Military Coalitions in War and Peace: NATO and the Greek-Turkish Conflict 1952 – 1989

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Introduction

My presentation at the "Military Coalitions in War and Peace" workshop is on how the North Atlantic Alliance handled conflicts between members of it against the background of the Cold War. To explain the subject, I would like to cite one or two examples from the decades of Greek-Turkish dispute on the south-eastern flank of NATO, focusing on two key issues: How did NATO deal with this conflict? Did the alliance play a significant role in the settlement or containment of the conflict?

I would first of all like to say a few words about the structure of my presentation. I will begin with the political and strategic backgrounds to the admission of Greece and Turkey to the North Atlantic Alliance in 1952 and then go on to discuss how the Alliance's dealt with the three major Greek-Turkish conflicts over the island of Cyprus. I will follow this up by looking at the disputes in the Aegean Sea, taking the conflict over oil drilling rights in 1987 as an example, and conclude by presenting the result of my deliberations, which will answer the question: Is it thanks to NATO that an open war between the two allies at odds with each other has been able to be avoided?

NATO in the Eastern Mediterranean

I would like to begin by explaining the motives which induced the two Aegean neighbours to apply for admission to the western alliance. Between 1947 and 1949, Greece was involved in a civil war with communist insurgents. Since the United Kingdom considered itself no longer able to provide military and economic support for Greece due to the excessive political, economic and military strains on its resources, the US filled the "gap" and in compliance with the Truman doctrine mounted the so-called AMAG (American Mission for Aid to Greece) to support Athens in the fight against the communist rebels. Although the US presence in the country was perceived as dominant rather than partnership-like, Greece had a firm interest in being admitted to the alliance, since NATO on the one hand offered a shield against the communist threat from Bulgaria and the USSR and on the other was able to provide military and economic assistance to prevent a rekindling of communist tendencies. Since Greece had assistance in fighting the axis powers during the Second World War, Hellas felt that it was more than entitled to receive western aid.

In addition to enjoying western protection against Soviet aspirations regarding the Bosporus and the Dardanelles, Turkey first and foremost saw accession to NATO as a means of attaining lucrative membership of a military alliance with the United States through which Ankara hoped to receive generous military and economic aid which would allow the country to solve its numerous economic and domestic problems.

The initiative came neither from NATO nor the West, but from Greece and Turkey themselves, with the two states pressing for accession to the western alliance. The first applications of the two south-eastern Mediterranean states had been turned down in November 1948. The United Kingdom was more in favour of the establishment of an alliance between the Mediterranean and the Middle East under British leadership, whereas some of the Northern and Western European allies (among them Norway and the Netherlands) had considerable reservations against the admission of Eastern Mediterranean states to a "North Atlantic pact". Furthermore, the Europeans also feared the effect of "spreading the butter too thin" in central Europe, what meant that the priority for defence would be shifted from the central front to the south-east.

What interest did NATO have in the admission of the two new members in 1952? The motives that induced in particular the USA as the leading power to press for Greece and Turkey to attain NATO membership were of both a strategic and political nature. In his capacity as SACEUR, Dwight Eisenhower regarded Greece and Turkey together with the Nordic states primarily as key geostrategic territory from where supporting nuclear air and naval attacks could be launched via the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea straight into the heart of the Soviet Union (part of strategy of Forward Strategy). At the same time, the affiliation of Turkey in the south would help to prevent the Soviets from gaining access to the Middle East and the oil resources there. Furthermore, both nations had large armies; but they were clearly obsolete from the technological point of view and western assistance was the only means of modernising them and raising their low operational capability.

The admission of the two eastern Mediterranean states proved to be far more effective from the political viewpoint than bilateral security agreements between the USA and the two of them. A decisive factor was the Korean War, which the western alliance perceived as the implementation of an intention it suspected the Soviet Union of harbouring to expand its influence. It argued that if the Soviet Union did not hesitate to pursue expansion in the Far East, there was no reason to assume that the Mediterranean area and the Middle East were not in similar danger. The Korean War therefore triggered a debate - led by the USA and the UK - about the defence of those regions which brought Greece and Turkey into NATO's view. The defence of the Near and Middle East was called the concept of the "Northern Tier". Unlike the United Kingdom, which intended NATO to only defend the "inner ring" (to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining access to the Mediterranean area, but not the Middle East), the Americans insisted on specifying a strategy for defending an "outer ring" which would prevent Moscow from gaining access to Turkey and Iran. Due to their country's hegemonial position in the western alliance, it was not difficult for the US strategists to get their way against the British.

What role did the Greek-Turkish tensions play at that time? At the time of their admission to NATO, national concerns or potential bilateral tensions between the two new eastern allies were an issue neither in Washington nor the NATO Council (NAC). NATO initially viewed Greece and Turkey solely from the angle of the contribution

they could make to the defence of the alliance territory and the containment of the Soviet Union's assumed urge to expand its influence. Since they were sometimes also regarded with certain reservations and as "second-class" allies in the 1950s, they hardly appeared to be autonomous entities with a history of potential for bilateral conflict. Apart from individual reports from the US embassy in Athens about occasional Greek-Turkish disputes over fishing rights, there were no recordings of political tensions or conflicts between Ankara and Athens at that time. Thus, both newcomers officially joined the North Atlantic Alliance in 1952.

NATO's Handling of the Greek-Turkish Conflict in Each of the Crises

The First Cyprus Crisis/Cyprus Question in the 1950s

The first Cyprus crisis arose in the 1950s as a consequence of the Greek Cypriots' aspirations for gaining independence from the colonial rule of the British government in Cyprus. Since the British Empire had terminated its provision of economic aid to the Greek government in the late 1940s and was losing influence in the eastern Mediterranean, the leader of the Greek Cypriots, Archbishop Makarios III, succeeded in putting pressure on the Greek government. Contrary to the policy of restraint that Greece had hitherto pursued in the Cyprus question, Athens began to openly support the unification of the island with the Greek motherland.

What was originally a Greek-British colonial dispute developed into a trilateral conflict when the British government decided to involve Turkey in the conflict, with Ankara being meant to act as a counterweight to the Greek demands with regard to the rights of Turkish Cypriots. London hoped to retain its suzerainty in Cyprus as a superior custodian. Contrary to British intentions, Ankara did not allow itself to be governed by London's policy, but pursued its own interests. The first trilateral Cyprus conference convened by London was nearly doomed to failure when the Turkish delegation refused to accept any modifications to the status of British rule on the island and accused the Greek delegation of not being willing to compromise. Even while the conference was still underway, a bomb attack was conducted outside the Turkish consulate general in Saloniki near the birthplace of Atatürk. This was followed, shortly afterwards, by severe pogroms against the Greeks in Istanbul and Izmir, with Greek

NATO officers and their families also numbering among the victims. The conference was closed immediately. According to current research, the attack had been orchestrated by Turkish government circles under Prime Minister Menderes. What was more significant, however, was the fact that this was only the first rekindling of the traditional Greek-Turkish antagonism which became the nucleus of a development that was to turn into decades of Greek-Turkish conflict with international consequences. The UK had proverbially opened "Pandora's box".

How did NATO deal with the conflict between its two allies? In 1954, the North Atlantic community was initially hesitant to deal with either the Cyprus question itself or the resulting conflict between its two new south-eastern allies at alliance level at all. While the Western Europeans saw any discussion of the right of self-determination of Cyprus in the NAC as a danger to their own colonial policies, the US State Department considered the matter a British domestic issue. Washington was only interested in Cyprus in connection with possible Soviet attempts to interfere in NATO affairs. The Germans on the one hand took a neutral position to this "colonial question", on the other hand, with a view to German cruelties of WW II, were even reported to have a certain kind of clandestine "Schadenfreude" (malicious joy) about watching the British enforcing martial law on Cyprus after the beginning of Makarios uprising against British rule. So the NAC did not at first officially discuss the topic.

It was not until September 1955 that the alliance first did something, having realized that alliance stability and the functionality of the southern flank were seriously threatened as a consequence of the impending danger of a dispute between the Greek and Turkish allies. Several European NATO partners joined in this first official discussion and demanded an investigation into the incidents, their objective being to prevent (publicly) a rupture of the unity of the alliance. On the initiative of the Secretary General, they proposed an official declaration of reconciliation between the Greeks and Turks. But the US representative and his British colleague rejected this plan, arguing that the alliance had overrated the impact of the incidents and caused unnecessary "alarm". They also argued that the main point that was to be borne in mind was the fact that routine duty at HALFSEE (Headquarters Allied Forces South Eastern Europe) had not suffered.

Washington furthermore rejected the idea of NATO assuming a general role as a conflict resolution authority and tried to keep the alliance out of the dispute in order to avoid endangering its internal cohesion.

When it became known that the Greeks cancelled maneuvers and refused to allow the alliance to use infrastructure facilities on Greek territory, the western NATO partners began to take a more serious look at the matter. The focus, however, was again on trying to convince Greece to continue to fulfil its NATO obligations. Accordingly, NATO bodies did not delve deeper into the whole problem. The US and UK representatives used the sessions of the NATO Council of Ministers in October and December 1955 as forums to slightly relieve the tensions between the Greeks and Turks. But the internal conflict still threatened to cause a permanent breach in a southern flank that was unstable as it was.

In the following year, leading US and UK NATO representatives realised that the problem could not be completely kept away from the alliance. So, with the approval of the other NAC members, Secretary General Lord Ismay made several attempts to get the Greeks and Turks to reach a compromise on the future of Cyprus by offering to have the NAC act as a mediator, by establishing a Committee of Three and by going through their permanent representatives. The idea was for NATO to be a forum for discussion only and on no account to be directly involved in the conflict as an arbitral authority or indeed a judge. Ismay's attempts to have the NAC act as a mediator in 1956 were nipped in the bud due to Greece's mistrust of NATO in the Cyprus question. The main reasons for this were on the one hand the "backstage consultations and collusions" between London, Ankara and the NATO Secretary General and the lack of support from the NATO partners for the motion on Cyprus that Greece had submitted to the United Nations. On the other hand, Western Europeans (France, Belgium, Netherlands, and Germany) considered the quarrels on the south-eastern flank a nuisance rather than one of the main problems of the alliance and believed that the focus should continue to be on the central front in Central Europe. In contrast, Washington only tried to influence the parties to the conflict with a view to ensuring the functionality of the alliance in general. The US government did not want to take an active, decisive role in this "British" affair.

In 1957 and 1958, the new Secretary General, P.H. Spaak, made bold attempts to resolve the problem of the status of Cyprus on the basis of several British plans (the Radcliffe proposals, the Foot plan, and the Macmillan plan) by trying to persuade Ankara and Athens to agree to a ministerial level conference following the establishment of a provisional agreement between the NATO permanent representatives of the parties to the conflict. Spaak walked a tightrope because frequently either the Greek or the Turkish government withheld their agreement shortly before a compromise was reached, even though the permanent representatives had sometimes been close to a breakthrough. Unlike the years before, the NAC in 1958 discussed the Cyprus question on several occasions and for quite some time, even going so far as to postpone other items on the agenda, and really took the conflict between its two south-eastern allies seriously. It must be said, however, that the Central and North European members in particular regarded the Greek-Turkish tensions as "troublesome quarrels" on the southern flank and avoided getting involved in the negotiations individually. Spaak's efforts indirectly met with success despite this, since his mediation in the end paved the way for the London and Zurich conferences on Cyprus, where key elements of his proposals were revisited, even though NATO itself did not participate in the conference.

In the 1950s, NATO developed a relationship with its internal conflict which ranged from an initial refusal to deal with the matter more intensively to serious and lengthy discussions in the NATO Council that generated both dispute and unity among the NAC members. The intensity of the NAC's involvement and the role it played largely depended on the Secretary General's initiative and willingness to do something, while he, in turn, had to coordinate his actions with the leading NATO nations, the UK and the USA, in order to be effective. Furthermore, Ankara and Athens viewed every step he took with suspicion and pedantry and each often accused him of taking sides.

By gradually and painstakingly establishing a rapprochement between the Greek and Turkish governments through their permanent representatives in the NAC in the face of many setbacks, NATO was almost able to reach a compromise in 1958. The Secretary General became the central figure as he was highly instrumental in compromise. While the alliance had failed to deal intensively with the internal conflict in 1955, it succeeded in subsequent years to establish a "hot line" between the parties to

the conflict which virtually "forced" the Greeks and Turks to continue the unwanted negotiations about Cyprus through diplomatic channels and accept concessions and a limited readiness to compromise under the eyes of the other NATO allies so as to avoid their becoming – Greece in particular – permanent outsiders within the alliance.

With regard to the 1950s, although it did not solve the problem, NATO can be said to have contained the internal conflict and so indirectly avoided an open exchange of military blows between the two quarrelling allies, irrespective of the fact that the two states at that time had only very limited military capacities for fighting out their conflict.

The Second Cyprus Crisis in 1963/64

The second Cyprus crisis flared up in 1963 between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The main cause was the fact that the Greek Cypriots did not abandon their long-term objective of unification with the Greek "motherland" and the Turkish ethnic group on the island was not prepared to stop striving for autonomous self-determination. As neither side showed any willingness to compromise, Archbishop Makarios announced unilateral changes to the Cypriot constitution which triggered violent opposition among Greek members of parliament. This in turn was followed by mutual violent responses and armed clashes among the ethnic groups. These were on the one hand supported by the small Turkish military contingent stationed on the island. On the other hand, Greek forces covertly infiltrated the island from the Hellenic mainland and participated actively in the fighting. For the first time in its history, the alliance had to accept that two of its members were fighting against each other indirectly with military means.

How did NATO deal with this crisis? It was not NATO, but London – the third "guarantor" of the status of Cyprus – that first took the initiative. Her Majesty's government was legally bound by the London and Zurich treaties to look for ways of ending or at least containing the armed clashes. London, however, was by no means willing to take military action on its own as it had done during its suzerainty in Cyprus. The Foreign Office argued that it would submit a motion to the UN for the stationing of UN forces in order to put pressure on the USA, a strong ally, to look into the matter. The British government knew that Washington was against the participation of the UN

because of the possibility of the Soviet Union gaining access to the Mediterranean area. On 7 January 1964, the British NAC permanent representative submitted a proposal to his US colleague for a peacekeeping force to be mounted with troops from NATO countries, but at the same he expressed doubts about whether it could be implemented. He believed that most of the NATO allies would be reluctant to get involved in the matter. In addition to that, he considered that the alliance was hardly prepared for such internal security missions. He felt that the alliance forces were not adequately equipped and trained for this purpose. Basically, London wanted to induce the US government to decide in favour of the deployment of a NATO-led "peacekeeping force" and simultaneously pressure it into taking a stronger, active lead in the Cyprus crisis so that London could relieve itself of the daunting responsibility. The British argued that such a plan could not be implemented without the participation of the USA and that time was of the essence as the situation on the island was deteriorating with each day that passed. The first response from the US State Department was evasive. US Secretary of State Dean Rusk indicated to London that Washington was not interested in an active intervention with US forces or in generally taking on a lead role in this unpleasant matter. Nevertheless, the State Department understood that the Cyprus crisis could become a problem for NATO if the USA, as a leading power, did not do anything at all. Moreover, both the Greek and Turkish governments began to press Washington to look into this matter in general, particularly since General Lemnitzer from the USA had visited Ankara and Athens in his capacity as SACEUR in order to warn the two governments not to have their countries take imprudent steps against each other. Neither of the governments concerned rejected a military commitment on the part of NATO out right (!). This was a new development for the Greek side as the policies of Makarios and the Greek government were no longer congruent.

US Undersecretary of State George Ball discussed different possibilities for using NATO troops as a peacekeeping force in one way or another with the British ambassador. The USA's assumption of a lead role, however, remained highly improbable. Even so, President Johnson allowed himself to be persuaded to involve the USA in some way, by ordering its armed forces to provide logistic support and relieve the British Army of the Rhine of some of the strain it had come under on account of the matter. London therefore reluctantly envisaged planning to mount a force of some

10,000 troops on its own responsibility. Although Makarios also rejected any NATO commitment on the island by referring to international law, he no longer received public support from Athens. SACEUR had namely succeeded in inducing the Greeks and Turks to withdraw their national units from the island if NATO forces were stationed there. Some NATO members like the Federal Republic of Germany were quite willing to provide contingents for a NATO-drawn force and in early February started to make preparations for sending officers to discuss details in London. In contrast, other members, France in particular, flatly rejected the plan, arguing that is was a purely Anglo-American matter. France said that it had not been involved in the development of the London and Zurich treaties and NATO was not intended for such purposes due to its character as a defensive alliance. It went on to say that the Alliance was being misused by the British and Americans in their pursuit of such a plan.

Accordingly, the plan failed first and foremost because of the internal disagreement between the leading NATO nations. In addition, the Soviet Union also interfered actively in the issue and expressed its displeasure at the possibility of a military intervention in Cyprus officially, declaring it a violation of international law. Moscow tried to use the disagreement among NATO-members to get Cyprus under its own influence (possible base for Soviet ships and aircraft) and probably saw this as an opportunity to drive a wedge into the NATO alliance.

When in June 1964 there was a threat of the fighting on the island resulting in ethnic displacements for the Turkish Cypriots, the Turkish government decided to take unilateral military action. In view of the danger of a Greek-Turkish war, President Johnson sent an extremely harsh note of protest to Ankara and threatened to withdraw NATO protection in the event of a Soviet act of aggression if Turkey put its plan into practice. Washington had already demonstrated that it would not hesitate to withdraw US intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Turkish soil a few years earlier in the course of the resolution of the Cuba crisis.

Ankara abandoned its plan in response to the US threat, but did carry out numerous air attacks ("close air support" for Turkish Cypriots) on Greek Cypriot positions and even dropped napalm bombs on some Greek Cypriot settlements. NATO itself was divided on the issue of taking the initiative. Several of the "smaller" members, including particularly Canada, having deployed UN-Soldiers on the island, but also

Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, demanded a strong line to be taken with Greece and Turkey and warned that their conduct violated the principles of the North Atlantic Treaty. Germany took a rather neutral position and remained undecided. In contrast, the leading members – Great Britain, France, the USA – and also Secretary General Stikker tried to avoid the NAC becoming directly involved and steered the alliance towards a course of restraint.

The second Cyprus crisis ended around the middle of the year with a fragile ceasefire and the stationing of a UN force that was neither very efficient nor able to handle the unrest in Cyprus.

In view of this stage of the Cyprus crisis, NATO itself – in a formal sense – remained passive at first since the Secretary General and NAC were not directly involved in the decision-making process. The idea of taking the initiative arose due to efforts by the British and the idea of a NATO-led peacekeeping force was a bilateral UK-US matter. Since NATO bodies were used for this purpose and there was talk of a NATO-led peacekeeping force, it is possible to say that NATO did do something – at least indirectly – aimed at containing the conflict. However, this plan failed because of disagreement among NATO members and the refusal of the USA to assume a lead role in the Cyprus question. Makarios' rejection of the plan and the Soviet Union's statement may have boosted this development. But it was the NATO members themselves that were mainly to blame for the failure.

Accordingly, the alliance did not assume a direct role in the settlement of the violent clashes in Cyprus. The alliance was not able to solve the (indirect) Greek-Turkish conflict on the island. The prevention of the planned Turkish invasion of the island can be regarded as a unilateral act by the US president, but not as a NATO act since it was not coordinated with the alliance or certain allies. The alliance was unable to agree on how to deal with its two quarrelling members and was therefore unable to send out a signal that was clear enough to induce Ankara and Athens to back down without the warning issued by Johnson. Consequently, the main weakness in the crisis management was the fact that the alliance was unable to take cohesive and effective action in a matter that was not of equal interest to all the leading members. The failure of the initiative to pacify Cyprus was thus inevitable.

While the alliance could not enforce peace actively, NATO did, however, achieved moderate success in its efforts to reduce the direct tensions between Ankara and Athens. As in the 1950s, the NAC, the presence of its Greek and Turkish permanent representatives as well as the personality and skill of the Secretary General in addition formed a "communication channel" which ensured that the mutual dialogue went on continuously despite the hostilities. Since the actions of Greece and Turkey were under the close scrutiny of the NAC, the two countries were unable to directly threaten each other if they wanted to save their faces within the alliance. They feared that open disregard for the principles of the alliance could result in a reduction of military and economic aid (AAPD, 18. Aug. 1964 DEU NATO an AM) or the loss of the obligation of the allies to come to their assistance in the event of a Soviet act of aggression since there was no legal obligation for the alliance to provide military aid under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. In contrast to later decades, the Cuban crisis caused the perception of a Soviet threat to still be very pronounced, particularly in Ankara. This in turn had the effect of enabling an open bilateral conflict between the two south-eastern members to be avoided on the structural level.

The Cyprus Crisis of 1974 and the Turkish Occupation of Northern Cyprus

The Cyprus crisis of the 1970s can be considered the most serious of the crises to date. The reason for it arising was the alienation of Makarios from the Greek military junta which had ruled Greece in Athens since 1967. The archbishop was overthrown by the junta in 1974 with the assistance of opposition members who were loyal to Athens and replaced by Nikos Sampson, who was feared among Turkish Cypriots because of his record of murders and acts of violence. This in turn was a new reason for Ankara to intervene militarily in Cyprus and occupy the northern part of the island by force. The advance of the Turks was accompanied by flows of refugees of Greek and Turkish Cypriots and massacres of civilians on both sides. Unlike in 1964, the USA and UK did not succeed in preventing the Turkish government from implementing its plan by exerting diplomatic pressure. The Soviet Union this time exercised restraint and confined itself to mildly criticising the general stationing of foreign troops in Cyprus and NATO's policy on this island.

After the first part of the Turkish operation Atilla had been completed, the western Anglo-American community managed to bring Greece and Turkey to the

negotiating table, but did not achieve any further success. It was only after the second phase of the Turkish operation had been completed that the two sides, representatives of Cypriot ethnic groups and the British government reached a peace agreement in Geneva. London and Washington worked on this matter without directly involving the alliance since in 1964 the diversity of the interests of the members had resulted in disagreement and restrictions. Nevertheless, it took a very long time for the unilateral measures to be successful.

The NAC met for a crisis meeting in response to the Turkish landing in Cyprus to support the British and American peace efforts. However, both the council and the governments did no more than issue general appeals to Greece and Turkey to end their military actions and agree on a ceasefire. NATO as an institution did not have the structural means to impose sanctions on its members or dictate how the conflict was to be resolved. Neither could NATO prevent the Greek withdrawal from NATOs integrated structures as a consequence of Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus.

Outwardly, NATO did not appear to succeed in taking on a decisive and effective role in the settlement of the conflict. The alliance did, however, try to do something to contain the conflict with the resources it had. The use of NATO bodies, in particular the North Atlantic Council, was at times the only way to keep negotiations going between the parties to the conflict. Although the alliance was unable to prevent the Greek-Turkish "proxy war" on Cyprus, the NATO Military Committee in Brussels did persuade the Greek and Turkish ambassadors attending an immediate crisis meeting to talk to each other in spite of the military clashes on the island, even though the dialogue was confined to their accusing each other over the causes of the Turkish invasion. NATO's achievement lay more in the diplomatic attempts made in future years to find a permanent solution for the Cyprus question and to have a corrective influence on the two parties to the conflict. In addition, the structural alliance partnership of the two Mediterranean states at enmity helped to prevent an open war breaking out beyond Cyprus as it had in 1964. Greece accused NATO of being directly responsible for the Turkish "aggression" against Cyprus. Nevertheless, the attraction Athens felt for the alliance was so strong that the Greek government could not make up its mind to turn its back on the alliance completely. Although NATO was unable to

prevent the Greek withdrawal in 1974, it achieved the full return of Greece into its structures in 1980.

The Conflicts in the Aegean Sea in the 1970s and in 1987

In addition to the disputes surrounding the militarisation of Greek islands off the Turkish coast, new conflicts had developed since 1973 over the bounds of territorial waters and airspace as well as the demarcation of the continental shelf. The latter was the most dangerous bone of contention in the Aegean Sea due to the discovery of crude oil deposits in contested waters. As an example I will examine the crisis of 1987.

In March 1987, the two nations were at the brink of war. At that time, the two Turkish research vessels "Sismik I" and "Pris Reis" were passing through contested waters in the Aegean Sea, while Ankara repeated its decade-old claim that the continental shelf of the East Aegean islands was a natural extension of the Anatolian mainland. Ankara rejected a note of protest of the Greek foreign ministry. While the "Piri Reis" withdrew into Turkish territorial waters, the Turkish government issued an official drilling permit for the national Turkish oil company for the "international zone" between Samothrake and Lesbos which overlapped with Greek claims. Greece responded to this by putting its armed forces on alert, drafting reserve personnel and ordering its entire fleet into the Aegean Sea. In contrast, the Turkish army was only ordered to raise its level of operational readiness. At the same time, Ankara ordered the "Sismik" into the northern area of Thasos in order for it to explore the seabed in the zone claimed by Greece. Greece answered this by announcing its intent to use force to prevent the implementation of the Turkish plan. The crisis culminated on 28 March when the "Sismik", escorted by two warships, left its Turkish home port and headed out for the contested sea area. Athens then declared that NATO and the USA bore some responsibility for the conflict because of their assisting Turkey in enhancing its military strength and because of their informing Turkey about Greek force movements. The people in the Greek region of Western Thrace expected an open war to break out and began to panic buy food, whereas there were hardly any indications of a crisis on the Turkish side of the border.

How did NATO deal with this conflict? NATO Secretary General Lord Carrington offered to mediate as soon as the crisis began. The two sides, however,

rejected mediation not only by NATO, but also by Washington. Athens accused both of having armed Turkey and thus caused the conflict, declaring that Greece would not be forced to the negotiating table by either of them. Athens furthermore announced a demand for the closure of the US military base at Nea Makri, but this remained no more than an announcement and the demand was not implemented. The Greek government looked to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia for support for its position, while Greek diplomats attached only secondary importance to the western allies.

Irrespective of this, the NAC took great pains to mediate via the permanent representatives of Ankara and Athens at an extraordinary meeting. A number of European NATO members, among them France and the Federal Republic of Germany, tried to put pressure on Turkey by stating that if fighting broke out between Greece Turkish, Turkey's wish for EU membership would be flatly rejected. In addition, the UK and the USA tried to continue to mediate unilaterally and persuade the two sides to sit down at the negotiating table. Washington urged Ankara to be willing to negotiate. Since Turkey depended on economic aid from the USA and was the fourth largest recipient of US military aid, the voice of the US Secretary of State carried weight despite anti-west reservations in Turkish circles. The Turkish government therefore accepted another offer of mediation from the NATO Secretary General, while Greece continued to reject the proposal. The crisis defused when the Turkish research vessel was ordered to remain outside the sea area claimed by Greece, and the Turkish foreign ministry declared that Turkey would refrain from drilling in the contested zone as long as Greece did so as well. In the end, Athens gave in to the pressure of the western allies, reluctantly declaring that it too would refrain, and the crisis eased.

In the Aegean crisis of 1987, NATO proved to have "lessons learned" from the past by acting directly and with the NATO Secretary General and NAC took the Aegean crisis very seriously and responded promptly, offering to mediate and exerting pressure on the two opponents to resolve their disputes peacefully by using the "possible sanctions", e.g. the issue of Turkey's accession to the EU. The US State Department provided the decisive and most effective impetus. This was reinforced by the united and resolute stance adopted by the European NATO allies both in the NAC and in direct contacts with Ankara and Athens to demonstrate that nobody wanted a military conflict between the two allies in the Eastern Mediterranean at all. In close

cooperation with the USA as the leading power, the alliance tactfully dealt with the two allies in enmity – putting pressure on Ankara on account of its aspirations to join the west, while appeasing Athens, which distanced itself from the western community without the alliance siding with Greece.

Working closely with the USA, the North Atlantic Alliance was able to prevent a Greek-Turkish war in the Aegean Sea. The unilateral measures adopted by the US State Department proved to yield the most success, whereas the action taken by the alliance seemed only to enhance them. Nevertheless, this action must not be underrated since the Secretary General and NATO Council were the first to take the initiative to resolve the conflict, showed internal and external unity and used the full range of structural possibilities to find a way out of this crisis. The US government also made extensive use of NATO channels and bodies in its action. The USA's willingness to get involved and do something was also due to Washington's own interest in maintaining coherence within the alliance, so NATO indirectly contributed to defusing the conflict simply through its existence.

Final Result

In the 1950s, NATO overcame its initial reluctance and succeeded in occupying itself with the Greek-Turkish conflict and was able to prevent a military conflict breaking out between Greece and Turkey due to the key efforts made by the NATO Secretary Generals and the support provided by members of the NAC.

During the Cyprus crisis of the 1960s, NATO at first remained passive. The British and American attempt to contain the violence on the island by resorting to the use of NATO structures and NATO-led armed forces failed because of disagreement among the members. The alliance was not successful in this case.

By contrast, the alliance succeeded in keeping the direct tensions between Ankara and Athens within limits. The Secretary General, SACEUR and the NAC succeeded in getting even Greece to fundamentally agree to the deployment of a NATO peacekeeping force and in inducing both sides to continue their dialogue despite open hostilities.

It was first and foremost the warning issued by US President Johnson, however, that prevented a Turkish invasion and the potential consequence of a direct belligerent response from Greece. Nevertheless, with a view to the global situation in the 1960s and the continuing latent feeling that the Soviet Union posed a threat, the alliance did succeed not only in taking account of the demand from some of its members for tougher sanctions, but also in using its structures to help raise the inhibition level for open bilateral acts of war.

In the Cyprus crisis of 1974, NATO did not succeed in preventing a Greek-Turkish "proxy war" on the island, which at times resulted in direct confrontations between regular armed forces of the two allies in enmity. Even in this case, however, NATO's structures induced both parties to the conflict to continue their dialogue and helped to reduce the danger of an open war as they had in 1964. In addition, the alliance acted as a kind of magnet which prevented Athens from completely turning its back on it and even led Greece back into the integrated structures in 1980.

During the Aegean crisis of 1987, NATO worked closely with the USA as the leading power, achieving a great success by preventing a Greek-Turkish war. As a vanguard in the resolution of conflicts, the alliance made use of all its structural and diplomatic options, and its mere existence as a collective defence community helped to motivate Washington to take action in order to maintain its coherence and credibility.

All in all, it can be said that even though the North Atlantic Alliance is unable to resolve conflicts among its members simply on account of its existence, it has been able to contain them in the long term. In a specific case of averting a crisis, success depended to a considerable degree on the skill of the NATO Secretary General, on the unity and willingness of the North Atlantic Council, and on high-level military authorities such as SACEUR. Although the alliance did not have the possibility of imposing sanctions and other means to exert pressure like the ones the US government can use unilaterally as crisis resolution instruments, Washington and London frequently resorted to the use of the integrated alliance structures and the help of the Secretary General to put crisis meetings between representatives of Greece and Turkey on the agenda without delay if necessary.

Being an institution, the alliance in addition had the advantage of having bodies like the NATO Council which held permanent sessions or an integrated command structure and was able to use them over a long period to gradually force the two parties to the conflict to be prepared to do something and accept some compromise.