to execute an aggressive foreign policy and brought the Greek government to the brink of war over the island of Cyprus against Turkey, a NATO ally and a fellow democratic country.

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