

Cyprus: An Ancient People, a Troubled History, and One Last Chance for Peace

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Having just read and understood what the authors of this book appear to have set out to achieve, the following quote came to mind: ‘But the past is eternal reality. [...] the loss of memory is, indeed, the chief and fundamental sign of insanity.’¹ This quote is not as extreme as an indignant analyst might claim: after all, if one were to consider various longstanding problems of humanity, one might well conclude that some loss of memory, whether contrived and rationalised or not, has contributed to humanity’s inability to resolve various matters logically and peacefully. Emotion and atavism stand in the way. So it is with many others of those well-meaning books avoiding or forgetting the fundamentals of history, and the precise origins of various international problems, usually the interests of large powers using small ones to their own ends, as the killing in the Ukraine demonstrates so well.

This book is well-meaning. Before setting out to comment, this reviewer was slightly flummoxed by the lack of either an index or a bibliography. Footnotes and acknowledgements are insufficient, and it is odd that the publishers did not insist on this.

Considering that the author(s?) spent time in Cyprus and ‘fell in love with the island’ and are clearly well-meaningly, even possibly slightly emotionally, involved in seeking a long-term peace deal, it is hardly surprising that, as Canadians, they think that a Canadian-style confederation would be the best solution, but then dismiss this because ‘the Greek Cypriots would prefer a unitary government’. How one can, in any case, compare French- and English-speaking Canadians to Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots, with their different histories, ethnicities and religions, is beyond the ken of this reviewer. Nevertheless, the idea is at least thought-provoking, which is a strength of this book.

But now to the grindstone. The object of the book is clear: ‘Failure in the next

¹ Nikolai Berdyaev, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=261Hf31ueZ8> *The Meaning of History*, Routledge, 2017, pp. 72-3; first published in 1936, by Geoffrey Bles.

round should be followed by an acceptance by both sides and by the international community at large that is time to negotiate a velvet divorce.’ (p.14); ‘This has gone on far too long. Both sides would be better off than they are under the status quo if they negotiated a velvet divorce.’ (p.222); and ‘BZBC would be a wonderful outcome, however unlikely. A velvet divorce, the probable outcome, would at least be preferable to the status quo and the unpromising future that will attend inaction.’ (p.224).

The book clearly promotes, inadvertently or otherwise, the Turkish government’s standpoint. I say ‘inadvertently’, because the author/authors has/have in the main used books which themselves promote the Turkish view and/or the Annan Plan. At the risk of sounding slightly snide, a detractor would say that the book is a eulogy to the late Clement Dodd who, while clearly a solid academic, was imbued in his knowledge of Turkey and its language. Similarly, the authors use James Kerr-Lindsay, a staunch supporter of the abortive Annan Plan. They also appear to support (pp. 99-102) Turkey’s putative membership of the EU -a highly controversial issue- and criticise the EU’s negative stance. They would have done well to balance the debate, by referring to the late French President Giscard d’Estaing, who said: ‘Turkey is a country that is close to Europe, an important country ... but it is not a European country. Its capital is not in Europe, 95% of its population are outside.’ Before elaborating on what seem to be the book’s weak points, let us consider some passages which seem pretty sensible and perceptive.

First, he quotes (pp. 26-7) Woodhouse as saying that the occupier turned the Greeks and Turks against each other. This is hardly news, but shows that the author(s) has/have studied the background to some extent.

Second, they clearly agree (p.30) that the 1960 arrangement was unworkable. This reviewer’s view is that the collapse was due at least as much to the complicated set of treaties as to the extremists on both sides, for whom the unworkable constitutional arrangements were fertile ground.

Third, he quotes (p.97) Stavrinides as writing that, if the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU without a settlement, the ‘TRNC’ would to all intents and purposes become a province of Turkey. This is true today, *de facto* if not *de jure*.

Fourth, echoing Hitchens, the authors comment (pp. 209-10) that Cyprus is a sovereign country and that the bases are an affront to Cypriot legitimacy and an unfortunate remnant of Britain’s colonial past. In any court of international justice, ‘the UK would lose the right to maintain these sovereign base areas’.

Fifth, they write (p.88): ‘Failure to understand the full dimensions of history leads to unwarranted bias and stands in the way of acceptable and lasting solutions, as the

EU, by now, should have learned.’ This reviewer could hardly agree more, but must qualify this by stating that he is not himself convinced that the authors themselves understand the full dimensions, as we shall see.

Let us now turn to some negative criticisms.

First, the authors state (p.12) that the fact that the Cypriot national anthem is also the Greek national anthem does not help bridge the ethnic divide in Cyprus. Yet they forget to mention –presumably accidentally– that the ‘TRNC’ uses the Turkish national anthem.

Second, they write (pp. 188-9) that ‘Europe has not stepped up to help Ukraine’, that they ‘talked tough and imposed economic sanctions on Moscow but did little else’. Given that the book was published in May this year, and that almost every EU state has delivered massive military aid and paid large sums to the Ukraine, they ought to have at least had time before publication to set the record straight.

Third, they write (p.156) that ‘Cyprus is a pawn on a much larger chessboard, where Putin can encourage NATO powers like Greece, Great Britain, and Turkey to fight one another and destabilise a peaceful world order’ and that ‘it is a strategy from the same playbook that Putin has used in other parts of the world, most visibly in 2016’s American presidential elections.’ This clearly is speculative, and oversimplifies Moscow’s position on Cyprus: the whole 1960 arrangement was predicated on maintaining the British bases, and was intended to be a NATO solution, to keep the Soviet Union at bay. The authors could have balanced matters by pointing out that, whatever the sensible, indeed laudable, pleas, for rebuilding trust between the two communities, there can be no solution without UN Security Council agreement. This agreement will be highly unlikely, since Russia will not accept a draft agreement that favours NATO and the effective continuation of what looks like a new kind of Annan Plan. The Russian position has always been simple: a united, neutral Cyprus, with no foreign forces. Whenever the USSR/Russia has suggested an international conference, NATO has rejected the idea. This has proven unacceptable to NATO. As regards the British bases, NATO ones in all but name, it is highly unlikely that NATO would agree to remove them. Hence Moscow’s position.

Fourth, they write (p.2) that Greek Cypriots would not abide by the minority rights that had been granted the Turkish Cypriots, and that in 1964 the Cypriot President, Archbishop Makarios, unilaterally abolished many of those enshrined rights which led to intensified intercommunal fighting. Again, this is too simplistic: to blame the Greek Cypriots alone for the 1963 breakdown is off-beam. The lack of precision of

the drafters of the 1959 agreements vis-à-vis the municipalities were also to blame, as were the Turkish Cypriots, who, for example, refused to participate in a single national army, and to support an extension of the country's tax laws. And if the Greek Cypriots were determined to revise the constitution without Turkish Cypriot consent, it is vital to point out that it was the British Foreign Office that both encouraged and helped Makarios to introduce the Thirteen Points. The Turkish-instigated riots of 1958 meant that extremists on both sides would continue to arm themselves after the unworkable accords of 1959. Although the Greek Cypriots share much of the blame for not helping to improve the economic conditions of the Turkish Cypriots in the early 1960s, the authors come across as being inadvertently biased towards the Turkish arguments.

Fifth, and in this connexion (p.126), the author's contention that Makarios was prepared to commit genocide to achieve Enosis is balderdash. Certainly, the likes of Ioannides (who despised Makarios) may well have been happy to kill Turkish Cypriots, but to slander Makarios without one iota of evidence is simply over the top, and betrays bias. Makarios' disagreements with Grivas, particularly after 1970, are well known. David Hunt, a former British High Commissioner to Cyprus would surely disagree strongly that Makarios would commit genocide: 'Makarios has the intellectual abilities, which would enable him to make his mark in a country of a hundred times the population. His mind is both clear and agile. He is a good psychologist and, although he sometimes cannot keep back a trace of arrogance, he is good at managing men [...] For a Greek, he is astonishingly undevious [...] I do not believe that he has ever told me a deliberate lie [...] perhaps because he thinks such a thing beneath him.'² While on the subject of killing, it is certainly true that both sides indulged in some atrocities during the summer of 1974. However, it was only *after* the Turkish invasion that matters became nasty. On 18 July 1974, just before the first stage of the invasion, the British High Commissioner Stephen Olver sent a telegram to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: 'I have no (no) evidence of any immediate threat to the Turkish Cypriot community. There have been no attacks on the community during the past few days. The Turkish Cypriot Minister of Defence, Mr Orek, confirmed to a member of my staff this morning that the Greek Cypriot Community, and in particular the National Guard, had been behaving with admirable caution: there had been a few minor casualties through bullets straying inadvertently across the Green

² Hunt to Foreign Secretary, 17 December 1996, *Valedictory Despatch*, NA/FO 371/185620, file CC1015/16.

Line, but in general the Turkish Cypriot Community had no cause for complaint in this respect.³

Sixth, the authors seem unaware that the 1958 rioting that so embittered the Greek Cypriots was instigated by the Turks in a false flag operation, as the archives in London show.⁴

Seventh, the authors state (p.34) that ‘trouble returned to Cyprus in 1967, again precipitated by Makarios. He sent police patrols into two Turkish Cypriot villages, Agios Theodoros and Kophinou, at a “cost of over thirty Turkish Cypriot lives”’. The UNFICYP report, however, stated that, at Agios Theodoros, Greek Cypriot police had entered the (mixed) village [as they were entitled to do], and that three shots and a burst of automatic fire had come, ‘from the evidence at hand’, from the Turkish Cypriots.⁵ The then Grivas-controlled forces then retook control of the two villages in a massive response, resulting in the death of 24 Turkish Cypriot and two Greek Cypriots.

Eighth, the authors argue (pp. 59-61) that the Treaty of Guarantee forbids Cyprus from ‘any political or economic union with any state whatsoever’, and that Cyprus therefore had no right to join the EU. Although they do cite an EU Commission official as saying that the EU is not a nation, they go on to split various hairs, parroting the Turkish position. This seems rather naïve, since the EU is not a state (it only has observer status at the UN), and since the ‘TRNC’ can have no *locus standi* in the question, as it is recognised only by Turkey.

Ninth, the authors write (p.6) that ‘today the UN is an obstacle to a solution’. But they do not even speculate on the potential dangers of the UN pulling out.

To Conclude

This book comes across as very pro-Turkish, and should be read by those wishing to acquaint themselves with the Turkish and therefore the Turkish-Cypriot position. I am not convinced that it is expressly biased, but rather the result of the authors having read only a narrow, and mainly *pro* official Turkish position. This is a pity, as it covers a good deal of ground chronologically. The book also falls into the trap (*viz.* the title) of saying that now is the last chance for a solution, when we have heard this

³ NA/WO/386/21.

⁴ Governor to Colonial Office, 8 July [sic, should read ‘June’] 1958, NA FCO 141/3848, *telegram 751*.

⁵ United Nations security Council Document 5/8248 of 16 November 1967, in NA/FCO 9/164/CE 33/8. See also Farid Mirbagheri, *Cyprus and International Peacekeeping*, Hurst & Co., London, 1998, p.54.

umpteen times before. Just as Hannay's book, to which the authors refer, ends with what can be interpreted as a subtle threat –'But if Turkey's candidature stalls or is blocked, it is not easy to be so sanguine.'⁶– so this one ends with the words 'But time is running out'.

Whatever solution may or may not be found, it is likely to have to involve Moscow. Perhaps the following FCO minute is germane: 'The benefits that we derive from the SBAs are of major significance and virtually irreplaceable. They are an essential contribution to the Anglo-American relationship. The Department have regularly considered with those concerned which circumstances in Cyprus are most conducive to our retaining unfettered use of our SBA facilities. On balance, the conclusion is that an early "solution" might not help (since pressures against the SBAs might then build up), just as breakdown and return to strife would not, and that our interests are best served by continuing movement towards a solution –without the early prospect of arrival.'⁷ Although written in 1980, the situation is not so different today, apart from new names and colours.

If this review may appear slightly promiscuous, it is a reflection of the book itself.

William Mallinson

⁶ David Hannay, *Cyprus: The Search for a Solution*, I.B. Tauris, London and New York, 2005, p.246.

⁷ Fergusson to Private Secretary, minute, 8 December 1980, FCO 9/ 2949, file WSC 023/1, part C.