

Reflecting on our Founding of 50 Years Ago: The American Hellenic Institute's Mission, Achievements and Continued Commitment to the Rule of Law

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On August 1, 1974, the Honorable Eugene T. Rossides, a former assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury Department, founded the American Hellenic Institute (AHI) with the primary goal of advocating for the application of the Rule of Law in international relations, especially concerning Cyprus and Greece in the aftermath of Turkey's brutal illegal invasion of the Republic of Cyprus (ROC) that commenced July 20, 1974.

In response, the AHI played a pivotal role in galvanizing Congress to enact the "Rule of Law Arms Embargo," prohibiting arms sales to Turkey. The resulting legislation—an unprecedented rule of law U.S. arms embargo against Turkey—proved that the democratic ideals of ancient Greece continue to thrive as long as ordinary citizens remain vigilant, informed, and active.

Since then, AHI has emerged as a leading voice with a deep understanding of issues impacting the region, actively engaging with high-level policymakers and military officials in the U.S., Greece, and Cyprus. One of AHI's significant accomplishments lies in its impact on U.S. legislation in strengthening U.S. relations with Greece and Cyprus. AHI also initiated a \$25 million annual Humanitarian Aid for Cyprus initiative, totaling over \$400 million. It has also annually testified before House and Senate committees on foreign aid proposals, emphasizing the importance of supporting the rule of law in the region regarding Greece, Cyprus, the Aegean, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Today, AHI's influence extends beyond legislation to fostering dialogue and collaboration organizing numerous conferences, including the first of sixteen U.S.-Greece Trade Conference in 1975, and has hosted over 50 conferences on legislative policy regarding Greece and Cyprus. AHI also annually hosts on Capitol Hill the

"Congressional Salute to Greek Independence Day" and a forum commemorating Turkey's illegal invasion of ROC.

Through publications and documentaries, AHI actively shapes U.S. foreign policy. It has produced nineteen publications and documentaries on topics related to U.S. foreign policy towards Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey. These materials contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, including the Institute's fact sheets on U.S.-Greece Strategic Partnership Overview, U.S.-Republic of Cyprus Strategic Partnership, and the initiated study, Souda Bay: NATO's Military Gem in the Eastern Mediterranean produced by the Lexington Institute.

Empowering the next generation of Greek American leaders is another cornerstone of AHI's mission. Through its Foundation it inaugurated its annual College Student Foreign Policy Trip to Greece and Cyprus in 2009, educating college students and preparing them for leadership roles within the Greek American community. The AHI has also consistently honored excellence in the Greek American community through its annual Hellenic Heritage Achievement and National Public Service Awards Dinner.

AHI also collaborates closely with various organizations, including the Order of AHEPA, PSEKA, and others, to advance shared goals and promote the interests of the Greek American community. In 2014, the AHI, in conjunction with the Order of AHEPA, B'nai B'rith International, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, established a biennial leadership mission to Greece, Cyprus, and Israel to promote the tripartite alliance between the three countries.

Today, a half century of occupation later, by a NATO member, of a country which has been a member of the European Union since 2004, is unacceptable and must not stand.

For generations, the ROC and its people have endured an illegal occupation by Turkish troops, currently estimated at 40,000, along with massive violations of both human rights and fundamental freedoms.

AHI continues to strongly advocate for the immediate removal of all Turkish troops from the ROC.

With their presence, Turkey continues to disregard U.S. law when it transfers US-made weapons from mainland Turkey to the Turkish-occupied ROC. Congress must put a stop to this irresponsible transfer of weapons to prevent the potential undermining of US intent and authority.

Turkey's perpetual threats and acts of aggression toward the ROC must end. Challenges to the sovereignty of the ROC are unacceptable and clearly demonstrate that Turkey is a force of instability in the Eastern Mediterranean. For example, Turkey reopened a beach in Varosha located within the fenced-in area of the territory of the ROC, which Turkey has occupied since it unlawfully invaded the ROC in 1974. This action violated United Nations resolutions and international treaties to which the U.S. and Turkey are signatories.

Moreover, Erdogan and the internationally unrecognized "Turkish Cypriot leader" Ersin Tatar publicly support a "two-state" solution for Cyprus--the permanent partition of the island. Erdogan's position on these matters contravenes the positions of the United Nations and the U.S. government.

Further, the AHI's position is very clear as it relates the United States. We feel strongly that our government must condemn Erdoğan's support for illegally reopening the beach in Varosha and disrupting efforts of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus .

The change in Varosha's status shows no interest by Erdoğan to resume settlement talks and indicates that he favors pursuing steps to continue the occupation of the ROC.

Furthermore, Turkey's illegal occupation of the ROC has impacted the ability of The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) to access certain Turkish military installations to excavate for the remains of 955 still missing Cypriots, including four remains of American citizens, for proper identification.

AHI contends there must be a more vocal condemnation of the division of the ROC by the United States and the international community as this 50-year anniversary is observed.

The United States government must send a strong message to President Erdogan by calling on Ankara to support reunification efforts in a constructive manner which would include the removal of troops, illegal settlers, and antiquated rights of guarantees.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has frequently mentioned the need of the United States to "uphold the rules-based international order." However, to do this, the application of the rule of law cannot be selectively applied; all countries which seek to undermine the "rules-based international order" must be held accountable, including Turkey.

In addition, The Treaty of Guarantee, which would allow for future Turkish military invasions and occupations of the ROC, must be abandoned. Such actions

would be significant confidence building measures in the peace process. Turkey must forgo its intransigence and unhelpful anachronistic positions.

Cypriots themselves should have ownership of the resolution process, and the Cypriot people should arrive at a solution that is best for the Cypriot people; a bizonal, bicomunal federation that must embody the full respect of the principles and laws of the European Union, of which the Republic of Cyprus is a member.

The United States should demonstrate it is dedicated to solving the 'Cyprus problem' by voicing and advancing positions that underscore support for the rule of law and respect for international order.

Finally, this is not the ROC of 50 years ago. The ROC has made tremendous strides and is viewed today by the United States as a strategic partner due to its commitment to counterterrorism and global security. The ROC is a signatory to the United States' Proliferation Security Initiative, and since the Statement of Intent agreement signed with the United States in 2018, several additional important steps have occurred. The United States provides International Military Education and Training (IMET) program funding to the Republic of Cyprus. The Cyprus Center for Land, Open-Seas, and Port Security (CYCLOPS), an innovative security site that has been partially funded by the U.S., is in operation. The U.S. lifted an arms prohibition on the ROC, subject to an annual review, although the lifting of the arms prohibition should become a permanent, long-term reality.

In 2023, the New Jersey National Guard and the Republic of Cyprus National Guard formalized their State Partnership Program collaboration, demonstrating the burgeoning US-ROC security partnership. Most recently, in June 2024, the United States and the ROC announced the beginning of a Strategic Dialogue between the two countries, citing recent high-level cooperation and partnership on multiple fronts. The first meeting of this dialogue will occur in September of 2024 in the ROC and will mark a new height in US-ROC relations.

The Republic of Cyprus continues to advance its bilateral relations with Israel and plays an integral role in an Eastern Mediterranean multilateral partnership with Israel and Greece; a partnership that at times includes the United States in a 3+1 framework. The ROC's ongoing development as a key contributor to security and as a major player in the energy sector in the Eastern Mediterranean, the broader region, and Europe can only be hindered by Turkish aggression and gunboat diplomacy demonstrated previously in the ROC's EEZ. Such aggression must never be allowed to materialize again.

Background

On July 20, 1974, the government of Turkey ordered its military to invade the Republic of Cyprus with the illegal use of U.S.-supplied arms and equipment, in violation of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. This also violated the Treaty of Establishment, the Treaty of Alliance and Treaty of Guaranty, which established the Republic of Cyprus and guaranteed the independence of the Republic of Cyprus; and the United Nations Charter and international law.

Turkey occupied about four percent of Cyprus during the initial phase of its invasion, yet on August 14, 1974, three weeks after the legitimate government of the Republic of Cyprus was restored, Turkey launched the second phase of its invasion of the Republic of Cyprus, occupying 37 percent of the ROC's sovereign territory, killing innocent civilians, forcing 170,000 Greek Cypriots from their homes and properties, and committing mass destruction of the Republic of Cyprus' cultural and religious heritage, including an estimated 500 churches and religious sites belonging to Christian and Jewish communities.

On January 27, 1989, then-Senator Joe Biden wrote to AHIPAC (the then lobbying arm of the AHI) Chairman Dr. Dean Lomis, a constituent, in which he stated:

"...we must urge the new Administration [President George H.W. Bush] to make Cyprus a higher policy priority in American foreign policy...we cannot lose sight of the fact that the rights of Greek Cypriots have been trampled upon, and we must ensure that their claims to ancestral land and property seized during the 1974 invasion are not compromised. Finally, we must send a signal to Turkey that until it has removed every last soldier from Cyprus, it will never be recognized as a full member of the international community."

In the closing days of the Biden administration, it should enact policies according to the ideals of this statement from then-Senator Joe Biden to ensure that the 50 years of illegal occupation of the ROC can eventually be brought to an end.

Conclusion

Fifty years later, the American Hellenic Institute has worked to fulfill its mission by promoting the best interests of the United States in Greece, Cyprus, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Southeast Europe while calling for action to stop blatant violations of the Rule of Law by malign actors in the region.

As we reflect on 50 years, we are deeply grateful and appreciative of the members, board officers and staff who have served the American Hellenic Institute

during this half century. Their collective dedication has been essential to the Institute success.

While we are extremely proud to reach our golden anniversary and honor all those, past and present, who selflessly contributed to the American Hellenic Institute, this milestone is bittersweet, as we mark the somber 50th anniversary of Turkey's illegal invasion of the Republic of Cyprus which continues to be occupied by over 40,000 illegal forces.

In the spirit of our founder, Eugene T. Rossides, we will not stop until the Rule of Law is applied to Greece, Cyprus, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

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