

Cyprus and International Peacemaking

Farid Mirbagheri

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Anyone who makes a point of collecting and reading books on Cyprus and its long-standing problems will probably have been looking for some time to move to a bigger house. There is an enormous catalogue of works available and even if you limit your purchases to those dealing with post-independent Cyprus, you may still have to consult your bank manager. The arrival of yet another book on the subject may fill hard-up Cyprophiles with dread, but this latest publication is, in fact, an excellent addition to those creaking bookshelves.

In "Cyprus and International Peacemaking" (Hurst), Farid Mirbagheri makes an extremely detailed and thorough examination of the many and varied attempts made over the years by the UN and other mediators to bring peace and normality to the island since having its originally unwanted independence thrust upon it in 1960. In fact, he goes back to the Zurich agreements and the "seven days of tough negotiations" between Greece and Turkey (not Cyprus!) which led to them. The reference to those seven days is a little startling for anyone used to the months and years of endless talks that have been going on since 1974, not to mention those prior to 1973. It also makes one realise why neither side in Cyprus is very keen on a Dayton-style process to resolve the problem - it probably could be sorted out in seven days.

Mirbagheri takes a dispassionate look at the various attempts at mediation since 1963 and gives all the required background details, such as Archbishop Makarios' proposed constitutional amendments (which, today, appear to be so reasonable and genuinely aimed at making independence work) and all the UN mediators' various reports and plans.

While we are used to seeing the Cyprus Problem in terms of a just Greek Cypriot cause up against Turkish intransigence, this book makes clear that the blame for failing to reach a settlement of the pre-1974 difficulties lay with the Greek Cypriot side, and specifically with President Makarios: "The Greek Cypriots' attitude to international peacemaking in Cyprus during this period was a mixture of positive and negative elements. Although they agreed to negotiate with the Turkish Cypriots, they nonetheless failed to adopt the positive role needed to settle the conflict peacefully...To talk of the Greek Cypriot position is in a sense to talk of Makarios' position." It is, of course, ironic, to consider today that agreement could not be reached in 1973, because of disagreements over local government, but the author is clear that it was "the uncompromising stand of the Greek Cypriot side preventing an agreement".

It is both refreshing and slightly worrying to read this analysis - it is easy to forget what has gone before, but Mirbagheri is impeccable in citing his sources. Some of the more unpalatable parts of his analysis are factually indisputable. It is interesting, for instance, to recall the progress - or lack of it - made during Spyros Kyprianou's presidency and how the then Foreign Minister Nicos Rolandis resigned, complaining that "Mr Kyprianou did not want meaningful negotiations on the future of Cyprus." Or how Tassos Papadopoulos attacked Kyprianou "for being autocratic and lacking a precise policy in the intercommunal talks." In the seemingly unchanging Cypriot political scene, the same characters are still centre stage, a fact that is beyond the scope of the book and thus receives no special attention. Readers cannot fail to notice it, however.

In the final chapters of the book, the author looks at what has changed since the 1980s, resulting in the present flurry of diplomatic activity aimed at resolving the Cyprus issue, particularly on the part of the United States. One basic reason given is the end of the Cold War: "A Cyprus solution is advantageous and the lack of one now seems to be a most unnecessary political nuisance," Mirbagheri writes, and he goes on to surmise that "Turkey may not wish to extend its stay in Cyprus indefinitely" and explains why.

In his conclusions, the author notes that "the most notable failure of peacemaking in Cyprus between 1964 and 1986 concerned the two mother-countries, Greece and Turkey. "Although the international community had, through various United Nations resolutions, diagnosed the internal and the external aspects of the Cyprus problem, it failed to pay sufficient attention to the need to bring Turkey and Greece to the negotiating table." And while remaining optimistic that a settlement of the problem can come about, Mirbagheri points out that "negotiations alone cannot bridge the wide gap between the two communities" and he notes that "political pressure should be applied on the Turkish Cypriot leadership to soften its tone and be more attuned to the peacemaking efforts of the international community."

This book could hardly have been published at a more appropriate time with Richard Holbrooke heavily involved in the peacemaking process. Moreover it is an extremely valuable summary of everything that has preceded what could turn out to be a historic time.

The author goes about his task in a highly organised manner, giving the reactions and attitudes of the various parties to each of the different attempts at resolving the problem. ("During the 1980-86 period, Britain's general attitude to the Cyprus problem, except in 1983, can best be described as one of inactivity...").

I suspect that readers from both communities will not take kindly to certain parts of Farid Mirbagheri's analysis, but that probably means that he's got it just right. His well-written book makes for highly enlightening reading.