

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN CYPRUS

FROM THE GREAT WAR
TO MIDDLE EAST CRISES

PANAGIOTIS DIMITRAKIS



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Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

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First published in Great Britain by I.B. Tauris 2010
Paperback edition first published by Bloomsbury Academic 2020

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-8488-5130-6
PB: 978-1-3501-6944-9
ePDF: 978-0-8577-1475-6
ePub: 978-0-7556-3037-0

Series: International Library of War Studies, vol. 17

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To Yiannis, Dimitra-Mimi and Timos

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GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Abwehr</i>	German Secret Service
AKEL	<i>Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou</i> (‘Progressive Party of the Working People’)
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
Cominform	Communist Information Bureau
CVF	Cyprus Volunteer Force
CIC	Cyprus Intelligence Committee
DIC	District Intelligence Committee, Cyprus
EMSIB	Eastern Mediterranean Special Intelligence Bureau
EAM/ELAS	<i>Ethniko Apeleutherotiko Metopo/Ethnikos</i> <i>Laikos Apeleutherotikos Stratos</i> (‘National Liberation Front/National Liberation People’s Army’)
EDES	<i>Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Syndesmos</i> (‘National Democratic Greek Liaison’)
EEC	European Economic Community
EOKA/EOKA B	<i>Ethniki Organosi Kyprion Agoniston</i> (‘National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters’)
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
ISLD	Inter-Service Liaison Department
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
KYP	<i>Kentriki Ypiresia Pliroforion</i> (‘Central Intelligence Service’), Greece
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MI5	Security Service

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NSA	National Security Agency
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
RAF	Royal Air Force
SBA	Sovereign Base Areas
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SLO	Security Liaison Officer
SOE	Special Operations Executive
UN	United Nations
UNFICYP	United Nations Force In Cyprus
USAF	United States Air Force

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe special thanks to David Carter for his interest in my research, and for pointing to valuable sources for this study. Major-General (retired) Georgios Tsoumis gave me a rare insight of the Cyprus question and my interviewees provided me with very interesting leads. Special thanks also go to Rosalie Spire for her research aid, to the staff at the National Archives, Kew, and the National Library of Athens, to the library staff at the Foundation for Mediterranean Studies, Athens, and to Olympia Wood, John Wood and Peter Barnes for their help in copy-editing. The photos included in this book are published by kind permission of Major-General (retired) Georgios Tsoumis and the Imperial War Museum (IWM). Every effort has been made to trace and contact copyright holders prior to publication. If notified, all reasonable efforts will be made to rectify any errors or omissions in subsequent printings. I would like also to thank my editor Joanna Godfrey at Tauris Academic Studies for believing in this monograph and working towards its publication. Finally, I owe a great debt to my family, Yiannis Dimitrakis, Dimitra-Mimi Petropoulou-Dimitrakis and Timos Dimitrakis, for their moral and material support, for the insightful foreign-policy and history-oriented conversations we have had, and for believing over all these years in my work.

PREFACE

Military intelligence is connected to strategy and diplomacy – in fact it precedes them. Only by having confident perceptions of friends and foes, their capabilities and intentions, through collecting information about their interests and aspirations, can a state draft its strategy and diplomacy for the near or long term, and so attempt to advance its interests in the international arena. Thus intelligence-gathering is as old as war and diplomacy. This study draws on many primary sources and attempts for the first time to tell the comprehensive story of British military intelligence on the beautiful and strategically located Mediterranean island of Cyprus, a British colony until 1960, and a sovereign state from then on. The study focuses exclusively on Britain's military intelligence, its evolving Cold War strategy, and its espionage and security operations with respect to Cyprus, from the Great War, to the Second World War and the insurgency, and on up to the 1974 Turkish invasion and the Gulf wars. The protagonists in this study are the Foreign Office, the War Office, the Colonial Office and secret intelligence and security services – notably MI5, Special Branch, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS); leaders' and intelligence officers' perceptions, deception schemes to defend the island from Nazi invasion, and the secret war against the Greek-Cypriot guerrillas in the 1950s, as well as the role of British intelligence during the Turkish invasions of July–August 1974, constitute key areas of research and analysis. The intent is to present the first fully archive-based and detailed narrative of what Cyprus meant for British military intelligence and strategy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. London did not invest in many colonial projects on the island, and was against union with Greece, a traditional ally of Britain since the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, with the advance of modern signals technology and nuclear weapons, Britain valued highly the signals intelligence and air bases on the island. Spying from there on Middle Eastern and Russian signals communications was made possible, as well as broadcasting propaganda. In addition, the Royal Air Force was provided with the strategic capability for nuclear-armed bombers stationed there to range as far as the Gulf in times of international crisis. In the eyes of post-war intelligence officers, Cyprus enjoyed a high strategic value in being so close to the volatile Middle East, and the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) on the island remained the last imperial outpost in the eastern Mediterranean.

INTRODUCTION: CYPRUS AND THE ENGLISH

Observing the location of Cyprus in the Mediterranean, a general, a spy and a diplomat would agree that this island had been, and would always remain, a key strategic location north of the Suez Canal, from the nineteenth century and the Great War, to the Second World War, the Cold War and the post-9/11 'war on terror'. One could claim that the island, together with Gibraltar, Suez and Malta, had constituted a constellation of British naval bases since the late nineteenth century. The power which held Cyprus could influence events in the Middle East, Anatolia, North Africa and the Aegean Sea; and with the advent of modern technology in the Cold War, the strategic value of Cyprus was upgraded. Whoever maintained bases there could spy on signals communications from, and broadcast propaganda to, areas as far away as South Russia, Iran and the Persian Gulf.

The mythical birthplace of the goddess Aphrodite and the god Adonis found itself occupied by many nations and armies, profiting from the island's strategic location to preserve their military and commercial interests. The Mycenaean Greeks landed on Cyprus in around 1600 BC. Egyptians and Persians then invaded several times, to be followed by Alexander the Great and the Ptolemy dynasty. In 58 BC it was the Romans who established their authority, recruiting Cypriots to fight in their cohorts in present-day Romania and around the Black Sea. Some 450 years later, in 395 AD, the Byzantine Empire incorporated the island into its territories. In 488 Greek-Orthodox Archbishop Anthemius discovered the tomb of Saint Varnavas there, and in recognition Emperor Zeno granted the Cypriot Church perpetual privileges: independent (autocephalous) status, and the right of the archbishop to carry a sceptre instead of a staff, to use red ink for his signature and to wear a purple cloak during services. From then on the Church would always play a key role in Cyprus politics.

Later, in 650 and 654, the Arabs invaded the island, but by 958 the Byzantines had successfully reclaimed it. However, Constantinople then faced

rebellion: in 1185 Isaac Comnenus tried and failed to claim the Byzantine crown, but held Cyprus and resisted any attempts to seize him.

King Richard I of England, 'Coeur de Lion', landed at Limassol in May 1191, during his Third Crusade voyage. A few days earlier Comnenus had attempted to arrest Richard's future wife, Princess Berengaria of Navarre, when three escorting English ships were wrecked. Comnenus 'plundered the [three] wrecks and treated the shipwrecked voyagers with cruel barbarity'.

[Coeur De Lion] on hearing from the lips of the royal ladies the tale of their insults, and the misfortunes of those that had been shipwrecked . . . became so enraged . . . he instantly landed with a body of troops, and rushing upon the imperial plunderers, drove them into Limoussa [Limassol], the capital of the island . . .¹

In a letter dated 6 August 1191, Richard himself wrote:

. . . as we were continuing our pilgrimage journey, we were diverted to Cyprus where we hoped to find the refuge of those of our number who had been shipwrecked. But the tyrant [Isaac Comnenus] . . . hurriedly brought a strongly armed force to bar us from the port. He robbed and despoiled as many as possible of our men who had suffered wreck and imprisoned those dying of hunger. Not unnaturally we were spurred to revenge. We did battle with our enemy and, thanks to divine assistance, obtained speedy victory. Defeated and fettered, we hold him together with his only daughter. We have subjected to ourselves the whole island of Cyprus with all its strong points . . .²

Comnenus had a brief meeting with Richard, setting 'terms of peace' to which the English monarch could not agree. Allegedly, Coeur de Lion replied angrily: 'Ha! De debil! You [Comnenus] do speak like a foule Breton.' The English troops stormed the city, and at the battle of Tremetusha the Byzantine ruler was defeated. A contemporary chronicler wrote:

The valiant King Richard,
as I understand,
before he departed
from Old England
Made an axe to slaughter
that infidel band
the Saracen dogs,

in the Holy Land . . .
 And when that he landed
 in Cyprus land,
 he first took
 this terrible axe in hand
 and he hewed and hewed
 with such direful slaughter
 that the blood flowed around him
 Like pools of water ³

When Richard arrested his only daughter, the heir to the crown of Cyprus, Comnenus had no option but to surrender. He was 'chained in silver', since Richard had promised not to chain him in iron. On 12 May 1191, at the chapel of Saint George in Limassol, Coeur de Lion married Berengaria, who followed him to the holy places together with the Cypriot princess 'with whom she [Berengaria] resided for years afterwards on terms of the greatest intimacy and friendship'. However, 'it may be well to remark, that Richard did not, as some writers have asserted, desert his Queen for the more captivating charms of the dark-eyed Cypriot Princess . . .'.⁴

Richard raised taxes, and next year sold the island to the order of the Knights Templar. British rule would return centuries later, in 1878. The order raised taxes again, and by Easter 1192 faced a revolt. Though the Knights emerged victorious, they wished to return the island to Richard, considering it a liability. Initially he was not interested, but eventually gave it to Guy of Lusignan, who had just been freed from the captivity of Saladin.

Comnenus was the last Byzantine ruler of Cyprus. The line of succession in the Kingdom of Cyprus would proceed via Guy's elder brother, Aiméry (1194–1205), and his descendants in the royal house of Lusignan. After the loss of Palestine the Lusignans would crown themselves also Kings of Jerusalem in Famagusta, in a vain attempt to legitimise their claim over the holy city. Symbolically (as the seat of the self-styled king of Jerusalem) and materially (as a commercial hub and place of refuge for Christians from the Holy Land) Cyprus was connected more with Palestine and the Middle East than to Byzantium and Europe. The Byzantines under Emperor Alexius III Comnenus considered a plan for retaking Cyprus, and even approached Saladin as a potential ally against the Lusignans. In 1203 Alexius wrote a letter to Pope Innocent III urging him to threaten Aiméry with excommunication unless he left Cyprus, but the Vatican was unwilling to side with Constantinople – a city which in any case would be sacked by the Fourth Crusade the following year.⁵

King Richard was not interested in keeping the island, and so sold it once he had departed from the Holy Land: he viewed Cyprus only through the prism of crusade requirements. At that time, England had no policy of maintaining an imperial presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, a number of figures would argue for English rights over Cyprus. Roger of Howden wrote that Richard had given Guy the island only 'for life', and thus after the death of the first Lusignan king Cyprus should have been handed back. The anonymous author of the thirteenth-century work *The Crusade and Death of Richard I* sided with this argument. In addition, Walter of Guisborough remarked that when Lord Edward visited the island in 1271 the Cypriot nobility admitted that 'they were bound by his orders because his predecessors had formerly ruled their land and they themselves ought always to be faithful men (*fideles*) of the kings of England'. Another fourteenth-century author, the compiler of the *Meaux Chronicle*, claimed that Cyprus was a dependency of England. According to the French *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois*, King Edward III confided to King Peter I of Cyprus in 1363 that if Peter recaptured Jerusalem he should return Cyprus to England.⁶

In August 1343, troops of the kingdom of Cyprus, together with those of Venice, Genoa, Byzantium and the order of St John, landed in Smyrna to contain the spread of the Turkish armies; however, the campaign would have no long-lasting results. Later, King Peter I of Cyprus convinced the Europeans to mount another campaign against Alexandria, in Egypt; and in October 1365 the city was destroyed by Peter's expeditionary force. However, faced with superior Mameluk forces marching from Cairo, he was forced to return to Cyprus, without continuing on to Jerusalem. Besides, his allies were unwilling to follow him in his adventures in Palestine.

Soon the kingdom of Cyprus became the hostage of Venetian-Genoese antagonism, with Genoa taking the lead. The Genoese would even briefly put King Peter II and his queen mother under arrest, just after his coronation on 10 October 1372; the following year they sacked Famagusta. The Republic of Venice, seeking to preserve its sea power and economic interests, conquered Cyprus in 1489. But the expansionist Ottoman Empire could not tolerate a Christian Cyprus, though the Venetians wished for peace to be preserved in the Eastern Mediterranean (since 1517 they had been paying a tribute of 8,000 ducats to the Porte); in 1539 the Ottomans destroyed Limassol, while the Venetians withdrew to Famagusta.

In a March 1570 letter to Venice, Sultan Selim II claimed that the island was his own 'by right', arguing its proximity to Anatolia and its distance from the Venetian territories. He also accused Cypriot ports of being bases for Christian pirates attacking Muslim ships. In late June of the same year

the Turks landed at Paphos; by September they controlled Nicosia and were ready to lay siege to Famagusta. The Venetian commander Marcantonio Bragadino was to be the last Christian defender of the island. Until the summer of 1571, Famagusta resisted the siege, but eventually Bragadino would be compelled to negotiate an instrument of surrender to save the Christians from massacre. He himself would be flayed alive and his lieutenants executed. Meanwhile, in the autumn of that year (7 October 1571) the Ottoman fleet would be defeated in the battle of Lepanto, but despite that defeat the Ottomans would hold the island until the late nineteenth century.

The War of Independence in Greece, which started in March 1821, was hailed by Greek-Cypriots; Archbishop Kyprianos was then accused of plotting against the Ottomans – and he his bishops, hundreds of priests and other prominent figures were arrested and, on 9 July 1821, hanged. Greek men-of-war sailed around the island during their engagements with the Ottoman fleet, attempting to bring in more troops to Greece. The Greek vessels received support and supplies from Greek-Cypriots, who were being persecuted by the Turkish administration; their captains moored them in isolated harbours for repairs. Sir George Hill remarked that: ‘The Greeks gave Mehmet Ali’s ships, which patrolled the coast, occasional trouble.’ Consul Méchain, the French diplomatic representative on the island, commented in a February 1823 dispatch that: ‘The Greek ships are frequently around these waters . . . they have virtually annihilated Turkish navigation by capturing their ships.’ Later, in a June letter, the consul argued that: ‘Cyprus would have been quieter if it was not for the presence of twelve Greek ships from Psara which come here for provisions . . . their presence infuriates the [Turkish] troops.’⁷ That same year the British Consul was implicated in a scheme for helping Turkish officers and troops to reach Haifa aboard a British merchantman. Eventually, Greek ships seized the vessel and her crew, turning them over to the pasha of Acre. The diplomat, accused of infringing neutrality, was reprimanded because ‘he [had] exposed the British merchant flag to insult’.⁸ Greek-Cypriots asked the first governor of Greece, Ioannis Capodistrias, for Cyprus to become Greek territory, but this was impossible given Ottoman power at that time. However, union with Greece remained a strong aspiration amongst Greek-Cypriots throughout the nineteenth century.

British imperial strategy required a key base in the eastern Mediterranean, close to the Ottomans. On 5 May 1878, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli wrote to Queen Victoria:

If Cyprus be conceded to Your Majesty by the Porte, and England, at the same time, enters into a Defensive Alliance with Turkey, guaran-

teeing Asiatic Turkey from Russian invasion, the power of England in the Mediterranean will be absolutely increased in that region, and Your Majesty's Indian Empire immensely strengthened.⁹

Defending the treaty with Ottoman Turkey he argued that:

In taking Cyprus, the movement is not Mediterranean; it is Indian. We have taken a step there, which we think necessary for the maintenance of our Empire and for its reservation in peace. If that be our first consideration, our next is the development of the country.¹⁰

Under the Convention of Defensive Alliance, signed in Constantinople on 4 June 1878, London secured a strategic outpost close to the Suez. Turkey agreed to 'assign the island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England', and Lieutenant-General Sir Garnet Joseph Wolseley was named the first British High Commissioner of the island. He was a hard-nosed Victorian soldier who had seen action in Burma, Crimea (where he lost an eye), the Indian mutiny, China and the Canada rebellion. Wolseley arrived on board HMS *Himalaya* at 7.30 am on Monday 22 July 1878. He did not hide his discontent with Admiral Lord John Hay's arrival in Cyprus ten days earlier, taking over the island in the name of Queen Victoria. The admiral had stolen Wolseley's glory, and acted as if he had already arranged everything for the occupying forces, with Wolseley's only duty being to 'keep things going'. However, the Lieutenant-General was not a person to hide his feelings. In his journal he remarked of the Admiral, and of the Duke of Edinburgh who accompanied them:

[Lord John Hay] is the devil to talk and talk such nonsense. I thought generals were far from brilliant but they are Solons compared to the pompous ignorance of such men as Admiral Lord John Hay. He has very fortunately had Walter Baring of the Diplomatic Service here to keep him from great follies . . . [the Duke of Edinburgh] is fond of 'havering' and has interviews with me on trifling subjects, and matters of detail which I want to keep myself aloof from . . . I wish these Royalties would keep out of my way; they retard public business and no one likes this Edinburgh. His laugh is the most unpleasant thing I ever heard: no man could have a good heart who laughed as he does . . . [the Duke of Edinburgh] comes here with his usual meanness for which he is notorious, sponging upon the captain of the ship [HMS *Himalaya*] or anyone else who will fill his stomach with champagne.

He is a low mean fellow who talks of nothing but himself with nothing of an Englishman about him . . .¹¹

When the High Commissioner greeted Sofronios, the Archbishop of the Greek-Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the latter openly admitted that Cypriots viewed the coming of the English as the last phase of an occupation which would lead to eventual self-determination and union with Greece (as had happened in the case of the Ionian islands, ceded to Greece in 1864). On another occasion the Archbishop informed the High Commissioner of the slaving activities of the Ottoman authorities – indeed, in the early 1870s the British Consul, R.H. Lang, had told London of the transport of slaves from North Africa to Cyprus.¹² Meanwhile, Wolseley was impressed by the conditions he faced:

. . . there is an air of decay about the place that tells one. . . of Turkey's Sultan . . . the face of the island is stamped with relics of a past prosperity that has been destroyed by the Moslems . . . [the Turk] can pull down and destroy but he cannot even succeed in keeping alive the creations of others . . . It is no wonder that the Christians should rejoice at our coming to relieve them from an oppression . . . like everything else that made this country a splendid one in ancient times, the forests have disappeared under the influence, the blighting influence of the Turk . . . the [last] governor [Aziz Pasha] was supposed to have robbed everyone and to be guilty of such malpractices that even the Porte could not stand him . . .¹³

Wolseley did not intend to give more rights to the Greeks: he condemned a Greek-Cypriot petition to recognise Greek as the official language of the island, and pressed for the continuation of the use of Turkish in the bureaucracy. In fact, wealthy businessmen and the church informed W.E. Forster, an MP, of these new requirements and their grievances – even the Archbishop had to petition in Turkish (something even Ottoman officialdom did not demand). Lord Salisbury was briefed by Forster and asked for the attention of Wolseley to these matters.¹⁴

However, the Lieutenant-General had little affection for the church, whether Roman Catholic or Greek-Orthodox. He wrote:

One of the reasons why I hate high church nonsense is that it leads to priest craft which tends to bring in, if not a foreign potentate like the pope, at least an object of higher earthly reverence, namely the villainous priest . . .¹⁵

In celebrating the coming of English rule the Greek-Orthodox monastery of Kiko conducted a ceremony for the blessing of the Union Jack. But the arrogant anti-church Wolseley could not change his mind, commenting:

Went to the monastery church to attend a great function in honour of hoisting the English flag upon it: first we had Mass – such a mockery of everything sacred, dirty greasy priests attempting to intone some dreary dirges that were utterly devoid of music or melody. Many of the Greek priests cannot read or write, which the Archbishop explained to me was the reason why no register of births, deaths or marriages was kept. After the mass which was very long, some of the congregation advanced to the screen which hides the altar and kissed the pictures of the Virgin and of some ugly looking saints . . .¹⁶

Wolseley was to leave Cyprus in late May 1879 to serve in Natal, where he captured King Cetewayo and defeated Chief Sekukuni. He went on to fight in the battle of Tel-el-Kebir in Egypt, and to attempt the relief of General Gordon in the Sudan. By the end of the century he had become commander-in-chief in Ireland, and later commander-in-chief of the British army (a post in which he was soon to be criticised for underestimating the Boers' military potential). He died in 1913.

Despite initial planning, no major construction works took place in Cyprus. The Egypt expedition of 1882, and the stationing of British troops and vessels there, made Cyprus a secondary Mediterranean base. In an 1885 letter Lord Kitchener admitted – as Wolseley had earlier – that:

Cyprus was handed over to Great Britain by Turkey in a thoroughly exhausted and ruined condition. The system for centuries had been to take as much as possible out of the Island, giving nothing in return. All public works and every institution in the Island were in the last state of decay.¹⁷

The colonial authorities examined the possibility of recruiting Cypriots into a local regiment, but Kitchener did not agree with sending a Turkish-Cypriot battalion to Egypt in 1902. At the time, the War Office attached importance to the stance of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire on enlisting Cypriots, since on paper Cyprus was part of that empire, and though the Colonial Office lobbied for the formation of a Cypriot unit, it failed to materialise. Besides, Cypriots were considered aliens under the Army Act.¹⁸