

## **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SYMBOLIC FACTOR OF GREAT BRITAIN'S GEOSTRATEGY IN THE CYPRUS-SUEZ ISSUE**

**Professor Ioannis Th. MAZIS**

Faculty of Turkish Studies and Modern Asian Studies  
School of Economic and Political Sciences  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens  
mazis@her.forthnet.gr; yianmazis@turkmas.uoa.gr

### **Abstract**

In the present paper I argue that, since Cyprus came under the British rule and for at least seven decades, Britain did not consider Cyprus a “territory of major strategic importance for the Crown”. I also argue that the policy makers of colonial Britain probably considered this island one of the “poor colonies”, since it did not have raw material deposits or any kind of industrial infrastructure. Thus, I suggest that Greek researchers should examine how Great Britain was perceiving the strategic importance of Cyprus until the end of World War II and, therefore, should not insist on blaming the Greek side that, supposedly, did not take into account Britain’s sensitivity and “unwisely sought the Union (Enosis) of Cyprus with Greece, which annoyed Britain and led to the well-known traumatic events”.

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### **1. First Stage: Cyprus as a class II British colony**

The fact that, even after – and despite – the construction of naval and air bases, Cyprus did not have a prominent role, neither during World War I nor during WW II, is indicative of the minor geo-strategic, as well as, operational and even tactical importance which policy makers of Britain’s Grand Strategy attached to Cyprus.

Around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the population of Cyprus was estimated at 500,000, the vast majority of whom (more than 80%) were Greek. Turks (or to be more accurate, Muslims) constituted 18% of the population, while the remaining 2% were Armenians, Maronites, “Latins” (Levantines) and British. Of course, it was well-known, to the British coloniser as well, that the burning desire of the vast majority of residents (Greek, in all respects), was the “Union” of Cyprus with Mother Greece – something as much obvious, reasonable and legitimate, as the equivalent request of the vast majority of the other Greek Great Island, Crete (also Greek, in all respects), or the Dodecanese or, shortly before, the Ionian Islands.

The fact is, though, that whenever the issue of the Union of Cyprus with Greece emerged – whether spontaneously as an instant action and an exclusive initiative of the Greek residents of the island, first in 1931, or after thorough planning followed by constant actions on many levels, and eventually, with the official support of Greece in 1955 – the reaction of London was absolutely negative.

In this context, it would be useful to remind that, as a result of the brutally suppressed popular uprising of 1931, Britain revoked the status of restricted self-administration that had been in force up until then, abolished the Charter in force and the elected local parliamentary body, and Cyprus became a direct-rule colony controlled through the Governor.

Some time later and amidst a turbulent international situation in the late 1930s and during the World War that followed, Cyprus seemed an absolutely “forgotten” colony. This can be presumed by the fact that, according to the hierarchical-evaluative ranking of the British bureaucracy that concerned the wages and the ranks of the officials of the colonial

administration, out of a total of 38 colonies of the British Crown, in 1947, Cyprus was a class II colony, occupying a position under Hong-Kong or Jamaica (first class colonies) in the list of the Colonial Office.<sup>1</sup>

After the war, the issue of the self-determination of Cyprus re-emerged imperatively by the Greek-Cypriots, i.e., the union of the island with Mother Greece. Much has been said and written during

the last decades, in Athens as well as in Nicosia, by members of the academia, journalists and politicians that seem to suffer from a self-accusation syndrome and always blame the Greek-Cypriots (and Greeks in general). Thus, it would be useful and purposeful to remind some undeniable truths, such as:

1) First, the request for Self-determination was in principle fair and legitimate, since it had an indisputable objective basis.

2) Second, the Greek-Cypriot population requested its self-determination in a historical period, that later would appear in schoolbooks and scientific literature as the “Era of Decolonisation” or “the End of Colonialism” – in a historical conjuncture, during which for different reasons, the whole international system was being shaken from end to end due to national liberation movements; from Ireland to Indochina, from Algeria to Malaysia, and from Congo to India.

3) Third, the request for self-determination emerged in the echo of the recently ended World War and of the dynamics which that war had unleashed, but also in the echo of the Victorious Powers’ rhetoric that persistently, systematically, skilfully and repeatedly had sought to attribute the character of a “total combat between the light and the darkness”, between freedom and tyranny, to their struggle against the defeated powers.

4) A further important remark should be added to the above-mentioned points: The Colonial Power to which Greek-Cypriots addressed their (completely legitimate, fair and timely) request for self-determination was the Ally of Greece par excellence, both historically and diachronically, and particularly during the recently ended Great War. Indeed, after 1940, the “*small but honest Greece*” remained literally the only active ally of Britain in the entire old continent, when every other state had “turned its back” to London, either voluntarily by joining the Axis (e.g., Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Finland), by flirting with the Axis and violating its commitments, without eventually being able to avoid violation (e.g., Yugoslavia, Belgium), by flirting with the Axis and achieving an evasive neutrality (e.g., Turkey, Sweden), or subordinating to the Axis after a symbolic resistance of a couple of minutes (e.g., Denmark, Netherlands, etc.).

At this point we should add a couple of remarks:

4.1) First, London could not but be aware of the fact that the Greek-Cypriots would not accept anything less than a pure and genuine self-determination by the Greek-Cypriots, i.e., the union of the island with Greece. Even a possible acceptance of a transitional solution of restricted self-governance could only be interpreted as a temporary transition stage before the final solution, i.e., absolute self-determination and union.

4.2.) Second – and crucial: the only truly strategically important issue for Britain, that was to maintain and use one or more military bases on the island had never been, not even slightly, a problem to the Greek-Cypriots or to the Greek Government. Already in 1953, Field Marshal Alexandros Papagos, then Prime Minister of Greece, had assured the then Foreign Secretary (and later Prime Minister) of Great Britain, Sir Anthony Eden, that if Britain consented to the union of Cyprus with Greece, the latter would guarantee the maintenance of the British military presence on the island.<sup>2</sup>

This point is considered crucial, since for half a century now, we have repeatedly heard and read from academic men (and women), but also from politicians, a severe criticism

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<sup>1</sup> Kirk-Greene 1999, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Newsinger 2002, 88.

against the Greek-Cypriots who are accused of raising the issue of self-determination, overlooking the enormous strategic value that the island had for Britain. Concerning the actual – and not a supposed or imaginary – strategic value of the island to Britain, at least until the 1950s, the answer lies in what we have already mentioned. But also during the 1950s, concerning the only tangible – and not fictitious or imaginary – strategic interest of Britain on Cyprus, no one, nor even a Briton, had ever claimed that the leaders of the National Liberation Struggle, or any Greek Government had denied to their ally, Britain, the possibility or the privilege of maintaining and using (in fact, largely) military facilities on the island – or that it had the slightest objection on that.

4.3) Besides – and this is another rarely mentioned point – the highly coherent Greek population of the island did not have anti-British feelings, nor regarded the Colonial Administration as particularly oppressive. Obviously, Greek-Cypriots shared, due to historical reasons, the same Anglophile feelings as their brothers in Greece (the British Ambassadors in Athens, Sir Sydney Waterlow and Sir Michael Palaret, like so many others before them, had recently confirmed again these feelings in reports during the late 1930s). Not even the most enthusiastic Greek-Cypriot supporters of the Union, regardless of the class they belonged to, had feelings of hatred against Britain.

Besides, many of them had fought on the side of Britain against Germany and Italy, serving the Greek Army or joining the British Armed Forces. We should not forget that even the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the famous SAS (Special Air Service), a specially selected and highly trained British Special Unit of Commandos-paratroopers, that scoured the sea and the insular region between the Aegean Sea, Crete, Cyprus and the Middle East from 1942 to 1945 (many of them are still associated with the British bases of Cyprus) was formed by the British Colonel Sir David Sterling and the Greek Colonel Christodoulos Tsigantes in the midst of World War II i.e., by a British Commando Regiment and the Greek “Sacred Band” of the Middle East, under the command of the Colonel Christodoulos Tsigantes (the name “Sacred Band”, was *honoris causa*, but it rapidly grew to the size of a regiment).<sup>3</sup>

Having in mind so recent and strong bonds of alliance (and even friendship), it was absolutely normal and reasonable for Greeks, both in Cyprus as in the rest of Greece, to expect a goodwill gesture from Britain, even more so, since, as we already mentioned, its strategic interests and sensitivities would be completely guaranteed in a Greek-ruled Cyprus.

On the other hand, in an intriguing historical irony, the above-mentioned attitude of the Greek-Cypriots towards Britain – the lack of hatred and of its possible consequences – may be what actually made Britain not to seriously consider the Greek-Cypriots’ repeated calls for self-determination. Britain thought that a Cypriots’ aggressive reaction, like that of the Egyptians was improbable.<sup>4</sup> A passing remark: those “Greeks” that for so many decades have been using their pens to construct the infamous industry of “wrongology” and “lost chances” do not have, not even once, criticised the spectacular incompetence that the British showed in correctly interpreting the stance of the local population.

Yet, the erroneous evaluation of the situation from the viewpoint of the local element by London is, to put it in modern terms, one of the most striking failures on the level of what contemporary military participating in international interventions call “Cultural Awareness”. The British had before them a Christian, European, civilised, with low literacy rates, hard-working, non violent population that sociologically was what we use to call “peaceful citizens”. Moreover, in Cyprus there had never been cases of heinous crimes or riots or massacres against members of the Colonial Administration or against foreign nationals, or even worse, against their families (as had repeatedly happened in Congo, Algeria, Kenya and elsewhere). Britain, instead of appreciating these facts, misinterpreted them as evidence that Greek-Cypriots did not seriously mean that they wanted to overthrow the colonial rule, or that

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Iliopoulos 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Holland 1993.

even if they meant it, they did not have the required strength and courage to fight for their cause.

## **2. Second Stage: Cyprus as a major strategic factor for Britain**

After World War II, the Grand Strategy was fundamentally revised, as were also the strategic interests and priorities of the British Empire. These revisions would turn out to be fateful for the Cyprus Issue. Quite ironically, a British dominion, that until then seemed to be of secondary importance, suddenly appeared to have a major strategic value. And while the former sea-rule of Britain, willingly or not, granted independence to a never ending series of big and small colonies, at the same time it was declaring that it would never lower the flag of St. George, St. Andrew and St. Patrice on this colony. “Never!”, according to the infamous statement, that remained indelibly etched in the memory of the Greek-Cypriots.<sup>5</sup>

What had happened? Britain was officially one of the winners of World War II, but was absolutely unable to maintain its former status of Great Power, even more so of a World Hegemonic Power. The country was facing the spectre of bankruptcy and was totally depending on external (i.e., American) borrowing and the American financial aid. The former sea-rule and global leader was dying. The day after the war, Britain was still alive, only due to the American loan of USD 4.34 bn. (an incredibly oversized amount for those times).<sup>6</sup>

Sir Winston Churchill, called “the architect of victory”, that had been defeated in the first peace elections, in 1945, handed over to his successor, Clement Attlee, first Prime Minister of the Labour Party, a country in crisis. The British people continued to live – until the early 1950s – with harsh restrictions concerning food, coal and clothing, as well as imported goods; restrictions already imposed since 1939. More than 2.4 million people were unemployed in 1947, while many had suffered due to a severe lack of coal supplies and very low temperatures, during the harsh winter of 1946-1947. And while this was the situation at the economic and social levels, the level of military expenditures remained extremely high, due to the constant need to maintain and sustain the military bases and garrisons throughout the British Empire. For example, the defence budget reached £1,091 during the 1946-1947, an amount corresponding to 15% of the country's GDP.<sup>7</sup>

From the viewpoint of the policy makers of the Grand Strategy of the British Empire, especially from the viewpoint of the Military, the situation that had emerged and which they had to confront the day after the “great victory” seemed a to be a nightmare. Apart from the obligation to maintain significant occupation forces on the lands of the recently defeated Germany, there were pleas to London– and to the Imperial Defence Staff – from everywhere to immediately send troops and reinforcement in order:

- either to suppress nationalist uprisings and to defend the Sovereignty of the Crown in the British colonies (in the Middle East and in Asia – see Indies, Ceylon, Burma, Palestine, etc. – and shortly in Sub-Saharan Africa);
- or to re-establish Sovereignty and also the public order in those British colonies that, during the war, had come under foreign (Japanese) occupation and now that the Japanese had withdrawn, were shaken by anti-colonial uprisings (such as Malaysia);
- or to safeguard peace and order in colonies of other allied countries until they would be able to control their dominions by themselves (such as the Dutch East Indies, where anti-colonial uprisings and a civil war were taking place, and Britain sent strong forces during 1945 and 1946, until the establishment of a Dutch Government that could have the colony under its responsibility – and could confront the latent guerilla warfare);

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<sup>5</sup> Said by the British officer of the Colonial Secretary, Harry Hopkinson, that precluded any possibility of changing the British Rule regime in Cyprus with his statement on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1954. Madden (ed.) 2000, 424.

<sup>6</sup> “British Finish Repaying U.S. Loan to Fight WWII”, *Arizona Daily Star*, 29/12/2006

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Barnett 1995, 76-77.

- or to reinforce allied countries and governments that were facing the mortal danger of the imposition of communist regimes (as in the case of Greece in December, 1944).

Under these circumstances, a reassessment from scratch of the colonial, overseas and global obligations of Britain and the subsequent drastic reduction of military expenditures was an inviolable condition for the salvation of the British National Economy and the survival of society.

However, also from a merely geopolitical/geo-strategic standpoint, it became absolutely necessary to radically reassess the strategic priorities of Britain. In view of the then incipient (1946-47) Cold War (that would shortly reach its first culmination with the “first Berlin Crisis”), the British Armed Forces had to focus on the defence against the “Soviet Threat” and, thus, on the defence of the metropolitan territory (British islands), but also of Western Europe against the enormous solid mass of the Red Army.

Taking into account the above-mentioned facts, the Attlee Government took the initiative to start a discussion on all the matters concerning the strategic situation of Britain, on the level of planning and implementing a Grand Strategy and a Defence Strategy. In the beginning of 1946, it took the painful, though imperative, decision to grant independence to India (the infamous “Diamond of the Crown”), while Ceylon and Burma followed in 1948. Moreover, in the beginning of 1947, Britain, exhausted after being a long lasting global searuler and empire, asked its “transatlantic daughter” to undertake the support of the legitimate Greek Government in its fight against the armed burst of Communism (something that led to the proclamation of the “Truman Doctrine”).

With regard to the geopolitical sub-system or complex of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (which is highly related to Cyprus), the Attlee Government, sent a memorandum to the Members of the Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff, questioning the necessity of constantly maintaining a strong military presence in this region as a consequence of the new post-war geo-strategic reality. The purpose of the British (robust) military presence in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, during the precedent era, had the aim to safeguard the sea corridors of Metropolitan Britain and its extensive colonies in Asia (in other words, the protection of the infamous “Indies route”. Now, however, in view of the upcoming independence of the Indies and the rest of the Asian colonies (Ceylon, Burma, Malaysia) from the British Crown, there was no reason for maintaining the British military presence in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East any longer.

Furthermore, taking into account the Soviet Threat, that according to the Prime Minister of the Labour Party, should have been the first strategic priority of Britain, the Government and Staffs should, thereafter, focus on the development and maintenance of offensive and defensive capabilities of the Royal Air Force, as well as on the development of the national nuclear deterrence capabilities, rather than on the traditional imperial/colonial obligations which according to the Prime Minister, were a minor priority.<sup>8</sup>

However, the judicious and careful Attlee’s attempt to suggest a sober and realistic interpretation of the new geo-strategic environment, in which Britain, willingly or not, would act in the future, encountered the fierce and obstinate reaction of the military. At this point we should, even briefly, have a look to the biographies of these men that, at this critical and transitional historical juncture, were in charge of the defence and security of the British Empire. Undoubtedly, they were brilliant officers, great military leaders, and they had a common characteristic: they were highly attached, personally and emotively, to the idea of the British Colonial Empire:

- Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery served as Chief of the Imperial General Staff immediately after the war, and had also served in India and Palestine in the past.
- Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder was the first post-war Chief of the Royal Air-Force, and had also served as a young Officer in the Middle East during the 1920s.

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<sup>8</sup> Butler 2002, 76.

- Air Chief Marshal John Slessor, successor of Tedder in the leadership of the Air Force General Staff in 1950, had also served in India as a young Officer in the early 1920s and, then again, as a Senior Officer during the second half of the 1930s.

For them, and for many other Officers, the global colonial Empire of Great Britain had been part of their lives. It is where they matured, where they emerged as leaders, and beyond that, where they became “social men”, where they received or broadened their social education, where their personality was formed – and of course it is there, in the colonies of the Crown, where they enjoyed, along with their families, all these (official and “collateral”) privileges that the enviable “status” of British Officer entailed; privileges that were a pipe dream for members of the Army who served in any other city of the metropolitan territory. Fact is that in this multiply critical period of transition, right after the last great war (while Britain had lost an empire, but had yet to find a role, according to the legendary saying), those in charge of the Defence Strategy of the nation were clearly guided by emotion instead of reason.<sup>9</sup>

This observation was to play a key, truly crucial role, in how British decision makers were to understand the Cypriot request for self-determination. What is really strange, is the fact that (I repeat it!) so many of “our” historians, international relations experts, journalists, and politicians have spent decades in over-psychologistic approaches to the Cyprus issue, they have harshly criticised our side, because we have supposedly always acted emotionally, and not reasonably (in 1931, in 1955, in 1964, but also in April 2004!), but they have never, to my knowledge at least, bothered to analyse the psychological profile of the men that were in charge of the British Strategy or that had a crucial role in its planning – so that we (the... ignorants!) could learn if and up to what point the stance of the Lords and the Staff Officers of Britain corresponded to what modern textbooks of Strategic Studies teach in relation to the Principle of Rationality and Decision-Making.

In their reply memoranda, the Chiefs of Staff intended to prevent a large-scale shrinkage of the colonial possessions of Britain (that would be a nightmare to them), cleverly but abusively relying on Clausewitz's “*language of military necessities*” and bombarding politicians with pompous but void terminology such as the “*maintenance of the imperial influence*”.

More in particular, they formulated the doctrine of the “*hub of Defence Planning*”, as well as the doctrine of the “*Three Pillars*” of the sub-system of Middle East/Eastern Mediterranean (which directly concerns us here). According to this reasoning, the Middle East was a hub for the whole Defence Planning of Britain and one of the three pillars of its national defence system. The other two were: the British Islands and the sea corridors. Subsequently, there was the belief that if one of the three pillars collapsed, then the whole defence system of the country would also collapse.<sup>10</sup> At this point we could detect an early version of the “Domino” theorem (well known because of the American involvement in Vietnam) – one of the most significant influences of Henry Kissinger in the American Grand Strategy and one of the most typical cases of failure to understand the scientific Theory, in this case that of Political Realism, for reasons of political expediency, as the father of the School of Political Realism, Hans J. Morgenthau, himself, denounced.

It is obvious that the assertions of the leaders of the British Strategy could not withstand the test of systemic geopolitical analysis, nor corresponded to the newly formed geo-strategic environment. Given that the USA had emerged as an impressive Naval Force of global status and taking into account, in particular, the presence of the mighty Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, but also considering, on the other hand, the then extremely feeble size of the Soviet Fleet, what was said about the need to maintain the British military presence in the region in order to safeguard the sea corridors sounds rather as an historical anachronism – or as a “denial of reality” on the part of people suffering from mental disorder.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Barnett 1995, 46-69.

<sup>10</sup> See, Butler 2002, 76.

The resistance of the Staffs – especially of Marshal Montgomery, who was overtly blaming the Labour Government for defeatism<sup>11</sup> – had such an impact that affected even members of the Government. Finally, the Prime Minister was not able to persuade not even the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin. Besides, the “Empire” became an “*idée fixe*” for the politicians and the officers of the state-bureaucratic elite and also for the Military.

Thus, already in 1946, a Government Committee that was established in order to examine the issue of the British Military Power, while it was describing in detail the enormous burden for the National Economy, that was the maintenance of troops around the world, ended proposing that it was of tantamount importance to maintain “British prestige abroad” and that there was a need “to live up to our responsibilities as one of the three Leading Powers of the world”.<sup>12</sup> All this was taking place in an era, where day by day it was becoming patently clear that Britain was no longer able to respond to the Military Crisis Management in its own and that it was completely dependent on the American aid, that in the period 1952-53 reached the inconceivable for that time amount of £244 million.<sup>13</sup>

It is well known, and has been historically proven on many occasions, that a bureaucratic organisation, in Wember's terms, always tends to vigorously resist to any attempt of shrinking its power. In Greece, the case of the Organisation for the Drainage of Lake Copais is legendary. It kept and is still alive, almost a century after the completion of the drainage works of the lake (1880-1931). On the international political level, the most typical similar case is, of course, NATO, that survived the dissolution of its (alleged) opponent (the Warsaw Pact), and even survived the collapse of the USSR (1991), seeking anxiously every probable or even improbable “threat”, so as to have some kind of “*raison-d'être*” (Let the wise hope that it will not intervene – more actively – in Ukraine!).

In the 1950s, the best similar example was the British Empire, whose strategists were struggling, exhausting their admittedly feverish inventive imagination, in order to justify the continuation of the “Empire's” life, and thus of the British presence, at least in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Middle East (read: Cyprus and Egypt), especially since Britain had withdrawn from its Asian dominions.

In fact, it is very strange that (apart from the above-mentioned personal attachment to the idea of the Empire that characterised many British politicians and the military bureaucratic elite) the impressive strengthening of the “obsession” with the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East was inversely proportional to the speed with which, for example, Indies, Burma or Malaysia were abandoned. A quite satisfactory explanation is that the complex of Eastern Mediterranean – Middle East was by then, the only wider region of the world that was still under the domination of the British Crown. It may not be coherent with an analysis of the rational behaviour of international actors, but, on a human level, the reluctance of Britain to abandon this last colonial heritage was certainly expected.

To confirm, thus, what we have already mentioned concerning the endurance of bureaucratic organisations to changes, London started now to try to justify (at first, before itself and before the American allies and “sponsors”) the continuous imperial presence in the Middle East, using George Kennan's “Containment” Doctrine against the Soviet Threat.

We have seen that Churchill's successor, Attlee, had asked for a radical redefinition of the British Defence Strategy and, thus for the drastic reduction of the number of colonies as well as of troops stationed in the imperial dominions – and instead asked that emphasis be given on the development of military, and especially strategic, capabilities of the RAF, due to the radical change of the international geo-strategic environment, whose main feature was now, from a western point of view, the Soviet Threat.

Very well then: Adopting Attlee's aforementioned axiomatic assumptions, the Chiefs of Staff, assisted by the political-bureaucratic elite, were now considering the Middle

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hamilton 1987, 650ff, 660ff, 676ff.

<sup>12</sup> Barnett 1995, 74.

<sup>13</sup> Rosecrance 1968, 138ff, 156.

East/Eastern Mediterranean to be a privileged field of application of the Western Containment Strategy against the Soviet Threat, since the region was perfect for the installation of the strategic (and soon of strategic nuclear) bomber aircraft of the RAF.<sup>14</sup> Taking off in Egypt, for example, the strategic (i.e., long-range) bombers of the British Royal Air Force (which would soon carry nuclear weapons) would be able to seriously hit the Soviet Union in its soft underbelly. Note that the British bases under discussion could certainly be used by the American Air Forces to seriously attack the USSR.<sup>15</sup>

Both Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff of Defence, and Chief of the General Staff of the Royal Air Force, Sir Arthur Tedder, developed this argument, which clearly aimed at gaining USA's political support in favour of the idea that the British Empire should not shrink any further – at least not in the Middle East. In 1949, Sir Arthur wrote a “Strategic Report” justifying the British presence in the region and arguing that the British Armed Forces were the “*only stabilising influence in areas of immense economic consequence to the Western World*”. Moreover, the Chief of the British Royal Air Force dared to predict that a withdrawal of Britain from the region “*could hardly fail to lead to the disintegration of the Commonwealth and the eventual fall of Africa to Communism*”.<sup>16</sup>

What is surprising, in this case, is that the British were reckoning without their host – i.e., the Arabs and especially the Egyptians. It is truly surprising to what point the leaders of Britain had underestimated the extent and the intensity of the anti-British feelings of the Arab countries and populations of the region, and mostly of the Egyptians (and this even though World War II had preceded and – in view of the initial impressive success of Marshal Erwin Rommel's “German (Expeditionary) Africa Corps” in the desert and the expected German march to Alexandria – Arab-Muslim populations' pro-Nazi sentiments were now explicit, while anti-British uprisings had already taken place from Egypt to Iraq).

Directly proportional was the surprise of London, when, suddenly Egypt made clear, already during the second half of the 1940s, that it had no intention to renew the earlier Anglo-Egyptian Treaty that was about to expire, and was permitting the installation and operation of British bases on Egyptian lands. While a forced withdrawal of the British troops from Egypt was about to take place, the Chiefs of Staff considered for a moment Palestine to be an adequate place to install the Headquarters and the major basis of the Middle East British Army.<sup>17</sup> However, the escalation of the national-political conflict between the Arabs and the Jews, along with the uprising of the Jews against the British Administration (which had taken dimensions that had upset the British – just think of the deadly explosion of the Headquarters of the British Army in King David Hotel in Jerusalem<sup>18</sup>), forced London to make a 180 degrees turn and to hurriedly abandon Palestine.

Under these circumstances, the zone of the Suez Canal became the main military base of the British Empire in the region, given that it was under a different regime than Egypt, and could guarantee the continuation of the British presence in the infamous “hub of defence planning” of the Empire – or, at least, that was what Britain thought.

However, what happened already before the Suez Crisis in 1956 forced the British to change their attitude once again. Under constantly growing frictions in the relations between London and Cairo, even the solution of Suez proved, over time, far from being an ideal one. Egyptians made the lives of the British unbearable, sometimes resorting to the strategy of civil disobedience (barrage of strikes), or to the strategy of terrorism (sabotages against the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Cohen 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ball 1991, 515-533.

<sup>16</sup> Barnett 1995, 96.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 65ff.

<sup>18</sup> 22nd July 1946, by the Israeli military organisation Irgun (*Irgun Zeva'i Le'umi, abbreviated as Etzel*) <<http://goo.gl/P1c1ZI>>.

British installations).<sup>19</sup> And after the Suez Crisis, the decision-makers of the British Strategy were forced to seek, once again, another solution.

And it was then that the gaze of the British Lords and Officers turned to Cyprus. Expelled from everywhere, they discovered Cyprus and considered it to be the only alternative. Thus, they decided to “hook” themselves onto this “green leaf thrown into the sea”, giving at the same time the promise to themselves that they would not permit, under any circumstances, to be humiliated again, as had happened in the Indies, Egypt, Palestine and Suez – “never”!

### **3. Third Stage: The return of the Tories and the denial to “shrink the Empire”**

In the meanwhile, while these were the developments in the international environment, in Britain an important change was taking place: the return of the Tories – and of an ageing Churchill in 10, Downing Street – in 1951. This was his “revenge” for 1945.

Obviously, a conservative Government – especially one of Sir Winston – was even more reluctant – than the Labour Government – to accept the territorial shrinkage of the Empire. On the contrary, for the man who served as a First Lord of the British Admiralty (Navy Secretary), War Secretary and Prime Minister in two World Wars, the Empire had an enormous geo-strategic and geo-economic importance – apart from its importance as a political symbolism and for the national imagination.

The “joy of joys” for the Military Leaders! Their position about the need to maintain the Empire was expressed in the “*The Chiefs of Staff Global Strategy Paper*” of October 1952: “Our standard of living stems in large measure from our status as a great power and this depends to no small extent on the visible indication of our greatness, which our forces, particularly overseas, provide”.<sup>20</sup> Objectively, it was just empty words with no strategic content that, however, reveal the degree of the emotional attachment to the idea of the Empire which we have already mentioned.

We have also mentioned that the obsession with the idea of the “Empire”, and consequently, with the idea of maintaining the British presence in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East was not limited to the military, but affected also the political elite. In a further and very disturbing irony of the History, the man that was officially at least no. 2, and unofficially no. 1 of the political elite (would shortly officially become no. 1) was possessed not just by this “obsession” with the East, but was also “modestly” considering himself as the absolute expert in the issues of the region and the best and most adequate, among all the citizens of Britain, to plan and implement a policy for the Middle East. We are talking about Sir Anthony Eden (the most “fateful man” for Cyprus, on the side of Britain of course).

Anthony Eden, born in 1897, had an impressive resume. After World War I, where he served as a reserve officer, he studied Oriental Languages (Arabic and Persian) at the prestigious University of Oxford, with a view to join the Diplomatic Corps of the British Empire. But, while still a student at Oxford, he got involved in politics in the side of the Tories and opted for a political career, instead of a diplomatic one. He entered the electoral arena and succeeded in being elected as a Conservative Member of the parliament, in 1923 – really young, especially for that time.

From the very beginning, this promising young politician emerged – and was seeking to emerge – as the expert *par excellence* of the Conservative Party in foreign policy matters. Of course, there were much senior, more experienced and wiser – also in foreign affairs – but who could compete the academic “credentials” of a graduate of Oxford?

In 1935, Eden became Foreign Secretary. Three years later something happened that was to take off the reputation and prestige of the young politician and to establish him as a wise and brave “statesman” who knows to go against the tide, even by denying chairs and offices,

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<sup>19</sup> David Lee, *Air Chief Marshal*, 1989, 45ff.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Butler 2002, 98.

in order to defend national interests – and whose positions are, finally, rewarded by the results: Eden strongly disagreed with the infamous “Appeasement” policy, which Prime Minister Sir Neville Chamberlain was following against Hitler’s Revisionary Germany and Mussolini’s Revisionary Italy that led to the Shameful Munich Agreement (October 1938) – and resigned. Eden’s absence from the Council of Ministers did not last long. When a little later, the Appeasement policy collapsed and Sir Neville Chamberlain was replaced by Sir Winston Churchill, Eden was asked by Churchill to take the lead of British Diplomacy.<sup>21</sup>

In 1951, Anthony Eden was undertaking, once again, the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, in a Churchill government once again – at a time when, as we have seen, the once global and overseas “British Empire” had shrunk, mostly in the complex of the Middle East/Eastern Mediterranean.

One could easily understand the enormous self-confidence of a man, who did not hesitate to “drop out” back in 1938, shortly after being chosen as a Minister in a then spectacular act, risking a brilliant political career, only to come back vindicated some little later when Hitler breached the Munich Agreement, splitting the remaining Czechoslovakia and preparing for an attack against Poland. We should add here, the absolute faith of this man to his ability to perceive, better than anyone else, Middle East issues, since he was an Oxonian scientist in the field of Oriental Languages, with accumulated experience in the region etc. – and you can tell if this man was willing to listen to the opinion or advice of any other political or administrative actor on issues of the Middle East (let alone to follow it)!

First of all, Eden was not willing to accept any suggestion of the Colonial Office – and it made this clear from the outset without quite respecting the British diplomacy elegance of that time. To put it simply: Eden “grasped” the (then arising) Cyprus Issue from the jurisdiction of the “Colonial Office”, prohibiting strictly any questioning of his leadership on this issue to everyone (to his colleagues in the Cabinet or diplomats).

At this point, it would be useful to clarify some points, in order to understand the actual power of Eden in the last Churchill Government. For some reason, in 1951, the British People felt the need, to offer one more, last, maybe symbolic, victory to the man that with his robust and explosive personality had indelibly marked the faith of their nation during half a century – the man they had followed, when he promised them “blood, toil, sweat and tears”, and that they rejected in 1945, the day after the victory. However, it was a “common secret” that the “old man” would not live much more (not long after he deceased). Similarly, it was a “common secret” that Eden (the only secretary with sound judgement and courage that was following Churchill in 1938 – then, politically isolated and considered extremist and “ultra-patriot – in the solitary path of objecting the policy of concessions vis-a-vis Germany), was not only preparing himself for the position of Prime Minister, when Churchill would die, but, he actually already had informally the role of the Prime Minister while Churchill was still alive.

The Foreign Secretary and potentially Prime Minister, therefore, made it clear to everyone that the Cyprus Issue would be, thereafter, an issue of his own exclusive jurisdiction. But perhaps a question arises: Why are we interested (once again) in an intra-system/intra-bureaucratic rivalry about power and influence? Unfortunately, this development concerns us because it was to have a fateful influence on the Cyprus Issue.

#### **4. Fourth Stage: The Eden Period**

Diachronically, a permanent principle of the Colonial Office was that the administration of every colony was an internal issue of the British Empire and, thus, no involvement of foreign countries was allowed on this issue. An intervention of a foreign Government in the internal affairs of the Dominions of the Crown – even in the form of “friendly” exhortations or suggestions – was by no means accepted. It was even more inconceivable for a British diplomat that London would recognise to a foreign Government the right or the privilege to express an opinion on what should happen in a colony of the Crown.

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<sup>21</sup> For Eden’s life and opinions cf. Eden 1962.

However, in the case of Cyprus this is what actually happened. The Foreign Secretary, after taking the jurisdiction of this specific portfolio from the Colonial Office, he himself involved Turkey in the Cyprus Issue and turned an issue of self-determination concerning the relations of a colonised country and a colonial power, into a dispute of two Governments of sovereign states, i.e., between Greece and Turkey (of course, in order to resolve this dispute, Britain was ready and willing to offer its services).

Besides, Eden totally agreed with the position of the Military Leaders about the paramount importance that the Middle East/Eastern Mediterranean space had for the interests and, thus, for the strategy of the British Empire. As the Foreign Secretary of the last Churchill Government, Eden was asked to resolve the torturous dilemma which Britain was facing in the post-war era:

- Which should be the hierarchy of strategic priorities within the new geo-strategic environment?

- That is to say: Should the main goal be to fulfil the new roles and duties that derived from the participation of the country in the Western collective defence and security system (i.e. NATO) – or to fulfil the traditional roles and duties that derived from the nature and the status of Britain as an Empire?

- Which should then be the principal mission of the British Strategy? The defence of Western Europe in the context of the already latent Cold War – or the defence of the overseas dominions of the Crown?

The answer that Eden gave was that the first priority was to defend Western Europe and, consequently, to support the North Atlantic Alliance. However, this was immediately followed by the responsibilities that derived from the role of Britain as an Empire, including particularly the need to defend the Middle East.<sup>22</sup> Eden strongly objected any idea or suggestion to abandon the imperial obligations of Britain in the Middle East, and on the contrary emphatically argued that there was a need to continuously maintain a strong British presence in the Middle East.

However, taking into account that, as we have already mentioned, the British abandoned, willingly or not, Palestine as well as Egypt, and were later (in 1954) forced to enter into an agreement that included their retirement from the Zone of the Suez Canal, Cyprus was their only remaining safe base of operation and base for projecting power in this wider sub-system. Note that, similarly to the Military that were turning their gaze toward their American counterparts, Eden was also skilfully seeking to interconnect two missions that were in principle contradictory, i.e., the defence of the West against the USSR and the defence of the Empire: the defence of the British position and the British interests in the Middle East were simultaneously contributing to the defence of the West, since this region (i.e., Cyprus – the only one they had left!) was the ideal base of operations against the soft underbelly of the USSR.

However, Eden's idea of the Middle East was not limited to the capabilities which the region, in general, and particularly Cyprus, offered on a strategic and tactical level against the Major Continental Eurasian Power. This ambitious and decisive British politician had in mind one more parameter whose name was Nasser.

The Colonel of the Egyptian Army Abdul Nasser, who rose to power in 1952 and was vigorously expressing a request for a full emancipation of Egypt and of the entire Arab World from any form of tutelage by the once Colonial Western Powers, was to become Eden's obsession. This charismatic leader attempted to give a quasi regulatory legitimacy to his policy, using an ideological mixture comprised of elements of pan-Arab nationalist, socialist and anti-colonial/anti-Western rhetoric.

Although this may surprise us, Eden right away saw in Nasser a dangerous new version of Hitler, this time not in the geo-cultural context of Central Europe but in the Middle East. Let us not hurry to assume that it was all about trivial pretexts of Western propaganda. In this case

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Butler 2002, 99.

(of Anthony Eden) there are some good reasons to make us believe that the British politician, stigmatised by the trauma of Munich in 1938, actually meant what he was saying and writing about the Egyptian leader:

- Nasser was ruling, as another Hitler, with an iron fist and was severely persecuting his opponents, while in the meantime he was enjoying a rather delusional worship by the masses.
- He was declaring, as another Hitler, a peculiar national socialism (Arab/Third World type).
- He aimed, as another Hitler, not only to satisfy certain rational and limited objectives of a nation-state actor (Egypt), but also the realisation of a supranational entity (the Arab World), whose ideological superstructure was not an Egyptian ethnocentric nationalism, but a pan-Arab one (along the lines of Pan-germanism).
- He raised, in that regard, a request for a historical “revanche” and geopolitical Revisionism, since Nasser was also asking the traditional Western Colonial Powers to set aside (national socialist Germany spoke about “saturierte Mächte” – “sated Powers” in a free version) in favour of the vigorous, dynamic and uprising factor of the geopolitical foreground named “Arab Nation”.

If we add to the above analysis the willingness of Nasser to accept, under conditions, the Soviet military aid, we realise that for the British Foreign Secretary, the Egyptian dictator constituted a great danger to the interests of Britain. These views were also shared by the Eden's colleague, Harold Macmillan (one of the few Conservatives that had followed him in 1938, when he objected Chamberlain's appeasement policy against Germany).<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, a sober and as possible as objective analysis can trace the actual dimensions of the threat posed by Nasser for the interests of the West, beyond fictions or psychotic obsessions of some Londoners that were stubbornly refusing to see and accept the new geopolitical reality.

What concerns us here, however, is the fact that, as if everything else was not enough (British withdrawal – or expulsion – from Palestine, Egypt etc.), in view of Nasser's above-mentioned ideas and obsessions, the British leaders were, suddenly, even less willing to discuss the cession of Cyprus to Greece. All of a sudden, Cyprus became not only a precious, safe base for the confrontation with the Soviet Union, but also an ideal, truly irreplaceable base for any military operation against Nasser, any air attack against Egypt and any invasion into the Zone of the Suez Canal. Especially now, under these circumstances, there could be no discussion about ending the British rule in Cyprus. Unfortunately, Cyprus was witnessing a sharp increase of its “shares” in this peculiar international “stock market” of geo-strategic values, while every other colony was, finally, left to its destiny.

And as if this was not enough, a new parameter arose: Not only did Eden consider the Middle East of paramount importance to Britain (for the reasons we have already mentioned) – and Cyprus the centre of the whole British defence system in the Middle East, but, much worse, he considered Turkey to be the keystone of the Middle East.

Eden, complacently promoting himself as an expert in matters of the geographical complex of Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East, was far from being a model of objective observer. On the contrary, he had strong anti-Greek and pro-Turkish feelings.<sup>24</sup> In the eyes of Eden, Turkey was for Britain what we would call today a “pivotal state”. Every policy about the Cyprus Issue, that would exclude or would offend Turkey, damaging British-Turkish relations, was strictly excluded. On the contrary, in a memorandum of February 1955, Eden refers to Greece, as an “unstable country”, while Papagos (at that time prime Minister) is described as “unworthy of trust”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Horne 1988, 393.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Eden 1960, 395-413.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Nutting (Foreign Office Parliamentary-Undersecretary), secret memorandum, February 1955, doc. 128a, In: Madden 2002, 424ff.

We do not know if his strong anti-Greek bias was, possibly, a side effect of the fact that as a young student and scientist he chose an unconventional path, i.e., to follow the Oriental Studies path – in a historical time when it was self-understood that the Western “hommes des lettres” primarily ought to follow Classical (i.e., Greek) Studies and Classical Studies were the core of the curriculum of every prestigious University.

It could be assumed that his obsession against the Greeks perhaps derived from the experience he had during his personal involvement in Greek affairs, during the period before the attack of Germany to Greece.<sup>26</sup> However, it could be reasonable to ask ourselves: if we here detect the beginnings of a strong bias of the then Foreign Secretary – and a little later Prime Minister – of Britain against the Greeks, what did he feel towards Turkey? Because, even if we accept that Eden was not satisfied with the Greeks, because Greece and the Greek Policies and Military Leaders (Metaxas – Papagos) – i.e., a country, along with its leaders, that was the only one in Europe to honour their commitment and stay actively and not only formally by the side of Britain when everyone had abandoned it – insisted on asking a deeper and more reliable commitment of Britain to the Greek front and hesitated to permit the descent of a negligible number of British soldiers, that would only provoke Wehrmacht's attack.

Even if this reasoning is correct, how should Eden feel for Turkey, a country that failed to fulfil every single international commitment it had signed, refusing to complete any obligation that resulted from the Anglo-French-Turkish Treaty of 1939? Moreover, for these commitments, Turkey, in total contrast to Greece, had received in advance a wealthy reward, both in pounds sterling, as well as in war materials.

How did Eden remember, in the mid-1950s, any unfortunate moments he had lived during his contact with Greece (that did not stop being, in any case, one of the few allies of Britain, “in practice”) – and did he not feel ashamed for the humiliation that the Turkish leadership made him suffer, when he rushed (he, the Foreign Secretary of the Planetary British Empire!) to Turkey in 1941, to supplicate the Turkish leaders to finally respect their commitments, only to receive Ankara's outright denial.

Unfortunately, at this point, we should talk about immorality and meanness. Because, how else could we characterise a British politician, and especially one that leads British diplomacy, when he refers to Greece, the firm ally of Britain, as an “unstable country”, and to Papagos as being “unworthy of confidence”, when the elder Marshal –unlike Pétain in France, Horthy in Hungary, Antonescu in Romania, Mannerheim in Finland, Franco in Spain or his

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<sup>26</sup> During that period, from late December 1940 to April 1941, a serious disagreement arose between London and Athens, since the Greek part (at first, Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas and after his mysterious death, Field Marshal Alexandros Papagos) reasonably insisted that Britain should respect what Athens, London and Paris had agreed before long, and thus that they should send to Greece sufficient fire power with a British Expeditionary Corps that would be able to confront a German invasion – while, on the contrary, the British side (Churchill and Eden), due to its own geo-strategic and operational needs and expediencies, was willing to send to Greece less expeditionary forces that would not be able to confront a possible German attack, however would be capable of provoking it. This friction culminated with a sharp disagreement that led to the well-known “incident” between Eden and Papagos during the Greek-British working meeting in the Greek General Staff (Hotel “Grande Bretagne”) and rupture was avoided due to the direct intervention of King George II. Fact is – especially if we consider Britain's strong denial, and especially the persistent denial of the Chiefs of Staff, until 28 October 1940, to send even the slightest reinforcement to the Greek Army – that there is, and will always be, an inkling that Britain's decision, as shown around late 1940 / early 1941, to suddenly send a quite limited military force to Greece, was not actually aiming to avert a German attack, but, on the contrary, to provoke it (with the ultimate goal being not to let close – since it had opened thanks to Mussolini – the open wound of the Balkans, but to “anchor” Germany in a “lateral” front, not included in its original planning).

Turkish counterparts – fought on the side of Britain and had also been imprisoned in a concentration camp in Germany?<sup>27</sup>

This meanness was obvious also during the infamous incident that followed the dialogue between Papagos and Eden in September 1953, when the Marshal (and at the same time Prime Minister) raised the question of the union of Cyprus with Greece. Eden's legendary answer was, in all respects, unethical: “New York has a large Greek population, so why not claim that?”<sup>28</sup> It was obviously an absolutely improper and disgraceful attitude, not only in terms of diplomatic courtesy, but even of common politeness. After all, that arrogant Briton had before him a much older man, that had passed some years as a war prisoner in the Dachau camp.

Macmillan, who succeeded Eden in the Foreign Office when the latter moved to Downing Street in the beginning of 1955, followed Eden's policy on the Cyprus Issue, namely: the Foreign Office was handling the issue, while side-lining the Colonial Office, and practically, absolutely declined the request for self-determination/union, and activated at the same time two factors:

- a) Turkey, that should be supported, and
- b) a “legitimate” Greek-Cypriot party, that “would emerge in order to support the continuity of the British rule on the island. Macmillan's phrase was quite eloquent and indicative of London's stance and plans: “*It should be possible to organise a pro-British party among the Greeks. After all, Xerxes had no difficulty...*”<sup>29</sup>

A clear reference to the historical precedent of the King of the Persians' bribe to political actors of the ancient Greek city-states, with the infamous “darics” (Persian coins that bore the image of Darius) and also the Peace of Antalcidas, a peace treaty that the Greeks (Spartans) signed with the Medes, abandoning Cyprus, as well as Greeks of the Eastern Mediterranean and Ionia, at the mercy of the barbarians (about 2,400 years later, in 1959/60, there would be some Greek actors, both in Athens and Nicosia, that would sign the Antaclidas's Zurich-London Agreements, like there would be Greeks on the island, and among them some “progressive” ones, that would become fanatic enemies of a national self-determination and supporters of the foreign occupation).

In the meanwhile, during the night of 31<sup>st</sup> March to 1<sup>st</sup> April 1995, appeared the armed National Liberation Struggle of the Greek-Cypriot People, under the enlightened and robust leadership of the Cyprus-born, General of the Greek Army, Georgios Grivas, a veteran of the past wars of the nation, an excellent military leader and a sincere patriot. The aim of this introduction is not, of course, to refer to the armed national liberation struggle of EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) (nor to the political developments of the Cyprus Issue), but to highlight, once again, the interconnection of the Cyprus Issue with the developments in the Middle East, and especially in Suez. For that reason, and for the sake of historical justice, we will only mention that:

- a) from a military viewpoint, in terms of preparation, organisation, planning and operation, Georgios Grivas (the legendary “Digenis”) had proven to be a truly great military leader and an expert of the Strategy and Tactics of Guerilla Warfare (ultimately recognised, by his own rival, Marshal Harding, as the best enemy whom he had ever fought),
- b) in terms of policy, Grivas proved to be an expert of what is considered to be the milestone of the success of every guerilla and anti-guerilla war, in the eyes of Clausewitz, Mao and modern experts: i.e., the need to have the support of the population (in other words to win “the hearts and minds” of the civilian population, as mentioned in the NATO manuals); and

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<sup>27</sup> In Dachau among others. He stayed in concentration camps from 1943 to 1945.

<sup>28</sup> Newsinger 2002, 88.

<sup>29</sup> Horne 1988, 364.

- c) in all respects, the struggle of EOKA was magnificent and unique and should form part of the long history of the National Resistance of Hellenism against any foreign conqueror.

As deduced from a memorandum of the Foreign Office in the beginning of 1955, Eden's administration believed that:

- a) the dominance of Britain on Cyprus should be continued and, thus, the request for self-determination/union should be rejected without question and should be dealt with, on one hand, using repressive methods (hence the emphasis on the reinforcement of the Police), and on the other hand, by affiliating with “moderate” Greek-Cypriots in favour of the continuous British Colonial Rule, offering them a status of restricted self-government as an alibi<sup>30</sup>,
- b) they should support and cooperate with the Turkish factor,<sup>31</sup> obviously as a counterweight to the Greek requests, and
- c) the Greek Government would be, ultimately, convinced to withdraw its support to the request for self-determination/union of the Greeks of the island and to accept instead the “fig leaf” of a nominal (in fact, very limited) self-government, that London would offer, both to “save face” and to help the Government of Athens to “save face” by presenting to the Greek public opinion, which was strongly in favour of the Greek-Cypriots, that there was a settlement of the issue, no matter how virtual.

As we have already explained, Eden's inexorable stance on the issue of self-determination was connected, among others, to the “Nasser” factor and the problems that London was facing with regard to Egypt and the Suez Canal, already before the international Crisis of 1956. It is obvious that the consequent escalation of the simmering conflict of interests between London and Cairo, until the Suez Crisis, and a little later, the Suez War of 1956, made the British even more intransigent on the Cyprus Issue – stance that related, of course, to the worsening of the condition in the internal front (armed activity of EOKA).

However, in an oddity of History (once again), the developments in the Middle East, in general, and in Suez, in particular – that, by the early 1950s, had for a long time a crucial and almost fateful role in shaping the (absolutely negative) stance of London towards any idea of ending the British rule, would now, suddenly, become the trigger for the processes that would lead – even partially – to the independence of Cyprus from the British rule.

More specifically, the crucial fact that made the leaders of the British Strategy to change attitude was the sudden pitiful failure of the common British-French military intervention against Nasser at Suez in October-November 1956. The unexpected, spectacular, and thus humiliating and painful fiasco of Britain and France, was for Britain a so-called “Scottish shower” and made the political and bureaucratic elite of London, as well as the British public opinion realise, albeit with a delay of eleven years since the end of the last great war, that the “days of the Empire” were long gone. It is what we know from Thucydides as “*change to the opposite*”<sup>32</sup>. There could be no stronger symbolism for this fact than Prime Minister's Eden resignation, in the beginning of the next year (1957). The inglorious end of the political life of the once mighty, arrogant and selfish “orientalist” of Oxford coincided with the end of the British fantasies and obsessions about the “imperial” presence in Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East.

And, as before, the fact that Britain's Chiefs of Staff, declared this geographical complex to be one of the three security pillars of Great Britain, but also the cornerstone of the whole system of the Imperial Defence, had made any substantial discussion on the request for self-determination of Cyprus prohibitive for the political elite in London. Thus, it was now imperative to develop a new defence doctrine that would actually take into account and reflect

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<sup>30</sup> F.O. Memo, 8 Feb 1955, F.O. 371/117625, cf. Madden 2000, 427-429.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “...by those who will wish to discern the truth about the events of the past and about the events of the future history ... the plans of the actors and the **change to the opposite**”, Thucydides, On Plataea.

the rapid and total collapse of the British domination on the sub-system of Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East (where it ruled for one and a half century, since the defeat of France in Abukir, in 1798).

Actually, a new Defence Policy was introduced in 1957 by Macmillan, who succeeded Eden in 10, Downing Street. Macmillan, possibly feeling and being freed by the shadow of his once “eternal” supervisor, developed and implemented a defence plan, whose main characteristics were:

- a) drastic cuts in defence expenditures; and
- b) emphasis on the defence of Britain and Western Europe, instead of the previous focus on issues of the Empire and, consequently, of the Middle East.<sup>33</sup>

However, once the British domination in the Middle East had ended, Cyprus was no longer considered irreplaceable, at least for the General Staffs. Thus, for the first time, and de facto, the way was open for an effective political solution to the Cyprus Issue, even for the satisfaction of the request for self-determination.

Moreover, it is interesting to note the fact that the causal – and not just temporal – relation between the Suez Crisis and the Cyprus Issue was fully understood by the Greek public opinion, not only in Cyprus, but also in the (rest of) Greece. Already during the massive nationwide protests that made Athens and the rest of the major urban centres of Greece vibrate as soon as the Greeks heard the horrible news that the heroes-national martyrs Karaolis and Dimitriou were sent to the gallows, there were slogans in favour of Nasser and in favour of an Athens-Belgrade-Cairo axis.

During the Suez War, the newspaper “Vima” published an article written by the retired Lieutenant Sergios Gyalistras, former Deputy Minister of Aviation during Papagos’s Government. In this article, the former military was relating the Issues of Suez and Cyprus, presenting a quite interesting estimation, that would later be confirmed by the developments on many occasions: The fact that both Superpowers (USA and USSR) held the hydrogen bomb was inevitably leading to an “*automatic rapprochement*”, even if only “*unintentional*”, between them. And that would happen because the “*fear of mutual retaliation*” diminished the possibilities of a war between them. But, that was exactly what made local wars more probable.<sup>34</sup>

The most advanced, daring and ground-breaking positions, in relation to the interconnection of the Issues of Cyprus and Suez, as well as to the (consequent) need for a redefinition of the Greek Foreign Policy, in a way that would reflect the new international situation were expressed by the newspapers “Estia”, “Eleftheria” and “Avgi”.

These positions were accompanied by harsh critics against the so-called “October’s” Governments on the national issue. “October’s” was called the first government of Kostantinos Karamanlis, who was suddenly appointed Prime Minister in October 1955, after the death of Marshal Papagos, and while everyone in Athens had for granted that two historical members and Vice-presidents of the conservative party (Panagiotis Kanellopoulos and Stefanos Stefanopoulos) would take the lead.

It was a common place that Karamanlis was appointed Prime Minister following a decision imposed by foreign factors. Furthermore, there is a legendary text, “Pipinelis’s Memorandum”, i.e., a concise text of what today we would call bullet-points, of the period prior to Karamanlis’s government that was written on behalf of Karamanlis by the veteran Ambassador, Minister of Foreign Affairs and once shadow advisor of King George II, Panagiotis Pipinelis.<sup>35</sup> The Memorandum was encoding the commitments that the then MP of the “Greek Rally” (Ellinikos Synagermos), K. Karamanlis, was to make to the foreign agent. It included a series of controversial questions, primarily on the Cyprus Issue. In this text,

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<sup>33</sup> See Jackson 1986, 170

<sup>34</sup> Gyalistras, Sergios, “Greece-Cyprus-Suez” [Ελλάς-Κύπρος-Σουέζ], In: “*To Vima*” [Το Βήμα], 12/10/1956.

<sup>35</sup> “How Karamanlis came to power” [Πώς ανήλθε ο Καραμανλής εις την εξουσίαν], *Neologos Patron* [Νεολόγος Πατρών], 21/12/1958.

Karamanlis appears to reassure that, if he assumed the responsibility of governing Greece, *“on the Cyprus Issue, there would be efforts to eliminate the public opinion’s reactions through a compromising solution on this issue”*.<sup>36</sup>

Remarks on Pipinelis’s Memorandum:

- first, it was published by the Director of Pipinelis's Office, P. Sotiropoulos, in person
- second, it was published in the prestigious daily newspaper of Patras “Neologos” in 1958,
- third, at that time, Pipinelis did not renounce it, but on the contrary, confirmed the authenticity of the “Memorandum” and,
- fourth and most important, everything written in the legendary Pipinelis’s Memorandum was fulfilled, word for word. Or as Panos Kokkas’s “Eleftheria”, put it in September 1956, answering to the Prime Minister (Karamanlis), who had stated that the government was fulfilling its duty in regard to the Cyprus Issue: *“However, he did not mention towards whom: the nation or, improbably, the ones who had placed him as Prime Minister. Because, in fact, the whole policy of “October’s” leaders on the Cyprus Issue and on its complications, that this appointed government has followed, proved to be a policy of accomplishing an undertaken duty”*.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, the fact that during the same period, the same newspaper published an article written by the President of Egypt, Colonel Nasser, that was in favour of Cairo in regard to its conflict with London, is also quite interesting. At the same time “Eleftheria” was promoting the idea that there was a common ground of strategic interests between Greece and Egypt against Great Britain, given that “Britain’s imperialism” was threatened by the national liberation struggle of the Greek-Cypriots and by the Arab emancipation, expressed mainly by Egypt.<sup>38</sup>

Even more interesting are the relevant articles of “Avgi”, especially if we juxtapose the highly and purely patriotic spirit of the Left of that time with the post-national and “multicultural” ideological constructions of part of today’s Left in Greece and in Cyprus. The editor of “Avgi”, Vasileios Efraimidis, was writing in September 1956: *“The government has been and still remains silent. This is coherent with its origins and with the role it assumed. It remains silent because everything in Cyprus, in Greece and in the Middle East takes place according to the prescribed plan of its “ALLIES”. If executioner Harding proceeds to the uprooting of Hellenism and Orthodoxy in Cyprus. If French troops disembarked on the island of Cyprus, the government does not have the will or the strength to protest because both serve the imperialist terrorist attack and demonstration of the front of the colonists in the region of the Middle East (...) in the Eastern Mediterranean colonisation clashes with anti-colonisation. Freedom clashes with slavery. A new situation is emerging in sea- regions that in antiquity were the cradle of the Greek-Egyptian civilisation. With Nasser, with the colonial peoples and with Cyprus (and) Greece or with British-Americans, French-Turks, i.e., with imperialism and its jackals, this is the dilemma. This is the historical dilemma”*.<sup>39</sup>

In the meanwhile, in mid-October in Athens circulated a leaflet written by Grivas, asking the replacement of Karamanlis’s government by a “National Front” Government, supported by a solid internal front, but also the re-examination of Greece’s foreign policy, implying the withdrawal from the North-Atlantic Alliance: *“For the political world of Greece an issue arises for our future stance towards various International Organisations, since there is no respect for the principles of Justice and Ethics, but only an arena of unethical bargaining, where interests and deals rule”*.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> “The duty” [Το καθήκον], *Eleftheria* [Ελευθερία], 5/9/1956.

<sup>38</sup> Nasser, G. A., “My policy” [Η πολιτική μου], and (editorial) “The great danger” [Ο μέγας κίνδυνος], *Eleftheria* [Ελευθερία], 2/9/1956.

<sup>39</sup> V.E. (Efraimidis, Vasileios), “Tongue Twister” [Γλωσσοδέτης], *Avgi* [Αυγή], 2/9/1956.

<sup>40</sup> *To Vima* [Το Βήμα], 19/10/1956.

The leader of the Liberal Party, Georgios Papandreou, soon declared that “*Digenis was fully expressing the nation’s feelings*”. Skilfully, avoiding to position himself in favour of abandoning NATO, Papandreou was actually asking “*the Regulator of the Polity*” to intervene. The leader of the “Democratic Party of the Working People”, Georgios Kartalis, stated that Grivas was making the ultimate effort to stop Karamanlis from closing the Cyprus Issue. The President of the United Democratic Left (EDA), Ioannis Pasalidis, was openly in favour of Digenis’s proposal.

The reaction of the Press, was in many ways revealing what was happening (and not only at that time) with the foreign “Protection” in Greece. As one would expect, “Vima” and “Kathimerini” – had a highly negative attitude towards Grivas’s positions, while the more “popular” daily newspaper of the Lambrakis Group, i.e., “Nea”, chose to follow the method of “death by silence”.<sup>41</sup>

On the contrary, Panos Kokka’s “Eleftheria” vehemently turned against the “*puppets of October 6<sup>th</sup>*” (read as: Karamanlis, Averof-Tositsas and Co.), openly and directly threatening that if they would try “*to ignore the logic of things*” and “*to fulfil their mission by surrendering, they would some day be found strangled with pliers of logic, that will throw their moral corpses in the sewer of History*”.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, the most militant stance in favour of the National Struggle was that of “Estia”, published by the Kyros family. Note that there is no relation between that – historical – “Estia”, directed by three generations of the Kyros family and the present namesake newspaper, both in terms of their political orientation and their stance towards national issues.

So, “Estia” was asking the resignation of the Government, or, otherwise, the intervention of the King. In view of the rumours of the highly conciliatory stance of Karamanlis and Averof and their willingness to accept whatever the British would “serve” them as a supposedly “self-governance”, “Estia” was directly making threats of a “*new Goudi*”.<sup>43</sup>

On 31 October 1956, the day after the Israeli attack against Egypt, and in view of the British-French attack that was taken for granted, Kyros Kyrou denounced through the columns of “Estia” the “*predatory raid*” of Britain and France, “*whose world record make Mussolini’s dishonesty seem innocent*”. he also denounced “*October’s Government*” (of Karamanlis) because it “*stupidly*” declared three days ago that “*we are inseparably connected to our Western Allies*”, emphasising that the bonds with the “*brigands of imperialism*” were continuously becoming more dangerous.<sup>44</sup>

This newspaper, considered as pre-eminent conservative, was asking a withdrawal from NATO. Immediately, an adequate answer came from “Kathimerini” and “Vima” (“leave to go where? Maybe to the Warsaw Pact...”).<sup>45</sup>

Finally, to prove once again the connection the public opinion was seeing between the Cyprus Issue and Suez, it is worth mentioning an article, published in “Vradini”, on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1956, by the once Grivas’s comrade, Konstantinos Efstathopoulos: “*we admire and appreciate the brave policy of our friends, the Egyptians, but at the same time we feel ashamed because in our valiant country no one worthy of Nasser was ever found*”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. *To Vima* [*To Bήμα*] and *Kathimerini* [*Καθημερινή*], 18/10/1956, *Ta Nea* [*Ta Néa*], 19/10/1956.

<sup>42</sup> “Simple Words” [*Απλά λόγια*], *Eleftheria* [*Ελευθερία*], 21/10/1956.

<sup>43</sup> *Estia* [*Εστία*], 18, 19 and 22/10/1956.

<sup>44</sup> “The robbers of the West” [*Οι ληστές της Δύσεως*], *Estia* [*Εστία*], 31/10/1956.

<sup>45</sup> “In view of the ultimate dangers, the people should concentrate its aims” [*Εν όψει των υπερτάτων κινδύνων ο λαός να πυκνώσει τους στόχους του*], *To Vima* [*To Bήμα*], 1/11/1956. Cf. *Kathimerini* [*Καθημερινή*], 1/11/1956.

<sup>46</sup> Efstathopoulos, K. “Grivas’s Message” [*To μήνυμα του Γρίβα*], *Vradyni* [*Βραδυνή*], 25/10/1956.

What followed is well known – and is outside the scope of the present paper. Let us only add a couple of observations:

First, for the sake of historical justice, we must recognise that the rapid, radical and dramatic change of the British attitude – from the obstinate denial of every substantial discussion on the Cyprus Issue (beyond pretentious virtual “offers” of a fictitious, highly limited self-governance) to the readiness and willingness to end the British rule and to recognise even the independence of the island – is not only due to the developments of the Suez Crisis in 1956 (that had started under quite different conditions and had ended quite differently), but also due to the absolute success of the Strategy of Georgios Grivas-Digenis and the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA).

An expert of the so called “Strategy of (the enemy’s) Attrition”, Grivas had rightly pointed out (and recorded, as early as in 1953, in the General Plan of Revolutionary Action, which he had prepared) that he did not expect, nor one should assume, that through the means used by EOKA, it would achieve an absolute military predominance on the British forces. “*Our aim*”, was explaining this great strategist and warlord, “*is to win a moral military victory through a war of attrition, which will consist in the harassment, confusion and, finally, the exhaustion of the enemy’s forces*. In other words, the aim was not a military victory against the British over the territory (hence there was no discussion about compiling large-scale rebel military formations – something that actually would have proven to be self-destructive).

On the contrary, as Grivas put it, the aim was – using only a small number of armed militants, supported by the passive resistance and civil disobedience of the entire population – to continuously provoke such damage and confusion to the British forces, that, on the one hand, it would become clear internationally that the British are not any more the absolute lords of the situation on the island, and on the other hand, to expose London to the continuous pressure of the international public opinion – and to keep disturbing the British, as Grivas said, until they would be forced by the international Diplomacy, conducted through the UN, to accept to discuss the Cyprus Issue and to solve it according to the will of the Cypriot people and the entire Greek nation.

The second observation that must be made, in conclusion, is that, taking into account the outcome of the Suez Crisis and War and the “shock” that it meant to London, but also considering the absolute success of the Guerilla Strategy adopted by the Greek-Cypriots, the Greek political leaders, that were called upon to resolve the issue of self-determination/union (and rushed to bury it, accepting, instead, a status of fictitious, partial and compromised independence and mortgaging the future of the Greek-Cypriot people eternally), objectively proved to be completely incapable or unwilling to take advantage of the world-historical change of the international and regional geo-strategic environment as well as the mighty “card” of the undeniable ethical and, thus, strategic victory of EOKA. This card was trusted to them by the fighting Greek-Cypriot People and the whole nation, as a precious heritage, when Greek-Cypriots wished them “farewell” on their way to Zurich and London, with the hope they would return to a “Greek Cyprus”.

Thus in an (truly tragic!) irony of History, it seemed that Sir Anthony Eden’s opinion was right (although he had completely failed and was humiliated on everything else), when he had foretold that sooner or later the Greek political leaders would be convinced to abandon the request for union, accepting instead what the British would offer them.

Unless, of course, Macmillan’s opinion about Xerxes’s ways to manage to find, among the Greeks, some willing to align themselves with his wills proved to be true...

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