

**Britain and the Cyprus Crisis of 1974:**

**'Responsibility without Power'<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Work in progress. Not to be cited without the author's prior permission. Comments most welcome.

## **Britain and the Cyprus Crisis of 1974:**

### **'Responsibility without Power'**

#### **1. Introduction**

This paper is part of an ongoing Ph.D. thesis which looks at the roles played by Britain and the United States during the Cyprus crisis of 1974. My thesis examines whether Britain and the United States were responsible by acts of omission or commission for the Greek coup and subsequent Turkish invasion, which led to the current division of the island. This paper will look at British policy from 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> July and assess how effectively Whitehall was able to make and execute its policy decisions.

#### **2. 1878-1960**

On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1878, Cyprus was leased to Britain by the Ottomans, as a consequence of the Congress of Berlin, so that Britain could use Cyprus as a *de facto* base in order to protect the ailing Ottoman Empire from Russian encroachment. Forty-five years later, in Articles twenty and twenty-one of the Treaty of Lausanne, the newly-founded Republic of Turkey renounced any claim to sovereignty over Cyprus in favour of Britain. In 1925, Cyprus became a British Crown colony. After the Second World War, the Greek Cypriot population of Cyprus began actively arguing for *Enosis* (union with Greece), whereas the Foreign Office's assessment of giving up Cyprus was

Assuming a worst but no means impossible case, with the Russians possessing a foothold in Palestine as a result of their efforts in the UN, and with Cyprus ceded to Greece which had subsequently gone Communist, we should ... not only [have]

created a vacuum in the Middle East, we should have gone halfway towards letting the Russians fill it.”<sup>2</sup>

On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1955, an armed campaign began, ‘the EOKA (*Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston*) struggle’, in order to achieve *Enosis*. Britain remained resolute with Prime Minister Eden stating during a visit to Norwich in 1956

No Cyprus, no certain facilities to protect our supply of oil. No oil, unemployment and hunger in Britain. It is as simple as that.<sup>3</sup>

After four years of fighting, during which Britain quite deliberately awakened Turkey’s interest in the island, an international agreement was drawn up in Zürich and then later in London by Britain, Greece and Turkey.<sup>4</sup> The agreement that was reached was largely down to a background role played by the United States, and would prove to be the first of many occasions during which Britain, quite happily, would have to give way over Cyprus to her more powerful ally across the Atlantic.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Cyprus became “the first country in the world to be denied majority rule by its own constitution”<sup>6</sup> and has been

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<sup>2</sup> FO 371/67084, ‘Cyprus: Question of Cession to Greece’, Minute by C.H. Johnson, 24/10/47.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1956.

<sup>4</sup> Eden, Sir A., *Full Circle*, London, Cassell, 1960, p.414 and p.396. Prime Minister Anthony Eden in 1955: “I considered it capital that we should carry the Turks with us in any new move...” after all “In early 1955 their passions were not yet inflamed, for the Turks is slow to anger, but once roused, he is implacable.”

<sup>5</sup> PRO: CO 926/977: The US expressed their concern to Whitehall in June 1957, over fears that Britain may pull out of Cyprus altogether. Their concern was to a certain extent due to US communication facilities situated in Mia Milea and Yerolakkos, as confirmed by CIA File, ‘The Outlook for Cyprus’, published 28/12/61, which states that the US reached a pre-independence agreement with Britain for these facilities.

PRO: CO 926/627: Following some subtle American pressure, Britain had accepted that she no longer needed the whole island as a base, but only required bases on the island. On September 12<sup>th</sup> 1957, FO and US officials covertly met at the US Embassy in London, where the Americans emphasized their preference for a form of independence, guaranteed by NATO powers, for the island.

PRO: FO 371/144640: The clandestine role played by the US cannot be underestimated and is once more underlined by the fact that a Gentlemen’s Agreement had been reached by the Prime Ministers of Greece and Turkey during the independence talks stating that that they would ensure that the two Cypriot communities had to outlaw communism and that this agreement would remain permanently secret. The records of this conversation highlight the fact that Britain was completely ignorant of the discussions between Greece and Turkey, where as the US was surprisingly well-informed.

<sup>6</sup> Foley, *Legacy of Strife, Cyprus from Rebellion to Civil War*, Baltimore: Penguin p.164.

described as having the “most rigid, detailed and complicated constitution in the world”.<sup>7</sup> A protocol was added announcing the agreement on a further three documents, including the Treaty of Establishment which ensured that Britain retained sovereignty over ninety-nine square miles of territory - two large Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs). In addition to the two SBAs (Akrotiri and Dhekelia), Britain also retained various communication and surveillance sites across the island and essentially reserved the right to use the whole of the island as a military base.<sup>8</sup> The safety and retention of these facilities would come to dominate British policy on Cyprus for the next fourteen years.

### **3. 1960-1974**

When inter-communal fighting erupted in December 1963, Britain was approached to deploy a Joint Truce Force to prevent further violence. This did not last long, and on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1964, the British Government approached the United States in forming an international peace-keeping force, which would eventually lead to the formation of the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).<sup>9</sup> From this point on, both the Wilson and Heath administrations would adopt a policy of ‘impartiality and non-involvement’, allowing the United States to be at the forefront of events in Cyprus.<sup>10</sup> Britain’s main concern throughout was the retention of her military facilities on the island.

During the 1960 negotiations, the Cyprus Government dropped earlier claims for payment for sites and facilities and accepted Britain’s proposal to determine at five-year

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<sup>7</sup> Polyviou, P.G., *Cyprus: Conflict and Negotiation, 1960-1980*, New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980, p.21.

<sup>8</sup> See Klearchos Kyriakides, ‘*The SBAs and British Defence Policy Since 1960*’, in ‘*Britain in Cyprus*’, Faustmann & Peristianis, Peleus, Band 19, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Ball, G., *The Past Has Another Pattern*, Norton and Company, London, 1982, p.340.

<sup>10</sup> PRO: DO 204/19, ‘Intercommunal Talks, Part C’, ‘Cyprus: The Enlarged Intercommunal Talks’, from Oliver to Sir Alec Douglas-Home, 24/10/73 and PRO: PREM 15/31: Under ‘Kyprianou calls in on the Secretary of State’, 17/7/70.

intervals, after full consultation with the Cyprus Government and taking all factors into account, the amount of financial aid to Cyprus to be provided in the succeeding five years. This was set out in an Exchange of Notes which provided for £12 million of aid up to 1965, paid in instalments tapering to £1.5 million in the final year.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Cyprus Government was told in March 1965 that further payment was dependent upon progress toward an intercommunal settlement, as this was the only way Britain could guarantee equal distribution amongst the two communities, thereby demonstrating and ensuring British impartiality.<sup>12</sup>

As the SBAs are sovereign territory, no rent was to be paid under the signed agreements, but in 1972, the Makarios government made a request for payment due for the use of Britain's other facilities.<sup>13</sup> The following year, a second request for payment was made. The Cypriot Government asked for £76.5 million from Britain for the use of facilities and services on Cyprus for the period of April 1<sup>st</sup> 1965 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 1972.<sup>14</sup> An additional request was made for a subsequent annual payment of £11.48 million as of April 1<sup>st</sup> 1972.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, Whitehall asked the Chiefs of Staff to re-evaluate the strategic importance of Cyprus, and found that the Chief of Staff Committee agreed with the results of the 1971 evaluation, in that Cyprus was of significant geopolitical importance to both Britain and the Western world.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, Whitehall was unwilling to concede to Makarios' request for payment and in December 1973, told the Cyprus Government, that the presented claims were not

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<sup>11</sup> PRO: AIR 20/12691: 'Cyprus – Financial Claims for Facilities, November 1974'.

<sup>12</sup> PRO: PREM 15/31: 'Kyprianou calls on Secretary of State, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1970', Appendix R.

<sup>13</sup> *Hansard*, vol.327, p.805: At least, there was no "direct payment". See Lord Carrington, Secretary of State for Defence in the House of Lords, 2/2/72.

<sup>14</sup> This was not for the SBAs.

<sup>15</sup> PRO: FCO 46/1017: B.Stanbridge, Air Commander, Secretary, Chief of Staff Committee, 13/9/73.

<sup>16</sup> PRO: FCO 46/1017: 'The strategic importance of Cyprus', 26/9/73.

legally well-founded, as all payments under the Treaty of Establishment were being honoured<sup>17</sup> and that any resumption of payment should be made in accordance with the 1960 Exchange of Notes.<sup>18</sup> The Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, concluded at a Defence & Overseas Policy Committee meeting before Christmas 1973, that Britain would need to resume financial assistance to ensure continued use of the SBAs and that the British High Commissioner, Sir Stephen Oliver, should inform the Cyprus Government that although the claim was questionable, Britain did not rule out discussion of the matter.<sup>19</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> May, with Edward Heath having been replaced by Harold Wilson, who had set British policy on course for a defence review, Oliver delivered a message from the Prime Minister to President Makarios, informing him that due to Britain's serious economic situation, it could not, for the time being, discuss the Archbishop's financial request. As always, Makarios was sympathetic, but explained that he too, was under pressure from his Minister of Finance, Mr. Patsalides, and asked Oliver whether Britain could pay the Cypriot Government the sum of £10 million.<sup>20</sup> In his message to Whitehall, Oliver explained that the future of the SBAs and the retained sites depended "ultimately on the goodwill of the Cyprus Government."<sup>21</sup> We now know that a paper was prepared proposing annual payments of up to £2.5 million from April 1974 to March 1980 as well as a retrospective sum of £10 million to be paid to the Cyprus Government. After the general election in February, this all changed, and once Wilson committed

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<sup>17</sup> PRO: CAB 148/131: HMG pays £1 million p/a for certain services and facilities.

<sup>18</sup> PRO: AIR 20/12691, 'Cyprus – Financial Claims for Facilities, November 1974'.

<sup>19</sup> PRO: CAB 148/131: D & OPC, 14/12/73.

<sup>20</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: Oliver to Wiggin at the FCO, 13/5/74. The letter had been written by Wilson on 20/4/74. Also: Wilson, H., *Final Term, The Labour Government, 1974-1976*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1979, p. 22-49.

<sup>21</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: Oliver to Wiggin.

himself to a defence review, it would have been unwise for Britain to commit itself to facilities which it might not want to hold onto for much longer.<sup>22</sup>

Britain had previously considered withdrawing from at least one of the SBAs,<sup>23</sup> but a combination of gentle prodding from Washington<sup>24</sup> and a belief that if Britain withdrew from one of the Areas it would become more difficult to hold onto the retained sites, meant that this was never realised.<sup>25</sup> However, in May 1974, a top secret paper suggested that the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Intelligence) should make a proposal based on the assumption that Britain totally abandon the SBAs, and try to establish what the minimum expenditure could be whilst maintaining “effective collections service.”<sup>26</sup> Further, there is an increasing amount of evidence available which suggests that Washington opposed any suggestion of Britain leaving Cyprus. A Ministry of Defence paper, dated 7<sup>th</sup> July, shows that the Commander of the British Forces Near East (CBFNE), Sir John Aiken, was concerned at the level of the American presence at Akrotiri. Aiken felt so strongly about this, that he asked the Ministry of Defence to help him prevent further increases in the deployment of U2 spy planes or US personnel in Cyprus.<sup>27</sup> In a memorandum prepared in December 1973, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was informed that the British were getting nervous about US use of Akrotiri in light of the continued left-wing press reports in Cyprus and that the US would be better to withdraw now, so that (a) Britain would not need to ask them to leave, and (b)

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<sup>22</sup> PRO: AIR 20/12691, ‘Cyprus – Financial Claims for Facilities, November 1974’.

<sup>23</sup> PRO: FCO 9/65, PRO: CAB 148/18: 24/11/65, PRO: CAB 148/29: D & OPC, 16/11/66, ‘Rundown of Forces’.

<sup>24</sup> NARA: RG 59, GR of the DoS, CFPF, 1964-66, Political & Defense, Cyprus: telegram from US Embassy London to State Department, 28/11/66.

<sup>25</sup> PRO: CAB 148/81: D& OPC, 2/6/67: Report by the Defence Review Working Party.

<sup>26</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: ‘Value of intelligence collecting facilities in Cyprus’, 5/6/74.

<sup>27</sup> Supported by: PRO: DEFE 68/90: Note of a meeting between CBFNE and VCDS, 7/7/74.

Washington would have a better chance of using Akrotiri again at a later date.<sup>28</sup> This once again highlighted how British policy on Cyprus was being influenced by the Americans.

Up until 14<sup>th</sup> July 1974, Britain's only considerations *vis-à-vis* Cyprus were the SBAs, her retained sites and whether or not, after the Defence Review, Britain could continue to justify such a large-scale military presence on the island. This was all about to change, and once more, British policy would be highly susceptible to decisions taken in Washington.

#### **4. 1974: 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> July**

On the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> July 1974, the Greek junta, through its officers commanding the Greek Cypriot National Guard, launched a *coup d'état* against the Makarios government, destroying the Presidential Palace in an attempt to kill Cyprus' President. In his memoirs, the British Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan, asserted that he did not have an "inkling" of what was about to happen.<sup>29</sup> However, once news of the coup reached London, Callaghan revealed 'other problems were pushed off his desk' and the Foreign Office became preoccupied with events in Cyprus. Both Greece and Turkey were reminded of

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<sup>28</sup> NARA: RG 59, CFPPF, 1970-73, Defense, Cyprus. On the other hand, US documents reveal that Makarios was fully aware of American use of the SBAs for U2 flights and that "he has been very good about it." See: NARA: RG 59, GR of the DoS, CFPPF, 1970-73, Political & Defense, Cyprus, memo for President Nixon, 22/10/70.

<sup>29</sup> Callaghan, J., *Time and Chance*, Collins, London, 1987, p. 335.



their responsibilities under the Treaty of Guarantee<sup>30</sup> and Britain asked both to show restraint and urged Ankara to avoid “any kind of precipitate action or intervention at this stage.”<sup>31</sup> During a meeting with Foreign and Commonwealth officials, Callaghan accepted responsibility in that Britain would have to take the initiative with Athens and Ankara and that Britain’s primary concern was the safety of British dependants and holiday-makers. Additionally, the safety of the SBAs was of vital importance to Britain. Callaghan and his advisers agreed that an armed response by Turkey needed to be avoided, that the junta was probably culpable and that despite this, Britain should consult with both Athens and Ankara as stated in the Treaty of Guarantee. Even if Makarios was dead, the decision not to recognise any other government in Nicosia had also been agreed upon.<sup>32</sup> By now news that Nicos Sampson, an EOKA fighter who was sentenced to death by the British but later amnestied, had been named as the new ‘President’ of Cyprus, had reached Whitehall. In Nicosia Oliver, concluded that Makarios had to take responsibility for provoking Athens, a sentiment which caused some disagreement within the department:

Surely even Makarios could not have calculated on such crass stupidity on the part of the Colonels to embark on a course of action which would almost certainly justify if not stimulate a subsequent Turkish intervention.<sup>33</sup>

At 12.30 GMT on the 16<sup>th</sup> July, Makarios asked Oliver, via General Prem Chand, Commander of UNFICYP, to airlift him to Akrotiri. This decision led to the

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<sup>30</sup> Under Article IV, each Guarantor reserves the right to restore constitutional order on the island. Before doing so, the three countries should consult together in an attempt to ensure the provisions of the constitution are observed.

<sup>31</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1890 ‘Notes for Supplementaries’, and Callaghan’s telegram to Ankara, Callaghan, p. 336.

<sup>32</sup> Callaghan, p. 337.

<sup>33</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1914: Comment by Lynton Jones on Oliver’s dispatch “The Coup against Makarios”.

implementation of Operation *Skylark*, a contingency plan which had existed for some time. Naturally, Whitehall was keen to keep the operation as covert as possible, so as not to provoke a reaction from the National Guard.<sup>34</sup> Once authorisation had been received at 16.00 GMT, camouflaged whirlwind helicopters of 84 Squadron, kept in Nicosia as part of the United Nations detachment, were alerted by CBFNE. One of these helicopter left Paphos at 16.25 GMT,

...and made a deliberate detour so that it looked as though it came from Nicosia, which is a well-established and non-suspicious route. The lift out was unopposed, but still a 'close run thing', as shortly after a brief battle for Paphos began.<sup>35</sup>

There was considerable concern as not only was Whitehall pressing for a delay in order to discuss the Archbishop's destination, but CBFNE feared the possible reaction of the National Guard against the SBAs, as, at that moment, the families in the dormitory towns were all under the control of the National Guard. A conversation between Kissinger and Callaghan at 15.15 GMT revealed the former's displeasure at hearing that Britain had agreed to evacuate Makarios. Kissinger feared Makarios would lead an "outside movement and ask for Soviet help." The US Secretary of State conceded that if Makarios was to leave the island he would have to re-assess the situation and that his primary concern was "to keep outside powers out of this."<sup>36</sup> Eventually, CBFNE applied sufficient pressure and Makarios' flight, the *RAF Argosy*, was airborne by 17.02 GMT. It appears that it was CBFNE who, due to the *Argosy's* limited range, chose Malta as

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<sup>34</sup> Callaghan, p.337.

<sup>35</sup> PRO: WO 386/21, 'Report on the Cyprus Emergency', 15/5/1975. PRO: FCO 9/1914: Sampson's account of the coup which appeared in *Machi*: As Makarios was boarding the helicopter, Sampson claims that he received a call from one of his officers, stating that the Archbishop was in shooting range. Sampson claims that he ordered that Makarios should be let go. In the circumstances this seems highly unlikely.

<sup>36</sup> NARA: NPMS, HAK, TCT, Callaghan and Kissinger, 15.15 GMT, 16/7/74.

Makarios' destination. A message was received by Callaghan, and the escorting officer, Wg Cdr Hodgkinson was asked to determine where Makarios wanted to go.

Makarios replied that he "had no concrete plans", but that his "final destination was London". At this time, Makarios was unaware that he was heading for Malta.<sup>37</sup>

The *Argosy* landed at Luqa at 21.12 GMT and was met by the British High Commissioner Haydon, the Governor General, Deputy Prime Minister and a little later by Prime Minister Dom Mintoff. They were all greeted warmly by Makarios "who had about him an Olympian calm and was really rather magnificent considering what he had gone through."<sup>38</sup> Makarios had wanted to head straight for London and needed a lot of persuading to stay in Malta overnight. He had spotted an *RAF Comet* and suggested that only if it took longer than forty-five to sixty minutes to get ready would he stay.

Hodgkinson took advice from the British High Commissioner and after visiting the *Comet* returned to report an unserviceability had been found (in fact a minor fault) and that it would take "more than an hour" to repair.

Makarios agreed to stay with the Governor General but added that he would have to leave the following morning by 9am.<sup>39</sup>

Very early on during the crisis, a divergence in British and US policy became apparent. This different outlook is reflected in a message sent by Callaghan to Kissinger, in which the former suggested a joint refusal to accept Nicos Sampson as head of state, the

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<sup>37</sup> PRO: WO 386/21, 'Report on the Cyprus Emergency', 15/5/1975.

<sup>38</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1891: tel. 207, Haydon, Valletta to FCO, 16/7/74.

<sup>39</sup> PRO: WO 386/21, 'Report on the Cyprus Emergency', 15/5/1975.

removal of the Greek officers from the National Guard, and the return of President Makarios. Also, Callaghan quickly enlisted the support of the nine member states of the European Community and urged the US to apply pressure on Athens, in order to remove the Greek officers from the island, secure the return of Makarios and thereby prevent a Turkish invasion.<sup>40</sup> During the first five days of the crisis there were two main issues on which Whitehall and Washington initially failed to agree. The first was the issue of recognition, the second was restoring Makarios as President of Cyprus.

Almost immediately, Callaghan informed the British Embassy in Athens that Makarios was the legitimate President and that Athens should unambiguously state what its intentions were whilst removing the Greek officers in the National Guard responsible for the coup.<sup>41</sup> Sir Robin Hooper, the British Ambassador, met with the acting Foreign Minister, Constantine Kypraios, and explained Britain's position. Kypraios "balked slightly" and asked why Britain still did not recognise the Portuguese dictator Dr Caetano or Colonel Papadopoulos, the leader of the initial junta, at which point Hooper explained there was a difference

...between a freely and constitutionally elected President and one imposed without genuine popular consultation.<sup>42</sup>

The reaction across the Atlantic was very different.

Throughout the crisis, Ambassador Robert Anderson, the State Department's press spokesman, would inform the media of Washington's stance during his daily noon briefings. Anderson had received instructions from Kissinger to avoid any binding

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<sup>40</sup> Kissinger, H., *Years of renewal*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, pp.210-211.

<sup>41</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1891: Instructions from Callaghan to the British Embassy Athens, 16/7/74.

<sup>42</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1891: tel. 204, Hooper to FCO, 16/7/74.

statements regarding the recognition of Makarios.<sup>43</sup> On the day of the coup, Anderson commented that the situation in Cyprus was “unclear”, that there was no confirmation of whether Makarios was dead or alive and that

The question of recognition...does not arise because the situation on the island is changing. It is necessary first to know who controls the territory of Cyprus...Our policy remains that of supporting the independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus and its constitutional arrangements.

By not condemning the coup, the US was tacitly recognising Sampson. A CIA report dated 19<sup>th</sup> July revealed that Kissinger had argued that it was better to deal with Sampson, than risk offending the junta, as otherwise they could “toss the Sixth Fleet out of Greek ports.” US policy concentrated on preventing the declaration of *Enosis*, as Turkey would not allow this and it would almost certainly result in a war between two NATO allies, thereby weakening the Alliance’s south-eastern flank, with only one possible beneficiary – Moscow. Washington, already concerned over its relations with Ankara due to the dope trade,<sup>44</sup> showed further concern upon discovering that Russia, “always eager to foment trouble, has lined up with Turkey.”<sup>45</sup>

On 16<sup>th</sup> July, Anderson was asked whether the Makarios government was the government of Cyprus, to which Anderson replied “I would rather just not comment on it at all.”<sup>46</sup> This was almost twenty-four hours after it had been revealed that Makarios was still alive and almost two hours after Callaghan had spoken to Kissinger about evacuating Makarios from Cyprus. Callaghan explained why he felt Britain should continue to recognise

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<sup>43</sup> NARA: SD, tel.154133, 17/7/74, ‘Department press briefing – Cyprus’.

<sup>44</sup> Under Ecevit, Turkey had re-commenced poppy cultivation. For several years, US pressure and financial aid had persuaded Ankara to ban such cultivation. Ecevit wanted Turkey to move away from its dependence upon other countries, most notably the US.

<sup>45</sup> NARA: CREST, CIA report, Research Institute Staff, Friday 19<sup>th</sup> July.

<sup>46</sup> Stern, *Wrong Horse*, Time Books, New York, 1977, p.112.

Makarios as he believed the Archbishop was genuine in his desire for Cypriot independence and by supporting him, one could “avoid him turning to Moscow. This I did.”<sup>47</sup> Having arrived in London on 17<sup>th</sup> July, Makarios was informed personally by Callaghan that Britain continued to recognise him as President and that Britain wanted him to return to Cyprus in that capacity.<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, Washington’s policy on Makarios would have a significant effect on the development of Britain’s intention of restoring him as the legitimate head of state.

The question of restoring Makarios as President of Cyprus also revealed differences between London and Washington. At a Cabinet meeting on the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> July, Harold Wilson informed his Cabinet that Britain was ready to implement contingency plans if needed, suggesting that Britain was seriously considering restoring Makarios to Cyprus.<sup>49</sup> On the following morning, Anthony Acland Callaghan’s Private Secretary, together with Callaghan, reviewed answers given to Callaghan by the Ministry of Defence on this question. The Ministry of Defence felt that the British forces in the SBAs could cope with the National Guard, but if they were to be used offensively, they would need reinforcing. The aircraft carrier, *HMS Hermes* was twenty-four hours from Cyprus and other forces were currently seven days notice away and could only be made available at the expense of Britain’s Northern Ireland contribution.<sup>50</sup> Provisionally, the Ministry of Defence felt Makarios could be restored militarily, provided the only opposition was that

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<sup>47</sup> Callaghan, p.338.

<sup>48</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1892: Makarios meeting Callaghan at FCO, 17.45, 17/7/74.

<sup>49</sup> PRO: CAB 128/55: Cabinet meeting, 10, Downing Street, 16/7/74, 11am.

<sup>50</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: Paper related to ‘preliminary draft’, 17/7/74.

of the National Guard.<sup>51</sup> It was considered that National Guard standards of training were poor, their equipment heavy and weapons old and that their morale before the coup was not high. The Ministry of Defence believed the operation could be successful, but that the problem might come afterwards, with Britain being left with a situation similar to that in Northern Ireland. The question that needed to be answered was whether a situation could be created where British troops could simply return to the SBAs and leave Makarios and his Government in a secure state - extremely low was the conclusion. One of the difficulties would be the 23 000 civilians (service dependants, British citizens and friendly nationals) living in Cyprus, as they could be used as hostages. They would have to be evacuated first, which might initiate action by the National Guard which Britain would want to forestall.<sup>52</sup> A minimum force would “require three brigades plus a HQ element and a detachment [sic] close air support airfield”, which would take two weeks to mount.<sup>53</sup> It was concluded that Britain would enjoy international support for this venture as long as it was based on the Treaty of Guarantee.<sup>54</sup> If Britain failed to act, Turkey “might go it alone”. Possible disadvantages cited were that even with Makarios restored, the situation would still be unstable, he would have to make improved constitutional arrangements and might ask for “some kind of continuing military guarantee” which could affect the Defence Review.<sup>55</sup> Crucially, it was also agreed that the US Government would have to be warned in advance and that they should seek assurances from Moscow not to intervene. It was clear that Washington would never

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<sup>51</sup> The NG comprised 10 000 men, light tanks, artillery and heavy equipment and could mobilise a further 30 000.

<sup>52</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: Paper related to ‘preliminary draft’, 17/7/74. Of those 23 000, 17 500 live outside the SBAs of which 13 000 are service dependants or UK personnel employed in the SBAs.

<sup>53</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: paper (not draft), 17/7/74.

<sup>54</sup> PRO: PREM 16/19: ‘Implications of Reinstating Makarios with UK military support’.

<sup>55</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1915, Top Secret, Killick to Goodison, 17/7/74, Acland and Callaghan.

agree to such a venture, having failed to denounce the coup or recognise Makarios.<sup>56</sup> Additionally assurances would be needed from Ankara that the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish forces on the island would not resist Britain and might even give unsolicited assistance.<sup>57</sup> On the 18<sup>th</sup> July, Wilson told his Cabinet that urgent studies were being made of the implications of military intervention. While he thought that intervention was undesirable, if diplomatic pressure on Athens failed, military action would have to be contemplated. “HMG had made some precautionary naval dispositions and [sic] looking at [sic] usefulness of [sic] international blockade...”<sup>58</sup>

The consideration of using a military naval blockade gathered momentum once the Turkish delegation had come to London for consultations on the 17<sup>th</sup> July. Once more, at least superficially, it appeared as though it was the British who were negotiating with Turkey. The reality, however, was that throughout their meeting, Callaghan, using the pretext “I am going to the loo,”<sup>59</sup> would leave the room in order to consult with Kissinger in order to obtain his approval on all crucial matters being discussed.<sup>60</sup> Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit asked the British Government whether Turkey could land her forces in the SBAs and whether Britain would consider joint military action against the Greek forces. These proposals were rejected by the British. Callaghan declared that he wanted Makarios to return, emphasizing that he did not equate this to restoring the *status quo ante*, and that, as dictated by the Treaty of Guarantee, Greece should be invited to

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<sup>56</sup> NARA: NPMS, NSC, Greece/Cyprus, ‘The Cyprus situation – today’s WSAG Meeting’, 16/7/74, memo for Nixon from Scowcroft.

<sup>57</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1915, Top Secret: ‘Possible military intervention in Cyprus’.

<sup>58</sup> PRO: CAB 128/55: Cabinet meeting, 10, Downing Street, 18/7/74, 11.30am.

<sup>59</sup> Birand, M., *Thirty Hot Days in Cyprus*, K.Rustem & Bros, Nicosia, 1985, p.7.

<sup>60</sup> Baroutdjou, Edjimele, ‘*The Cyprus Peace Operation and its Aftermath*’, a series of articles published in *Cumhurriyet* from 17 July 1989, p.17. Translated into English by the Public Information Office, Nicosia.



consultations, which would help delay the issue of a United Nations Security Council resolution having to be discussed, thereby pleasing Dr. Kissinger.<sup>61</sup> No agreement was reached and the obvious conclusion was that without serious pressure being put on Greece to restore constitutional order in Cyprus, Turkey would take unilateral action.<sup>62</sup> British policy continued to be at the mercy of Washington, and more specifically Henry Kissinger. The British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Peter Ramsbotham, spoke to Kissinger and found him to be critical of Whitehall's approach to the coup. Kissinger felt it was wrong to commit to Makarios, as if he were to return, the already influential communist party in Cyprus could gain further in strength.<sup>63</sup> Pressure was being applied on Britain to cease its support for Makarios and Washington also urged a joint Anglo-American approach at the United Nations. On the other hand, Callaghan's main concern was that the US should put pressure on Athens and obtain a withdrawal which would prevent the "Turkish hawks" from sinking their teeth into Cyprus. Callaghan further raised the possibility of a naval blockade to prevent Greek and even theoretically Turkish troop reinforcements.<sup>64</sup>

The American attitude has been rather disappointing...the Americans want us to go slow in the UN. They are showing some reluctance to speak firmly to the Greek Government, no doubt because of their different view of their interests, particularly as regards the strategic importance of Greek bases to them.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1894: instructions from Callaghan to Richard, 19/9/74: Callaghan instructed UK representative, Ivor Richard that although Britain believed Makarios was the legitimate President of Cyprus, if the US were to make an issue out of it "don't commit to continued recognition of Makarios indefinitely regardless of the circumstances." Kissinger was fearful that Makarios would enlist the help of Moscow at the UN or secure his recognition as the head of state in a resolution.

<sup>62</sup> PRO: 'Record of Conversation between the Prime Minister, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, and the Defence Secretary, and the Prime Minister, the Acting Foreign Minister, and Minister of the Interior, after dinner at 10 Downing Street, Wednesday 17 July 1974.'

<sup>63</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1892: tel. 2414, Ramsbotham to FCO, 17/7/74.

<sup>64</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1892: John Killick to Goodison, 'Note for the Record', 17/7/74.

<sup>65</sup> PRO: PREM 16/19: Letter by Lord Bridges, 18/7/74, after request made to Robert Armstrong for an account of the position of Her Majesty's Government on Cyprus after Wilson had met with Makarios.

Callaghan expressed similar disappointment and confusion during a Cabinet meeting at 11.30 GMT on the 18<sup>th</sup> July. “US policy is not entirely clear”. Britain still believed that if the Greek officers could be made to withdraw, however unlikely that was, Sampson would probably fall and Makarios would be free to return.<sup>66</sup>

Although Whitehall may have been able to argue that it was surprised by the coup, there was ample evidence available to British intelligence about developments in Ankara<sup>67</sup>

...as early as Monday, 15<sup>th</sup>, the Turkish General Staff ordered preparatory measures for armed intervention in Cyprus.<sup>68</sup>

On the afternoon of 19<sup>th</sup> July, a Nimrod surveillance aircraft on patrol north of Cyprus obtained a radar indication that

...considerable force of vessels was moving south from the Mersin area...The force split into two groups of 37 units and 6 units and, on instructions from Near East Operations Centre the original Nimrod and another which succeeded it on task shadowed the larger element of 37 vessels using radar and reported that they had been joined after dark by a further three vessels from the west.

This larger group of about forty vessels continued to move towards the northern coast of Cyprus and by midnight it was assessed that “a landing in the Kyrenia area was likely for the following morning, 20 July.”<sup>69</sup> Further, it had been clearly established that on both

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<sup>66</sup> PRO: CAB 128/55: Cabinet meeting, 10, Downing Street, 18/7/74, 11.30 am.

<sup>67</sup> PRO: AIR 23/8715: ‘Cyprus Emergency, Akrotiri’, *HQ Near East Force, 25//174, Cyprus Crisis, July/August 1974, Operational Aspects and Lessons Learned, signed RD Roe, Air Vice-Marshal for Air Officer Commanding in Chief*. The Ministry of Defence instructed sorties to take place even when the Near East Air Force felt the gains did not justify the risk and on at least one occasion a flight was refused permission when the Near East Air Force felt it was operationally justified.

<sup>68</sup> PRO: AIR 23/8715: ‘Cyprus Emergency, Akrotiri’, Annex A.

<sup>69</sup> PRO: AIR 23/8715: ‘Cyprus Emergency, Akrotiri’. This revised existing intelligence predictions that a landing was likely on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> July, Turkish aircraft had been identified carrying out reconnaissance flights over northern Cyprus.<sup>70</sup>

On 18<sup>th</sup> July, the Chief of Defence Staff wrote to Callaghan informing him that the indications were that Turkey might take unilateral action and that the forces currently earmarked to protect the SBAs and British citizens were inadequate. He recommended the following be brought under seventy-two hours notice:

- (a) forces originally envisaged for the reinforcement operation (Operation *ABLAUT*),  
and
- (b) in addition, one infantry battalion and armoured recce regiment (less one squadron).<sup>71</sup>

The Ministry of Defence prepared papers listing the Royal Navy ships available for operations off Cyprus and on 19<sup>th</sup> July, Chief of Defence Staff Sir Michael Carver, informed Callaghan that Ministers had agreed the previous night to reinforce the SBAs in order to facilitate the evacuation of dependants and other British civilians due to a likely Turkish invasion, which at the time was predicted to take place within the next seventy-two hours. It had been decided not to act prior to the invasion, as this might have given the impression of collusion and could endanger civilians.<sup>72</sup> Callaghan recalled that both he and Alec Douglas-Home, Shadow Foreign Secretary, agreed that Britain should not hesitate to defend the SBAs,<sup>73</sup> and that contingency plans were being discussed

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<sup>70</sup> PRO: AIR 23/8715: 'Cyprus Emergency, Akrotiri'.

<sup>71</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: 'Defence Review: Cyprus', Chief of Defence Staff to Callaghan, 18/7/74, 'Cyprus Contingency Planning.'

<sup>72</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: 'Defence Review: Cyprus', Chief of Defence Staff to Callaghan, 19/7/74.

<sup>73</sup> Callaghan, p.337.

In the event of Turkish or Greek forces intervening in Cyprus you are to avoid hostilities unless specifically instructed to the contrary. You are, however, to take such action as you consider essential for the protection of British lives, the SBAs, and those Retained Sites which in your view warrant protection. In those circumstances you are to maintain the closest possible liaison with the UN Force Commander.<sup>74</sup>

British policy *vis-à-vis* British citizens in Cyprus and British facilities were executed without difficulty. British military considerations *vis-à-vis* the political consequences of a Turkish invasion would suffer a different fate.

Callaghan had already raised the possibility of a naval blockade and there is considerable evidence to support the assertion that Whitehall did propose such a venture along the northern coast of Cyprus in order to prevent a Turkish invasion. Lord McNally, then Tom McNally, Callaghan's political advisor, has revealed that although Makarios was not Britain's favourite Commonwealth leader, the Wilson government did support him and wanted him re-instated. McNally went on to say that the new Labour government had come into power, without a parliamentary majority, at a time of economic crisis, which meant that although military options were considered, they were unrealistic. The only available option was to act in concert with the United States, which was the only power capable of preventing an invasion. According to McNally, Callaghan genuinely wanted to prevent a Turkish invasion and suggested a joint military operation. Smiling, McNally revealed that the realities of 1974 meant that a joint military operation meant sending the US Sixth Fleet along with one British ship (probably *HMS Hermes*) to the northern coast

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<sup>74</sup> PRO: DEFE 11/729: Vice Chief of Defence, signed by J.R. Rigby, Colonel, 16/7/74.

of Cyprus. McNally called this “responsibility without power”. Kissinger, who was obsessive about the importance of the south-eastern flank of NATO and the importance of Turkey to American interests, rejected the proposal.<sup>75</sup> Neither Callaghan nor Kissinger mention this in their memoirs and there is no documentary evidence of this approach in the US National Archives. In the British National Archives, there is a ‘Note for the Record’ prepared by Sir John Killick, the Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in which he revealed that during a conversation between Callaghan and Joseph Sisco, the American Assistant Secretary of State, on 18<sup>th</sup> July, Callaghan mentioned the possibility of a naval blockade. Sisco’s response is not noted.<sup>76</sup> Further, there is an official record of a proposed ‘Royal Navy Blockade of Northern Cyprus’, which was considered after the 23<sup>rd</sup> July ceasefire. With the ceasefire being continuously violated, the idea of a blockade was suggested in order to prevent further Turkish reinforcements reaching Cyprus. At one point, a Task Group made up of four Royal Navy ships made it as far as Cape Andreas, in anticipation of the blockade being authorized, only for the Vice Chief of Defence Staff to send a last minute message stating that the action was too grave and its potential consequences too serious. “The idea was not shelved and continued to be contemplated at ministerial level.” Callaghan requested an assessment of Turkish strengths and whether the US Sixth Fleet could be used in conjunction with the Royal Navy. The following morning he received information that

...the current Royal Navy forces in the theatre were adequate for a blockade, but if Turkey were to use all forces at her disposal, the blockade might not be 100% effective.

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Lord McNally, House of Lords, London, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

<sup>76</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1892: John Killick to Goodison, ‘Note for the Record’, 17/7/74.

Using the US Sixth Fleet would have solved the problem. It is unclear from the documents whether the Americans once again refused to take part in this proposal or whether Britain simply decided that the risks outweighed the benefits.<sup>77</sup> Whatever Britain decided, one can assume that Washington wanted no part in any kind of blockade against Turkey and that this official record of a proposal for a naval blockade was based on the initial proposal made by Callaghan to the Americans before the initial phase of Turkey's military operations.

It is, of course, possible that Callaghan made the original suggestion in a telephone conversation with Kissinger, who was well known for being selective about the conversations he recorded. In his memoirs, Callaghan does recount that the US had far more influence with both countries than Britain, and felt that Britain's experiences during WWII had made him a strong advocate of Anglo-American cooperation when crises developed. Not only were his wartime experiences crucial, but the effect of Suez on British foreign policy thinking cannot be underestimated. Callaghan revealed that he did not want to expose Britain to those kinds of differences again, when the American fleet used its radar to deliberately 'sabotage' both British and French ships.

I was determined that if military force had to be used in Cyprus, there must be a clear understanding with the United States, with their support fully guaranteed.<sup>78</sup>

It is also clear that Callaghan was an admirer of Kissinger and that some British officials were virtually in awe of him.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> PRO: WO 386/21 'Report on the Cyprus Emergency'.

<sup>78</sup> Callaghan, p.341.

<sup>79</sup> PRO: FCO 49/548: 'British interests and objectives in Cyprus', Lord Lennox, North America Department, FCO, 14/11/74.

If McNally is to be believed, and there is sufficient documentary evidence to suggest he should, it is hardly surprising that Callaghan makes no direct reference in his memoirs to this suggestion. In his chapter on Cyprus Callaghan does mention that

I therefore sent him [Kissinger] a detailed personal message on 19 July urging the need to coordinate British and American views on the best way to bring the situation under control. I made certain proposals on lines of policy.<sup>80</sup>

McNally even asserted that in his desperation Callaghan was willing to fly to Ankara on 19<sup>th</sup> July to try to dissuade Ecevit from authorising an invasion.<sup>81</sup> Callaghan believed that only pressure on Greece could prevent a Turkish invasion and to this end he “asked that America should redouble its efforts.” Callaghan recognised the importance of the US and that it would be essential for Britain to carry the Americans with them in whatever Britain decided to do. US support would be necessary for any representations made in Ankara or Athens and as this was not forthcoming, Washington’s position ultimately failed to provide Callaghan with the tools needed to prevent a Turkish invasion.<sup>82</sup>

Immediately after the coup, Britain, assuming responsibility, set out to prevent Turkish military action, to continue to recognise President Makarios, possibly even to restore him by force and to secure and safeguard British citizens and military/intelligence facilities on the island. It is not a coincidence that the only one of these policies which was not in conflict with US policy, namely securing and safeguarding British citizens and

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<sup>80</sup> Callaghan, pp.341-342.

<sup>81</sup> Interview, House of Lords, London, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

<sup>82</sup> PRO: FCO 9/1894: ‘HMG’s draft response to the possible Turkish invasion of Cyprus’, 19/7/74, and Callaghan, p.342.

military/intelligence facilities, was the only policy which Britain had the power to successfully and effectively implement.

Late on 19<sup>th</sup> July, the United Nations Security Council unanimously carried a resolution, deploring the outbreak of conflict in Cyprus, highlighting the necessity of restoring constitutional order, requested the withdrawal of those officers requested to leave by Makarios in his letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1974 and called for an immediate end to foreign military intervention.<sup>83</sup> Whilst this resolution was being voted on, the Turkish military, using the pretext given to them by the Greek junta's coup, had already begun the first phase of its invasion of Cyprus.

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<sup>83</sup> UNSC Resolution, No.353 (1974).



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FCO 9	Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
FCO 46	Defence Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
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