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Greek Charge of 'Lies' on Cyprus Gets Stiff Washington Response

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON — The White House has denounced a verbal attack on President Bill Clinton by the foreign minister of Greece, Theodoros Pangalos, as "unbecoming" and a chill on otherwise warm ties.

Speaking in Athens last week to representatives of the Greek diaspora, Mr. Pangalos charged that Mr. Clinton had not kept a 1996 re-election campaign promise to find a solution to the Cyprus problem.

"It was all utter lies," Mr. Pangalos said, and accused Washington of siding with Turkey, which opposes the planned deployment of Russian missiles in the south of the island, the part that is aligned with Greece.

The White House press secretary, Michael McCurry, responded the next day by saying of Mr. Pangalos, "He directed very intemperate, disappointing and undiplomatic remarks to the president of the United States.

"Those are remarks unbecoming a senior official and close ally of the United States and inconsistent with

what are otherwise close and warm bilateral relations," he added.

Mr. McCurry said the U.S. ambassador to Greece, Nicholas Burns, had issued a protest to Mr. Pangalos about his comments.

Washington strongly opposes the Greek-Cypriot authorities' plans to deploy Russian-made S300 air-defense missiles, which Turkey has threatened to use force to prevent, later this year.

Cyprus has been divided since Turkish troops occupied the north of the Mediterranean island in 1974 after a coup in the capital, Nicosia, that was aimed at uniting Cyprus with Greece.

Akis Tsohatzopoulos, the defense minister of Greece, has also criticized a statement by Mr. McCurry describing the Cyprus problem as a "conflict" between its Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities rather than a result of the 1974 invasion.

That criticism came on the eve of a Greek cabinet meeting to decide whether to choose Russian missiles or U.S. Patriot missiles as part of an army modernization program.

