

Cyprus 1974: Greek Coup and Turkish Invasion

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Cyprus 1974: The title raises expectations. If a book is dedicated to a time period as short as two summer months, it is expected to provide a novel viewpoint, new interpretation, new evidence, or new information. This is especially so since the particular period is considered to be the most crucial period in modern Cypriot history, the moment that Greeks and Greek Cypriots like to refer to as the point when the Cyprus problem was created, while Turks and Turkish Cypriots view it as the moment the Cyprus problem was finally resolved. So, what value does this book have to attract researchers, historians and other interested readers? Does it present new evidence, considering that in particular the US National Archives have classification periods of some 30 years which have, in the meantime, passed by since the 1974 events?

In fact, Makarios Drousiotis has conducted his own research at the US National Archives and is thus able to quote from first-hand sources. The relevant question is how consequent his research has been – or in other words, how thoroughly his findings have been cross-checked within a limited number of first-hand sources before being presented as evidence for a specific claim that fits into his argumentation. The impression at the end of the book is that Drousiotis, a well-known Cypriot journalist, has an obvious claim to have his publication considered as the work of a historian – but he is mastering the tools and methodologies of historians only partially. So, does the value of the book rest on the concentration of a specific, novel aspect followed throughout the story?

Actually, a common thread is hard to find in Drousiotis' book because it is a patchwork of articles and excerpts from other books which have been published in Greek in the past, composed and translated into English for a single volume, in which a clear chronological account of the period seems to be the only concept. The foci of some chapters have aspects that are positioned differently to others. While the chronology of events continues, the respective chapters shed light on the various periods from several angles – the intelligence, domestic, international, or military technical aspects, but unfortunately without any justification as to why this may be of relevance to the book's main concept.

For Cyprus research, the added value of this work is not, therefore, obvious. The historian likes to skim through the introduction in the expectation of finding the main question or thesis for the book, as well as information on the general state of international research about which the present

work is embedded, together with a clear explanation of the gaps it attempts to fill. It is indeed disappointing that, by way of introduction, Drousiotis merely summarises Cypriot history from the end of World War II to 1970 without reviewing the aspects that a scientific introduction is expected to yield. When considering that the author is well informed on the many common conspiracy theories or nationalist propaganda produced over the past decades from domestic authors, it ought to have been especially important for him to point out the specialities of his work that would make his conclusions all the more trustworthy as opposed to the mass of unserious authors from whom he can distance himself.

Within such an alternative introduction – or preface to the book for that matter – the author, or the editor on his behalf, might have explained that the real value of the book lay in the combination of US archival research with vast Greek material and Cypriot oral history. This combination provides added value to the Cyprus research of historians who are unable to work with Greek-language sources, as well as to those without the international picture who concentrate on the domestic and regional aspects only. On the one hand, the author's neglect here to adequately set the Cypriot history facets into the broader general history context – such as the Cold War or the British Decolonisation period – make the story a rather isolated one that renders some important international behaviour inconclusive to all but those who have the respective historical general knowledge at their disposal. On the other hand, presenting a work based on a huge variety of international sources also means opening up the perspectives through which the book loses focus as it simply tries to cover too many aspects. In spite of these *caveats*, the book goes a long way to dispute, with good reason, the mass of simplistic Greek or Turkish arguments on the market as it frequently takes on a well-varied, differentiated view of key aspects.

Nevertheless, Drousiotis also seems to have fallen into the trap of writing about some aspects with a foregone conclusion in mind, urging him to make adventurous direct links that do not seem conclusive enough to be evident to the unprejudiced reader, or – even worse – are not supported with references (e.g. p. 192). This often leads to generalised indications of protagonists, such as “the Americans”, when the distinction between the political elite, the diplomats in the field, the secret service establishments or individual CIA officers would have been crucial for respective conspiratorial conclusions or blame. To be fair, however, while such deficiencies are evident in various areas where specific provocative conclusions are reached, Drousiotis clearly identifies policy differences between the above-mentioned actors elsewhere. The emphasis of individual ambassadors' disagreements with their superiors that have, on more than one occasion, led to catastrophic neglect are valuable – the best-known being the all-too-silent disagreement between the Head of the Europe Desk at the US State Department, Arthur Hartman, the US Ambassador to Greece, Henry Tasca, and the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. More doubtful are some conclusions on the behaviour of key persons, built on inconclusive documents or second-hand accounts. Here, especially, it would have been indispensable to have adequate source critique in the footnotes: clear indications on how a specific source and statement is to be judged in terms of trustworthiness, relevance, and context. This is delivered in a few instances only, i.e. on p. 198.

Drousiotis begins his work with a brief summary of post-World War II Cypriot history up to 1970 with the obvious exercise of transposing the US Gladio concept at the outset of the Cold War on the Cyprus context, together with other components of “a network of semi-legal paramilitary organisations in Europe” (p. 2). This exercise fails to convince those readers who are not primarily looking for confirmation of their own presupposed conspiracy theories on US and British hidden agendas in Cyprus – especially as from here onwards, few references to the link between US behaviour vis-à-vis Cyprus, US policy behind such behaviour, the US secret service influence of policy or behaviour, and Greek, Turkish or Cypriot military or para-military establishments are conclusive enough not to leave a shallow after-taste that the author has trouble resisting the temptation to draw attention to an overall conspiratorial concept of the superpowers. A typical example of this is a rather bold statement claiming that the US, by 1958, had been “acquiring footholds in EOKA through the Greek regime and controlling TMT through the Turkish Gladio” (p. 15), or the contention that in the late 1950s a Cypriot para-state had been created “with the assistance of the Greek secret services and the CIA and the strengthening of TMT, an offshoot of the Turkish Gladio [...]” (p. 21). Later on, Drousiotis claims that “the Americans, through IDEA, carried out their political coup of 15 July 1965 and toppled George Papandreu” (p. 28). No reference is indicated to support such a claim. By concentrating on such rather overstated, alleged “American” roles, the more crucial aspects of Cypriot history remain neglected. The November 1967 crisis is treated within one sentence only, which conceals the impact of the crisis on Cypriot politics concerning both the plans of General Grivas and the bicomunal negotiations for a solution commencing in its immediate aftermath (p. 30).

There next follows a very detailed, well researched and carefully written development of the Cyprus scene up to the 1974 war, with well-structured chapters that illuminate various aspects. More adequate space is allocated to the US role here, and after the doubtful generalisations in the introduction on alleged US intelligence community interference with Greece and Cyprus, the elaborated differences between the influence of individual US actors, opinions, and attempts by diplomats to rectify somewhat misdirected attitudes in Washington, may come as a positive surprise. It is deplorable that the author then destroys his own carefully built-up plot with renewed contentions based on somewhat doubtful or irrelevant sources (compared to evidence to the contrary) or based on no references at all.

Impatience first arises in chapter 7, which focuses on the Ioannides junta 1973, with quotations that are too lengthy. By this time, it has also become clear to the reader that the prelude to the alleged actual focus of the book – the Greek coup and the Turkish invasion of 1974 – takes up more than half of the book, which eventually unmasks the book’s choice of title as inadequate. Something akin to “the path to disaster”, indicating that the prelude is as relevant as the coup and invasion themselves may have been more suited.

The chapter on the coup of 15 July 1974 itself is a thrilling account, mostly based on domestic evidence. At the same time it is again an attempt to whitewash some characters and blame others regarding their roles. It is good and attractive for readers to include oral history in research, but

some protagonists' statements about alleged behaviour sound suspiciously influenced by the 30-year time lapse rather than mirroring the feelings at the time. Chapter 11 then follows, which amplifies in too much detail, military technical data on the forces fighting each other in Cyprus in July 1974. This part of the book possibly stems from an article originally written for a military magazine. Also, while elaborating on the time span between coup and invasion, Drousiotis makes it sound as though the coup follow-ups had been masterminded by the US tacit behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings – a contention again not supported by relevant documents.

At the end, the main questions remain unanswered: Why should direct links between a CIA hidden agenda and the Greek and Cypriot military policy be proven by the mere evidence of individual contacts? Why should alleged CIA preferences have been powerful and influential enough to undermine a much more thoroughly founded official US diplomatic policy? And most of all: Why should there have been US policy conspiracies in 1974 based on alleged CIA interests, if the overwhelming US interests had been counter to the situation as it turned out? Researchers tend to scan the book for clues to prove their doubts once suspicion on the reliability of research and on the justification of key claims sets in. It is at this stage that some – mostly minor – deficiencies are noticed, which results from the book's rather hasty composition, without allocating adequate time to its editing. It transpires that the original writings were in Greek, but the author used the Greek translations of standard British and US literature and quoted the Greek translations in this English version rather than the respective originals. Finally, several editorial mistakes spoil the overall positive impression, of which style and spelling are the lesser of these evils. If the names of crucial protagonists are misspelled, not too much harm is done ("Sands" instead of "Sandys" p. 25 and index). But if Ambassador Macomber turns into "Macawber" the impression may be worse. This is surely not helped by cases of anachronism, e.g. a reference from 1967 serving as alleged evidence for a quote uttered in 1970 (p. 35).

Nevertheless, the listing of errors and deficiencies may not do justice to the general impression: Overall, the book is attractive and interesting reading for a wide readership. It might not, however, be satisfactory to the scientists who will not settle for just being entertained.

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