

Lifting Embargo on American Non-lethal Arms to Cyprus Is Aimed Against Russia. US Militarization of the Eastern Mediterranean

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Washington announced the lifting of the embargo to sell American-made non-lethal equipment to the Republic of Cyprus. US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, told Cypriot President Nikos Anastasiadis over the phone on Tuesday that Washington decided to lift the embargo imposed on Cyprus since 1987, but only for non-lethal equipment.

“The Republic of Cyprus is a key partner in the Eastern Mediterranean. I am pleased to announce that we are deepening our security cooperation. We will waive restrictions on the sale of non-lethal defense articles and services to the Republic of Cyprus for the coming fiscal year,” Pompeo [said on Twitter](#).

Turkey’s Foreign Ministry slammed the decision saying it “disregards the equality and balance” on the island and said it expected its NATO ally to “review” it, “otherwise, Turkey as a guarantor country will take the necessary reciprocal steps in line with its legal and historical responsibility to guarantee the security of the Turkish Cypriot people.”

Cyprus was divided in 1974 when Turkey invaded the northern portion of the East Mediterranean island. Turkey then established the illegal Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus that is recognized by no other country in the world except Turkey. Washington established an arms embargo on Cyprus in 1987 in the supposed attempt to encourage the reunification of Cyprus and prevent an arms race on the island, however, this was actually to ensure that the island remained permanently divided to serve NATO interests in the region. For decades the U.S. has not only tolerated Turkish aggression, but has encouraged it.

In fact, a declassification from the [National Security Adviser’s Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library](#) revealed that then US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, told President Gerald Ford that if Greece went to war with Turkey, America should back the Turks and that they were entitled to seize a part of the island. When speaking about a Greek response to a Turkish invasion of Cyprus, Kissinger told the president that “We certainly do not want a war between the two, but if it came to that, Turkey is more important to us and they have a political structure which could produce a Qadhafi,” referring to Libya’s long-time ruler. Kissinger added that “there is no American reason why the Turks should not have one-third of Cyprus.”

The US appeasement for Ankara during the decades of the Cold War, and beyond it, is what has created a “Qadhafi” in the country that Kissinger had told about. Although US President

Donald Trump undoubtedly has a [“bromance”](#) with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for his personal business ventures, many within the US state apparatus have a growing animosity towards Turkey. The US State Department as recently as last week condemned Turkey for hosting Hamas leaders, and Senators and Congressmen from both major political parties are banding together to force American sanctions on Turkey.

The US Ambassador to Cyprus, Judith Garber, stated only yesterday that the US decision to lift the embargo imposed on Cyprus, in terms of non-lethal equipment, does not concern Turkey but greater security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. Garber said that the US decision to lift the embargo will be valid from October 1, 2020 until September 30, 2021. Garber reminded that the legislation that enabled the announced decision calls on Cyprus to continue its efforts to implement strong anti-money laundering and financial regulatory oversight regulations and to take the necessary steps to refuse access to Russian warships in its ports for supplies and services. The American Ambassador went on to claim that Russia is playing a very destabilizing role in the region.

“Cyprus is an important partner and a key player in the Eastern Mediterranean... this step strengthens our security relationship with Cyprus and increases security in the Eastern Mediterranean,” she added.

In return for not allowing Russian ships to port in Cyprus, the island country can buy non-lethal equipment from the Americans, such as binoculars and bullet proof vests.

It is highly unlikely that decisionmakers in the Cypriot capital of Nicosia will enforce Washington’s desires as Russia has been a mainstay of the Cypriot economy when the US has never showed an interest in it. The US always had a preference for its foreign investment in the East Mediterranean to go to Turkey and Israel instead. In addition, although Cyprus does not have a fully professional military, it is a highly militarized state, despite being a country of only 1.2 million people. Cyprus has 14-month compulsory military service for all men, where they will also be reservists until they are 50 years old. With the US embargoing weapons to Cyprus to ensure Turkey’s military superiority on the island, it is Russia that sells critical weaponry to the Cypriots.

Cyprus is not a NATO member; in fact, it is a NATO member that occupies northern Cyprus. It is for this reason that Nicosia has a lot more independence in its decision making to its interests - unlike Greece, as an example of an East Mediterranean NATO member. Cyprus is not willing to sacrifice a decades’ long positive relationship with Russia to buy military gloves and boots from the US. Nicosia understand that the US demands are not to serve Cypriot interests, whether it be security from another potential Turkish invasion or for the reunification of the island, but rather they are receiving tokenistic gifts from Washington so that it can become an anti-Russian state in the East Mediterranean. Although the US has made efforts to improve relations with Cyprus, albeit for the ulterior motive of targeting Russia, decision makers in Nicosia will opt to try and balance its relations with Washington and Moscow. However, this also means that Cyprus is unlikely to decide to close their ports to Russian ships.

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