

Cyprus in the Eye of the Storm

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John Milton, in the third book of his *Paradise Regain'd*, spoke in the 17th Century of a region "From Arachosia, from Candaor East,/And Margiana to the Hyrcanian cliffs/Of Caucasus, and dark Iberian dales;/ From Atropatia and the neighboring plains/Of Adiabene, Media, and the south/Of Susiana, to Balsara's haven./He saw them in their forms of battle rang'd, ..." ¹

Milton saw, and recreated in his epos, this Greater Eastern Mediterranean — reaching from and beyond the mouth of the Nile to the Sea of Azov, and from the Western shores of the Caspian or further East into the Bactrian lands of Afghanistan, to the coasts of Italy and Malta, and up into the Western slopes of the Balkan isthmus — as what it was: the nexus for change and the pivot of power since the emergence of modern human societies. The island of Cyprus is in the eye of this perpetual storm. Now, the storms are gathering into a comprehensive hurricane, and cyclonic winds of change will swirl around Cyprus for the coming few years.

The two greatest high pressure areas from which change emanates are the powers now dominating the Eastern Mediterranean through surrogates: Russia and Iran. Both must now be considered Eastern Mediterranean powers. The two great low pressure areas which have given way to allow the influx of Russia and Iran are the European Union and the United States. Neither today have unrivalled supremacy in the Mediterranean Sea.

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¹ . Milton, John: *Paradise Regain'd, A Poem in IV Books*. Book III. London, 1671.

Everything is in flux in the region, and has been since the end of the Cold War, although the engine for much of the present pattern of events began in 1978, when US President Jimmy Carter deliberately — and arrogantly — undermined the Government of the Shah of Iran and decided to bring about the collapse of a stable, modern Iran. This dubious goal he achieved in 1979, a decade before the end of the Cold War. Indeed, Carter's precipitate action, so decidedly against the interests of Iran and the West, allowed the foundering Soviet Union, and therefore the Cold War, to spin on until 1990. This historical abandonment of Iran and all that was Persia signaled the end of the West's ability to truly sustain victory in the Great Game for Central Asia. Iran was, and is, the keystone of the Eurasian landmass, for a number of reasons, and even the break-up of the Soviet Union — which briefly gave the West strategic access into Central Asia — could not compensate for the loss of Iran.

There have been numerous significant watersheds since that time: the ill-considered actions of Germany, leading to the Yugoslav wars, and the ongoing unrest in Eastern Europe; the US failure to understand Central Asia, leading to the loss of the Kyrgyz Republic as a viable ally; the failure of the West to embrace Russia and to insist on the perpetuation of the Cold War by default; the inability of the West to sustain the semblance of credible power in the Greater Black Sea Basin and Central Asia when Washington supported Georgia's military actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008; and so on. Indeed, it was the collapse of US credibility with its allies in the greater Black Sea and Caucasus region which occurred with the Georgian débâcle that Turkey and Azerbaijan were forced to make the unavoidable obeisance to Moscow, the power they had for centuries sought to avoid or oppose.

What are the overriding factors we see today?

- **Firstly, Malaise in Western Europe; and the *Relative Strategic Collapse or Paralysis of the US*.** We see much of the West in the disunity of political paralysis, in economic disarray, in social denial, and exhausted. I said recently: "The collapse of the West is not because Islam is at the gates. Islam is at the gates because of the collapse of the West."² At Europe's south-eastern continental extremity, protruding into the Eastern Mediterranean sea, nothing more greatly exemplifies the plight of the West than Greece. The Greek public still insists on heaping high the fires of comfort and indul-

² Copley, Gregory R.: "The New Civil Wars Within the West", in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 7-2010.

gence while the fuel is all but gone, and Winter approaches. To repeat: do not blame the rise of Islam for this situation; blame the hubris of the West. This, in particular, includes the extremely rapid relative — in terms of its position a few years ago — strategic decline of the US, exemplified by the relative decline of the US economy; the retreat of the US dollar as the global reserve currency; and the declining US ability to sustain its dominance in global military projection.

- **Secondly, Russia's Near-Control of Eurasian Energy Networks.** The principal evidence of the post-Great Game strategic framework in Eurasia is the Russian dominance — essentially near control — of the energy logistics linking Central Asia with Western Europe and, now, linking Russia with the People's Republic of China (PRC).³ To achieve this, in essence, Russia had to gain renewed influence over those Central Asian states which once were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Warsaw Treaty states of Eastern Europe. It has achieved this, and more, picking up — with the PRC — great leverage over Iran, and now Turkey. The creation and dominance by Moscow and Beijing of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) facilitates the revival of the new Great Silk Route, and will significantly aid in creating a virtually seamless market environment from the Pacific to the Atlantic. As part of this, we are likely to see shifts in the geopolitics as well as the technologies of energy, which may see the PRC, for example, becoming less dependent on long resource supply chains for oil, coal, iron ore, and so on, hurting exporters in Africa, Australia, and South America, while boosting use of Eurasian resources. In all of this, including the supply of energy, the European Union states will increasingly be integrated with Russia and the PRC, and less with North America. This may be the most profound geopolitical schism since the first sustained European contacts began with North America in the 15th Century.

³ On September 27, 2010, Russian Pres. Dmitry Medvedev and PRC Pres. Hu Jintao, in Beijing, opened the completion of the PRC branch of a pipeline to bring Russian oil to the PRC. Russia was to start pumping 300,000 barrels a day on January 1, 2010, via the EPSO pipeline which goes from the Russian oilfields at Skvordino, through the Eastern Siberian Steppes to Daqing, an oil hub in the PRC. State-controlled Rosneft, Russia's largest oil concern, will sell the crude to China's top energy group, PetroChina. Source: *The Financial Times*, September 27, 2010.

- **Thirdly, Global Economic Transformation.** We are seeing a global transformation in the use of currency and credit. It is probable that we will soon enter a period without a universally-trusted global reserve currency, a position which the US dollar has held for the past four to five decades, and which facilitated the emergence of a fluid global trading system.⁴ Trade — and balances of payments — will become more significant once again on a bilateral basis, and protectionism will rise. All of this contributes to a lessening of the ability to amass investment capital globally and will lead to the end to many aspects of the globalism of the post-Cold War era. It will lead, also, to the strengthening of nationalism, protectionism, and political correctness as societies once again begin to focus on productivity, especially in the area of essentials. These trends will drive how we approach research and development, the affordability of essentials, healthcare, and so on. It will greatly influence, and be influenced by, population trends, and we will see, following the final period of growth, a period of precipitous decline in both population numbers and life-span expectancy, perhaps in a decade or two.

So these, briefly, are three of the global, overriding trends, which will play out over the coming decade. Right now, however, we see a confluence — that is, a meeting and interaction — of shorter-term trends which are subordinate to these “Big Three” trends, and which place great emphasis on the Eastern Mediterranean.

- **The Increasing Proxy Power Projection of Iran into the Mediterranean as the Trigger for Civil War in Lebanon, and War With Israel:** Lebanon is on the verge of take-over by *HizbAllah*, which is directly controlled by Iran, and by Iran’s ally, Syria. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia — always a force for compromise in the face of threats — kept Lebanon’s Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, in the Kingdom, pressuring him to deliver a “compromise” which would accept this “inevitability” without an overt show of force by *HizbAllah* which could escalate to a coup against him. It might be too late. Hanging over all of this is the fact that Israel considers a *HizbAllah* take-over of Lebanon to be a *casus belli*: a legitimate provocation of

⁴ See, for example, Copley, Gregory: “The Search for a Reserve Currency”, in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 4-2010.

war.⁵ Meanwhile, Iran is already a Mediterranean power, reaching the sea through *HizbAllah* and through its other major partner, the Syrian Administration of Pres. Bashar al-Assad. We will see the velvet come off this glove in the near future. This reality constrains not only the Western powers and Israel, but also Turkey, which to some extent sees itself becoming encircled by Russia and Iran, despite the uneasy *détente* between Moscow, Tehran, and Ankara.

Already, Syrian interests regard Cyprus as a place to do clandestine business, something which both the Israelis and Turks find of concern.

To some extent, there are many in Tehran who would welcome the fact that, by showing their hand through a *HizbAllah* takeover in Lebanon, Israel may itself take the first steps toward a conflict which could ultimately bring in Syria and Iran. The Iranian clerics are justifiably reluctant to take the step of a military first strike against Israel, because the consequences — an Israeli retaliation with consequent widespread damage to Iran — would be blamed by the Iranian public not on Israel, but on the clerics for having precipitated the action. However, an Israeli first strike against Iran, regardless of how it is provoked, would be blamed by the Iranian people on Israel, and they would rally around their own Government, regardless of how mistrusted it is, as they did in the Iran-Iraq War.⁶

I mentioned earlier the declining ability of the US to sustain a global military projection and capability. But in every aspect — as recent Iranian statements have made clear — the word of the US is no longer capable of constraining the governments of Iran or Turkey; the leaders of those countries see Washington's impotence in a way which not even Washington can perceive.

In November 2008, immediately after the election of US Pres. Barack Obama, I noted: "The states of the world are going their own

⁵ See, particularly, Bodansky, Yossef: "Prospect of a Coup — and Wider Conflict — Grows in Lebanon", in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, September 21, 2010.

⁶ See, Copley, Gregory: "The Prospect of an Israeli Military Strike Against Iran: Far Lower than Western Analysts Would Like to Think", in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, July 6, 2010, and in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 8-2010, as "The Return of Chicken Little. The Prospect of an Israeli Military Strike Against Iran: Far Lower than Western Analysts Would Like to Think".

way. They will play with the US when it suits them. They will look Washington in the eye, and turn away when they wish. As the US ability to build security coalitions (or to retain them in, say, Afghanistan or Iraq) declines, US diplomats will become more strident, and yet more ineffective, in their pressures on onetime allies and foes. Their coercive powers will be seen, increasingly, as having been vacated.”⁷

We have insufficient time in these brief remarks to go into detail, but suffice it to say that Iran is already in the Mediterranean; it has broken out of the US-led containment; it is not yet ready for direct war with Israel, but it is ready to provoke it through a third party, such as Lebanon. All of this is cause for concern in the Eastern Mediterranean, and in Israel, but it is also of concern to the US, the EU, and to Moscow and Ankara. The Obama Administration, playing at peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, does nothing to forestall a regional war. Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman told the United Nations General Assembly on September 28, 2010, Israel — the only stable state in the Middle East — is not the cause of instability in the region; that instability is endemic to those unstable states themselves.

Meanwhile, the US Obama Administration’s obligatory attempt to “solve” the Arab-Israeli dispute has gone nowhere, and is likely only to distort politics in the region in favor of conflict.

- **The Increasing Direct Power Projection of Turkey into the Mediterranean:** In basic terms, the Turkish Government had slipped away from the influence of both the United States and the European Union and had moved unhappily under the dominance of Moscow by the end of 2008. It had become clear by that time that the US could not support it, or any of its allies in the region (such as Georgia, Ukraine, or Azerbaijan), and when it became equally clear — as a result of the US failure which was exemplified by the unsuccessful Georgian military adventure to seize control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008 — that Russia could control the spigots on pipelines of energy going from the Caspian through Turkey. By late 2008, in any event, Russia was already Turkey’s biggest trading partner. Turkey, beset by its own internal power

⁷ Copley, Gregory: “Continental Drift: Heartland Power Revives”, in the Early Warning column, *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 10-2008.

struggles, had, in the short-term, to bow to Moscow for the first time. Moscow demanded, successfully, that Ankara mend fences with Iran and Armenia, with the promise that energy would flow through Turkey from Iran via Armenia.

None of this meant that Ankara was happy with the situation, for a variety of reasons. Again, there is insufficient time here to go into all the details. But by 2010, Ankara had regained its economic equilibrium; the civilians had made strong progress in assuming dominance over the Armed Forces and the Turkish General Staff; and Turkey was conscious of the need to move rapidly to build regional strategic influence if it was to avoid being eclipsed by the geopolitical ambitions of Iran.

For this reason alone — this new battle with Iran for geostrategic space extending into the Arab world, but also into the Mediterranean — the issue of Cyprus has assumed a new centrality to Ankara. Within this framework, we must assume that all the indicators are correct in showing that Turkey has begun moving ahead with the development of its own military nuclear weapons capability.⁸ Certainly this would help Ankara achieve a degree of perceived strategic parity with Iran and, for that matter, Israel, but it would further alienate the European Union in attitudes toward Turkey.

But another reality that Turkey would not become part of the European Union — and basically has no wish to do what is necessary to become part of it — was highlighted by the steps which have been taken, under Turkish leadership, to create a new free trade region incorporating, initially, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. This zone, which would include visa free travel between the member countries, was announced by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, in concert with the Foreign Ministers of the other three states, alongside the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 26, 2010.⁹

⁸ See, Copley, Gregory R.: “Turkey Considers its Moves Toward Nuclear Weapons”, *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 8-2010. And also, as “Turkey Now Escalating its Moves Toward the Acquisition of Nuclear Weapons” in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, July 23, 2010.

⁹ “Turkey, Arab neighbors gear up for Mideast free trade zone”, in *Today's Zaman*, September 27, 2010. The report noted: “Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, speaking after the meeting with his Arab counterparts on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meetings in New York,

While such a move could reinforce the view of Turkey as an attractive bridging partner from Europe to the Middle East, the essence of the new “free trade zone” would be — if Turkey was to become part of the EU — to make Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan (or at least their trade) *de facto* members of the EU, something which even Ankara is aware would not at this time necessarily be acceptable to the EU.¹⁰

In all of this, apart from numerous other factors, it is clear that the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus becomes *more* important than ever to Ankara, giving it less incentive to accede to the EU demand that Turkey cease its illegal military occupation of part of the island of Cyprus.

- **The Balkan Systemic Crisis:** The crisis of re-distributing boundaries and populations in the Balkans is far from over. Even if we put aside, for the moment, the matter of the creation, by the international community, of an artificial new state, Kosovo, we cannot forget that the boundaries left after the break-up of Yugoslavia are still causing concern. Bosnia-Herzegovina should, and possibly will, be broken up still further if the Bosnian Muslim and Serbian communities are to live in peace, and the independence of Republica Srpska from Bosnia-Herzegovina has far greater political legitimacy than the creation of Kosovo. But of greater widespread concern is the

said the free trade zone was likely to be formally announced at a summit of leaders of the four countries, slated to take place in İstanbul in January. ‘We will declare at that summit that this economic zone is in effect,’ Davutoğlu told reporters at a joint press conference on Saturday. ‘We hope that this is good news not only for these four countries but also for the entire region.’ The four countries first agreed to set up a cooperation council ‘to develop a long-term strategic partnership’ and ‘create a zone of free movement of goods and persons among our countries’ during a meeting of foreign ministers on the sidelines of a Turkey-Arab cooperation forum in İstanbul in June [2010]. Since then, Turkey and Lebanon have signed a bilateral deal on free trade and abolished visa requirements, thus paving the way for future implementation of the free trade deal. In August [2010], the trade ministers of the four countries met to review preparations for the implementation of the June deal.”

<http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-222767-turkey-arab-neighbors-gear-up-for-mideast-free-trade-zone.html>

¹⁰ The EU already has a free trade agreement with Jordan, so the Turkish-led *bloc* with Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, and potentially Iran, is not necessarily unworkable for the EU, although the EU-Jordan arrangement is something which the EU itself has negotiated. Whether the EU is ready to embrace the terms of an externally-negotiated *bloc* is another matter. When the UK joined the EU, for example, it had to surrender many of the privileges it had once extended to Commonwealth states, as these were unacceptable to the EU.

dispute over the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and its claims to territories which historically have been part of Greek Macedonia and other peoples who historically can be said to be Bulgarian. We have seen neither an end to the irredentist claims of Albanians to parts or all of FYROM, nor the boundary disputes which may involve FYROM, Greece, and possibly Bulgaria. [It is significant that 77 percent of Greece's population growth in recent years has been due to immigration, much of it from Albania.] This pattern, along with unfinished border claims by Kosovo and others, as well as by Albania against Greece and possibly Greece against Albania, may well affect the logistical patterns within the Balkans. This in turn will impact on the viability of the various strategic pipeline networks being planned to run southward through the Balkans to the Mediterranean.

- **The Greek Vacuum of Strategic Power:** The economic crisis now facing the Greek Government and Greek society is symptomatic of the crisis facing the West in general. Modern Western society has grown accustomed to wealth, and in abandoning productivity. We have moved into a pseudo-post-industrial type of society, in which we feel that the produce of life — the food, energy, and consumables — can be acquired from someone else. We are now reaching the point at which it is no longer possible to sustain viable economies without a balanced economy. And unless Greece, the principal exemplar of this failing, moves even more rapidly, then the strategic balance in the Eastern Mediterranean will fall more heavily under Turko-Russo-Iranian influence, and Greece will find itself hard-pressed to sustain its position with regard to oceanic boundaries or in defending, for example, even the *status quo* on Cyprus.
- **The Impending Political Collapse, or Transformation, of Egypt:** The strategic viability of the Eastern Mediterranean has, since the 1860s, heavily depended on the arterial seaway of the Suez Canal. The transition from the present Egyptian Administration of Pres. Hosni Mubarak, then, to a new leader — possibly his son, Gamal, but possibly not — is likely to bring social and political upheaval. Egypt's return to economic growth, now so heavily dependent on the exploitation of new gas fields, may help ease the transition, but it is equally likely that Egypt will become engaged, reluctantly or otherwise, in the conflict which could soon engage Israel. At the same time, Egypt itself is, at this critical time in its political life, en-

gaged in difficult political engagement over the future use of Nile River waters, which are vital to Egypt's economy. But this also encompasses Egypt's actions in the Red Sea, not merely for the sake of the Red Sea/Suez sea lane, but also because it involves the containment or otherwise of Ethiopia. As a result, the Horn of Africa's stability, and that of the Red Sea, directly impinges upon Egyptian stability, and therefore upon the dynamic of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Significantly, however, in all of this, Egypt sees in the Iranian expansion of influence into the Mediterranean a threat to Cairo's historical regional leadership and interests. Similarly, despite cooperation with Turkey, Egypt does not wish Ankara's interests in the area to once again extend south toward Gaza and Sinai, or even the West Bank and Jordan, as did the Ottoman interests until World War I.

- **The Continuing Prospect of a Civil-Military Confrontation in Turkey:** Quite apart from the Turkish move away from the EU, and the chafing hegemony of Moscow, Turkey faces its own internal turmoil. The great confrontation between the military and the civilian Government is not yet resolved, despite the September 12, 2010, referendum which essentially gave greater power to the civilians and removed some of the powers which the military had arrogated to the General Staff in the Constitution of 1982, during the term of military rule.

It is still possible that the military could act to restore some of its powers, and to constrain elected civil governance, if and when the society is willing to accept that the "democratic reforms" designed to win European Union approval are no longer necessary. In other words, when it is finally accepted that Turkey is not going to become a member of the EU, then the EU demands for Turkey to have a Constitution in line with those in Western Europe will have no weight. We are essentially already at that point, but the civilian Islamist leadership in Turkey now seems convinced that it has contained the military, and is — with such projects as the free trade region with its Arab neighbors — already walking away openly from the EU.

What crisis, then, will give the Turkish Armed Forces the legitimacy — the internal *casus belli* — they need to move against the civi-

lians. Whether the military takes power again or not, there is no significant pressure on either party to remove Turkish troops from Cyprus.

Possibly the only pressure for Turkey to change its military projection would be a growth in domestic unrest, possibly from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The civilian Government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has made steps toward resolving the "Kurdish problem" in recent months, but the issue is far from over. A resumption of Kurdish armed rebellion against the Government could provide the trigger for the Armed Forces to once again assert their dominance over the nation, in the interests of security.

The major and minor trends identified here are just the superficial aspects of a complicated mosaic. We have here identified just some of the short- and long-term factors swirling around the Eastern Mediterranean, and around Cyprus. They highlight some of the challenges facing Cyprus, but not the solutions. Indeed, there are many other facets to be considered. The decline of Western influence — particularly that of the US, EU, and, by default, NATO — in the region will have an impact on whether or not the US and UK will want to strengthen their grasp over sovereign base areas and intelligence-gathering assets in Cyprus, or whether they will see the need to appease Turkey diminish. Recent changes in Russia; the recent election changes in Britain; and the forthcoming changes in the US political scene all will bear on how the major players will respond to the transforming Eastern Mediterranean situation. How, and whether, an Arab *bloc* can be built to challenge the Iranian surge toward the Mediterranean and, indeed, through the Arabian Peninsula to the Red Sea and Horn of Africa is equally critical, and equally significant for the viability of the Red Sea/Suez sea lane.

Ultimately, to understand the Eastern Mediterranean cyclone, it is necessary to understand Eurasian and East-West energy issues, and the emerging dynamism of the Indian Ocean region, bearing in mind that the Indian Ocean — the hub of much of the 21st Century framework — reaches up to the Gulf of Aqaba, the Suez Canal (and therefore into the Mediterranean), and to the Western reaches of the Persian Gulf.

The power plays in Tehran, and the end of the rule of Iranian Pres. Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad in the next few years, will be critical to the Eastern Mediterranean and to Cyprus.

Cyprus, meanwhile, is operating in an entirely new world, and yet is still paying homage to a world which no longer has the shape and hierarchy it once

had. Cyprus should have moved much of its diplomacy from Washington, DC, to Moscow two years ago, or at least added Moscow as a priority partner, especially given Russia's Orthodox Christian population. The visit to Cyprus by Russian Pres. Dmitry Medvedev on October 5-6, 2010, began the process, and highlighted the fact that Russia was the biggest investment partner of Cyprus. As with Turkey, Cyprus acknowledges the facts on the ground.

What becomes evident, then, is that Washington now only preaches; Moscow acts.

The conclusions, then, include:

1. The West is in strategic decline, and is doing little or nothing to reverse this decline. Russia and the PRC dominate the Eurasian energy and market space, and make a Russian-European alliance more important than a Euro-American framework. This is the most profound geo-strategic schism since the late 15th Century, and directly impacts Cyprus.
2. The Great Game for Central Asia is over for the time being, and Russia has won, with Iran and Turkey temporarily — and very precariously — under Moscow's sway. All three states, however, are competitive with each other, and the US has very little to say in the matter. This, too, is critical to Cyprus, because Iran, Turkey, and Russia are all competing for dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean. This could, among other things, lead to war again, pushed by Iran, involving Lebanon and Israel, and then Syria, Iran, and others. The US is not helping to resolve this.
3. The global economic and political turmoil still has a way to go.
4. Turkey, which is clearly working toward becoming a nuclear weapons state, is now firmly on a path away from the EU, which begs the question as to why Britain and Spain and others — and the US — are trying to still woo Turkey into the Union. Turkey is trying to build a *bloc* of states which would dominate the Eastern Mediterranean, and for this reason, too, will not abandon its foothold in Cyprus.
5. The Government of Cyprus is still not responding fully to the changed world with a meaningful strategy or new capabilities.