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**Cyprus:**  
**The Geography of Division**

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February 1984

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# Cyprus: The Geography of Division

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## A Reference Aid

*Information available as of 16 January 1984  
was used in this report.*

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This paper was prepared by [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Office of Global Issues. It was  
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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
directed to the Chief, Geography Division, OGI, on  
[Redacted]

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# Cyprus: The Geography of Division

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The Turkish-Cypriot declaration of independence for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in November 1983 has heightened tensions between the island's two major ethnic groups as well as between their mainland patrons, Greece and Turkey—NATO allies who previously have come close to armed conflict in protecting their interests in Cyprus. Greek and Turkish Cypriots have been divided by a narrow UN buffer zone into economically, politically, and socially independent communities since Turkish troops invaded the island in 1974—securing the northern sector for their Cypriot compatriots. The Turkish-Cypriot independence move, while not entailing the expropriation of additional land, solidifies the division between the two communities and weakens prospects for reunification. This report examines the geographic characteristics of the division that underlie current tensions and that will form the framework for any negotiated settlement of the Cyprus problem.

flights resupplying the US peacekeeping force in Lebanon transit the airport at Larnaca.

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With an area of 9,251 square kilometers (slightly larger than Puerto Rico), Cyprus is the third-largest island in the Mediterranean. The northern Turkish-Cypriot sector comprises 34.8 percent of the total land area; the UN buffer zone, 3 percent; the southern Greek-Cypriot sector, 59.4 percent, and the two British sovereign base areas, 2.8 percent.

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### History in Brief

Turkish interests in Cyprus reach back to 1571, when Ottoman Turks conquered the Greek-inhabited island—beginning three centuries of Turkish rule and the development of an indigenous Turkish minority. In 1878 the Ottoman Sultan ceded control of Cyprus to the United Kingdom, which made it a crown colony in 1925. Under British rule, Greek-Cypriot agitation for union with Greece (*enosis*) became an increasing source of tension, which—aggravated by the ensuing Turkish-Cypriot demands for partition (*taksim*)—erupted in 1955 into what was to be four years of full-scale intercommunal conflict and Greek-Cypriot guerrilla warfare against the British; consequently the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Greece negotiated a settlement forbidding *enosis* or *taksim* and establishing the independent Republic of Cyprus in 1960. Intercommunal violence broke out anew in 1963-64 and again in 1967, raising the prospect of wars between Greece and Turkey, which were averted only by US mediation efforts. In July 1974, Greek-Cypriot rightists, backed by the military junta in Athens, mounted a coup that temporarily ousted President Makarios and triggered a Turkish invasion. Shortly after Makarios resumed his presidency in December 1974, the Turkish Cypriots established the northern sector as a separate local administration—the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus—which was neither independent nor internationally recognized.

Cyprus consists of two rugged mountain belts, an intervening broad, semiarid plain (the Mesaoria), and wide-to-narrow coastal lowlands. The Turkish-controlled area encompasses the entire Kyrenia Range—a narrow forested belt along the northern coast that varies in maximum elevation from over 1,000 meters in the west to 300 meters on the Karpas Peninsula, the narrow panhandle of easternmost Cyprus. Most of the fertile plain of Mesaoria also falls within the Turkish-Cypriot sector. The Greek-controlled area is dominated by the Troodos Mountains—a forest-covered, heavily dissected range with central elevations generally exceeding 1,000 meters; the highest point, Mount Olympus, reaches 1,952 meters.

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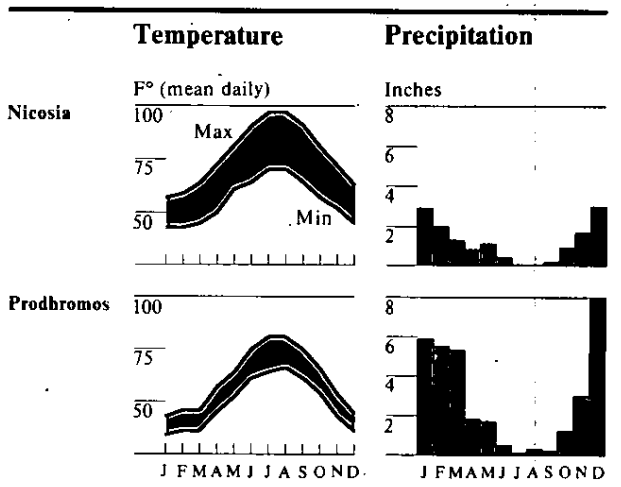
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The Cypriot climate is characterized by cool, rainy winters (mid-November through March) and hot, dry summers (June through September), with brief spring and fall seasons between. The island's bright sunshine during much of the year favors its economically important tourist industry. Snow, which is rare on most of Cyprus, blankets the elevations of the Troodos Mountains above 1,000 meters from December through February—attracting foreign as well as domestic skiers.

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### Strategic Location and Physical Setting

Only 65 kilometers south of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus in recent times has served the United States as an important staging area and transshipment point.

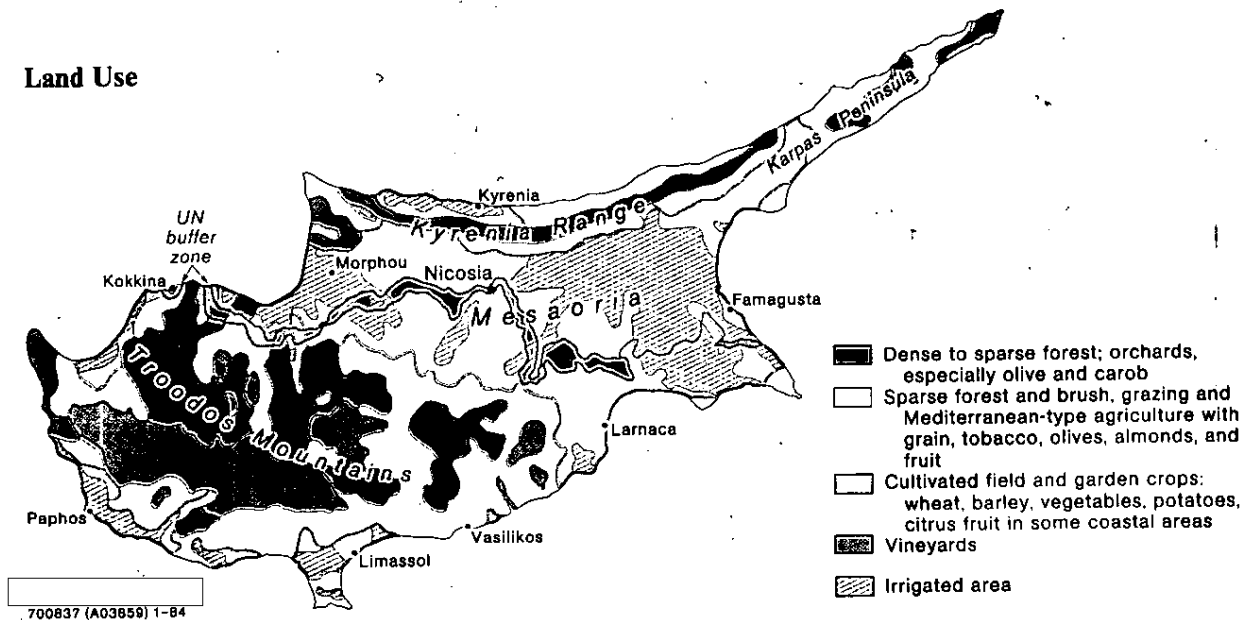


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**Land Use**



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Water supply is a constant problem for semiarid Cyprus. Because rainfall is concentrated in the winter and the island's rivers dry up in the summer, underground aquifers—many of which are in the north—and artificial reservoirs are essential to ensure a year-round supply of water for both domestic and agricultural use. Between 1960 and 1978, dam construction increased the water storage capacity tenfold to 65 million cubic meters; projects to construct additional dams are continuing, mostly in the southern sector [redacted]

**Divided Population**

Even before the events of 1974, Cyprus's Greek and Turkish populations had become politically polarized and the seeds of physical separation had been planted—as evidenced by the 1964 installation of UN peacekeeping forces along the "Green Line," dividing the capital city of Nicosia. The Turkish invasion completed the polarization—almost completely segregating Greek and Turkish Cypriots physically and creating massive refugee problems that altered the population distribution of the country. [redacted]

By far the largest population upheaval was experienced by the Greek Cypriots—150,000 to 200,000 of whom fled or were expelled from the north, leaving behind nearly all of their property. In 1981 the Greek-Cypriot Deputy Minister of Interior estimated that 100,000 refugees had been resettled and that by 1983 the number would have risen to between 145,000 and 150,000. We believe that the figure is actually higher and that almost all of the refugees have been assimilated in the south. Currently Greek Cypriots make up about 500,000 of the island's estimated 653,000 inhabitants. [redacted]

By 1974 many Turkish Cypriots had already settled in enclaves in the north, but the Turkish intervention brought about the migration of approximately 45,000 others who had remained in the south. Most of these refugees—along with some 20,000 mainland Turks that the US Embassy in Nicosia estimated had settled in the north by 1979—were easily accommodated in the housing abandoned by the substantially larger number of Greek Cypriots who went south. The current total population of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—including mainland Turks and Turkish Cypriots—has been estimated by the Embassy to be about 140,000. [redacted]

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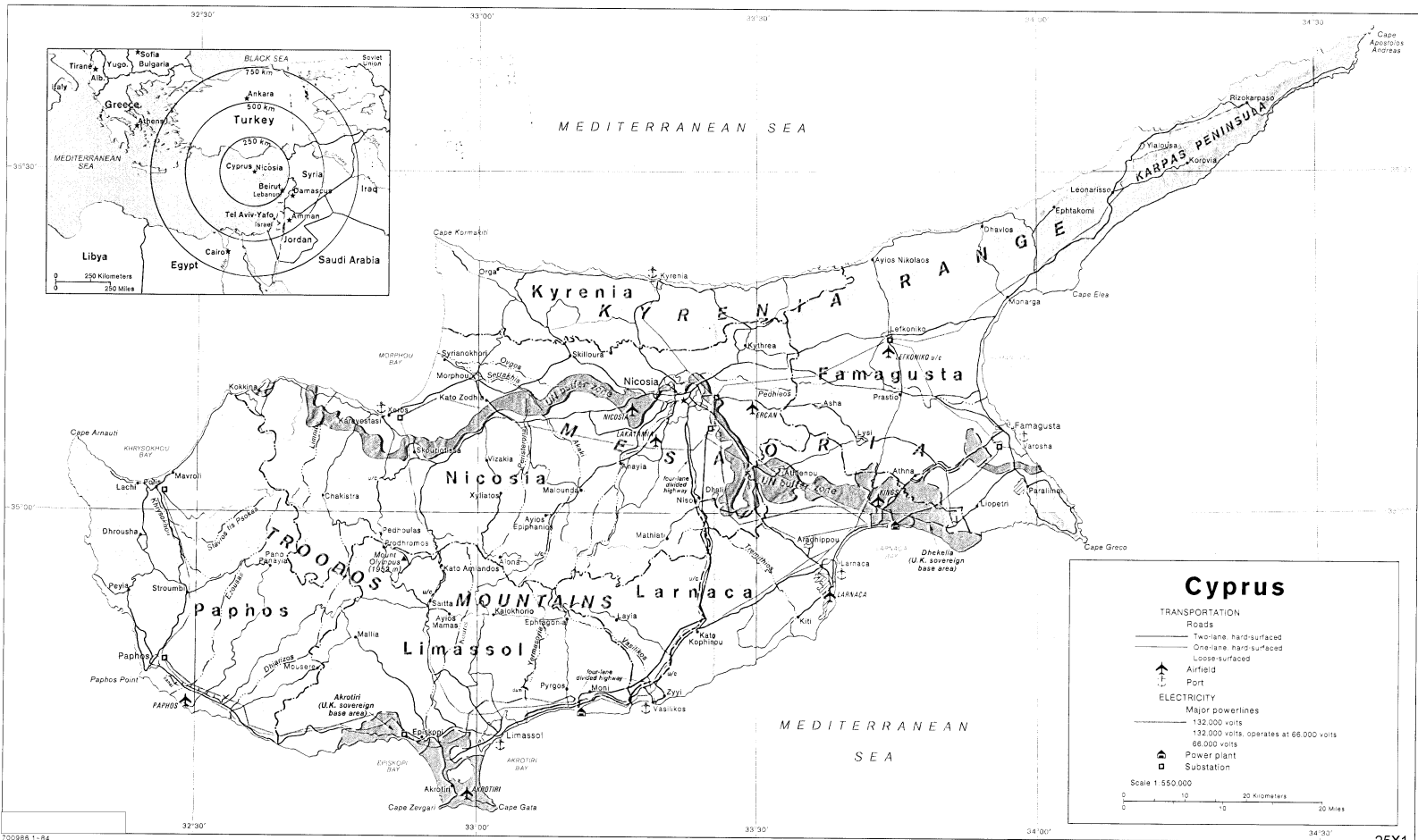
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Approximately 45 percent of all Cypriots reside in urban areas. Nicosia, the island's largest city, has an estimated population of 135,000, projected from the 1973 census base. Most of Nicosia is within the Greek-controlled area, although within the wall-enclosed old city at the center of the capital Turkish and Greek Cypriots occupy approximately equal-size communities on either side of the "Green Line." There are few other large urban areas in Cyprus. Limassol, the main Greek-Cypriot seaport, has a population of about 65,000, and Larnaca, the Greek-Cypriot port city and site of the main international airport, has slightly more than 20,000. Based on projections from 1980 US Embassy estimates, Turkish-controlled Famagusta—once Cyprus's main seaport—currently has a population of almost 23,000 Turkish Cypriots; adjacent Varosha—a popular Greek-Cypriot resort area before the 1974 invasion—is now a ghost town sealed by Turkish troops. In 1973, the two had a combined population of more than 38,000. The rural [redacted]

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population of Cyprus is fairly evenly distributed in small compact villages located throughout the island; only parts of the Karpas Peninsula and the central Troodos Mountains are sparsely populated. [ ]

#### Partitioned Economy

Prior to the 1974 Turkish invasion, Cyprus had a unified economy dominated by agriculture and supplemented by manufacturing, tourism, and mining. With the de facto partition of the island, however, its economy was divided into two independently functioning parts having only minimal contact—a division that persists today. Only for the supply of water and electricity are the two sectors still somewhat economically interdependent. [ ]

The current focus of each sector's economic activity reflects, in large part, the share of the island's resources it acquired with the 1974 de facto partition. The Turkish-Cypriot sector, which gained control of more than half the arable land, continues to rely primarily on agriculture—which, according to a 1979 Turkish publication, generates about 70 percent of the Turkish-Cypriot income. Although they acquired about a third of the island's preintervention manufacturing facilities, the Turkish Cypriots have not realized any significant growth in this economic sector—largely because of a continuing shortage of skilled managers and workers precipitated by the flight of the Greek-Cypriot population. Conversely, the Greek-Cypriot sector, which lost access to large tracts of valuable cropland while gaining a large skilled labor force, has been forced to diversify its economy and has invested heavily in labor-intensive export-oriented light industry. Despite this emphasis, however, agriculture continues to be an important contributor to the economic viability of the Greek-Cypriot south. [ ]

Tourism continues to be important to the economies of both sectors. Unlike in the north, however, where resort areas are said to be underutilized and in need of renovation, accommodations at tourist facilities in the south more than doubled between 1974 and 1980 and expansion is continuing. In contrast to the tourist industry, the once-important mining industry—focused on copper in the north and chromite, asbestos, iron pyrite, gypsum, and umber in the south—has all but ceased to be of economic importance, largely as a result of the depletion of ores, falling world prices, and the growth of other economic sectors. [ ]

On balance, the Greek Cypriots have weathered the economic hardships of the island's partition far better than their Turkish counterparts. While the south enjoys a robust economy, the north continues to rely heavily on Ankara for economic support. [ ]

**Agriculture.** More than 60 percent of Cyprus consists of arable land. Turkish Cypriots control more than half of the best cropland, including 65 to 68 percent of the cereal-producing areas of the Mesaoria Plain, all of the tobacco lands (in Karpas), 80 percent of the citrus plantations (along the Kyrenia coast), and rich vegetable-producing lands in the Morphou Bay area. Much of the eastern Mesaoria Plain and the Morphou Bay area is irrigated. [ ]

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Cropland in southern Cyprus—which accounted for 29 percent of the sector's total land area in 1981—is concentrated along the coastal lowlands near Paphos, Larnaca, and Limassol and on the southern slopes of the Troodos Mountains, where most of the island's vineyards are located. Major crops in the Paphos belt include table grapes, citrus fruit, vegetables, olives, and carobs; some cereals, potatoes, and other vegetables thrive on cropland near Larnaca and Limassol. Lack of water is a major constraint to improvement and expansion of agricultural land in the south. Irrigated land is currently limited to coastal areas, mostly near Paphos and Limassol. Some 50 square kilometers of the irrigated land in the Paphos region was added during the late 1970s through projects funded by World Bank loans; other irrigation projects in the Troodos Mountains and the Vasilikos area are to be completed in the mid-1980s. [ ]

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**Water and Electricity.** Water and electricity constitute the only vestiges of economic interdependence between Cyprus's divided communities. Turkish Cypriots rely on the south for all of their electricity, for some of the water for the Turkish sector of the divided city of Nicosia, and for most of the water for Famagusta. Greek Cypriots rely on the north for most of the water for the Greek sector of Nicosia. To date, each side has continued to supply the other with the necessary services—without payment and virtually without interruption. (Turkish Cypriots curtailed the water supply to the Greek sector of Nicosia for a brief period in June 1981.) In addition, the two share in the operation of Nicosia's sewage system, completed in 1980—with the Turks controlling the treatment plant and the Greeks controlling the collection system. [ ]

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All responsibility for public electricity generation and supply falls to the Electric Authority of Cyprus, an autonomous utility owned by the Greek-Cypriot Government. Two oil-fueled power plants, one at Dhekelia and one at Moni, generate the island's 264 megawatts of power. Powerlines of 66 and 132 kilovolts carry electricity to all main areas of the country. The World Bank is funding a project to add two 60-megawatt units to the Dhekelia plant to meet growing demands for power and to replace older equipment. [ ]

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**Transportation**

Roads are the only means of land transport on Cyprus. The island's network, which is relatively dense except in the most rugged parts of the Troodos Mountains, is divided into two systems by the UN buffer zone. Traffic through the single official transit point between the two sectors—located just outside the west walls of Nicosia's old city, near the Ledra Palace Hotel—has been severely restricted since the recent Turkish-Cypriot declaration of independence. Both northern and southern Cyprus are adequately served by hard-surfaced roads. In the south, the main network was expanded from 3,600 to 4,300 kilometers between 1975 and 1980 to serve the expanding economy. A new four-lane divided highway extending 72 kilometers from Limassol to Nicosia was about half complete in August 1983. [Redacted]

Outside the road network, cross-country vehicular movement and off-road dispersal are practical in the central plain and along the coastal lowlands, except for short periods during the winter rainy season. Canals in irrigated areas hinder cross-country move-

ment throughout the year. In the foothills and mountain areas that cover about half of Cyprus, steep slopes and dense forest preclude off-road mobility. [Redacted]

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Turkish Cypriots control one major port—Famagusta, on the east coast—which prior to 1974 handled 70 to 80 percent of Cyprus's general cargo shipments. A small cargo port is at Kyrenia on the north coast and a small mineral port is at Karavostasi/Xeros on Morphou Bay. Greek Cypriots control two main ports—Limassol and Larnaca, on the south coast—which have developed as major ports since 1974. Larnaca handles general cargo and POL; Limassol handles general cargo and grain. A new cement-exporting port is under construction at Vasilikos, about midway between the two main ports. [Redacted]

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Of the island's seven hard-surfaced airfields, one is in the Turkish-controlled area, three are in the Greek-controlled area, two are in the British areas, and one is in the UN zone west of Nicosia. A large airfield of undetermined surface is under construction in the Turkish area. [Redacted]

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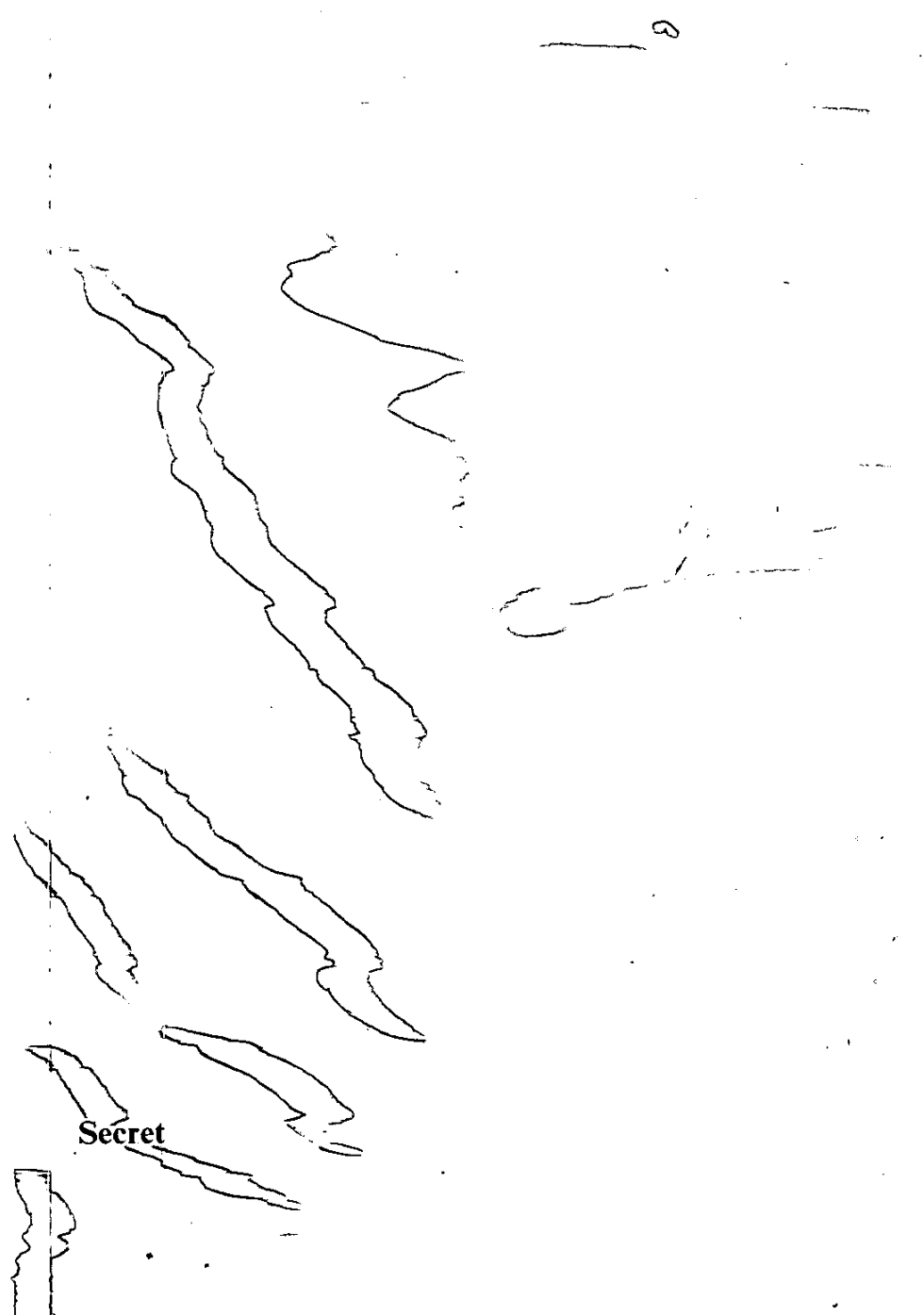
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