

Military Intelligence in Cyprus: From the Great War to Middle East Crises

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The author introduces us to his text by highlighting the 'key strategic location' of Cyprus, a concept that for him stayed unchanged from the time of the goddess to the modern post-9/11 'war on terror'. He then moves on to provide a brief history of Cyprus under different rules ending with the British arrival in 1878, having declared wrongly in the process that the British arrival was perceived by the then head of the Orthodox Church, Sofronios 'as the last phase of an occupation which would lead to eventual self determination and union with Greece' (p. 7), something which reportedly expressed the aspirations of the majority of the Greek-Cypriot population of the nineteenth century (p. 5). In fact we know (Katsiaounis, 1996; Varnava, 2009; Erdal, 2011) that neither the nineteenth century Greek-Cypriots (Orthodox Ottomans) nor their leader Sofronios at the point of British arrival were aspiring for *enosis*, a nationalistic concept that became a mass phenomenon only in the twentieth century and particularly after the first fifty years of British rule.

In chapter one, within the space of ten pages, Dimitrakis takes us through the first sixty years of British rule in Cyprus until the beginning of WWII, providing scattered and out of context accounts of some selective intelligence reports or incidents. The following two chapters focus primarily on the WWII period and are weaved around the perception of Cyprus as the land of desire by the contesting powers (including the British, who tried to maintain their sovereignty on it). Useful data regarding AKEL, labour strikes, the Cyprus Regiment and the efforts of the British colonisers to initiate various forms of military, intelligence and economic organisations which concerned and involved the locals are also highlighted. In chapter 4, the author points out how AKEL in the late 1940s was perceived as the enemy and how as a counter force the *enosis* and right-wing political movements were supported by the colonial administration. In a post-WWII international environment of self-determination and liberation movements, the *enosis* and right-wing Greek Cypriot consciousness-raising would eventually turn against the colonisers leading to the internationalisation of the 'Cyprus question' by the beginning of 1950s.

Chapter 5, titled 'The Insurgency', deals with the decade of the 1950s that ultimately led to the engineering of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960. By the mid-1950s, the student protests of the Greek-Cypriots were becoming more and more militarised and with the establishment of EOKA as an underground guerrilla organisation, the colonial state's monopoly over violence was being

challenged. With the financial support and the guidance of the Greek-Orthodox Church of Cyprus together with the blessing of the then ruling circles of Greece, EOKA, under the leadership of Grivas, who had made a career in Greece as 'a staunch anti-communist, the leader of an ultra-rightist armed group CHI ('X')' (p. 73), started to challenge the British colonial rule. To this the British responded with violence and the implementation of their 'divide and rule' policy through the involvement of Turkish-Cypriots and Turkey in the game of ownership of the sovereignty of Cyprus. In the end, all parties concerned, Greece, Turkey, Turkish- and Greek-Cypriots and the UK found themselves tied up in an arrangement in 1960 that came to be known as the Republic of Cyprus.

Chapter 6 begins with the iteration of the importance of the British Sovereign Bases in Cyprus for the British and their allies in the post-1960 environment. It then moves on to talk about the events of 1963 leading to the Turkish 'invasion' of 1974, in depth analysis of which forms the bases of the next chapter. Finally, Chapter 8 provides the reader with the selective coverage of events and issues up to 2008 when the Republic of Cyprus entered the euro zone. Throughout its recent history, therefore, Cyprus is celebrated as the land that 'would always enjoy strategic value' (p. 172).

The notion pointedly given emphasis by the author at the end of his book, that Cyprus is the desire of regional and global powers, is in fact a prevailing theme throughout the whole book which I find worrisome as the desired (i.e. Cyprus and Cypriots) seem to have almost no say in this contestation for its control. This is arguably an andro-centric and top-down analysis of the drama of the island and its peoples through the eyes of selective intelligence information through the archives, particularly British. The information provided does furnish the reader with the knowledge of important events and issues, but does so without in-depth analysis of the socio-economic and political environment of the locals, the region as well as the world which may have influenced the evolution of what came to be known as the 'Cyprus problem'. There is a particular silence about the actual geographic division of the island into Turkish-Cypriot north and the Greek-Cypriot south after 1974 and the subsequent ethnic cleansing of each side from the 'enemy other' formalised by the population transfer agreement of 1975. Turkish-Cypriots in this history are either the agents of the British against the Greek-Cypriot *enosis* supporters or the agents of Turkey and largely unaccounted for.

Comparing the 'Turkish invasion of Cyprus' to 'Pearl Harbour' (p. 133), Grivas to Mao (p. 103) and using over-loaded terms such as 'post-9/11 war on terror', the author tries to ignite interest and reach a wider group of readers. However, these comparisons remain rather hollow as the differences in time and space are not properly contextualised. Coupled with the essentialisation of 'the strategic value of the island', it could be said that the lack of contextual specificity is an under-riding weakness of the analysis.

Overall, this is a useful book which presents important archival data. As the author himself suggests, it is best suitable for those who can clearly see the 'strategic value' of Cyprus, namely 'a general, a spy and a diplomat' (p. 172). It is also informative for the general public and can easily be

read by undergraduate students of Cyprus history and politics. What the book fails to deliver on is in enhancing our understanding of 'military intelligence in Cyprus' from what we already know, thus regretfully ending up as another selective historic account of the Cyprus problem read through the lens of archival intelligence reports.

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