



ISRAEL'S ENTRY INTO CYPRUS, 1959-1963: DIPLOMACY AND STRATEGY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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Israel's establishment of relations with Cyprus in 1960 marked the successful culmination of the diplomatic campaign that it had commenced in early 1959. The entry into Cyprus deepened Israel's strategic cooperation with Turkey, ameliorated the regional isolation from which the Jewish state had begun to emerge, and enhanced its image as a dynamic state that could assist other countries emerging from colonialism.

Cyprus gained its independence on August 16, 1960 and agreed to exchange ambassadors with Israel. That assent notwithstanding, Cyprus deferred until January 1961 the opening of an Israeli embassy, acquiescing to it only after Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots supported a sustained Israeli campaign to gain diplomatic entry. Moreover, Cyprus did not send an envoy to Israel and only in 1994 did they open an embassy in Tel Aviv. Why did Israel nevertheless consider the establishment of ties with Cyprus, a country with a population of less than 600,000, and poor in natural resources, an important foreign policy objective?

From 1948 to 1956, Israel devoted most of its attention in foreign policy to relations with the powers that could provide it with arms, economic aid, and immigrants. At the beginning of 1957, Israel maintained only seven embassies, four of which were in Europe (Britain, France, Italy, and the Soviet Union), two in North America (the United States and Canada) and one (Argentina) in Latin America. But by 1960, Israel had sent ambassadors to Ghana and Liberia, established ties with Ethiopia and Guinea, and forged a relationship with Turkey and Iran marked by a quiet but growing strategic consensus. The Israeli

Foreign Ministry created a separate division to deal with fourteen African countries that in 1960 and 1961 became independent and entered into diplomatic relations with the Jewish state.

Israel wanted to establish ties with Cyprus, too, in order to further ameliorate the isolation that had marked the first decade of its existence, but also anticipated the establishment of friendly ties with a new state that "shared its border."⁽¹⁾ Thus, attendant upon Israel's desire for representation in Nicosia were additional foreign policy aims that made relations with Cyprus a goal more ambitious than merely the opening of another embassy abroad. This article analyzes the cluster of objectives that Israel pursued in its diplomacy with Cyprus, the role of Israeli-Turkish relations in achieving them, and the measure of success of those policies.

Israel's foreign policy with regards to Cyprus has been almost completely unexplored in the secondary literature.⁽²⁾ Among primary sources, British documents in the Public Record Office at Kew reveal little regarding Israel's role in Cyprus, while files at the Ben Gurion Archive and the Israel Defense Force Archive contain little more than cursory references to the subject. Thus, this article makes extensive use of recently

released documents at the Israel State Archive and highlights the role of the Israeli Foreign Ministry in the formulation of policy toward Cyprus.

OBJECTIVES AND OBSTACLES IN CYPRUS

Six elements in Israel's foreign policy made salient the establishment of diplomatic ties with Cyprus. These are recounted here briefly and dealt with at greater length below. First, Israel was determined to thwart the attempts of the United Arab Republic (UAR; the union of Egypt and Syria that the former dominated) to pressure the new republic to deny Israel a presence there and thus hinder its efforts to break out of its regional isolation. Second, Israel also sought to ameliorate the isolation that marked its international diplomatic standing. In April 1955, Israel was excluded from the Bandung Conference of non-aligned countries, which adopted an anti-Israeli motion. Exclusion from Bandung distressed the Israelis, who thereafter placed even greater emphasis upon every demonstration of friendship shown them and heightened the importance of establishing relations with emerging states. Third, as an independent state, Cyprus could vote in the United Nations, and Israel's desire to avoid ostracism made diplomatic ties with it important for that reason too. Closer trade ties was a fourth incentive to pursue relations.

A fifth goal was Israel's attempt to exploit ties with Cyprus to improve its chilly relations with Greece. Since 1954, the debates in the United Nations on the future of Cyprus had Greece seeking the support of the Arab states.⁽³⁾ Israel had refrained from supporting either Enosis (the union of Cyprus with Greece) or partition of the country between its Greek and Turkish communities, but had lobbied in the United Nations in favor of Turkey's position regarding a compromise on Cyprus.⁽⁴⁾ Thus, were an improvement in relations with Athens not

possible, Israel wished at least to ensure that Greece not dictate the character of its future ties with Cyprus.

Sixth, Israel aspired to closer relations with Turkey, which, since the establishment of Israel, had declined to exchange envoys at the ambassadorial level. Ankara's refusal to do so notwithstanding, the 1958 coup in Iraq and the rise of the UAR created greater common ground. This was the basis for Israel's initiative of an "alliance of the periphery," the purpose of which was to forge ties in regions beyond the Arab confrontation states. Israel cultivated relations with Turkey and Iran, both Muslim but non-Arab states, and predominantly Christian Ethiopia, which controlled the approaches to the Red Sea.⁽⁵⁾ On August 2, 1958, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir met in Zurich with Fatim Zorlu, her Turkish counterpart and on August 29, 1958, David Ben Gurion, Israel's prime minister, met secretly in Ankara with Adnan Menderes, prime minister of Turkey. Israel and Turkey also shared intelligence discreetly with a view to containing the influence of Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser.⁽⁶⁾

Israel included neither Greece nor Cyprus in the alliance of the periphery but nevertheless viewed favorably the emergence of a friendly regime in a Cypriot state that was both geographically proximate (220 miles to its west) and non-Arab.⁽⁷⁾ At the same time, Israel sought to enhance its status in the eyes of the Western powers by presenting itself as a regional power able to exert a pro-Western influence on its newly independent "neighbor." It was also natural that Israel consider ties with the Turks of Cyprus a means to further enhance its relationship with Ankara. Moreover, the support that the Arab states lent the Greek Cypriots both before and after that country's independence deepened Turkey's sense of regional isolation and heightened its perception that there existed the potential for

cooperation with Israel over Cyprus as well.(8)

Yet, four main obstacles obstructed Israel's diplomacy in Nicosia: the disposition toward Israel of the government of Greece, the circumstances of the Greek diaspora in Egypt, the identification with Athens of the Greek community of Cyprus, and the attitude of that community's leader, Archbishop Michael Mouskos Makarios. Thus, at first, the Greek government had accorded Israel only *de facto* recognition, applauded Egypt's 1956 "victory" over Britain, and developed close ties with the Arab states, while allowing Israel no more than the lowest level of diplomatic representation in Athens. Second, both Greece and the Greek Cypriots evinced great concern for the Greek communities of Egypt. In 1960, the Greek diaspora in Egypt, centered mainly in Alexandria, numbered approximately 70,000 people, of whom some 17,000 were Greek Cypriots. This diaspora community exerted pressure upon both the government in Athens and Greek leaders in Cyprus, claiming that both an enhancement of Greece's relations with Israel and the inauguration of Cypriot-Israeli ties would bring upon them the wrath of the Egyptian authorities.

A third encumbrance lay in the area of commercial ties. The Greek community of Cyprus constituted 80% of the population of the island and controlled, proportionally, an even greater share of its commerce. The Greek Cypriots traded with the Arab states, and many of them viewed askance Israel's efforts to create closer economic relations with Cyprus. A fourth obstacle was in the person of Archbishop Michael Mouskos Makarios, leader of the Greek community of Cyprus, who was generally pro-Arab and had friendly relations with Nasser.(9) On March 1, 1959, Makarios had returned from exile in the Seychelles and shortly thereafter became the most powerful influence on the foreign relations of pre-independence Cyprus. On December 13,

1959, he won two thirds of the Greek Cypriot vote, thereby becoming President-elect of Cyprus.(10) The Israelis considered Makarios a threat to their endeavors in Cyprus, viewed overcoming his resistance to their presence a principal diplomatic challenge, and sought the help of both the government of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots in pursuing that goal.

These objectives and obstacles provide the setting for the three periods that this work explores. The first phase commenced when Greece and Turkey signed the February 1959 Zurich and London agreements that lay down the terms for the end of British rule and the political future of Cyprus.(11) The Israelis assumed that when Cyprus achieved statehood, it would grant them permission to open an embassy and prepared the groundwork for that occasion. Yet, when in August 1960, Cyprus became independent, it left in abeyance Israel's diplomatic status. This setback forced the Israeli Foreign Ministry to concentrate upon forestalling exclusion from that country, and during this second phase, Israel conducted a lobbying campaign in which Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots played a central role. That campaign culminated in January 1961, when the government of Cyprus allowed Israel to open its embassy in Nicosia. The third part of this work evaluates the manner in which Israel then exploited its opportunity.

FEBRUARY 1959 TO JANUARY 1961: BALANCING ACT

Israel welcomed the signing of the February 1959 agreements on Cyprus as an opportunity to normalize its relations with Greece, hoping that "the road to Athens will pass through Nicosia."(12) The Israelis considered the Cyprus accords a turning point that would remove the restraint hitherto preventing Greece from extending *de jure* recognition to the Jewish state.(13) Greece's campaign over Cyprus and

coordination with the Arab states at the United Nations had also served Athens as a pretext for keeping Israel at a distance. In March 1959, Evangelos Averoff, Greece's foreign minister, told the Israelis that resolution of the Cyprus issue would bring but little change to their relationship. He reminded them that the precarious position of the Greek community in Egypt remained a serious obstacle to closer ties⁽¹⁴⁾ and in fact, during the months that followed, Greek-Israeli relations did not grow warmer.⁽¹⁵⁾ Therefore, Israel understood that the pursuit of its goals in Cyprus dictated forging a relationship with Nicosia independent of the influence of Greece.⁽¹⁶⁾ This policy required Israel to exploit both its relations with Turkey and the communal divide in Cyprus.

In March 1959, Dr. Fazil Kutchuk, leader of the Turkish Cypriots, told Peretz Leshem, Israel's consul in Nicosia, that the Turks of Cyprus sought warm relations and close economic ties with Israel.⁽¹⁷⁾ Israel did not reject Kutchuk's overture but still wished to maintain a careful balance in its relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Thus, Leshem also met that month for the first time with Archbishop Makarios, describing to the prelate Israel's aid projects in Burma and Ghana. Makarios expressed interest and assured Leshem that he intended Cyprus to establish full relations with Israel.⁽¹⁸⁾ In May 1959, the Foreign Ministry drew up detailed plans for hosting Cypriot ministers, religious figures, and trainees in Israel, emphasizing the exigency of inviting representatives of both communities.⁽¹⁹⁾ At the same time, Leshem carefully cultivated both prominent Greek and Turkish Cypriots expected to play leading roles when their country became independent.⁽²⁰⁾

At the beginning of July 1959, senior officials of the Foreign Ministry met to formulate Israel's policy toward Cyprus during the "lead-up" to statehood and to provide Ze'ev Levin, who was to serve as

consul in Nicosia during that period, with operational guidelines. Moshe Sasson, head of the Middle East Division of the Foreign Ministry, acknowledged that the Turkish Cypriots were Israel's "natural allies" but cautioned against drawing Cyprus into the Arab-Israeli dispute. Any attempt to do so, said Sasson, would damage Israel's standing there. Zvi Locker, head of the British Commonwealth Division, also warned against open identification with either the Greek or Turkish Cypriots, because, he feared, Israel would later pay a political price for such partisanship. The Foreign Ministry decided to urge both Cypriot communities to reject outside interference in their affairs, planning to use the months preceding independence to expand trade ties and to begin providing technical assistance.⁽²¹⁾

Yet, relations with the Greek Cypriots in general and those with Makarios in particular became cause for growing Israeli concern. For example, in March 1959, Greek Cypriot leaders requested that Israel guide them in their negotiations with Britain. The Greek Cypriots wished to draw upon Israel's experience with the 1948 termination of Britain's mandate in Palestine and asked for detailed information regarding the financial arrangements of that period. The approach appeared to afford Israel with an opportunity to help Cyprus but in truth, this was an uncomfortable proposition. First, assent to the Cypriot request might bring Britain to conclude that Israel sought to interfere with the process of transferring power on the island.⁽²²⁾ Second, the Greek Cypriots were negotiating the terms of Britain's continued presence at its bases on Cyprus. Archbishop Makarios was intent upon minimalizing any vestiges of "colonialism" in his country and determined to gain from Britain the maximum possible financial advantage. Third, in the view of the Foreign Ministry, the circumstances of Palestine in 1948 were in any case too dissimilar to

those of Cyprus in 1959 to make such cooperation at all useful.(23)

Therefore, the Israelis were reluctant to accommodate the request.(24) They did not wish to become identified with either a militant Greek Cypriot stance or negotiations the purpose of which was simply to extract the highest possible price from the British. Moreover, the contingency of an overtly political service to the Greeks of Cyprus (but not the Turks) dictated caution. As a result of that logic, the Israelis did not regard evasion of the Greek Cypriot approach as cause for disquiet regarding their position in Cyprus. However, in July 1959, for the first time Makarios openly evinced an attitude inimical to Israel, telling the *Washington Star* that Cyprus would seek UAR approval before establishing diplomatic ties with Israel.(25)

On July 12, 1959, Levin (who had four days earlier replaced Leshem in Nicosia) met with Makarios, who denied that there was any substance to the article in the *Star* and rejected the idea that Nasser would be dictating Cypriot foreign policy.(26) Nevertheless, during the second half of 1959, increasingly heavy pressure from the UAR, principally on the economic level, made the Greek Cypriots increasingly wary of ties with Israel.(27) The Egyptians threatened that were Cyprus to allow Israel to open an embassy, all markets in the Arab states would be closed to Cypriot trade.(28) On the other hand, Israel was important as a source of tourism, and in 1959, some 3,000 Israelis visited Cyprus.(29) Levin remarked acerbically that Cairo's claim to have sent thousands of tourists to Cyprus was absurd; the real number was about 100.(30)

In mid-1959, the expectation that Cyprus would in January 1960 become independent brought Egypt to intensify its pressure upon the Greek Cypriots to refrain from establishing relations with Israel. The Israelis fought the Egyptian campaign against their presence in Cyprus by attempting to stimulate greater

Cypriot interest in the prospect of technical assistance programs and seeking out those Greek Cypriot businessmen who recognized the potential in trade with Israel.(31) But Makarios displayed little enthusiasm, and before the independence of Cyprus Israel's ability to prove its value as a source of training and purveyor of aid projects was highly circumscribed. Thus, for example, in August 1959, the Foreign Ministry prepared to host Turkish Cypriot youth groups, but at the same time, Makarios withheld the authorization to visit Israel that two of the seven Greek members of Cyprus' Transitional Government had requested (the ministers of Labor and Agriculture).(32) Three days before election to the office of president, Makarios told the newspaper *Ethnos* that he was determined to make Cyprus a "true paradise" in the Middle East and in a rare friendly reference to Israel, expressed admiration of the kibbutz, the agricultural success of which he said he considered a model for his country.(33) But this hardly mitigated Israel's growing wariness of Makarios and its apprehension concerning the diplomatic consequences of relations with a government that he would dominate.

On January 18, 1960, the leaders of both Cypriot communities met in London with the foreign ministers of Britain, Greece, and Turkey, and decided to postpone independence for one month. In fact, Anglo-Cypriot talks broke the impasse in negotiations only in July, when final arrangements were made to declare Cyprus independent on August 16, 1960.(34) For the Israelis this meant more time for diplomacy, the purpose of which was to thwart a bid by Makarios to deny them a presence in Nicosia.(35) By early 1960, the Foreign Ministry considered that to be an increasingly possible contingency and pursued three avenues toward avoiding exclusion.

First, Israel attempted to convince the United States and Britain that its diplomatic presence in Cyprus was both a

matter of principle and of strategic benefit to the West. The Israelis pointed to what they claimed was their part in combating communist influence in Africa and suggested that an embassy in Nicosia would be of similar utility to the Western powers.(36) The Department of State and the Foreign Office accepted the Israeli plea for diplomatic "fair play" and agreed to exert pressure upon Makarios not to favor the UAR and discriminate against Israel.(37) Moreover, the Americans and British acknowledged Israel's concern that Nasser would attempt to induce Cyprus to adopt a "neutralist" stance in foreign policy.(38) However, both London and Washington responded coolly to the idea of cooperating with Israel in containing communism in Cyprus.(39)

Second, Israel cultivated leading figures in the Greek community in the United States who had influence in either Athens or Nicosia. According to the Foreign Ministry, a warm relationship with Greek Americans could balance the influence that the Greeks in Egypt wielded in both Greece and Cyprus.(40) Among the Foreign Ministry's contacts were the Greek archbishop of New York, the Greek-American millionaire Spiros Skoras, who had warm relations with Makarios and business ties in Cyprus, and Dean Alfange, the chairman of the American Hellenic Congress.(41) While little resulted from contact with the archbishop, Alfange (who also promoted closer Greek-Jewish relations in the United States) lobbied leaders in Athens on behalf of Israel but to no avail.(42) Israel also conveyed through these Greek-American "back channels" to Makarios notice that the Jewish community in the United States would protest loudly in Washington were the government of Cyprus to discriminate against Israel.(43) Yet, the overall benefit to Israel of these various contacts with Greek Americans was of a highly limited nature compared to the support that Israel

found in both Ankara and the Turkish community of Cyprus.

Thus, the third avenue that Israel pursued in order to avoid exclusion from Cyprus was increased contact with the Turkish leadership on the island and closer coordination with the government of Turkey with a view to exploiting mutual mistrust of UAR intentions.(44) Ankara's role in determining Cypriot policy was Israel's "first line of defense,"(45) but the relationship with the Turkish Cypriots was of rapidly increasing importance. By the beginning of 1960, the Israelis had concluded that relations with Athens would help them in Cyprus not at all, while at the same time, a completely neutral approach to the communal divide in Cyprus was unrealistic. Fortunately for Israel, the Cypriot constitution gave both the President (a Greek) and the Vice-President (a Turk) the power of veto in the areas of defense, internal security, and foreign affairs.(46) For the most part, Makarios ignored Kutchuk instead of consulting him regarding important diplomatic appointments or the general conduct of foreign policy.(47) Nevertheless, Makarios could not decide that Cyprus would have diplomatic relations with the UAR and other Arab states while denying Israel the same status unless the Turks of Cyprus so consented.

In mid-December 1959, Moshe Sasson secured Turkish Foreign Minister Fatin Zorlu's promise that Ankara would work to help prevent Israel's exclusion from Cyprus.(48) This was a turning point for Israel's diplomacy in pre-independence Cyprus, and in early January 1960, Levin met with Turkey's consul in Nicosia to coordinate policies.(49) Zorlu also urged both Kutchuk and the Turkish Cypriot leader's protégé, Rauf Denktash, to work closely with the Israelis. In mid-January 1960, Kutchuk informed Levin that he had told the archbishop that Cyprus must maintain a strictly even-handed approach to all

countries of the region. Makarios had agreed, Kutchuk reported but then continued, "You know how he changes his mind from day to day."(50)

Turkey did not change its policy toward Israel after the May 1960 coup in Ankara that ousted Menderes and Zorlu.(51) Both the government of Turkey and the Turkish leadership in Cyprus continued to cooperate with Israel, and during the first few months of 1960, the Israeli Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry examined the possibility of offering the Turkish Cypriots paramilitary training as a way of strengthening relations with them. The Foreign Ministry assumed that the Turkish Cypriots would be receptive to Israeli overtures on this issue, but the Ministry of Defense concluded that the limited size of the armed forces that Cyprus would maintain offered little opportunity for either arms sales or military training. Israel based its decision to refrain from such a connection on the great care that it took to make no such move without the approval of Ankara,(52) but both awareness of the fragile nature of the Cypriot polity and plain expedience also played a part. Both communities in Cyprus were storing arms in preparation for a future confrontation, and in late 1959, a former member of the Greek Cypriot underground approached Israel with a request for light arms. The Israelis replied evasively, knowing full well that supplying arms to one side would incur the hostility of the other, thus placing in jeopardy Israel's future relations with Cyprus.(53)

The decision not to cultivate a defense connection did not mitigate Israel's desire to foster a discreet, but special relationship with the Turkish Cypriots and to pursue the help of Ankara, both of which Israel considered vital sources of support in Cyprus. Turkey's new foreign minister, Selim Sarper, was determined that the Israelis gain diplomatic entry into Cyprus, and in early August 1960, he provided a clear demonstration of his

appreciation of Ankara's ties with Israel. Sarper alerted Jerusalem to a scheme that Makarios had devised to undermine Israeli efforts in Cyprus. The archbishop had attempted to convince the mufti of Cyprus to prevail upon Kutchuk to withdraw his support for Israel. Makarios' purpose was to demonstrate to the mufti that while the Christians of Cyprus wished to support Muslim interests, Kutchuk preferred Israel to the Arabs. The Turkish government considered this to be dangerous incitement that could have inflamed radical Islamic sentiment in Turkey, and Sarper worked quietly to ensure that the Muslim religious leadership of Cyprus refrain from being partner to such an initiative.(54)

INDEPENDENCE AND IMPASSE

By mid-1960, the prospect of diplomatic ties with Israel forced the Greek Cypriot community in Egypt to launch a campaign in the newspapers of Cyprus, claiming that such a move would bring the government in Cairo to expel their entire community. The Cypriot Federation of Trade and Industry called upon Makarios to refrain from any act of foreign policy that would jeopardize relations with the Arab states, which were Cyprus' "natural" trade partners. In fact, Makarios reacted to these pressures in a contradictory manner. He told the Cairo newspaper *al-Gomhuria* that he was not free to accommodate Egyptian demands because he had to take into consideration the position of his vice-president, thus failing to uphold the principle of Cypriot neutrality. Makarios should instead have made clear to the Egyptians that he too, and not only his Turkish colleague, intended to pursue full diplomatic relations with Israel as well as with the Arab states. Yet, several days later, he stated forcefully that the Arab states could, if they so desired, open six embassies in Cyprus but not prevent the opening of an Israeli embassy as well.(55)

Several days before independence, Makarios gave a clearer indication of the manner in which he proposed to deal with Cyprus' Arab-Israeli conundrum. Makarios urged Kutchuk to agree to the immediate opening of a UAR embassy in Nicosia but a six-month postponement of Israel's entry into Cyprus. Kutchuk adamantly refused, insisting upon both Cypriot impartiality regarding the Arab-Israeli dispute and equal treatment of Israel and the Arab states.(56) Sarper instructed both the Turkish consul in Nicosia and Ankara's ambassador-designate to ensure that Kutchuk be co-signatory to any document regarding the accreditation of foreign diplomats in Cyprus. When Cyprus attained independence, Egypt refused to send an ambassador until Nicosia provided assurances that it would not grant Israel representation, and other Arab states threatened to follow Cairo's lead.(57) Makarios took no action at all, arousing concern among the Israelis that he was colluding with the Arab states to perpetuate a diplomatic stalemate that was most clearly to the detriment of Israel.(58)

In truth, Makarios would have preferred a solution that permitted the Israelis representation, but at a level no higher than the minimum required to liaise with those Cypriots who insisted upon doing business with them. Israel continued to appeal to the Cypriot leaders for a status equal to that assured its Arab rivals, pointing to Cyprus' own stated desire for neutrality but also emphasizing the contribution Israel could make with its technical prowess.(59) The archbishop was not averse to hosting Israeli aid programs and technical assistance, but he assumed that that was a price Israel would in any case be willing to pay for a presence in his country.

In late 1960, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir met with Zenon Rossides, Cyprus' ambassador to Washington and permanent representative to the United Nations. Meir knew that Rossides was

not sympathetic to Israel, but that he had influence with Makarios, and so she approached him during the diplomatic stalemate that followed Cypriot independence.(60) Her overture was to no avail, and Israel's attempts to sway Makarios through Spyros Kyprianou, the Greek Cypriot foreign minister, were equally unsuccessful. Kyprianou was a protégé of Makarios but had far less influence over policy than Rossides, who (according to Levin) held the young foreign minister (he was 28 years old) in contempt.(61) Kyprianou tried to explain to the Israelis that only technical complications at the compound designated for the Egyptian embassy had delayed the arrival of the UAR ambassador, promising that when the UAR finally did open its embassy, his government would permit Israel to do so.(62) Levin replied that clearly Egypt was still dictating the foreign policy of Cyprus.(63)

In June 1960, Nasser visited Athens. The Greek government, eager to please Egypt, added its voice to those urging Makarios to restrict Israel's presence in Cyprus to the lowest possible level.(64) Israel again turned to Turkey to balance Greek influence and Arab pressure. At the end of December 1960, the foreign ministers of Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey met in Paris. Sarper told Kyprianou that Turkey could not accept further tarrying regarding the accreditation of an Israeli ambassador to Cyprus nor the archbishop's attempts to postpone the opening of the Israeli embassy to a date at least several months later than the Egyptian's arrival.(65) In this instance, Israel found its most effective support in the pressure that the Turkish Cypriot leadership exerted upon Makarios. On January 13, 1961, Kutchuk, Denktash, and Osman Orek, the Turkish Cypriot minister of defense, demanded that the President receive the Israeli ambassador-designate without further delay. Makarios was able to procrastinate no longer, and the "best" he could do for the Egyptians

was to keep the Israeli envoy out of his office for several more days, allowing the representative of the UAR the symbolic privilege of arriving first. Kyprianou informed Levin that on January 14, 1960, the Egyptian ambassador would present his credentials, requesting that the Israeli diplomat do so on January 20.

Israel had made its diplomatic entry into Cyprus. On February 2, 1961, Moshe Sasson met with Sarper in order to convey Israel's gratitude to Turkey for its part in bringing that entry about, noting that this was "an interesting example of fruitful and quiet cooperation in an endeavor that began two years ago." (66) The Foreign Ministry also viewed with a mixture of satisfaction and surprise the initiative that the Turkish Cypriots had demonstrated. (67)

1961-1963: DIPLOMATIC CONSTRAINTS, CONSOLIDATION OF TIES

In truth, Israel did not intend to advertise its tilt toward the Turkish community nor build a relationship with Cyprus based on a pronounced proximity to one but not the other of its ethnic groups. (68) The fact that Israel did not limit its efforts in Cyprus to the Turkish sector accounts for much of its success there. Nevertheless, the quiet cooperation inherent in the "special relationship" with the Turkish Cypriots remained a basic element in Israel's Cyprus policy, and Levin wrote, "of principal importance is the connection with Ankara, from which the Turkish leadership here receives direct instructions, mainly with regard to foreign relations." (69) Israel carefully nurtured its strategic accord with Ankara, and its ties with the Turkish Cypriots broadened that common ground.

Israel continued to cultivate ties with the Greek community in the United States, hoping that its influence would balance the pro-Arab bent of President Makarios. The Cypriot President was not implacably anti-Israel, and his conduct toward the Jewish state reveals a measure

of ambivalence. However, within a few months of the opening of the embassy in Nicosia, three elements of Makarios' policies made apparent that as long as he led Cyprus, his country's orientation with regard to the Arab-Israeli dispute would be incongruent with Israel's interests. The first of these was the disposition of Cyprus at the United Nations. In 1961, Rossides voted against Israel on the issue of the Palestinian refugees, making clear that Cyprus would be no friend in that setting. Israel protested to Kyprianou that the vote violated Cypriot neutrality regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. To no avail, however, as Rossides completely disregarded the foreign minister and exploited his own direct line to Makarios. (70) The best the Israelis could do was to maintain close contact with Ahmed Akyamach, Rossides' Turkish Cypriot deputy, in the hope that he would share with them information regarding his delegation in time to be of some use. (71)

Second, Presidents Makarios and Nasser began to establish a growing rapport. On June 3, 1961, Makarios began a week's visit to Egypt. The archbishop used the trip to acknowledge Egypt's support during the Cypriot struggle for independence, obtain Cairo's promise of backing if the issue of Cyprus once more arose at the United Nations (as he surely knew it would), and appeal to Nasser to remove restrictions (principally in business and education) upon the Greek Cypriot community in Egypt. How far, wondered the Israelis, would Makarios go toward satisfying Nasser's reciprocal demands upon him? In fact, the archbishop rejected Nasser's call to challenge the presence of British bases on Cyprus. He exercised caution with regard to Israel, agreeing only to a joint communiqué making general mention of the Palestinian refugee problem, and responding not at all to the Egyptian demand that Cyprus sever its ties with Israel. (72) Nevertheless, Makarios and Nasser drew closer in inexorable fashion,

as the archbishop and his Greek Cypriot colleagues, virtually ignoring Kutchuk and the Turks, decided to orient the new republic toward the non-aligned bloc.(73) Afterwards, the Israelis took comfort from the fact that the "damage" to them from Makarios' Egypt visit was limited.(74)

Third, Israel was conducting its relations with Cyprus in the context of a diplomatic anomaly: Cyprus had no envoy in Israel. Meanwhile, Makarios himself perpetuated that irregularity. Thus, while the archbishop had acquiesced to the presence of an Israeli ambassador, he did not intend to reciprocate by dispatching a diplomat to Tel Aviv (much less Jerusalem). The Israelis initially did not assume that this incongruity would become a permanent feature of the relationship. Moreover, in early August 1961, Moshe Sasson (then assigned to Ankara) urged the Foreign Ministry to press Makarios to visit Israel in order to "balance" his trip to Egypt. Nasser was supposed to have visited Cyprus in September 1961 (though in fact he did not), and Sasson called for a Foreign Ministry initiative to convince Makarios to receive Israel's president in Cyprus.(75) However, Makarios would consider neither a trip to Israel nor a visit of the Israeli president to his country.(76)

Two months later, Makarios told Israel's English-language newspaper, *The Jerusalem Post*, that Cyprus would soon open a consulate in Israel. This raised hopes at the Foreign Ministry, and Israeli officials considered insisting that the Cypriots open an embassy.(77) In fact, these musings were gratuitous. By 1962, Nicosia hosted the embassies of four Arab states: Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and with the breakup of the UAR in late 1961, Syria. While Arab displeasure had not succeeded in preventing the opening of an Israeli embassy in Nicosia, Arab pressure and the implications for the Greek Cypriots in Egypt constituted the principal reasons for Makarios' indefinite deferral of

Cypriot representation in Israel. In late 1962, the Israelis once more attempted to convince Makarios to assign an envoy but by then understood that "postponement" of Cypriot diplomatic reciprocity would remain the regular state of affairs.(78) Cyprus' ambassador to Turkey had charge of his country's Israeli affairs, but no Cypriot ambassador visited Israel until the opening of an embassy in 1994.(79)

Yet, limitations in the realm of diplomacy did not prevent Israel from establishing "facts on the ground." The Israelis quickly exploited the opening of their embassy in order to consolidate their presence in Cyprus by rendering technical assistance, expanding economic ties, and providing training in areas essential to the host country's development. The scope of Israeli activity during the two years that followed the advent of diplomatic relations warrants note. In 1962, some 70 Cypriots participated in various training programs in Israel. That figure was greater than the number of trainees from more than half of the African states with which Israel at that time had relations, the populations all of which were considerably larger than that of Cyprus. *Tahal*, (Israel's water planning authority), conducted a hydro geologic study of Cyprus and submitted to the Cypriot government detailed plans for the development of the country's water resources, in which the Israelis later played a central role.(80) In the same year, *Mashav* (the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Division for International Cooperation) set up two experimental farms for irrigation methods in Cyprus and instituted separate programs for agricultural training in both the Turkish and Greek sectors. According to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the Egyptian embassy tried to match Israel's success by offering Cyprus 70 six-month scholarships for the study of agriculture in Egypt. Only 31 Cypriots took advantage of the opportunity, and all returned home within one month.(81)

Israel viewed with satisfaction, too, the development of its trade ties with Cyprus. In May 1962, Cyprus granted Israel "most favored nation" status, allowing Israeli exporters unrestricted access to Cypriot markets. In 1960, Israel exported to Cyprus goods worth \$1,709,000, while Israel's imports were \$421,000. In 1961, Israeli exports reached \$2,620,000 and imports \$336,000.(82) These figures bear brief comparison to those of Israel's trade with sub-Saharan Africa. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, encouraging relations with Africa constituted a major Israeli foreign policy initiative. In 1963, exports to Ghana, with which Israel had particularly close ties, reached \$1,615,000 and those to Ethiopia, which Israel had engaged in its "alliance of the periphery," stood at \$1,223,000. Only the level of Israeli exports to Nigeria, which in 1963 reached \$1,947,000, rivaled that of Cyprus.(83) Yet, the population of Nigeria in 1963 was 45,000,000, more than 75 times that of Cyprus.

However, Israel's advantage in trade exposed it to Arab charges that its economic relationship with Cyprus was exploitative. The trade gap between Israel and Cyprus was 4 to 1 in Israel's favor, while the overall imbalance in Cyprus' foreign trade at that time was 2.4 to 1.(84) In 1962, Israeli exports to Cyprus fell to \$1,719,000 and Cypriot exports to Israel to \$200,000. But the Israelis pointed to the tourist trade as a great benefit to the economy of Cyprus and considered it (as did the Cypriots) a principal element in the balancing of the trade ledger with that country. In 1960, 4,500 Israeli tourists visited Cyprus. In 1961, this number rose to 8,400 and in 1962 reached 9,320.(85) Israel sought ways to strengthen ties by exempting tourists who visited Cyprus from the tax on foreign travel that Israeli citizens at that time normally paid. The Israeli government at that time permitted its citizens to purchase \$500 for purposes of foreign travel and estimated that the

foreign currency that Israelis spent in Cyprus compensated it for the imbalance in commerce between the two countries. (86)

The Arab states, principally Egypt, never ceased exhorting the government of Cyprus to terminate its relationship with Israel, and the limits to the Turkish minority's influence upon Cypriot foreign policy encouraged Cairo to persist in those attempts. Yet, Israel had gained entry into Cyprus, and its various enterprises there both served as the bulwark that allowed further ties to be cemented with the Turkish Cypriots and greatly mitigated the suspicion with which so many Greek Cypriots regarded Israel.(87)

CONCLUSION

The establishment of relations with Cyprus in August 1960 and the inauguration of an embassy in Nicosia in January 1961 marked the successful culmination of a diplomatic campaign that Israel had commenced in early 1959. Israel's entry into Cyprus and a status there equal to that of the Arab states prevented its rivals from exploiting the exclusion that would have deepened the diplomatic and geostrategic isolation from which the Jewish state had by 1960 begun to emerge.

What had Israel gained and what were the rewards of its statecraft? Neuberger writes (perhaps in exaggerated fashion) that during the period of decolonization, a state ostracized by the countries achieving independence after colonial rule was devoid of legitimacy.(88) Diplomatic relations with Cyprus augmented the growing acceptance that began to accrue to Israel and enhanced its image as a dynamic young state with which countries emerging from colonialism, principally those of Africa, sought association. In that sense, the establishment of diplomatic ties with Cyprus also obviated a failure that would have adversely affected Israel's endeavors elsewhere.

The commercial ties that Israel developed with Cyprus were clearly a reward for its diplomacy, and the Foreign Ministry considered the growing number of Israeli tourists who spent their foreign currency there an important element in fostering closer ties between the two countries. Greek Cypriots did business with Israelis and called upon Israel to share its technical expertise with their government. At the same time, Makarios was not averse to receiving assistance from Israel, and the advent of aid projects and training programs that attracted both Greek and Turkish Cypriots constituted the most visible mark of Israeli success in Cyprus.

Israel's entry into Cyprus also became an opportunity to draw closer to Turkey. Ankara's interest in the opening of an Israeli embassy in Nicosia both solidified Israeli-Turkish ties and added an important dimension to cooperation that increased in the context of the alliance of the periphery. While Cyprus was not a state that the Israelis sought to include in that framework, the desire to contain Nasser's influence in the region convinced Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots to coordinate closely with the Israelis in order to ensure that Israel provided a counterweight to Egypt's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, Israeli-Turkish consultations regarding Cyprus and Israel's ties with the Turkish Cypriot leaders continued after the May 1960 coup in Turkey. This coordination demonstrated the resilience of both the Ankara-Jerusalem relationship in general and the mutual interest of both parties with regard to Cyprus in particular.

The Israeli rapport with the Turkish community in Cyprus contrasted with the skepticism of the Greek Cypriot leadership. Makarios evinced an attitude toward the Jewish state that was detached at best and at times deliberately obstructive. The behavior of Zenon Rossides, Cyprus' representative to the United Nations, demonstrated Makarios'

patent unwillingness to uphold his country's neutrality with regard to the Arab-Israeli dispute. Israeli-Turkish accord over Cyprus also set in bold relief the lack of success that marked Israel's attempts to use Nicosia as a bridge to warmer ties with Athens. Greek-Israeli relations remained cool, and Greece accorded Israel *de jure* recognition only in 1991.

Warm relations with the Turkish Cypriots notwithstanding, Israel wisely remained aloof of the communal divide in Cyprus, refraining from establishing a defense connection with the government of Cyprus and did not engage in the supply of military hardware to either of the rival communities. Israel's care to avoid involvement in Cyprus' ethnic dispute served its interests well. Thus, on the one hand, the modest profile of the Israeli presence in Cyprus contrasted with its prominence in Africa (by the end of 1962, Israel had twenty-two embassies in Africa and military ties with several states on that continent). Yet, on the other hand, the Israelis did not experience in Nicosia anything on the order of the severing of relations that most of those African states effected in 1973, continuing to maintain an embassy in Nicosia even in the absence of a Cypriot envoy in Israel, a situation which was rectified in 1994 when an envoy was finally assigned.

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NOTES

1. Western Europe Division to Legation in Athens, April 15, 1959, Israel State Archive (ISA) 3122/38.

2. The subject is treated briefly in Baruch Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," in Yosef Govrin, Aryeh Oded, and Moshe Yeager (eds.), *The Foreign Ministry: The First Fifty Years* (Tel Aviv, 2002, in Hebrew), 371-6; Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey, and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean* (London: 1987). An authoritative account of Cyprus during this period is Nancy Crawshaw's, *The Cyprus Revolt: An Account of the Struggle for Union with Greece* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978); see also Tozun Bahcheli, *Greek-Turkish Relations Since 1955* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 19-50.
3. Egypt backed the Greek position mainly because it wanted to see Britain forced out of its bases on the island. In 1956, Britain had used those bases to stage attacks on Egypt and in 1958 to airlift help to Jordan's King Hussein. Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey, and Greece*, p. 105; Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 375.
4. Leshem to Comay, April 1, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
5. For an account of the alliance of the periphery see Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Norton, 2000), pp. 186-217.
6. Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 372.
7. See Sasson's note to the Foreign Ministry's British Commonwealth Division explaining that both Greece's diplomatic entente with Egypt but also geographic distance from the Arab states were the main reasons for excluding it from the "alliance of the periphery." Sasson to British Commonwealth Division, April 18, 1961, ISA 3348/27.
8. Suha Bolukbasi, "Behind the Turkish-Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View," *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 29, No. 1 (Autumn 1999), p. 24.
9. "Position of the Arab States on the Cyprus Problem," report of the Foreign Ministry, August 10, 1958, ISA 3057/2.
10. Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, p. 355.
11. Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, pp. 355-63; John Reddaway, "Cyprus - The British Connection," *International Relations*, Vol. 8 (November 1986), pp. 529-56.
12. Eytan to Legation in Athens, February 22, 1959, ISA 3122/38.
13. Prato to Western Europe Division, February 15, 1959, ISA 3122/38.
14. Prato to Fischer, March 24, 1959, ISA 3104/16.
15. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, November 26, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
16. Prato to Eytan, June 26, 1959, ISA 3104/16.
17. Leshem to British Commonwealth Division, March 25, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
18. Leshem to Comay, March 15, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
19. Locker to Comay, May 29, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
20. See the three cables from Leshem to British Commonwealth Division, May 25, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
21. Meeting at the Foreign Ministry, July 2, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
22. Comay to Leshem, March 20, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
23. Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, pp. 356-61.
24. Comay to Eytan, May 7, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
25. Leshem to British Commonwealth Division, July 6, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
26. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, July 12, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
27. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, August 5, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
28. Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 375.
29. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, September 17, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
30. Levin to Eytan, December 6, 1959, ISA 3123/1.
31. Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 375.

32. British Commonwealth Division to Foreign Ministry, August 10, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
33. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, December 10, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
34. Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, pp. 357-63.
35. British Commonwealth Division to Embassy in Paris, January 6, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
36. British Commonwealth Division to Embassy in Washington, January 4, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
37. Embassy in London to British Commonwealth Division, January 8, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I; Sufot to Levin, January 12, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I; Embassy in London to British Commonwealth Division, January 29, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
38. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, February 18, 1960, ISA 759/5.
39. Embassy in Washington to British Commonwealth Division, January 16, 1960, ISA 1008/1; Embassy in Washington to United States Division, February 3, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I; Levin to British Commonwealth Division, May 11, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
40. Avner to Arad, January 16, 1961, ISA 3317/3.
41. British Commonwealth Division to Arad, January 11, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I; Harman to Meir, February 24, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
42. See copy of Alfange's letter to Senator Jacob Javits, May 24, 1960, ISA 3317/3; Consulate in New York to Foreign Ministry, October 12 and October 28, 1960, ISA 3317/3.
43. Foreign Ministry to Embassy in Washington, 20 December 1959, ISA 3122/41.
44. Levin to Eytan, December 6, 1959, ISA 3123/1.
45. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, June 27, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
46. Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, p. 341.
47. Robert Stephens, *Cyprus, A Place of Arms: Power Politics and Ethnic Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), p. 173.
48. Meeting at the Foreign Ministry, December 20, 1959, ISA 3122/41.
49. Levin to Sasson, January 7, 1960, ISA 1431/1.
50. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, January 14, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
51. Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 373.
52. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, July 19, 1960, ISA 1431/1.
53. Consulate in Nicosia to Ministry of Defense, May 6, 1960, ISA 1008/1; Levin to Western Europe Division, April 21, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
54. Foreign Ministry to Consulate in Nicosia, August 22, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
55. Levin to Foreign Ministry, August 31, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
56. British Commonwealth Division to Foreign Ministry, September 2, 1960, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
57. Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 373.
58. Levin to Yachil, December 29, 1960, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
59. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, February 4, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
60. Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 375.
61. Stephens, *Cyprus, A Place of Arms*, p. 172; Levin to Yachil, January 19, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
62. Levin to Yachil, November 17, 1960, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
63. Levin to Foreign Ministry, November 27, 1960, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
64. Levin to British Commonwealth Division, June 15, 1960, ISA 3344/58-I.
65. Levin to Yachil, December 29, 1960, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
66. Western Europe Division to Embassy in Nicosia, February 8, 1961, ISA 3348/27; see also Moshe Sasson's report titled "Assessment of the New Regime in Turkey," May 17, 1961, ISA 3348/20.

67. Levin to Yachil, January 19, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
68. "The Turkish Minority in Cyprus," report of the Foreign Ministry, July 14, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
69. Levin to Bendor, April 19, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
70. Levin to Yachil, January 19, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
71. Levin to Western Europe Division, May 4, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
72. Levin to Western Europe Division, June 15, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
73. P.N. Vanezis, Makarios: Pragmatism v. Idealism (London, publisher? 1974), pp. 114-5.
74. Stephens, Cyprus, A Place of Arms, p. 174; Levin to Yachil, June 22, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
75. Sasson to Western Europe Division, August 2, 1961, ISA 1007/4.
76. Levin to Bendor, August 10, 1961, ISA 3344/58-II-III.
77. Bendor to Levin, October 3, 1961, ISA 3344/57.
78. Embassy in Nicosia to Western Europe Division, October 30, 1962; November 8, 1962, ISA 3443/30.
79. Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 376.
80. Gazit to Remez, January 18, 1962, ISA 3443/30; Economic Division to Embassy in Nicosia, March 16, 1962, ISA 3025/31; Economic Division to Legation in Ankara, July 17, 1963, ISA 1430/14.
81. Levin to Bendor, August 31, 1962, ISA 1910/12.
82. Economic Division to Sasson, July 17, 1963, ISA 1430/14.
83. See several reports of the Foreign Ministry entitled "Our Exports to African Countries," March 1964, ISA 3501/18.
84. Stephens, Cyprus, A Place of Arms, p. 171.
85. Economic Division to Sasson, July 17, 1963, ISA 1430/14.
86. Report of the Legation in Cyprus for 1960, January 1961, ISA 3344/62; also Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 375.
87. Gilad, "Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus," p. 376.
88. Benyamin R. Neuberger, 'From Idealism to Pragmatism: Israel and the Third World, 1948-1992,' in Anita Shapira (ed.), Independence: The First Fifty Years (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1998, in Hebrew), p. 352.

position in the Eastern Mediterranean. Kremlin policy-makers had accurately predicted that Cyprus would have turned into an "apple of discord" between NATO member-states [Tasoulas 2020b]. Cyprus remained a place of a great interest, as it was stated by N.S. Khrushchev during the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. Concurrently, by accepting the Soviet proposal Greece could strengthen its position in the Eastern Mediterranean and increase its international prestige, especially taking into consideration that relations between Athens and the Arab states were at a decent level. Reacting swiftly, Karamanlis took advantage of Khrushchev's proposal and applied counter pressure on NATO. Z. Levey, "Israel's Entry into Cyprus, 1959-63: Diplomacy and Strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean", 7, Sept. 2003 (<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue3/jv7n3a5.html>). In eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. As a country with essential interests in the eastern world, it had to maintain its reputation as a pro-Arab state, without. Dr. Ahmet Şakr, head of the Cyprus Policy Center at Eastern Mediterranean University. By providing me with important contacts, they made it possible for me to conduct invaluable interviews with policymakers and opinion leaders in the United Kingdom, Turkey, Brussels and the TRNC. I am also indebted to Dr. Niyazi Kirek, for arranging a meeting with George Vassiliou. Many other international actors have been involved in the Cyprus question, forced into it by their own national interests. As indicated above, within the scope of this study, the aims and interests of international actors such as the United Kingdom, Turkey, Greece, and the United States. Turkish control of Cyprus, the third largest island in the Mediterranean, ended in 1878 when the Ottoman Sultan transferred the administration of the island to Britain. Coveted as a naval platform for British power in the Middle East, the new colony had from Antiquity been Greek in population and culture, with a Turkish minority introduced after Ottoman conquest in the 16th century. Traditionally, they sought to increase their influence in the eastern Mediterranean, an area connecting their territories on the Black Sea with their vital interests in the Middle East. The importance of Cyprus in the region was obvious. In 1959, Turkey applied for an associated status in the EEC. About 90 percent of Israel's foreign trade is carried out via the Mediterranean Sea, making freedom of navigation in this area critical for the Jewish state's economic well-being. Moreover, the newly found gas fields offshore could transform Israel into an energy independent country and a significant exporter of gas, yet these developments are tied to its ability to secure free maritime passage and to defend the discovered hydrocarbon fields. While the recent regional turmoil has improved Israel's strategic environment by weakening its Arab foes, the East Mediterranean has become more problematic due to an increased Russian presence, Turkish activism, the potential for more terrorism and conflict over energy, and the advent of a Cypriot-Greek-Israeli axis.