



# THE CYPRUS PROBLEM

WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW

JAMES KER-LINDSAY

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## INTRODUCTION

For almost sixty years, the small Mediterranean island of Cyprus has been a regular feature in the news. From the anti-colonial uprising against British rule in the 1950s through the emergence of fighting between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities in the 1960s, the Turkish invasion of the island in the 1970s, and the subsequent thirty-year effort by the United Nations to reunite the island, Cyprus has received a disproportionate degree of international attention.

For the most part, this interest has little to do with the intrinsic importance of the island itself. It has no significant mineral wealth. Nor is it a vital transit route to the Middle East, as it once was. Instead, the island's significance is due to wider geopolitical factors. Throughout the Cold War, conflict on the island had the potential to ignite an armed confrontation between NATO allies Greece and Turkey. More recently, the division of the island has played a central role in Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union. This is significant inasmuch as the relationship between the EU and Turkey could well determine how the union evolves as a regional body and what sort of ties it will have with its neighbours and the wider world. However,

this is not the whole story. The attention devoted to the island is also a result of the level of notoriety it has achieved over the years. The Cyprus Problem (or the Cyprus issue), as it is often called, has become a byword for an intractable international conflict. No matter how much effort was exerted by various UN secretaries-general—to date, six have devoted time to the issue—it appears to be stubbornly immune to all peacemaking initiatives. Indeed, many eminent diplomats, including Richard Holbrooke, the architect of the Dayton Accords, which contributed to ending the bloody civil war in Bosnia, have tried, and failed, to find a solution to the Cyprus Problem, thus earning the island the title the ‘diplomats’ graveyard’. Others take a more cynical view, believing that the Cypriots have little inclination to reach a solution as they actually rather enjoy the international attention they receive. As George Mikes, a Hungarian wit, once famously, if rather unfairly, put it, ‘Realizing they will never be a world power, the Cypriots have decided to settle for being a world nuisance’.

The high level of interest in the island is also the result of familiarity. Despite its division, the island of Cyprus is a popular holiday destination. Every year, tens of thousands of British, German, Russian, and Scandinavian tourists make their way to the island to enjoy its beaches, restaurants, and nightlife. Many have liked it so much that they have retired to the island. At the same time, Greek and Turkish Cypriots have established large expatriate communities in Europe, North America, Australia, and Africa.

And yet, for all of this, the Cyprus Problem remains extremely confusing for most outsiders. Though the foundation of the conflict between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities is a relatively straightforward dispute between two ethnic groups over power and geography, the details can be

fiendishly complex. Seemingly trivial points take on major importance. Matters are not helped by the fact that the two sides have radically differing views on the origins of the conflict and how it should be resolved. Moreover, terms such as ‘bizonality’, ‘bicommunality’, ‘federalism’, and ‘political equality’ have very specific meanings depending on which side of the Green Line—the buffer zone dividing the two communities—you are on. Indeed, even within the two communities, there are stark differences of opinion on key questions.

For all these reasons, it is often extremely difficult for outsiders to come to grips with Cyprus. This book aims to address that problem. By answering the most commonly asked questions posed by people trying to understand the many diverse and confusing aspects of the Cyprus Problem, this work will trace the history of the island and examine the issues at stake. It will also try to explain why a solution has been so hard to find and analyse a number of factors that could shape the future of the island, its two main communities, and the wider region.

### ***STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK***

As is often the case in conflicts, the past plays a significant role in shaping the positions of the two sides. The first chapter therefore explores a range of historical questions that are essential to understand in order to build a rounded and balanced picture of the Cyprus problem. The chapter begins by detailing the origins of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities and the other indigenous communities that live on the island (Maronites, Latins, Armenians, and Gypsies). Then it traces Cypriot history by addressing a range of key questions and queries that relate to various facets of the contemporary

Cyprus issue. The chapter concludes by examining the path to independence in 1960 and by explaining the complex constitutional provisions and international treaties that were put in place to safeguard the new state.

The second and third chapters examine the problems that emerged between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities after independence in 1960. Chapter 2 looks at the attitudes of the two sides towards the new state and explains the constitutional problems that emerged before analysing the start of intercommunal fighting in 1963 and the origins of the UN presence on the island. Chapter 3 explores the invasion and the division of the island in 1974 and the subsequent efforts by the UN and the international community to reunite Cyprus.

The fourth chapter provides a guide to the range of issues that divide the two communities. It begins with an analysis of what is meant by a 'bizonal, bicomunal federation' as the agreed basis for reunification, and shows how the two sides have very different conceptions of the term. It then explains the structure of the new state and its international legal personality before addressing the key concerns of the two sides over questions such as property, refugee returns, and the repatriation of settlers. It concludes by examining the key issues concerning security, such as the demilitarisation of the island and the differences over the role of guarantees in any settlement.

The fifth and last chapter explores a number of general questions that often arise when people start to learn about Cyprus, framing these in the context of current and future efforts to resolve the Cyprus Problem. It looks at the international actors and factors shaping the settlement process, such as the role of the UN and the European Union, and the roles played by Britain, Greece, and Turkey. Finally, it analyses the