

# TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY; THAT IS THE QUESTION: CYPRUS AND THE OFFICIAL MIND OF IMPERIALISM IN THE POSTWAR WORLD (1945-1955)

George H Kelling

---

## Abstract

*The study examines the differing points of view of the British Colonial Office, the Foreign Office, and to a lesser extent the Chiefs of Staff in discussion of the future of Cyprus after World War II. Relying largely on documents in Britain's Public Record Office, the study points out the contrast in the plans the ministries had for Cyprus. Ideas and mind sets are examined more than the actions those ideas brought about, and the study uses examples from the wartime period to set the intellectual stage for discussion in the immediate postwar period. After outlining the differing points of view of the ministries, the study concentrates on the Colonial Office quest for a firm statement of British intent to remain in Cyprus. It examines the ultimate futility of such a statement which neither ended ministerial debate on the future of the island nor fully considered conditions on the island.*

---

This study is more about ideas than actions. It examines the basic assumptions which guided officials in British ministries, particularly the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office, in consideration of the future of Cyprus. The differing visions for the future of the island, stemming from the different missions and world views of the ministries, are sharply contrasted in the case of Cyprus. It is hoped, therefore, that this study will provide insight into both the Cyprus question and the British official mind.

In 1939, Cyprus was Britain's only territory with a Greek majority and a substantial Turkish minority, and shared with only a few other colonies (notably Hong Kong, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands) the problems associated with being claimed by other states. Despite the many parts of area under some type of British authority, Cyprus was the only territory in the Middle East which was under unqualified British rule.

The island was of strategic value to the British world system, but Britain's interest in maintaining Cyprus was more preemptive and potential than direct. The island's value to the empire had to be balanced against the potential diplomatic advantages of ceding it to Greece. The clear-sighted imperialist Lord Curzon saw Cyprus as part of the Levant, rather than of Greece, and he put the geostrategic realities succinctly in 1919: 'The history of the island shows... that none but a strong power has ever succeeded in holding [Cyprus]. Its fate is linked with that of the opposite mainland. Its cession to Greece would offer a tempting spoil for those who are stronger than Greece.' He went on to state the rationale for holding on in Cyprus: "[I] hope that we shall not lightly throw away an asset which, though it may seem of relatively small value now, may turn out...to possess a very great and powerful significance." The overall question was whether Greece could provide better bases than were available on Cyprus, and whether Greece was a strong and reliable enough ally to allow the island to be safely transferred without jeopardizing imperial security<sup>2</sup>.

The issue smouldered from decade to decade, but as Britain emerged victorious but economically battered from the Second World War, the future of Cyprus was one of scores of issues which had to be settled. The dilemma was as Curzon stated it twenty-six years previously. Greece was prostrate and in need of British sponsorship. Britain could probably write its own ticket in base rights and other concessions as quid pro quo for the cession of Cyprus. Suda Bay in Crete, for example, was a better base. On the other hand, what would the future bring? Would bases in Greece proper come under pressure in the unknown future? Could Greece defend Cyprus?

The military authorities were always loath to give up the only British territory in the Eastern Mediterranean, although strategic planners well understood the island's limitations as a major base. The military point of view is well put in a document of the Strategic Planning Committee on 3 September, 1945. The report noted: "Cyprus, with its status of Crown Colony, is the only British possession in the Middle East Area. This status makes the island of value to us in that it is the only territory in the Middle East where such measures as we consider necessary for defence can be carried out unfettered by treaties." The paper notes the island's disadvantages, including its poor ports, vulnerability to long-range weapons and lack of space. Their summary recommended the island be retained, with rationale which reflected that of Lord Curzon twenty-six years earlier: "Although possession of Cyprus only confers limited strategic advantages on us, control of the island by a hostile power would be a very great embarrassment.<sup>9</sup> The military planners would always strive to keep the island.

The Foreign Office saw it differently. Since acquisition of the colony in 1878, the

## TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY; THAT IS THE QUESTION

---

Foreign Office had seen the status of Cyprus as a part of the larger question of Britain's relationship with Greece, one time proposing its transfer to Greece in exchange for bases, another time as a gesture of good will, and other times simply viewing transfer as inevitable and wishing to make the most diplomatic mileage possible out of the cession. Foreign Office policy towards Cyprus was focused on Anglo-Hellenic relations, but also questioned whether retention of Cyprus and its potential bases was the best way to ensure Britain's strategic interests. The Foreign Office often viewed transfer of the island to Greece as the correct and ethical thing to do, although the diplomats had few illusions about Greece's weakness and internal problems.

Sir Orme Sergeant, Superintending Under Secretary of the Foreign Office's Southern Department, made a classic statement of the ministry's point of view in a September, 1945, minute dealing with Cyprus as part of Greece's postwar territorial claims: "The case for agreeing to the cession of Cyprus to Greece is very strong. The principal arguments for handing it over are: (1) We ought to. (2) It would strengthen our position in Greece. (3) We stand to lose nothing." He went on to elaborate on the effect on Greece cession would have, and the importance of timing: "If, however, we wait until the [Greek] campaign for Cyprus develops, ultimate yielding on this point would lose half its effect."

He saw cession of the island as a strategic plus, providing bases both in Cyprus and in mainland Greece. He also noted the importance of having those bases in friendly territory: "The Greeks would be delighted to comply with any strategic requirements we might have in Cyprus....They have repeatedly offered us bases in Greece proper....It might even be strategic advantage in the cession, since we should have a more friendly and reliable population in Cyprus itself."<sup>4</sup> The Foreign Office's view, based on a combination of realpolitik, morality and emphasis on good relations with Greece, was consistent throughout the postwar period, until changed with the advent of Anthony Eden as Foreign Secretary noted below.

The Foreign Office's were not shared by the Colonial Office, to say the least. While the Foreign Office viewed the world as a whole, and looked for ways to maintain Britain's position in an increasingly interconnected world, the Colonial Office was committed to a policy of robust paternalism devoted to the welfare of the inhabitants of an empire of infinite diversity.

Whether seen from Whitehall or the outposts of empire, the Colonial Office view of Cyprus saw a crown colony on which Greece, a foreign power, cast envious eyes. The CO's view was as ethical as that of the Foreign Office, although based on different assumptions. The Colonial Office felt that the best interests of the inhabitants of Cyprus lay in remaining within the Empire, regardless of popular feeling in the colony.

Colonial Office officials were generally in accord that Cyprus should remain in the Empire, and that prosperity and good government, despite popular sentiment in Cyprus, were of more value to the Cypriot than union with Greece. Mary Fisher, perhaps the most imaginative and clear-sighted official in the Colonial Office in the postwar era, summarised the ministry's argument against giving Cyprus to Greece in 1948 in the same point-by-point manner used by Sir Orme Sargent above: "(1) We dislike on principle giving up pieces of our territory. (2) Cyprus has a potential strategic value to us. (3) 1/5 of the population of Cyprus is Turkish and would not welcome enosis. (4) The Greek state is hardly capable of functioning with its present territory and is not in a position to take on further responsibilities. (5) The Greek Govt. has not asked for Cyprus lately."<sup>5</sup> Mary Fisher's comments could have been made at virtually any time in the postwar years.

That fear of enosis agitation did not prevent the more perceptive administrators on the spot from realising that the enosis ideal was popular. They felt, however, that the best interests of the Cypriot lay within the Empire. Sir Charles Wooley, governor for most of World War II and noted for his liberal points of view, took a typical approach. In his 1946 farewell address, at a time of unbounded optimism the world was finally at peace, the economic outlook was favourable and the map of the world was being redrawn, he told the Cypriots: "I leave you at a time when immense opportunities open before you to secure the future well-being and prosperity of the whole island. Such opportunities can rarely have come the way of Cyprus before... I... ask you not to let these great opportunities pass by, but to grasp them firmly so that you may enjoy these improved standards of living, of health, of education and general well-being which we all so earnestly desire."<sup>6</sup> In a world in which colonial development promised to transform the colonies and in which Greece was mired in starvation, inflation and civil war, Wooley's admonition was sincere.

Eighteen months later, Governor Sir Andrew Barkworth Wright spoke to the inhabitants of Ayios Ambrosias on the topics of government plans, enosis agitation and the future. His words epitomise Colonial Office tough paternalism: "You will never get all you want, not in this world at any rate, but if you lived in some other countries near Cyprus you would soon find that the people in them are not nearly so well looked after as you are and you would soon want to be back here. I want you to be well looked after." Wright is typical of colonial administrators in his authoritarian attitude, his genuine concern for the welfare of the Cypriots and his wish that Greece and enosis agitation would just go away. Unfortunately for the peace of mind of the Colonial Office, the island's Greek population never lost its Greek identity.

Although frustrated administrators on the spot tended to take the direct approach and go head-to-head with enosis feeling, prohibiting flags and maps, changing

## TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY; THAT IS THE QUESTION

---

street names and jailing troublesome activists, officials in the Colonial Office often advocated a more subtle approach. L. S. Amery, one of the prime architects of imperialist thought, suggested through the years that the imperial government not only recognise the feeling of Greek Cypriots to be Greek, but to use that feeling to defuse enosis agitation. In 1949, using a classical Greek precedent, he proposed dual citizenship, in effect personal enosis for Greek Cypriots while retaining Cyprus within the Empire.<sup>9</sup> The idea was discussed and resurrected from time to time over the years until it was finally discarded for good in early 1955 in the wake of the United Nations debate over Cyprus.<sup>9</sup>

The perceptive Mary Fisher discussed the Amery proposal in a penetrating and imaginative analysis of the Cyprus issue and possible approaches. She cannot have made friends among the hard-liners by noting that Britain had treated enosis "rather as if it were a somewhat embarrassing hereditary disease which it was good manners to pay as little attention to as possible." Like Amery, she fully accepted the popularity of the enosis ideal, and proposed ju-jitsu manoeuvres to turn it to British account: "Would there not be a case for taking a bold and completely contrary line of... appropriating Enosis much as the Germans appropriated the V-sign during the war?" She proposed turning the repressive legislation barring enosis activity on its head: "We could declare that we fully recognised that the Cypriots were culturally Greek....! should also like to see, say, appropriation of... the Greek flag and the Greek National Day in Cyprus, making the flying of the flag compulsory and making the Greek National Day a compulsory holiday."<sup>10</sup> The proposals met with no response; the official view was that the Cyprus question was closed and that enosis manifestations were demonstrations of disloyalty in the Crown Colony of Cyprus.

Mary Fisher took the same approach on the issue of proscribing Cypriot organisations. Wright, the governor in 1949, proposed outlawing the youth organisation sponsored by AKEL, the Cyprus communist party. Fisher noted how such overt action could well be counterproductive: "I should have thought that for a young Cypriot, it would probably be more fun to belong to a clandestine organisation than to an open one."<sup>11</sup> Her comments were prophetic in view of the youth-based EOKA rising six years later.

The ministry's search for the indirect approach in dealing with Greek Cypriot nationalism is illustrated further in the minutes surrounding the appointment of Michael Mouskos as Archbishop Makarios III in 1950. The shape of things to come with the new archbishop were unclear in the brief honeymoon period following his enthronement, and the Colonial Office held modest hopes for an easing of conflict with the church. J. S. Bennett of the Colonial Office minuted that there were hopes of coming to an accommodation with the new archbishop: "Mr Martin met him [Makarios] during his visit to Cyprus last year and gained the impression that he was ba-

## THE CYPRUS REVIEW

---

sically a reasonable man... though for political reasons connected with his ambitions to succeed to the Archbishopric he was for the moment following the customary Church line on Enosis."<sup>12</sup>

Mary Fisher, commenting on a ministry proposal to send a telegram of congratulations to Makarios, noted that such an act would brand the new archbishop as a collaborator: "The Cypriots would be aware that this [telegram] had never been done before and would conclude that we had reason to hope that the present Archbishop would be more accommodating than his predecessors." Politically incorrect as usual, she added: "This is precisely what we do hope, but our hopes are least likely to be realised if we give any public indications of their existence."<sup>13</sup> Fifty years after the fact, these innovative proposals for indirect approaches to the Cyprus problem are intriguing. There is no evidence that they would have been more effective than the direct paternalistic and repressive approaches adopted by governor after governor, but they do indicate that Colonial Office thinking was often perceptive and innovative.

The above-quoted words of working officials indicate the diverging views of the Colonial Office, the Foreign Office and the defence planners. The Colonial Office had a troublesome colony to run, and was often disappointed by lack of support, particularly from the Foreign Office. The FO saw Cyprus as a part of the issue of relations with Greece, and the greater game of ensuring Britain's status as a world power. Military planners were well aware of the island's limitations as a base, but were loath to give up the only British territory in the Middle East.<sup>14</sup>

A comment of Sir Orme Sargent in 1947 sums up the situation, at least from the point of view of the Foreign Office, in reply to ministry minutes favouring a stand-pat policy in Cyprus: "The Chiefs of Staff will always object to evacuating anything where they have been for some time, just as they will always object to occupying anything where they have not hitherto been. The views of the Colonial Office<sup>15</sup> are, of course, not worth having on the subject, which is essentially foreign affairs." The contrast with the Colonial Office point of view was complete.

These conflicting points of view came into sharp contrast over the question of a firm statement of British intent to remain in Cyprus indefinitely. The Colonial Office felt, correctly, that governing the island would be all but impossible so long as the Cypriots felt that cession to Greece was under consideration. Not only would the Cypriots put the possibility of enosis before all else, but the colonial development capital investments necessary to secure the colony's place in the modern world would not be made. The answer, in the Colonial Office official mind, was a firm, unambiguous statement of British intent to remain in the colony forever. That pronouncement having been made, the Colonial Office felt that Cypriots and Britons

## TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY; THAT IS THE QUESTION

---

could get on with the more important jobs of developing the colony's economy and accomplishing political reform.

The Colonial Office's fears that the Foreign Office wanted to use Cyprus as a game piece in grand diplomacy were not without foundation. Since England's acquisition of the island in 1878, periodic feelers were put out, mostly from the Foreign Office, to transfer Cyprus to Greece. A 1915 proposal to give Cyprus to Greece with Greek entry into the world war on the Allied side as a quid pro quo went nowhere, but it did indicate the feeling in some British circles that Cyprus was naturally Greek.

During World War II the issue came up again in ways which horrified the Colonial Office and the Cyprus Government. In December, 1940, before the fall of Greece, Sir Michael Palaret, Ambassador to Greece, wrote to the Foreign Office: "I am not going to breathe a word officially about the future of Cyprus, but do you not think yourself that we should be wise, after the war, to turn it over to the Greeks, while reserving all rights as to its use as a naval, military and air base?" His rationale was classical Foreign Office thinking: "I do not see how our position there can ever be satisfactory, whereas by doing this we should win the undying gratitude of our new (and valuable) ally."<sup>16</sup> The issue was overtaken by the dramatic events of the following year.

The German invasion of Greece in the spring of 1941, the retreat of British forces and the Greek Government to Crete, and the subsequent German airborne invasion of that island changed the political architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean. The actions of the British ministries, and also the Greek Government, underline the basic realities of the Cyprus question in the new and dangerous situation of 1941. On 13 April, 1941, a week before the surrender of the mainland Greek forces, Prime Minister Winston Churchill wired to General Wilson the British commander in Greece, "If the King must leave, every facility will be offered in Cyprus."<sup>17</sup> This statement, apparently issued on Churchill's own initiative, indicates the extent to which British official thought saw Cyprus as a Greek island, regardless of its official status.

The desires of the Greeks were clear. On 14 April, ten days before the evacuation of the mainland and the day after Churchill's message, the Greek king approached Lincoln MacVeigh, the American ambassador in Athens. MacVeigh reported to his superiors: "If the Government does go [the King] prefers Cyprus to Crete, as less exposed to bombing on all sides, and has actually asked Britain to cede a part of Cyprus so that the Greek Government might still be on Greek soil." The American ambassador's report indicates how constant Greek policy was towards Cyprus, even in Greece's darkest hour: "He said Korizis [the Chancellor] pro-

## THE CYPRUS REVIEW

---

posed to ask for the whole island, but that he himself demurred, as he felt that the British might well hesitate over an action which might create a difficult precedent."<sup>18</sup> Events moved too quickly for any action on these proposals, but these suggestions in the midst of the action in the fast-moving Greek campaign indicate that both the British prime minister and the Greek king instinctively felt that Cyprus was a Greek island.

Ideas were overtaken by events, and the Greek royal family and government accompanied what British forces could be evacuated from mainland Greece to Crete. It was obvious that Crete was unlikely long to remain a safe haven for the Greek court. Once again, the Foreign Office began to consider the next place for the fugitive Greek Government to set up shop.

With the prime minister's message and the obvious desires of the Greek king, Cyprus remained a prime candidate. Greek policy towards Cyprus was nothing if not consistent. On 3 May, 1941, the British ambassador to Greece (now located in Canea, Crete) reported to the Foreign Office: "President of the [Greek] Council has sent me personal letter suggesting as encouragement to the Greeks in their present disaster, Cyprus should be granted to the King of Greece 'as a personal present'. For duration of the war, His Majesty would govern the island through existing British authorities. After the war, it would be governed by Greek officials. Thus if he had to leave Crete he could transfer his residence to territory under his sovereignty."<sup>19</sup> The personal letter did not bring about a British reply.

The views of moving the Greek government to Cyprus were, of course, anathema to the Colonial Office. On the day of Churchill's message quoted above, Sir William Battershill, the Cyprus governor, told the Colonial Office: "Presence of [Greek] King and his government here would render position of this Government almost impossible. All loyalties would be centred on the King of Greece who would be considered by most Cypriots as their King....Proposal [would indicate] that cession of Cyprus only a matter of time."<sup>20</sup> It is hard to fault Battershill's logic.

Once again, ideas and discussion were overtaken by the dramatic events of the war. After the fall of Crete, Cyprus' credentials as a safe haven for anyone were in doubt. With Greece under German occupation, the Vichy French in control of nearby Syria and the Italians in the Dodecanese, Cyprus was less and less desirable as a new site for the Greek court. Lack of anti-aircraft protection was the final deciding point, and the issue of the Greek government taking up residence in Cyprus was dropped.<sup>21</sup> Germany's lightning invasion of Crete shook British planners, who feared a string of airborne coups.<sup>22</sup> The general malaise which pervaded British official thought in 1941 in the aftermath of the springtime disasters led to as much consideration of how to handle the impending German conquest of Crete as of how to defend the island.<sup>23</sup>

## TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY; THAT IS THE QUESTION

---

Reginald Bowker, an official of the FO Southern Office, minuted on 28 May, 1941: "It is, of course, quite possible that, *on taking Cyprus*, the Germans will declare it to be a part of Greater Greece [emphasis added]".<sup>24</sup> Minutes followed on how to deal with the resulting German propaganda, and whether the island should be ceded to allow the Germans to take it from the Greeks rather than the British. Discussion was brought to an abrupt halt by the always-pugnacious prime minister. Churchill directed on 6 June, 1941: "It is much better to leave all questions of territorial adjustment to be settled after the war....I do not think we should cede an inch of British territory during the war. It does not follow that Cyprus will immediately be taken. If it is, the Germans will be able, if they choose, to give it nominally to the Greek Quis-ling Government while using it for military purposes themselves. This will not make much difference to what happens."<sup>25</sup>

This pronouncement, and the famous Mansion House speech of 10 November, 1942, in which he proclaimed: "We mean to hold our own. I have not become the King's first minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."<sup>26</sup> The Mansion House pronouncement and Churchill's personal memo on Cyprus ended discussion on turnover of the island for the remainder of the war. Although the issue was put to rest for the time being, there was no indication that the idea of transferring Cyprus to Greece in exchange for base rights and goodwill, while strengthening the Greek ally and British influence, was dead.

In fact, the issue was alive and well, and took on new strength in 1945. With the end of the war and the inevitable territorial changes which would ensue, and Greece's absolute prostration after its liberation, the Cyprus question came to the fore once again. Of equal significance, with the elections of 1945, Churchill was out, and Labour was in.

While all these changes were taking place, the Colonial Office had a colony to run, and with the certainty of increased political agitation, the return of veterans from the war, and a liberated Greece free to resume pressure for enosis, the colony's rulers prepared for a rough time.<sup>27</sup> Colonial Office planners saw, correctly, that the colony would be all but ungovernable if its inhabitants felt that enosis was around the corner, or even on the horizon. If union with Greece were coming, the island's Greeks and Turks alike would concentrate on preparing for that future, and make issues of law and order, colonial development and building bases all but impossible without resort to brute force. From 1945, the Colonial Office's goal was a firm statement of British intent to remain in the island forever.

One apparent irony of the situation in 1945 was that the newly-elected Labour government, on the surface anti-imperial, was not at all anxious to slough off the Crown Colony of Cyprus. Fabian interest in the welfare of colonial inhabitants

meshed well with the Colonial Office view. The connections were more specific. Arthur Creech Jones, who served as Ernest Bevin's parliamentary undersecretary during the war, had a particular interest in colonial affairs and was chairman of the Fabian Colonial Bureau. In 1945, the bureau's publication Strategic Colonies and their Future brought Curzon's analysis of a quarter-century earlier into the situation in the post-war world: "It is not as yet clear whether Cyprus is a necessary base... Certain it is that Cyprus must be associated with a bigger state [for] her defence and protection." He went on to define the crux of the discussion over the colony's future: "Whether Greece can afford that protection is a doubtful point."<sup>28</sup> The idea of the strategic colony fit well with the newly-minted United Nations plans for world security, and provided a rationale for some colonies being sidetracked from the post-war conveyor belt leading to independence.

Cabinet discussion in the postwar years was complex and confusing, but the points of view of the protagonists remained constant.<sup>29</sup> Sir Arthur Dawe, one of the true-blue hardliners in the Colonial Office minuted on 6 September, 1945 that the time had come to make a firm statement of British intent to remain in Cyprus. His rationale was a classical statement of the Colonial Office point of view: "Having made our position clear on the question of union with Greece, we shall be better able to go forward with a policy of economic improvement, social welfare, and constitutional advance."<sup>30</sup> George H. Hall, the Labour Government's Colonial Secretary, took the issue up with Ernest Bevin, the new Foreign Secretary.

Bevin, faced with crises around the globe, was not anxious to further complicate his life with the Cyprus question: "Generally speaking, my feeling as regards Cyprus is to let sleeping dogs lie and not to say anything at all about the island at this particular point." He went on to politely point out the inferior role the Colonial Office played: "it is a matter of deciding which is most important, the local aspect of the question or the foreign affairs aspect."<sup>31</sup> The lines were drawn.

The Cypriot sleeping dogs were stirred up again two months later when parliamentary questions were proposed on the status of the island. Hall told Bevin that he would find it impossible to report to Parliament that England was considering giving the colony away.<sup>32</sup> Bevin's reply on that "no change is contemplated at present", was as far as he could go. He noted that he understood such a statement would encourage further agitation in Cyprus, but he once again cast the issue in international terms, citing the danger to the weak Greek government if an unqualified statement was made. "I need not emphasise that the collapse of the present government in Greece at this moment would have most inconvenient consequences on our own position in Greece"<sup>33</sup> A Foreign Office minute to Bevin at the time demonstrates how far apart the two ministries were with respect to Cyprus: "We do not need to take a decision now about the future of Cyprus, but we do want to avoid

## TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY; THAT IS THE QUESTION

---

giving the impression in Greece that we have finally rejected all Greek claims to the island."<sup>34</sup> So long as Cyprus was seen as both a bargaining chip with Greece the views of the two ministries were unlikely to be reconciled.

The situation was moved off dead centre as Bevin began to question whether supporting the Greek regime, with all its problems was worth the cost it entailed in Cyprus. He more or less gave up on Greece, stating on 7 December, 1946, That "it would be senseless to hand Cyprus to Greece if that country was on the point of going Communist."<sup>35</sup>

Arthur Creech Jones, Bevin's former parliamentary undersecretary and author of *Strategic Colonies and Their Future*, replaced Hall as Secretary of State for the Colonies on 7 October, 1946. He established a better personal relationship with his old boss than Hall had enjoyed. After further consideration, Creech Jones announced in Parliament a new Cyprus policy on 11 December, 1946 which included British determination to stay in what was considered a strategic colony, plans for a new constitution, and appointment of Lord Winster, Labour minister of civil aviation as governor-envoy to put the changes into place.<sup>36</sup>

On the surface, it appeared that the Colonial Office dream had come true, and the long-sought statement of intent to remain had been made. In practice, it made little difference. Perceptive observers, whether in England, Cyprus, or Greece, well understood that the statement, despite hard work on the part of the Colonial Office to remove any qualifiers such as "at present" from the words, could be more than the policy of the cabinet of the day.

Further firm statements followed. For example, on 12 February, 1947, Prime Minister Clement Attlee felt constrained to warn Bevin: "I think it would be inexpedient [for] you to make... any mention of the possibility that the people of Cyprus might be allowed to determine their own future."<sup>37</sup> One indication that little attention was paid to Creech Jones' statement in Parliament is that six years later, in April, 1952, Cyprus *Governor* Sir Andrew Wright pressed "that Her Majesty's Government should at least make a very firm statement of their intention to retain the sovereignty of the Island." The Foreign Office minutes dealing with the issue made no mention of the 1946 statement.<sup>38</sup> Few took Whitehall's firm statements as the final answer.

Not least of the ironies of the Cyprus question was that the less the credibility of the firm statements, the more flexibility all sides had to negotiate something which would work. On 28 October, 1951, Anthony Eden became Foreign Secretary when the Conservatives returned to power. He placed a high premium on Britain's alliance with Turkey, and put some backbone into British statements that Cyprus would remain British.<sup>39</sup> In September, 1953, Eden visited Greece, and told Field

Marshal Papagos, the Greek premier, that there was no Cyprus question, nor would there ever be one. He added with gratuitous insult: "Cyprus had never belonged to Greece....After all, there was a considerable Greek population in Alexandria and New York, but he [Eden] did not suppose that the Greek Government was claiming enosis for them."<sup>40</sup> Eden's rudeness accomplished what a decade of ministerial debate had failed to do: the Greeks were finally convinced that Britain really did mean to remain in Cyprus forever. In the famous "Hopkinson Never" of 1954, in which Colonial Secretary Henry Hopkinson told Parliament: 'There are certain colonies in the Commonwealth which, owing to their peculiar circumstances, can never expect to be fully independent,"<sup>41</sup> and named Cyprus as one of those territories, was more public, but it is unlikely that it had as much effect on the Greeks as Eden's tete-a-tete with Papagos. The Greeks and the Greek Cypriots, finally convinced that there was no future in negotiation or the waiting game, took matters into their own hands. The resulting United Nations debate of 1954, and the EOKA rising of 1955 were to follow.

In retrospect it seems that, for all the soul-searching and bureaucratic infighting which went into determining Britain's Cyprus policy, there was insufficient consideration of probable actions by Greece and the Greek Cypriots. The lack of emphasis on the Cyprus Turks in the papers quoted in this study is typical of the surviving documents. The island's Turks were not a major factor in discussions about the future of the island until Anthony Eden came on the scene.<sup>42</sup> While most British planners understood the popularity of the enosis ideal in Greece and among the Greek Cypriots, there is little evidence that they thought the enosists would actually do much to achieve their goals. Sir Orme Sargent of the Foreign Office was an exception, and noted prophetically in 1947: "When the Greeks in despair turn to the methods of the Irish, the Jews, the Hindus and the Egyptians, then, I suspect, the British people will rise and compel the Government to evacuate."<sup>43</sup> Such comments were rare. Lawrence Durrell, at the time the information officer of the Cyprus Government, noted that on the eve of the 1955 EOKA rising officials did not believe that Cypriots had any real fight in them. But, Durrell remembered, "inability to see Cyprus detached from the colonial framework blinded them to the fact that Cretans might come over and set the island an example."<sup>44</sup> The prospect of a home-grown Cypriot rising was not seriously considered. Of course, when Cypriots did rise in 1955 in a Cypriot-led and Cypriot-manned fight, all previous assumptions were swept away.<sup>45</sup>

In retrospect, it appears that the aims the Colonial Office pursued over the period of this study; a firm statement and elimination of ambivalence about British goals in Cyprus, actually worked against British permanence in Cyprus. Clear statements convinced few, but reduced the negotiating room on all sides. This study, through examining documents written at the time of the actions, looks at the varying points of view of the actors who formed Britain's Cyprus policy, notably the Foreign and

#### TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY; THAT IS THE QUESTION

---

Colonial Offices. The Colonial Office strove to get a firm statement of Britain's intent to remain in Cyprus over Foreign Office opposition which saw Cyprus more valuable as a bargaining chip with Greece, or saw such a statement as likely to be a blow to weak Greek governments the Foreign Office wanted to support. Finally, in 1947, a statement of British intent was made in Parliament, but Greeks and Cypriots did not appear to have believed that it was a final word on the topic. In 1953, Anthony Eden's insulting remarks in Athens finally convinced the Greeks and the Cypriots that Britain intended to stay. From that time, Greeks in Cyprus and in the mainland concentrated on their own actions, rather than trying to deal with Britain. Greek Cypriots took matters into their own hands in 1955. The firm statement, pursued with such intensity by the Colonial Office, turned out to be counterproductive.

## THE CYPRUS REVIEW

---

### Notes

1. Memorandum, Lord Curzon of Kedleston, "The Future of Cyprus, 3 January, 1919, CO 67316/3.
2. The question of the rights of the Turkish minority, key to the issue in the 1950s, was not a vital consideration in the wartime and postwar periods. For example, the Colonial Office reaction to the proposal to put the King of Greece in Cyprus in 1941, and the discussion about making a statement of British willingness to transfer the island to Greece after the war make little mention of Turkish rights. Exceptions are noted later in this study.
3. COS (45) 215, 5 September, 1945, CAB 79/39.
4. Memorandum, Sir Orme Sargent, 3 November, 1947, R 13462/390, FO 371/67084.
5. Minute, John Commile, FO, summarising Mary Fisher's comments, 10 June, 1948, FO 371/ 72295.
6. Cyprus Gazette Extra 3277, 7 December, 1946.
7. Message, Cyprus to CO No. 479, 16 July, 1948, FO 371/72295, R7057.
8. Amery, L. S, (1953-55) *My Political Life*, London, Hutchinson, 3 vols. Vol. 2, pp.367-69; *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 500-535, 51-52, 7 May, 1952. See also letters to *The Times*, 3 March, 1951, 7d and 6 March, 1951, 6d, re Amery's proposal. For discussion of Amery's brand of imperialism, see Louis, Wm. Roger, (1978) *Imperialism at Bay*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 31-34.
9. D. L. Pearson, CO to R. W. L. Wilding, FO, 24 March, 1954, WG 1081/56, FO 371/112844; Memorandum, discussion between Hopkinson and Nutting, 25 January, 1955, FO 371/117624, RG 1081/96.
10. Minute, Mary Fisher, 9 June, 1949, CO 537/4978.
11. Minute, Mary Fisher, 5 May, 1949, CO 537/4976.
12. Minute, J. S. Bennett, 11 June, 1950, CO 67/367/1.
13. Minute, Mary Fisher, 20 October, 1950, CO 67/367/1
14. The many parts of the Middle East where Britain either practiced de facto rule or maintained bases, such as Palestine, Egypt and the Suez Canal Zone, Iraq, and Trans-Jordan were treaty bases, mandates or were held under other bilateral arrangements, but Cyprus was the only territory under undiluted British sovereignty in the area.
15. Minute, Sir Orme Sargent, 3 November, 1947, FO 371/67084, R13462/390.

TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY; THAT IS THE QUESTION

---

16. Palairet to Foreign Office, 19 December, 1940, FO 371/28746, R397.
17. Churchill to Wilson, 13 April, 1941, PREM 3/206/3.
18. MacVeigh, Lincoln. (1980) *Ambassador MacVeigh Reports: Greece 1933-1947*, ed. John O. Iatrides, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, p. 134.
19. Message, Canea to FO No. 25, 3 May, 1941 FO 371/29884.
20. Message Cyprus to CO, No. 128, 13 April, 1941, CAB 120/499.
21. The correspondence concerning the decision is found in PREM 3/211/1.
22. In fact, German losses in the Crete operation were so high that the Germans never undertook a major airborne operation again. See Liddell-Hart, B. H. (1948), *The German Generals Talk*, New York, Quill, pp. 160-61, Jacobson, Hans-Adolf, ed., (1965) *Kriegstagesbuch fur des Oberkommando de Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtfurungsstab)*, Frankfurt am Main, Band I, 1 August 1940 - 31 December 1941 ). Entry for 4 June, 1941, demonstrates continuing German General Staff interest in Cyprus, but no airborne invasion was seriously planned
23. Kelling, George (1990), *Countdown to Rebellion: British Policy in Cyprus, 1939-1945*, Westport, CT, pp. 25-35, contain a more complete account of plans for defence of the island.
24. Minute, Reginald Bowker, 28 May, 1941, FO 371/273776, R 4106.
25. Personal Minute, Winston Churchill, Serial No. M 651/1, FO 371/23776, R5841.
26. Janes, Robert R. ed. (1974) *Winston S. Churchill, His Complete Speeches*, 8 vols, New York, Chelsea House, 1974, Vol. 6, (1939-1949), pp. 6692-95. To put the issue into perspective, it should be noted that Cyprus was one of several similar issues confronting the British Government, with Hong Kong's future being discussed on remarkably similar terms.
27. A number of factors leading to disorder, chief among them the rise of AKEL, the communist party, are outside the scope of this study. Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion*, pp. 67- 68, summarise these issues.
28. Fabian Colonial Bureau, (1945) *Strategic Colonies and Their Future*, London, p.35.
29. Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion*, deals with the cabinet discussion in detail, particularly in pp. 68-88 and 128-132.
30. Minute, Sir Arthur Dawe, 6 September, 1945, CO 67/327.
31. Bevin to Hall, 26 September, 1945, FO 371/58761.

## THE CYPRUS REVIEW

---

32. Hall to Bevin, 20 November, 1945, FO 371/48360, CO 67/327, R20301.

33. Bevin to Hall, 4 December, 1945, FO 371/48360, CO 67/327, R20301.

34. Minute, J. S. Laskey, Southern Department, FO, 30 November, 1945, FO 371/48360, R 20973.

35. The minutes of Bevin's visit to the United Nations and the development of his attitude towards Greece are found in FO 371/58891. See also G. M. Alexander, (1982), *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p. 229, and Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion*, pp. 71-72.

36. *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 431/235, 11 December, 1946.

37. Attlee to Bevin, 12 February, 1947, FO 371/67081, R2077.

38. The correspondence and minutes dealing with Wright's 1952 visit to London are found in FO 371/101810, WG1081/16.

39. Anthony Eden is frank about his emphasis on the Turkish alliance in his memoirs *The Eden Memoirs*, 3 vols., (1965) Vol. 3, *Full Circle*, Boston pp. 452-456.

40. Message, Athens to FO, No. 504, FO 371/112884, WG1081/1269.

41. *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 531/511, 28 July, 1954.

42. It should be noted, however, that Churchill mentioned the island's Turks in his 1942 memo cited above, as did Governor Battersill in his objections to the Greek King coming to Cyprus in 1941.

43. Minute, Sir Orme Sargent, 3 November, 1947, FO 371/67084, R13462.

44. Durrell, Lawrence, (1958) *Bitter Lemons*, New York, p. 158.

45. The 1955 rising is outside the scope of this study. Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion*, pp. 139-153 with the references in the notes, is a good place to start in consideration of the rising from the British point of view.