but after a few weeks, the Turks were forced to retreat. Kolokotronis is a revered Greek leader, because he embodied the hopes and dreams of the common man, while displaying extraordinary courage and moral fiber in the face of overwhelming odds.

According to Diakos, another legendary hero, a priest, a patriot, and a soldier. He led 500 of his men in a noble stand against 8,000 Ottoman soldiers. Diakos’ men were wiped out and he fell into the enemy’s hands, where he was severely tortured before his death. He is the inspiration of a Greek arete (the Greek word for excellence), and a symbol of leadership and patriotism.

In the story of the Suliotes, villagers who took refuge from Turkish authorities in the mountains of Epirus. The fiercely patriotic Suliotes bravely fought the Turks in several battles. News of their victories spread throughout the region and encouraged other villages to revolt. The Turkish Army acted swiftly and with overwhelming force to quell the Suliote uprising.

The Suliote women were alone as their husbands battled the Turks at the front. When they learned that Turkish troops were fast approaching their village, they began to dance the Suliote Greek dance. One by one, rather than face torture or enslavement at the hands of the Turks, they committed suicide by throwing themselves and their children off Mount Zalogos. They chose to die rather than surrender their freedom.

The sarcophagus of the Suliotes was repeated in the Arkadi Monastery of Crete. Hundreds of noncombatants, mainly the families of the Cretan freedom fighters, had taken refuge in the monastery to escape Turkish reprisals. The Turkish army was informed that the monastery was used by the Cretan freedom fighters as an arsenal for their war material, and they set out to seize it. As the Turkish troops were closing in, the priest gathered all the refugees in the cellars around him. With their consent, he set fire to the gunpowder kegs stored there. The next day, the monks of the Arkadi Monastery, like the ruins of our Alamo, still stand as a monument to liberty.

The freedom we enjoy today is due to a large degree to the sacrifices made by men and women in the past—in Greece, in America, and all over the world. We must not overlook those who are still fighting for their independence in other parts of the world, such as in the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey still illegally occupies Cyprus, as it has since its invasion in 1974. Finding a fair resolution for Cyprus will help stabilize a region marked more often by conflict than accord.

As with so many international issues, U.S. leadership is essential to urge Turkish and Turkish Cypriot leaders toward peace. One year after United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan proposed his plan as a basis for negotiations between the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, the Turkish Cypriot leadership finally agreed to the negotiations. The proposed plan aims at reuniting the island under a government of shared power and having the united island admitted to the European Union on May 1, 2004. This is a vision worthy of our attention and full support because it has the potential to end the illegitimate division of Cyprus, improve the relations between Turkey and Greece and promote stability in the sensitive region of Eastern Mediterranean.

We must never forget that freedom must be constantly guarded. It is a noble but fragile thing that can be stolen or snuffed out. We must fight to preserve it. The Star-spangled Banner must wave in the Aegean... a messenger of fraternity and friendship to Greece.

Various Members of Congress also showed a keen interest in the Greek struggle for autonomy. William H. Seward, who in 1857 became Secretary of State, was a champion of Greece’s fight for independence. Among the most vocal was Daniel Webster from Massachusetts, who frequently roused the sympathetic interest of his colleagues and other Americans in the Greek revolution. It should not surprise us that our Founding Fathers would express such keen support for Greek independence, for they themselves had been inspired by the ancient Greeks in their own struggle for freedom. As Thomas Jefferson once said, “To the ancient Greeks... we are all indebted for the light which led ourselves... American colonists, out of gothic darkness.” Our two nations share a brotherhood bonded by the common blood of democracy, a bond that we must never lose.

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