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Washington's Culpability for Turkey's Misconduct in Cyprus

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| [Ted Galen Carpenter](#) ^[2]



Seeing Cyprus again after an absence of more than a decade causes a renewed sense of sadness. Although most Americans are unaware of the situation, an ugly, militarized dividing line still runs down the center of that unfortunate country more than 36 years after Turkey's invasion. The desolate, UN-patrolled "buffer zone" in the heart of the capital, Nicosia, resembles a Mediterranean version of the Cold War's Berlin Wall.

An even more appalling sight exists in the port city of Famagusta, once the leading resort destination in Cyprus—and, indeed, in the entire eastern Mediterranean. Since 1974, the Turkish army of occupation has fenced-off a portion of the city, including the principal tourist hotels along the beach, and refused to allow the Greek Cypriot owners to return. Strangely, though, the Turks never took over operation of that area themselves. Instead, they have preserved it as a "ghost city." Looking at blocks and blocks of empty high rises

(most now with their windows broken out) is a truly spooky experience.

Turkey's appalling behavior in occupied Cyprus (which is 37 percent of the island) raises the inevitable question of the extent (if any) of America's culpability [3]. After all, Turkey is a fellow NATO member, and U.S. leaders have always asserted that NATO stands for the preservation of peace and the rule of law. Yet at a minimum, Washington looked the other way in 1974 while its ally invaded and occupied a neighboring country. And in the decades since then, U.S. criticism of Turkey's behavior (which includes the systematic desecration of Christian churches in the occupied territory) has been, at best, perfunctory.

Privately, policymakers in both Republican and Democratic administrations argue that the United States has little alternative, since Turkey is a pivotal power in its region and a crucial U.S. security partner [3]. That attitude illustrates the dilemma that Cato foreign policy analyst Malou Innocent and I are exploring in a book that we're writing, *Dubious Partners: Washington's Authoritarian Allies and American Values*. It focuses on the willingness of the world's leading capitalist democracy to make common cause with regimes that are neither capitalist nor democratic. That situation was most evident during the Cold War when the U.S. supported such corrupt autocrats as the Shah of Iran, Ferdinand Marcos, and Mobutu Sese Seko, but it is also a characteristic of U.S. policy in the so-called war on terror.

Turkey does not entirely fit the profile, since it is at least a quasi democracy. But Ankara's conduct, especially in Cyprus, is distressingly similar to that of more clearly odious allies. The underlying question is: To what extent should U.S. leaders compromise important American values in the name of protecting national security—or advancing Washington's foreign policy objectives? Our preliminary conclusion in *Dubious Partners* is that U.S. officials over the decades have been far too willing to compromise—or even outright violate—those values. They have done so on numerous occasions when the stakes did not come close to justifying such a sacrifice.

Washington's failure to speak out against Turkey's egregious behavior in Cyprus [3] is one example (albeit, perhaps not the worst) of such moral cowardice. No one is suggesting that the United States bomb Turkey or send in the Marines to expel the invaders—although it should be noted that Washington did lead a massive military effort to punish Saddam Hussein for a similar land grab in Kuwait. One does have a right to expect that the United States will take an ethical stance in the conduct of its diplomacy. Washington has failed that basic test with respect to its policy toward Turkey on the Cyprus issue.

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