The Cyprus Conspiracy, America, Espionage and the Turkish Invasion

Brendan O'Malley and Ian Craig,
1.8. Tauris, (London, 1999) 256 pp.

It's not often that a piece of historical research attracts quite as much public attention as *The Cyprus Conspiracy* has done. One large bookshop in Cyprus has it heading its top-ten sales, while its authors Brendan O'Malley and Ian Craig are interviewed on television, and its findings have had papers - in Britain as well as in Cyprus - publishing news stories ahead of reviews.

Publishers I.B. Tauris have admittedly been working hard at ensuring maximum impact. Publication was timed last year to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the 1974 invasion and embargoed proofs and press releases were sent out to the media well ahead of time.

The authors, meanwhile, are journalists, not academics, Brendan O'Malley is foreign editor of the *Times Educational Supplement,* and Ian Craig is political editor of the *Manchester Evening News.* That background certainly contributes to the book's success, though also to some of its shortcomings.

What it does mean is that *The Cyprus Conspiracy* is a gripping read, both for the uninitiated and for those in the know. The chapters are short, with an excellent balance of analysis, context and narrative, and an innate understanding of how to keep the reader hooked, whether through fascinating titbits of information or through the galloping pace of unfolding sequence.

So what are the 'revelations' that have attracted so much attention? For British readers it was undoubtedly the discovery that their country came to within a whisker of war with Turkey in the summer of 1974, in what then foreign secretary James Callaghan told the authors was "the most frightening moment of my career". Reaction in Cyprus has focused more on the way the book strips bare the extent of the involvement of American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, whose manipulations, the authors argue, deftly steered the crisis towards its final outcome. Indeed, O'Malley and Craig claim it was Kissinger's veto of a British military deterrent

that left the way clear for Turkey to invade Cyprus after the July 15 coup in Nicosia, allowing a 'solution' that better suited American strategic interests.

Building up to those fateful summer days of 1974, *The Cyprus Conspiracy* seeks to place events on the island within a much broader Cold War context. Playing down the 'ethnic hatreds' argument cited in his defence by Kissinger (though they undoubtedly provided the backdrop and the spark for events), the book lays out the vital strategic importance of Cyprus to western planners, be it the British chiefs of staff using it as a base for their dwindling Middle Eastern power, or the American spies using its electronic facilities to monitor Soviet nuclear missile tests at the height of the arms race.

Again and again the book underlines the crucial importance of British military facilities in Cyprus, initially to Britain itself, but increasingly to the United States through a 1974 agreement on the exchange of intelligence. O'Malley and Craig point out how, of the 103 pages of the 1960 agreements that established the independent Republic, more than half were devoted, not to constitutional provisions, but to the maintenance of British military and intelligence facilities. In fact, the authors are par- ticularly effective in demonstrating just how vital those facilities were for NATO during the cold war, explaining their role in the monitoring of Soviet nuclear activity, provid- ing an early warning system at a time when inter-ballistic missiles were feared capa- ble of wiping out America's nuclear strike force within half an hour of their launch.

American policy on Cyprus was therefore motivated by two primary considerations: maintenance of British military facilities on the island, and keeping the southern flank of NATO from exploding into all-out Greco-Turkish war over Cyprus. With such considerations in mind, it is perhaps little surprise that the rights and wrongs of the dispute and the interests of the people on the ground were of secondary importance at best.

The constant flare-up of inter-communal fighting throughout the 1960s and the threats of Turkish invasion that they regularly provoked were hardly the most reassuring environment for those facilities; nor was Makarios' involvement in the non-aligned movement and his flirtation with Moscow in an ultimately vain attempt to play off the superpowers. Of additional concern to the Americans was the perceived unreliability of the British presence on the island. With Britain in economic crisis, defence reviews repeatedly raised the possibility of a pullout from Cyprus, a prospect averted every time by considerable US pressure. Indeed, the Treaty of Establishment specified that any change in the sovereignty of the bases could only be in favour of the Republic, thereby preventing any handover to NATO or the United States if Britain decided it could no longer afford the commitment. Moreover, even in British hands, the Americans could not take the Cyprus facilities for granted.

When in 1973 the Yorn Kippur war in the Middle East threatened to escalate into global confrontation, Britain, fearing Arab reaction, denied the Americans use of the bases, either for military or intelligence purposes. It was against this backdrop, the authors argue, that the Americans were "left scouting around for an insurance policy" against the loss of the bases. Using evidence gathered in a Congressional post-mortem on America's role in the coup and the invasion, O'Malley and Craig claim that, by-passing normal diplomatic channels, CIA agents in Athens reporting directly to Kissinger "tacitly encouraged" the Greek Junta to lead a coup against their common bogeyman Makarios, convincing the colonels that Turkish sabre-rattling need not be taken seriously. Once the coup had taken place, they argue, "the Americans seemed to be doing everything they could to help the Turks make up their mind that intervention was the only way they could get satisfaction." Though risky, it was a solution that seemed ideal to the US, at the same time getting rid of Makarios and safeguarding military facilities, whether in the Turkish occupied north or in a Junta controlled south. The result would have been a partition that solved the Cyprus problem once and for all and allowed the Americans to continue their work unhindered by the violent instability that had dominated the 1960s.

So when the British scrambled to head off a Turkish invasion, drawing up plans to interpose a deterrent naval task force between Cyprus and the Turkish mainland, and pleading for American support in the matter, they were firmly slapped down by Washington. For the US, such an intervention and a British plan to restore Makarios would simply have maintained the status quo that they were working so hard to change.

Interviews with Callaghan's political adviser at the time, Tom McNally, give a revealing insight into those plans: "It was made quite clear that Henry Kissinger was not going to get the Americans involved and did not think it was a good idea for Britain to get involved either," he tells the authors. Without US backing, the British were left exposed. Attempts at bluffing the Turks, McNally adds, had little effect "because they were clear the Americans were not involved at all in the exercise... We moved ships around... (but) they never looked very frightened."

Kissinger, portrayed as the villain of the piece, is given a chance to reply to the allegations in an interview at the end of the book, but, referring the authors to his memoirs, denies any meddling in events. Thus he "cannot recall" receiving any British request for joint action, and denies ever having colluded with Turkey over the invasion.

Even if Kissinger is to be believed and did not encourage the Turks, he clearly did nothing to deter them, and the book highlights the stark contrast between America's all-out efforts to prevent the crisis from spilling into Greco-Turkish war and the total

lack of diplomatic reaction to either the coup or the subsequent invasion.

There is no doubt that *The Cyprus Conspiracy* is a fascinating book; but does it convince? Is the 'conspiracy' theory sustainable? Much of the evidence is circumstantial, and some of it is politically motivated (the authors draw heavily on the findings of Congress's post-mortem inquiry into America's role in the crisis, an inquiry that raised almost identical questions to those posed by O'Malley and Craig).

The details on Britain's attempts to defuse the crisis are new and do inject a dramatic twist into events, while the interpretation of American policy in 1974 *does* make sense and is backed up by the available evidence - evidence that I suspect will be confirmed when the archives on the period are opened to the public. However, where the book convinces less is on the long-term Western 'conspiracy' to partition Cyprus.

In fact, less than half of the book is *devoted* to 1974, the rest covering the period from the start of the Eoka struggle against British colonial rule, through indepen- dence and the intercommunal strike of the 1960s. Too often, the authors appear to gather evidence to match their theory, pieces to fit the 'jigsaw', as they call it on more than one occasion. They present the events of 1974 as the culmination of "an aston- ishing international plot, developed from a blueprint evolved first under British rule, (and) then by US President Johnson's officials." There is no doubt the partition idea did come up on many occasions and that specific ideas, even maps, were drawn up by officials. Indeed, many Western planners did increasingly see partition as the 'solution' most conducive to their interests in Cyprus. But it's a very broad sweep to claim that there was a Machiavellian long-term plan, which finally bore fruit in 1974.

In 1964, for instance, O'Malley and Craig show how former US Secretary of State Dean Acheson drew up partition plans of which "key elements were echoed in the crisis of 1964". But the Acheson plan was ditched, and though considerable attention is given to its elaboration and its similarity to what took place in 1974, no explanation is given to why the plan was not followed through, beyond a laconic phrase about "the dangerous turn of events in Vietnam".

Likewise, the coverage of the Eoka struggle is sketchy, concentrating excessively on the long-term strategic nature of British policy, whereas in fact British policy was *very* short-term and haphazard, bitterly divided by often conflicting interests (foreign office, colonial office, chiefs of staff, Cyprus government, Westminster party political...).

The authors also on occasion succumb to the temptation of 'juicing up' elements of the story. It certainly makes a better read, but it detracts from the credibility of the

whole. For example, they write that in the 1950 Enosis plebiscite organised by the Church, "Greek Cypriots were reportedly threatened with excommunication if they did not sign up to the cause". They cite no evidence for this assertion, which smacks of sensationalist hearsay. Surely the fact that the island's only two political organisations, the Ethnarchy and the communist party Akel, backed a 'yes' vote, and that the ballot was public, are reason enough to account for an overwhelming proportion of the 95.7 per cent score in favour of union with Greece.

Similarly, when discussing Makarios' reluctant acceptance of the Zurich independence agreements, they give excessive credence - quoting intelligence writer Nigel West - to claims that the Archbishop was blackmailed into signing up by British security service threats to reveal his "rather unusual homosexual proclivities". It's only at the end of a long paragraph on the sexual allegations that they mention in a brief sentence the "less colourful" (but far more likely) theory that Greek diplomats put considerable pressure on the Cyprus delegation.

For all these shortcomings, however, *The Cyprus Conspiracy* remains a very important book, firmly placing the 1974 debacle in the context of American Cold War imperatives, and uncovering the nuances in Britain's role during the crisis, often dismissed as that of an idle bystander. If the price to pay for bringing such work to a greater public is the prevalence of journalistic cliches (Cyprus "bristles" with weapons and spies too often for my liking), then so be it, for the work deserves as wide a readership as possible.

"In the end," Callaghan's advisor McNally recalls, "the essential military interests of the West remained intact - the intelligence [facilities] and the Turkish membership of the Alliance - and any other scenario put those in jeopardy. When all the dust settled, it looked a damn sight more stable for the Americans than some fool British military expedition, knocking the Turks about."

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