

Crisis Is Worst Since Independence

War-Torn Island Facing Disaster

By Murrey Marder
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United States officials described the turbulent situation on Cyprus yesterday as highly precarious, with the island near the brink of disaster.

Top American diplomats who are trying to keep the Cypriots, the Greeks and the Turks from plunging the Eastern Mediterranean into war, however, are still hopeful that they can succeed.

If the United Nations can obtain a cease-fire on Cyprus, and make it work, American officials said, negotiations for peace on Cyprus can be salvaged. They said the island is now experiencing the worst crisis since it obtained independence from Britain in 1960.

Shooting Subsides

It will not be enough, however, American officials said, just to halt the fighting. The shooting reportedly subsided at nightfall, with the Greek Cypriots apparently in possession of their objective in a Turkish Cypriot area.

What will be necessary, officials here said, will be to restore the situation to what it was before the Greek Cypriots launched their offensive. That is certain to be an extremely difficult task.

President Johnson said the renewed fighting is a cause of "grave concern." He said at his news conference in Texas that the United States is "in

very close touch with the situation" and strongly supports U.N. peacekeeping efforts.

Officials said that the Greek and Turkish Cypriots are now so filled with hatred toward each other that Cyprus could erupt in wholesale massacres at any time.

While there have been some provocations by both the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, officials here said, the United States holds the Greek Cypriots primarily responsible for the new danger.

The United States tried to dissuade Turkey from using any force, such as the jet strafing attacks on Greek Cypriot columns that Turkey mounted yesterday, it was said.

But Turkey, which complied with similar U.S. persuasion in recent months, told the United States it felt compelled to apply a measure of force yesterday.

Turkey has described its air attack to the United States as a one-strike decision. United States officials said they do not expect any Turkish invasion of Cyprus under present circumstances.

Ironically enough, United States officials who were preoccupied at the beginning of last week with an air strike against North Vietnamese bases in the Gulf of Tonkin, ended the week trying to halt

a Turkish strike against Cyprus.

Moreover, the Turkish planes were American-made F-100 Supersabre jets.

The United States looks to Greek Premier George Papandreou to take a responsible position in calming the new Cyprus crisis, officials here said. Papandreou yesterday publicly called on Archbishop Makarios, President of Cyprus, to do his utmost to maintain peace on the island. As the United States sees it, Archbishop Makarios has reneged on his past peace pledges.

What has now occurred on the island is what American officials feared most in recent weeks of delicate diplomatic maneuvering to get Cyprus-settlement negotiations going in Geneva.

That is an offensive to undermine these negotiations launched by the Greek Cypriots, who outnumber the Turkish Cypriots four-to-one.

That is exactly what has happened now, United States officials maintain.

A planned buildup of Greek Cypriot forces to take over the strategic northeast coastal area of Monsoura has been under way for several days, it was said.

Capture Reported

The Greek Cypriots claim that Turkish Cypriots captured three Greek Cypriots in the Turkish quarter of Nicosia, according to the information given to the United

States on the reasons for the new attacks on Turkish Cypriot villages.

But the Greek Cypriot retaliation was far out of proportion to the provocation, in the judgment of officials here. Instead, they regard the incident as a match used to ignite a planned offensive.

The United Nations has only about 6000 men on the island, and their freedom of movement has been limited by the Cypriot government. In recent months, it is estimated here, the Greek Cypriots have brought in 4000 to 6000 well-trained men from Greece, some of them Greek Army regulars. Turkey reportedly has sent in less than 1000 men.

Grivas Returns

Gen. George Grivas, who led the guerrilla uprising against the British, has returned to Cyprus. He reportedly has about 30,000 to 35,000 men under arms, about 10,000 of them described as well-trained.

In any direct conflict over Cyprus between Greece and Turkey, both members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Turkey holds the advantage. It is only 15 minutes by air from Cyprus, and has a much greater population and army than Greece.

Both nations are equipped with United States weapons. The United States strength in the area is its powerful Sixth Fleet. But what the United States dreads is being caught in a conflict between two Allies.