

# **Greece and the Cold War: Frontline State, 1952-1967**

(Cass Series: Cold War History)

**Evanthis Hatzivassiliou,  
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“A central benefit for the reader of this volume will be the wealth of evidence that questions single factor explanations and/or convenient conspiracy theories.”

The concluding sentence of Theodore Couloumbis's foreword to this excellent analysis sums up the high level of scholarship Evanthis Hatzivassilou harnesses to enlighten us on the complexities of Greece's foreign policy in the context of the Cold War. The main theme emerging is that Greece's policy was not static during this period, but evolved in relation to shifts in NATO strategy and in the regional balance of power in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. The book is arranged chronologically into three parts, each corresponding with a phase of the security problem (1952-1955, 1955-1963 and 1963-1967). The Karamanlis years (1955-1963) are at the heart of the matter, the other two sections being, in a sense, a prologue and epilogue.

Greek security concerns, and therefore this book, focus mainly on 'the front line', Greece's vulnerable northern borders. Other issues – a sobering reminder for Cyprocentric readers – are always perceived in relation to it. The 'menace from the north', it is argued, was no figment of the imagination, although it invited exploitation for anti-communist drives within the domestic political struggle. It was a 'real and ever present danger'. Indeed Hatzivassiliou is careful to point out that this was not a new element, the Soviet threat from the north being but the modern evolution of the old Pan Slavic menace that had driven Greek security concerns since the end of the nineteenth century. It was a chronic consequence of geography and history rather than a creation of the Cold War. In both cases Bulgaria loomed large.

The sense of the weight of Soviet military power that stretched from the Baltic to the Balkans bearing down on an isolated and vulnerable Greek state was, above

all else, the driving force for the search for a comprehensive strategy to deter aggression from that quarter. This strategy was refined during the Karamanlis years into a defence policy which Evanthis Hatzivassiliou defines as 'functionalism'. An emphasis on the economy and geographical realities rather than rigid ideological rivalries with the East resulted in a policy of deterrence that depended on diplomatic more than military strategy. Its underlying aim was full integration with Europe. Thus NATO is perceived not only as a defence shield, but as 'a tool' in this direction and the benchmark EEC association agreement secured by Karamanlis in 1961 is perceived in terms of security as much as economic development.

The pivotal Greece – United States relationship is subjected here to a sophisticated analysis in which Greek policy-makers, while always aware of the extent of their dependence on the United States, emerge as subtle operators, their designs by the late 1950s, complex, even multilateral, debunk the simplistic perception of total obedience to an overbearing power. Hatzivassiliou observes that for the historian "it is very difficult to define dependence" and sets out to achieve "a detached study" of the phenomenon, rather than to "deify or demonise it". He concludes that the US restraint of 1952-1963 might have been a more efficient tool of the projection of US interests in Greece than the more aggressive tone of the 1960s.

The popular anti-Americanism of the late 1950s and 60s, however, provided no temptation to abandon NATO. Membership of NATO was vital to Greece's overall security strategy, not simply a supplier of free military hardware. A striking fact emerging from this book is that Greece's remaining within NATO was as important to Tito as it was to Karamanlis. The attempts of the Karamanlis government to build bridges with Balkan neighbours, most famously with Tito's Yugoslavia, are plagued by traditional rather than Cold War animosities over Macedonia, ever, together with Cyprus, an emotional issue in popular street level politics and exploited as such. One is once again impressed by the extent to which these issues, and foreign policy general, feature in Greek domestic power struggles, a reflection of the history of the creation of the contemporary Greek state and its relations with the prevailing power in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Cyprus issue may have been peripheral but it was a potent factor, becoming, during this period a major bone of contention with NATO ally Turkey. In the mid-1950s, the author observes, it was this issue which created a need to re-shape Greek foreign policy as it became clear that the Anglo-Greek dispute over Cyprus would be a long one. The chronic capacity of the Cyprus problem to worm its way into the heart of Greek domestic politics ensured that no government could afford to ignore it. Hatzivassiliou argues that it was mistaken handling of it in 1954 and 1963-1964 that led to deep crisis in Greece's overall security policy

endangering the crucial relationship with the West. In this case in particular, and in the handling of foreign and security policy in general, it was prudence rather than grand gestures that paid off in the long term. One is led to conclude that the element of prudence in the handling of crises must feature in any comparison of the Karamanlis governments with their predecessors and successors.

I have found myself returning to this book again and again – for its analytical detail. Hatzivassiliou provides us, once more, with a rich bibliography of secondary sources, while it is clear that he himself has delved deep into British and US archives. His research into the newly accessible private papers of the key Greek politicians assures us a new insight into the thinking behind Greek foreign policy during the Cold War. This is a must read for all those interested in the Cold War, contemporary history of Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean generally.

**Diana Markides**