

Historein

Vol 15, No 2 (2015)

Historein 15/2 (2015)



Review of Evanthis Hatzivassiliou's, *NATO and Western Perceptions of the Soviet Bloc: Alliance Analysis and Reporting, 1951-1969*

Sotiris Roussos

doi: [10.12681/historein.8715](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.8715)

Copyright © 2015, Sotiris Roussos



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Roussos, S. (2016). Review of Evanthis Hatzivassiliou's, *NATO and Western Perceptions of the Soviet Bloc: Alliance Analysis and Reporting, 1951-1969*. *Historein*, 15(2), 80-83. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.8715>

vivors. She has followed and incorporated the relevant literature. Camp literature, fictional prose, novels, historical novels and films have provided ideas, inspiration and, at times, as she admits, a firmer mental guide than the historical source. The author aptly demonstrates the deficient management of sites of memory in Greece, which raise “uncomfortable” issues between Greeks and Germans and between Greek Jews and Greeks, and the two sides of the Civil War. The conflicting and traumatic memory of the Second World War, including the selective amnesia of the occupation, is the reason why a unified memory culture did not emerge after the war.

The explosion of European memory in the 1990s highlighted the policies of memory as a special research area. The study of sites of memory is thus virgin soil in the rich Greek historiography on the 1940s. In this sense, the present study is a most welcome contribution to the newly emerging field of memory studies in Greece. By highlighting for future historians the unexplored areas of research such as the study of divided memories at various sites of memory throughout Greece and the study of the memorials of the civil war, Droumpouki expresses her belief that material remains, these visible traces of the past, will ultimately create the ideal conditions for a cultural reading and understanding of the 1940s.

Evanthis Hatzivassiliou

NATO and Western Perceptions of the Soviet Bloc: Alliance Analysis and Reporting, 1951–1969

London: Routledge, 2014. xii + 228 pp.

Sotiris Roussos

University of Peloponnese

The study of the policy-making process is always a fascinating exploration, even in circumstances where an iron-clad balance of power and a state's interests ultimately dictate foreign policy positions. This is even more so in the case of alliances, where the effort to legitimise the allied position is indispensable. Cold War international politics were always a mixture of geopolitics and ideology and, thus, the case for legitimisation was always of major importance. Evanthis Hatzivassiliou stresses the importance of the legitimisation process from the outset. At the same time, the bipolar system that dominated Cold War politics led the superpowers to legitimise their hegemonic positions within their respective camps. In that sense Hatzivassiliou's work on Nato's analysis and reporting process in the first two decades of its existence is most interesting and welcome.

The book examines the internal politics before, during and after the composition of major analyses and reporting papers. It researches the institutional changes that accompanied this composition, the stance of the alliance's major powers and the accuracy and the effectiveness of these reports in influencing Nato strategy. It also focuses on the role played by certain individuals in both the drafting of the reports and the initiation of new institutional frameworks. The study of this analytical pro-

cess addresses, firstly, “the external context”, notably the pressures created by the Cold War that served as a powerful centripetal force; secondly, the intra-alliance debate, usually centring on the reassurance of the hegemonic role of the USA and on the taxonomy of the member states, that is, the distinction between major and smaller, richer and poorer and “front-line” and “rear” states.

As early as 1952, a comprehensive analysis of the Soviet threat reaffirmed a series of views already held by the alliance. The analysis looked into both political and economic developments in the Soviet Union and concluded that the Kremlin’s strategy remained unaltered. It basically discerned two patterns in the Soviet strategy: the first was the direct subversion of countries through violent intervention, as in the case of Korea, and the second, that of forced subversion either by internal revolution, as in the cases of Greece and Indochina, or by coup, as in the Czechoslovak case. The report noted the rapid growth of Soviet GNP, particularly in the industrial sector, but it took assurance from the west’s economic lead.

The report seemed to side with the British view proposing that a protracted cold war was more likely than a hot confrontation between the Soviets and Nato. This caused concern on the part of the Americans, who were afraid that underestimating the prospect of a hot confrontation would relax the Allies’ alertness and steadfastness and that this would lessen the need for US hegemony in Europe. Here a distinction can be made between “imperialistic” behaviour, involving attempts by the Americans to impose their agenda on their allies, and “hegemonic” authority, which could be exercised when US concerns were shared by all or almost all of the other members.

Failures to analyse the inner-Soviet power mechanisms were evident throughout the 1950s, a decade marked by the striking events of the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the diplomatic tactics of the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Despite the regularisation of the analysis process, Nato’s analysis mechanism failed to predict such impressive changes in Soviet leadership and policy. The working groups on Soviet trends were scheduled to meet monthly, despite the scepticism of the British and Americans towards regularising the analysis processes. It was German and French support that led to the establishment of monthly working groups. These groups, however, were staffed mainly by diplomats from the national delegations to Nato. Compared to the information flow enjoyed by the American national analysis process, these groups enjoyed very little intelligence input and lacked input from specialised experts. Their failures in analysing and predicting Soviet developments undermined their credibility and rendered a reorganisation of the analysis and reporting processes necessary.

From the drafts of the reports and the reorganisation of the analysis process in the 1950s, it is evident that the balance between the USA and the old European great powers was still in the making. Although no one disputed the indispensable role of the USA in safeguarding western Europe from communist domination, Britain and France had yet to accept Washington’s hegemonic position. In this context, the analysis and reporting process could be seen as one more “device” for the old powers to influence the alliance. It would take the Suez crisis in 1956, when the Americans thwarted Anglo–French colonial plans in Egypt, to define the balance of power in the western bloc.

In the late 1950s the Nato analysis was preoccupied with four other issues: intra-Nato rela-

tions; the Soviet Union's relations with the socialist republics in Eastern Europe and, most importantly, Sino-Soviet relations; the economic potential of the Soviet Union and, last but not least, Soviet overtures to the Third World. Addressing the shortcomings of previous analyses and reports, in 1956 the Nato council ministerial session set up the Committee of Three, comprising the foreign ministers of Italy (Gaetano Martino), Norway (Halvard Lange) and Canada (Lester B. Pearson).

The report of the committee stressed "the need to strengthen internal solidarity, cohesion and unity" of the alliance. In other words, the trio's findings reflected the fear that Khrushchev's new tactics would drive a wedge between the western allies or sow the seeds of revolution in their societies, given the serious inequalities that persisted in the Allied economies. Thus they called for economic and political cooperation in order to dissipate Soviet propaganda and show the superiority of western societies and economies. Some years later, in 1959, the issue of *détente* was seen by Nato's Committee of Political Advisors as a reason for intra-Nato cohesion problems as a result of the Soviet change in tone.

From 1957 to 1960 Nato analysts focused on Soviet influence on the non-aligned states. They believed that the new Soviet leadership's thinking was based on a triangle comprising the Soviet bloc, Nato and the non-aligned nations. In 1960 the Nato experts believed there was a Soviet "economic offensive", as economic growth allowed Moscow to undertake major initiatives in the non-aligned world, especially in those countries recently liberated from colonial rule and tutelage. Throughout the 1960s, despite the fact that trade between the non-aligned and Nato allies remained much larger than with the Soviet bloc, it appeared that the relatively small levels of Sovi-

et economic aid could leverage much greater political influence due to the anticolonial and anti-western ideology and rhetoric that accompanied it.

In the 1960s the analysis and reporting process came to address mostly problems that arose from the *détente* policies, the possibility of expanding West-East trade and the inequalities in economic and social development among alliance members. The problems addressed here correspond directly to what Morton Kaplan describes as the "loose bipolar system", "characterised by the presence of two major bloc actors, a leading national actor within each bloc, non-member national actors, and universal actors, all of whom perform unique and distinctive role functions within the system".¹ In such a system the two blocs are destined to negotiate rather than to fight, to fight minor rather than major wars, and to fight major wars rather than to fail to eliminate the rival bloc. Particularly after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the two blocs preferred to negotiate rather than fight, leading to the rise of certain concerns in both the frontline states, which feared that Nato military aid might be reduced, and the US, which was concerned about the alliance's cohesion.

Hatzivassiliou devotes much attention to the various transformations in Nato's analysis/reporting bodies and groups. Most of these transformations vacillated between relying on diplomatic representatives and the high officials of the national governments and on scientists, academics and experts, who staffed the expert groups particularly in the 1960s. In this analysis/reporting process, the epistemic communities, which, as Peter Haas argued, can influence policy debates due to their professional training, prestige and reputation of expertise, played no role.

Hatzivassiliou's book makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of essential features and complex interactions within Nato policy debates. Based on exhaustive research in the relevant Nato archives, it reveals a lively debate on both the institutionalisation of the alliance and its role as a global, and not only a European, security player. In the Cold War of geopolitics and ideology, the legitimacy and political cohesion of the alliance was perhaps as crucial as military strength. The study includes a select bibliography providing the necessary political/historical context.

NOTE

- 1 Morton A. Kaplan, *System and process in international politics* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015), 48.

Yiannos Katsourides

History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left

London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014. 266 pp.

Alexis Rappas

Koç University

Yiannos Katsourides' *History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left* begins with a simple goal: to examine the establishment and development of the Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK, 1922–1944), namely a formation that preceded, played a decisive role in setting up, and eventually merged with the Progressive Party of Working People (Akel, 1941–), arguably the electorally most successful communist party in Europe. In its 266 pages, the book exceeds its stated objective by making at least three additional and important contributions: it provides a clear survey of the island's socio-economic situation in the interwar period, tying up the fragmentary references in the existing literature; it offers a contextualised analysis of party formation in Cyprus under British rule; and finally, beyond the historiography of Cyprus, it presents a carefully researched case study of political organisation under the specific circumstances of interwar British imperialism, marked by anticommunism and increasing interference in local social life.

As the author reminds us, there are both epistemological and methodological reasons why the history of Cypriot political parties (and the Cypriot left in particular) has been so little explored. This has to do first with the specific approach marking most studies on Cyprus which,