

## *Cyprus at War: Diplomacy and Conflict during the 1974 Crisis*

JAN ASMUSSEN

I.B.Tauris (London, 2008), 364 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-84511-742-9

The 1974 Cyprus mega-crisis has been a source of a heated debate among supporters of conspiracy theory and its critics. The conspiracy theorists, most of them journalists, point to US and perhaps British collusion to divide Cyprus between Greece and Turkey (see in particular Stern, 1977; Hitchens, 1984; O'Malley and Craig, 1999).<sup>1</sup> The initial premise of conspiracy theorists is that an independent Cyprus under Makarios ('the Castro of the Mediterranean'), with the biggest communist party in Europe (AKEL) as his supporters to boot, was against the interests of the West, the US in particular, hence the conspiracy to overthrow him.

However, scholars that base their research on archival material (mainly US and British archives) have found no evidence of conspiracy or collusion by the US or Britain (see in particular Slengesol, 2000; Nicolet, 2001; Rizas, 2002).<sup>2</sup> Turkish analysts (see Birand, 1985; Bölükbaşı, 1988; Firat, 1999 and 2000)<sup>3</sup> concur on this point, even though Ecevit was initially of the view (in July 1974) that the CIA may have encouraged the Greek Junta. However, until a few years ago the archives on the question were far from complete. Moreover the conspiracy theorists could console themselves with the thought that such evidence is concealed and so may be unavailable to researchers. The conspiracy line has been dashed once again by the book under review, written by

- 
- 1 Laurence Stern (1977) *Wrong Horse: The Politics of Intervention and the Failure of American Diplomacy*, New York: Times Books; Christopher Hitchens (1984) *Cyprus: Hostage to History*, London: Quartet Books; Brendan O'Malley and Ian Craig (1999) *Cyprus Conspiracy: America, Espionage and the Turkish Invasion*, London: I.B. Tauris.
  - 2 Ivar-André Slengesol (2000) 'A Bad Show? The United States and the 1974 Cyprus Crisis', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 2; Claude Nicolet (2001) *United States Policy towards Cyprus, 1954-1974: Removing the Greek-Turkish Bone of Contention*, Mannheim: Bibliopolis; Sotiris Rizas (2002) *Oi Inomenes Politieis, i Diktatoria ton Synthgmatarhon kai to Kypriako Zitima, 1967-1974* [The United States, the Colonels Dictatorship and the Cyprus Question, 1967-1974], Athens: Patakis.
  - 3 Mehmet Ali Birand (1985) *Thirty Hot Days*, Nicosia; Suha Bölükbaşı (1988) *Turkish-American Relations and Cyprus*. Lanham: University Press of America; Melek Firat (July 1998-March 1999) 'Oi Politikes tis Tourkias sto Kypriako' [The Politics of Turkey regarding the Cyprus Problem], *Syghrona Themata*, No's 68-69-70; Melek Firat (2001) 'Yunanistan'la İlişkiler' [Relations with Greece], in Baskın Oran (ed), *Türk Dış Politikası, (Cilt I 1919-1980)* [Turkish Foreign Policy, Vol. I, 1919-1980], Istanbul: İletişim, pp. 742-749.

Jan Asmussen, the most complete book to date that focuses exclusively on the dramatic events of July-August 1974.

One of the main research questions of the book is precisely to address and test the conspiracy theory. Asmussen asks, among other things, the following questions:

- (1) Why did Washington not stop the coup against Makarios by the Greek Junta (July 1974), in view of the fact that it is well established that the Americans (at State Department level) were well aware that it was hatched by early July 1974. Is this lack of resolute behaviour on the part of Washington a proof of collusion or can it be attributed to indifference and sheer incompetence?
- (2) Why did the US and Britain not stop the Turkish military intervention (20-26 July). Was it because they did not try hard enough (which may imply collusion) or because the Turks could not be convinced (Ankara was adamant in its decision, early on, to intervene drastically so as to forestall *enosis* and save the Turkish Cypriots from the likes of EOKA-B)?
- (3) Why were the US and Britain unable to halt the second Turkish intervention (14-16 August), which would have been no modest achievement. In the first operation the Turks had taken control of some 7-9% of the territory, while in the second – which was far bloodier than the first one – they secured almost 37% of Cyprus, far greater a region than the percentage of Turkish Cypriots in the island.

In what is a careful, balanced and convincing presentation, using newer archival data unavailable previously (such as records of conversations, telephone communications, telegrams, etc) Asmussen reinforces the previous findings of Slengesol, Nicolet and Rizas (though he is not aware of the work of the latter), demonstrating beyond reasonable doubt that the conspiracy theory does not hold water.

The picture that emerges is the following. To begin with, in the period 1968-1974, for the US under the Nixon administration, Makarios was more of 'a nuisance than menace'. Washington was well aware that the Cypriot president, however unpredictable, was a staunch anti-communist and had AKEL well under control. More crucially, in 1974 or before that, no one in his right mind in the US, Britain or NATO contemplated yet another international border in an island the size of Cyprus, between the two rivals, Greece and Turkey. Kissinger (1999) in particular points out that he was no madman to risk a Greek-Turkish war by orchestrating the division of the island via a coup by the fanatic brigadier Ioannidis.<sup>4</sup> The US was indeed aware of the upcoming Greek coup in Cyprus but did little about it, mainly due to Kissinger's lack of great interest on the matter (he was of the view that the State Department officials, such as desk officer Thomas Boyatt were crying 'wolf'). The US intervention was limited to a forewarning by a lesser US official of the embassy in Athens to a Greek official. When the coup did take place, the diplomats of Britain as

---

4 Henry Kissinger (1999) *Years of Renewal*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

well as the US went into high gear, but then again Kissinger was of the view that little could be done about it, other than putting pressure on Athens, for Ankara had decided to intervene militarily whatever the risk and was unstoppable. Britain and especially the US (Kissinger) were instrumental in bringing about the ceasefire at the 1<sup>st</sup> Geneva conference, but from then on their various attempts though constant (in the course of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Geneva conference, where a solution to the Cyprus problem via a federal framework was sought) were uncoordinated between the two of them, a factor that made them appear less convincing to the main party that needed convincing – Turkey. As we already know from the memoirs of Callaghan (1987) and Kissinger (1999),<sup>5</sup> the latter was unprepared to use US and British military force or a blockade to stop the Turks and was furious with the British foreign minister's proposals to this effect.

Asmussen goes about his task admirably, painstakingly deconstructing all the conspiracy conjectures. Of particular importance for those of us that regard the 2<sup>nd</sup> Geneva conference as a great missed opportunity of the Greek Cypriots and Greeks, that could have stemmed the second Turkish invasion (see e.g. Heraclides, 2002)<sup>6</sup> is the extended chapter 'Second Geneva Conference, 8-14 August 1974' (pp. 181-224), where one sees in considerable detail the various attempts by Kissinger (by phone though not in person), with his cantons idea (that Ankara accepted with difficulty), and those of Callaghan in Geneva, but also the flexibility shown momentarily by the Turkish Foreign Minister Güneş, but also Clerides and even by Greek Foreign Minister Mavros. As in previous presentations, Makarios again comes out as mainly responsible for the deadlock in Geneva with Karamanlis unable and unwilling to dissuade him, and with the hawks in the Turkish military-diplomatic establishment keen to oblige.

To conclude, this is a thorough book and a worthwhile contribution to the literature on the Cyprus problem.

**ALEXIS HERACLIDES**

---

5 James Callahan (1987) *Time and Change*, London: Collins; Kissinger, *op. cit.*

6 Alexis Heraclides (2002) *To Kypriako: Syngrousi kai Epilysi* [The Cyprus Problem: Conflict and Resolution], Athens: I. Sideris, pp. 178-187.