

# **Cyprus A Modern History**

**William Mallinson**  
**IB Tauris (London, 2005) 264 pp.**

William Mallinson's book emerges at a timely moment to add yet another book on Cyprus and by implication on the long-debated 'Cyprus Problem'. There is, however, a difference that distinguishes Mallinson's book in that most of the books published in recent years refer and cover mostly some aspect of the Cyprus Problem. There are a number of books authored by people who were involved in some capacity or other with the events they describe. Mallinson's book contributes to the debate on the Cyprus Problem but does so in the wider context of modern Cypriot history. In reviewing this book I was tempted at first to partly answer a particular article that had been written about it, but on reading the author's own response, I felt that a more than satisfactory answer had been given and that no greater weight should be given to views that are very personal and in many respects unsubstantiated.

Mallinson opens his book with a general survey of recent years, and places 'modern' Cyprus history in the 1950s. One could argue that in order to understand the events of the 1960s and the early years of the Republic it is useful to have a more detailed coverage of the period from at least the beginning of British Rule in 1878. This would have given a better perspective to the later events through a better understanding of the origins of Greek-Cypriot nationalism and the development of the "enosis" movement amongst the Greek-Cypriot community. The EOKA struggle for union with Greece and the ultimate result of the Zurich – London Agreements that led to independence and the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus contain the seeds and explain the tumultuous early years of the Republic. However it is understood that the author decided to cover this particular period and, after all, there are other books to which an interested reader can turn to.

The second chapter begins with 1955 and unravels the involvement of Britain in the events that were to follow.

The section on 'Divide Et Imperia' is particularly revealing and well-documented in analysing the role of Britain in the triangle of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey. The outbreak of the liberation struggle was to further aggravate the British Colonial Government, which would embark on further measures of 'divide and rule'. These are of particular significance since they help to explain much of what was to

transpire and be incorporated in the Zurich – London Agreements of 1959. These were to lead to internal conflict between the two communities.

One cannot deny the fact that the Cypriots themselves (both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots) made mistakes that contributed to the creation or intensification of the inter-communal conflict. But Mallinson also clearly indicates in a well-documented way, that Britain's role was not conducive towards promoting good relations between the two communities – the British appear quite ready to offer their services to 'solve the problem' after their policy had largely contributed to its creation. Some critics may see in Mallinson's approach and analysis the 'conspiracy theory', but how can one explain the British encouragement of President Makarios to propose amendments to the constitution (13 Points, November 1963) and the subsequent policy of Britain once the inter-communal violence erupted in December 1963? The mistakes of the leadership on either side, or the exploitation of the situation by extremists on both sides, do not provide sufficient excuse for the role of British diplomacy prior to and after the events of 1963-1964.

I would very much agree with Mallinson's statement that "Britain's essential aim was to preserve its military bases on Cyprus" (p. 49). The importance of the bases in the formulation of British policy on the island and the wider Eastern Mediterranean area has produced different interpretations but perhaps one can see a consistency in the British approach to the 'solution' of the Cyprus Problem all the way to the Annan Plan and its provisions regarding the bases and British sovereign rights on the island.

Another important aspect that is also covered extensively in the book is the increased involvement of the United States in the affairs of the area and in Cyprus in particular. This is not surprising in the context of the Cold War, the threat to NATO interests in the eventuality of a Greco-Turkish conflict and the wider US interests in the area involving Israel and the oilfields of the Middle East and beyond.

The events of 1967 in Greece are crucial to an understanding of the developments in Cyprus that were to lead to the July 1974 coup against Archbishop Makarios and the Turkish invasion that followed. The attempts at a negotiated settlement, the involvement, not only of the main actors within Cyprus, but also of the major powers (with emphasis on Britain and the United States) are covered in chapters 7 to 10. Further analysis of Greco-Turkish relations in the context of the Cyprus Problem is provided in chapter 11; the last chapters embody the attempts at reaching an agreement in Cyprus and the NATO, EU and UN dimension is well covered.

Chapter 15, aptly titled “The United Kingdom Nations Plan”, raises a number of interesting points and poses intriguing questions as to what really happened in 2004 and what lies ahead in the future. The extent to which the “Annan Plan” was a “United Kingdom-Hannay Plan” or not is debatable, but what is clearer is that for the majority of the Greek Cypriots who voted “No” in the referendum this was very much so. Furthermore, the British role is seen as extending considerable and unacceptable support to Turkey; this support, in an effort to promote a spirit of ‘compromise’, went as far as accepting and justifying violation or exclusion of the basic human rights as provided in the UN Charter and the EU’s *acquis communautaire*.

Overall, Mallinson has produced a well-researched and well-balanced book on the “Modern History of Cyprus.” Minor inaccuracies or misinterpretations cannot detract from the value of the book. It stands as another contribution to modern Cypriot historiography. There are always bound to be certain omissions in a work of this range but since the events described are so recent it is up to others to supplement this and other similar works with new contributions as and when more facts and documents become available.

It is possible that our view of events might alter in time and we might acquire “a more balanced history of Cyprus.”

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