

Memorial Service for Rauf Denktash, January 24, 2011

Statement by Paul Heinbecker

Thank you, Ambassador Akgunay, for inviting me to say a few words on this sad occasion.

I remember Rauf Denktash very well although in fact I never knew him personally.

Though I had not met him, Denktash was part of my professional consciousness almost my whole career.

And like most foreign officials who followed the Cyprus issue, I was struck by his determination and his dedication—his opponents would say obduracy.

My introduction to the Cyprus “issue” came in Ankara in 1967—during the near war that year over Cyprus.

Canada was particularly interested because we had peacekeeping forces on the island.

—and because we were allied then, as we are now, with both Greece and Turkey in NATO.

[Anecdote--Goreme, hepatitis and Caglayangil]

What we were seeing in those days, without the world having by then named it as such, was ethnic cleansing.

The Greek colonels, who had taken over Greece by force, and their EOKA sympathizers on Cyprus wanted Enosis—the union of the island with Greece.

And they did not want inconvenient Turks to stand in their way.

I remember how much PM Ecevit tried to get the world to do something about it.

But the world was not prepared in those days to intervene to protect the innocent —as it has now done in Kosovo and Libya.

So it fell to Turkey to act.

And it did so.

And it did so, pursuant to the treaties of London and Zurich and the Treaty of Guarantee, under which Turkey was a guarantor of the Cypriot constitution.

As one Greek said ruefully after the 1974 invasion,
they thought they could act as a majority on the island
but they forgot they were a minority in the region.

In subsequent years, as one keen observer said, the problem with the Cyprus issue was that the Turks never forgot the violence of the decade from 1964 to 1974 and the Greeks never remembered it.

[Anecdote--I saw that myself – while serving in Bonn]

Rauf Dentash never forgot that the central issue was the security of Cypriots.

And, to ensure the liberty and security of the Turkish Cypriots, he wanted a two-state solution for the island.

The same solution as the world came to want for Israel and Palestine, a few kilometers away across the Mediterranean.

Denktash stuck with that position--or at least a bizonal federation--through thick and thin, even bringing into being the Republic of Northern Cyprus.

But for whatever reason—it was a solution that none would accept for Cyprus.

And the republic remains little recognized to this day.

I also remember how hard the UN—especially then Secretary General Kofi Annan-- worked to achieve a solution.

In 2004, the Turkish Cypriots voted to accept that solution---

And the Greek Cypriots—cynically assured membership in the EU—voted to reject the agreement.

Cynical, because one of the motivations of the Europeans for bringing Cyprus into the EU.

--was to create a plausible excuse to keep the Turks out.

But times change and fortunes change.

The EU is in crisis, and the crisis has been triggered by Greek intransigence.

Cyprus, too, is in trouble--its bond rating has been very substantially downgraded.

Meanwhile, Turkey has begun to thrive.

And northern Cyprus endures—as Rauf Denktash was undoubtedly happy to see.

The island's future is now in the hands of his successors.

Perhaps Greece's fall from grace and Turkey's prosperity will have at long last created the conditions for an agreement.

And in fact negotiators are currently meeting at the Greentree estate on Long Island.

May they finally agree to resolve this entirely resolvable problem.

And if they do, may they pause a moment to thank Rauf Denktash who doggedly defended the liberty and security of the Turkish Cypriots in anticipation that such a day would eventually come.