A Rock and a Hard Place: Attempts at Resolving the Cypriot Problem

https://www.e-ir.info/2019/06/17/a-rock-and-a-hard-place-attempts-at-resolving-the-cypriot-problem/

JACK SMART, JUN 17 2019

Regarded as a protracted and intractable dispute, the Cyprus conflict has undergone several decades of conflict resolution efforts. This essay will analyse the factional conflict on the island, notably between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots, and their respective ethnic motherlands, with reference to Lund's "Curve of Conflict" (Lund cited in USIP, online). In order to understand the level of success of the resolution strategies employed, the conflict will be explored by analysing: the causes; how the conflict has been managed, including assessing the effectiveness of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission; and conflict resolution attempts, particularly negotiations between the belligerents. The conclusion will surmise that conditions on the island are suitable for a political resolution, thanks to the peaceful environment facilitated by the UN peacekeeping force. Yet, the proxy actors involved in the conflict, particularly the presence of Russia and Turkey, and internal political pressures, means that a political resolution has been particularly difficult to negotiate and remains highly unlikely to be successful in the foreseeable future.

Lund's "Curve of Conflict" has three principal phases: prevention, which occurs during peace and instability; crisis management, which arises during conflict and war; and peacebuilding, which aims to de-escalate tensions to peaceful levels. These can be further described by nuanced subcategories, ranging between: durable peace; stable peace; unstable peace; violent conflict; and war (Lund cited in Levinger, 2013, pp. 30-32).

The origins of the Cypriot conflict have been accredited to ethnic tensions, which were exacerbated during the period of British colonial rule, from 1878 to 1960 (Chan, 2016, online). Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots had differing hopes for the island during this period. Greek Cypriots were predominantly supportive of the whole island entering a union with Greece, yet Turkish Cypriots favoured a partition of the island, with rule divided between Greece and Turkey (ibid). This phase of the conflict can be categorised as "unstable peace" with "increasing tensions" during the "prevention" or "early" phase of the curve (Lund cited in Levinger, 2013, pp. 30-32). This period was characterised by sporadic violence during the 1950s, as members of the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) rebelled against British rule (Chan, 2016, online). In order to avert the nation from civil war, compromise was sought, and Cyprus became an independent nation in 1960, with a constitution that acknowledged the need for representation of both predominant ethnic groups (ibid).

This example of preventive diplomacy and negotiation, however, did not go far enough to pacify the belligerents and intercommunal violence became a feature of Cyprus during the 1960s and early '70s (Dağlı, 2017, online). It was during these years, in 1964, that the UN deployed a peacekeeping force that was to become the longest peacekeeping mission in its history, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) (ibid). After several years of failed, UN-mediated peace talks, Greece's military-led junta ousted the Cypriot government in 1974, installing a new puppet government (Chan, 2016, online). Following a Turkish intervention/invasion in the North, the country became divided demographically and physically, as well as psychologically (Dağlı, 2017, online). From this historical context, an understanding develops on the complexities of the conflict, which are further complicated by the proxy-element within the dispute, and why a resolution for the island has proven to be so difficult to come by. As Dağlı states:

"As George Christou highlights, the history of Cyprus 'has been characterised by tension and conflict due to the

diametrically opposed interests of Greece and the Greek-Cypriots on the one hand, and Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots on the other'. If we add the colonial heritage, proximity to the Suez Canal and interests of Great Britain, remnants of Cold War paranoia that the island was to become a Russian satellite or a 'Cuba in the Mediterranean', the British Sovereign Base Areas that hosts one of the biggest intelligence infrastructures in the region and the close links between the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches to the equation, the protracted conflict on the island starts looking multi-layered, multi-factored and multi-faceted." (ibid)

The complexity of the situation alone, however, is not the only obstacle. As Ramsbotham et al describes (2017, p. 173), environments which prove to be the most challenging for conflict resolution are areas of "heated conflict, where violence has become routine and the prevention of violent conflict has failed". This, in part, explains why a resolution has not been found in Cyprus, as violence had become routine during the 1960s and '70s, and the UN-led talks and the UNFICYP had failed to prevent the outbreak of war. As the hourglass model illustrates, peacekeeping is deemed appropriate during three phases of a conflict, in order to: contain violence and prevent it from spreading to war, as had been the original purpose of the UNFICYP's deployment in 1964; to limit the geographical spread, intensity and duration of the war once it has broken out, which the UNFICYP was successful in doing so during the Turkish intervention; and to consolidate a ceasefire and create a space for reconstruction (ibid, p. 16 and p. 173). The UNFICYP can be regarded as having limited success overall, by shortening the war phase and subsequently creating a peaceful space for reconstruction. However, it is the lack of a peace agreement and a political settlement, which particularly limits the success of the UNFICYP in bringing about a complete resolution to the conflict. This is demonstrated by the continuing presence of the peacekeeping force on the island and the island's extant partition.

Following the "war" phase, the peacebuilding phase commences (ibid, p. 236). The presence of peacekeepers has been able to deter would-be spoilers and prevent a reigniting of the conflict. The peacekeeping force has also been able to contribute to an easing of tensions, which has led to the opening of border crossing points between the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRoNC) and the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) (UNFICYP, online). However, the peacekeeping force alone has not been, and will remain not, enough in itself to bring about a political settlement. Yet, it has created an environment in which the two parties are in a position to seek such a settlement. However, this has been particularly difficult to come-by, due to the proxy elements of the conflict. This is despite the fact that the conflict is presently lying in a state of stable peace, that has been coined as "comfortable" and "normalised" (Dağlı, 2017, online). Additionally, this atmosphere that has been partly facilitated by the presence of peacekeepers, has been (despite the economic, social and political costs) labelled as a cause of the lack of impetus to find a political resolution (ibid).

To achieve the political settlement needed, negotiations have taken place over several decades. The last round of talks broke down in 2017, with the UN Secretary General Guterres citing "a certain number of questions" as the reason for failure (Guterres cited in Saeed, 2017, online). Ultimately, in order for negotiations to be successful, parties must be willing and committed to a peaceful political process and manage those who would seek to undermine such a resolution (Ramsbotham et al, 2017, p. 220). Whilst talks to resolve the Cyprus problem in 2017 aroused hope, they collapsed without resolution, even though both the TRoNC and the RoC had leaders who appeared sincerely willing to negotiate to reunite the island (Stefanini, 2017, online). Whilst the RoC leader, President Nicos Anastasiades, was judged to be genuinely prepared to negotiate an agreement, critics argue that he was susceptible to spoilers and sceptics amongst the electorate and within the RoC's political establishment (Stefanini, 2018, online). Stedman (1997) argues that sceptics should be managed with inducements and incentives, and spoilers should be marginalised, rendered illegitimate or undermined (cited in Ramsbotham et al, 2017, p. 222). A more positive take-away from the 2018 presidential election, is that a further requirement for successful negotiations is that parties should be willing to return after setbacks and failures (Ramsbotham et al, 2017, p. 220). To that end, the fact the RoC's two most popular parties in the elections are pro-reunification shows there is popular support for a negotiated agreement amongst the citizens of the RoC (Stefanini, 2018, online). Ultimately, it was the failure of the parties to manage spoilers, both internal and external, that proved to be too burdensome (Rahman, 2017, online).

The major external spoilers come in the form of Russia and Turkey, who have an interest in the status quo remaining. Therefore, they both have cause to see negotiations ending unsuccessfully. The presence of Turkish forces in the TRoNC has been enough to prevent the internationally recognised RoC from de facto rule. This, as well as Turkey's

overall influence in the North, has given Turkey leverage in its bid to join the European Union (EU). The greatest barrier to formal EU-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) co-operation derives from the state level. The protocol governing matters of security and foreign policy within the EU, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), requires consensus; as does the decision-making process at NATO (Yost, 2007, pp. 82-83). The "Berlin Plus Agreement" (2002) set the framework for formal NATO-EU co-operation, allowing members of the EU that were not members of NATO to work in partnership with the Alliance, under the auspices of the EU, provided that they were instead a member of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme (ibid, pp. 75-76). However, of the 28 members of the EU, one remains both outside of NATO and outside the PfP programme.

Since 2004, and the integration of the RoC into the EU, an issue that has been dubbed the "participation problem" has arisen. Given the historic feuding of Turkey (a NATO member) and the RoC (an EU member), formal discussions that would allow for greater collaborative work has been vetoed by the respective parties (BBC, 2018, online). Efforts of Cypriot-NATO interactions have been obstructed by Turkey. Any attempts by Cyprus to join NATO or the PfP programme, due to Turkish veto powers, are realistically futile. By using the Cyprus dispute and the "participation problem" to restrict the power of the EU, Turkey is attempting to incentivise the EU to allow it to join. Furthermore, Turkey's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has consolidated his personal position, as a strong-man autocrat, on the back of nationalists and hard-liners within Turkey. Ceding the TRoNC to a reunified Cyprus would be unpalatable to those in power in Turkey, regardless of the economic benefits this would bring to Turkey (ibid). Turkey's announcement to construct a naval facility in the TRoNC signals its intentions that Ankara would not agree to any solution that would not permit a Turkish presence in Cyprus (CRS, 2018, p. 2). This unbendable position would serve as another potential stumbling block for reunification, that serves Turkish interests over those of the islands.

Turkey, however, is not the only state whose self-interests are not served by successful negotiations that could lead to reunification. The increasing Russian influence in Cyprus and Turkey further complicates matters of NATO and EU integration (Stefanini, 2017, online). Such limits on formal co-operation has resulted in the "scope problem", which has inhibited the goal of an effective "strategic partnership" between the two transnational organisations (Yost, 2007, p. 94). Therefore, Russia has little to gain if successful negotiations resulted in a final resolution to the conflict, which subsequently would see two of its greatest transnational organisational rivals become more effective collaborators (Stefanini, 2017, online). Russia is able to use soft power tools, such as ties to the Orthodox Church, and political, economic and cultural ties between Russia and Greek Cypriots run long and deep. Russia's number one nation for direct international investment was the RoC in 2014 and the RoC is the largest source of foreign investment back into Russia. Russia's €2.5 billion loan in 2011 to the RoC, during the global financial crash, deepened the countries' ties, with a military co-operation agreement following in 2015 (ibid). Russia has proven to be an obstacle in previous negotiations, too. During Cyprus' only other opportunity at reunification, Moscow vetoed a resolution in the UN Security Council (UNSC) on changes that would have taken effect if the Greek Cypriots had not rejected the premise of reunification during the 2004 referendum. This, Russia's first veto since 1994, along with Russia's ambassador to the RoC attending meetings of hard-line, anti-reunification parties in the RoC, have led to suspicion that Russia is purposefully keeping Cyprus partitioned for broader geopolitical gains (ibid).

Added to this is the growing complexity of increasing Russian leverage and co-operation with NATO-member Turkey. As the two nation's strategic interests align, their political, economic and militaristic co-operation broadens and deepens (Daily Sabah, 2018, online). Given the fact that Russian tourist numbers to Turkey have increased from 197,000 in 2010 to 5.5 million in 2018, and that trade has increased by 40 per-cent year-on-year since the diplomatic spat between the two in 2015, Russia now has the economic influence needed to dissuade Ankara from its current Cypriot policy – especially given Turkey's weak economic performance, post the failed coup (ibid).

Although integrative solutions in ethnic conflicts are notoriously elusive to come-by, they are possible. Power-sharing agreements, similar to the one mandated by Cyprus' previous constitution, federalism and autonomy are all options in which this can be achieved (Ramsbotham et al, 2017). Given that Cyprus is presently in a more peaceful phase on the "Curve of Conflict" than it was during the 1960s, the previous era that Cyprus has a power-sharing agreement, this solution has a greater chance of success. As Ramsbotham et al states:

"successful negotiations are thought to have the following characteristics…they should include affected parties…they

need to well-crafted and precise…offer a balance between clear commitments and flexibility…they should offer incentives for both parties to sustain the process…they should provide for dispute settlement, mediation and, if necessary, renegotiation in case of disagreement…and they should deal with the core issues in the conflict" (ibid, p. 224).

Such a power-sharing deal would: include both parties and would not be unilaterally imposed; would benefit from the assistance of the international community, to ensure details such as specifics on transitional elements and voting rules were clearly defined; and by the very nature of a power-sharing agreement, would incentivise the parties, as they were both power-holding stakeholders in the agreement. Yet despite a readiness to negotiate, "the talks again fell victim to the harsh realities of five decades of separation and both sides' inability to make the necessary concessions to reach a final settlement" (CRS, 2018, p. 2). Such an incapacity to punctuate early rounds of negotiations with sensible early concessions, suggests that the moderate governing parties on each side remain too obligated to pander to their more uncompromising internal factions (Ramsbotham et al, 2017, p. 223).

In conclusion, the presence of the UNFICYP has resulted in a stable peace in Cyprus. It has created an environment were political, social and economic reconstruction can take place. Yet this can only go so far, and it can not bring about a political settlement in itself. The inability of the RoC and the TRoNC to reach a political agreement, points to a failure to manage internal pressures and a lack of ability to manage external pressures. Whilst there is a willingness on both sides, highlighted by the optimism that existed before the last round of negotiations, the recent failure has pushed back any possible renewed talks to late 2019, if at all (CRS, 2018, p. 2). The external influence that is yielded, by both Ankara and Moscow, has proven to be the greatest stumbling block. Despite positive talks in 2016-17, Turkey's unwillingness "to accept the replacement of Turkish security guarantees with guarantees from the EU or an interim international security force, despite the fact that some Turkish troops might have remained under a compromise", knowing that this would be unacceptable for Anastasiades, displays that external actors' interests are paramount in the negotiations, even to the detriment of Cyprus (CRS, 2018, p. 37). Additionally, as Russia's interests are best served by the status quo, and a continuing headache on the "participation problem" for NATO and the EU, it is likely attempting to spoil any negotiations between the TRoNC and the RoC. Now Russia has the ear of those in power on both sides, it is likely able to do so effectively, for some time. Furthermore, the apparent shift of Anastasiades' position on what constituted a bi-zonal and bi-communal federation, indicates a lack of ability to manage internal, fringe opinion. Critics in the RoC blamed the president for walking away from a potential deal in the final stretch of the negotiations, out of concern that he would lose conservative voters in 2018's election. In order to reach an absolute resolution to the Cyprus dispute, each party needs to free itself of outside interests and marginalise the internal dissenters. Given the fact that the TRoNC is de facto a Turkish puppet state, this is highly unlikely.

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Date written: January 2019