

## Modern Cyprus 1878–1974: An Overview

By Stavros T. Stavridis

Cyprus is a beautiful island which occupies an important strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean sea and Middle East. Foreign powers such as the Venetians, Ottoman Empire including modern Turkey and Great Britain occupied the island of Aphrodite from the 15th-21st centuries. All occupying powers imposed their own socio-economic, political and administrative forms of government on the indigenous population. Our focus will be on Cyprus' history based on five key dates-1878, 1915, 1931, 1955 and 1974, a period characterized by great political upheaval.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Treaty of San Stefano and Treaty of Berlin 1878

On January 27, 1878 the Russians and Turks signed an armistice at Adrianople (Edirne) to halt their conflict. Finally the Russo-Turkish peace settlement was embodied in the Treaty of San Stefano signed on March 3, 1878 where Bulgaria became an autonomous principality (Art 6) with Montenegro (Art.2) , Romania (Art 5) and Serbia (Art 3) granted their independence from Ottoman rule.

When Britain received a copy of this treaty, she was horrified and raised objections to it. Lord Salisbury, the British Foreign Secretary, issued a circular on April 1, 1878 opposing Russian gains in Batoum, Armenia, and Trebizond route and the creation of a new Bulgarian state. The British believed that Bulgaria would greatly impact on the rest of SE Europe giving Russia a preponderant influence in the Balkans. Furthermore Britain thought that its trade and commercial interests would be imperiled with Erzeroum and Trebizond in Russian hands. To solve these differences a conference was convoked in Berlin under the chairmanship of German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck playing the role of the “honest broker.”

The British Ambassador Layard was instructed to tell Sultan Abdul Hamid II that Britain's control of Cyprus would ensure the territorial sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. Layard sent a draft of an

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<sup>1</sup> This is a short version of a longer paper presented at the Cyprus Independence day celebrations on October 5, 2008 in San Jose California.

Anglo-Turkish agreement on Cyprus for discussion with the Ottoman Government. After discussion between Layard and Abdul Hamid the agreement was signed on June 4 1878.

### 2. The British offer of Cyprus to Greece, October 1915

When the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers: Germany and Austro-Hungary during the Great War in October 1914, Great Britain annexed Cyprus. Britain offered Cyprus to Greece in October, 1915 on the condition that she went to the assistance of Serbia. Under the terms of the Greek-Serbian Treaty 1913, Greece was obliged to aid her ally against a Bulgarian attack. King Constantine refused to come to Serbia's aid "claiming that the Treaty did not apply to a war in which Serbia was not only attacked by Bulgaria but a Great Power (Germany)". Zaimis consulted with the King and his cabinet colleagues before officially responding to the British offer. His response was that Greece wished to maintain its neutrality and even the offer of Cyprus did not offer her many advantages either. The Greek-Cypriots were greatly disappointed to learn of the Greek Government's refusal to accept the British offer. Unfortunately Cyprus was divided along Venizelist and Constantinist lines thus relegating any notions of enosis into the background.

### 3. The riots of October 1931

The Cypriots complained that the British exploited them for financial gain. However the island's budget was in deficit coupled with falling commodity prices necessitating a reduction of government expenditure. The only available remedy was to raise taxes in order to achieve a budget surplus for which Greek members of the Colonial Legislative Council weren't prepared to do.

A crowd had gathered outside the Commercial Club in Nicosia on October 21, 1931 to hear the news that members of the Legislative Council had resigned over the budget. Speeches made inside the club criticized the injustices of British rule and shouts for enosis with Greece could be heard outside in the street. Crowd increased from a few hundred to a few thousand. A priest "mounted the makeshift platform and declared a revolution was to be underway." A Greek flag was flung which the priest kissed symbolizing the Cypriots demands for enosis with mother Greece. They were continual cries "To Government House, To Government House" where protestors saw this building as a symbol of British rule. In the ensuing trouble, the Governor's residence was burnt to the ground.

However further troubles broke out in Larnaca, Famagusta, Kyrenia, Limassol and Paphos that continued until early November. Storrs took the drastic step of deporting the ringleaders George Hajipavlou, Dionysios Kykkotis, Theofanis Tsangarides, Theofanis Theodotou, Theodoris Kolokassidis and the two bishops of Kition and Kyrenia to Malta barring them from returning to Cyprus. He believed that such a measure would defuse the political tensions on the island.

Storrs telegraphed for additional British troops from Egypt to be dispatched by air and also the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean fleet to send an aircraft carrier. British troop and naval reinforcements from outside began to arrive and slowly established some semblance of law and order on the island. RAF airplanes flew over Cypriot villages to keep a watchful eye on the situation from the air.

#### 4. The struggle for independence 1955-60

EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) waged a fierce guerilla campaign against Britain from April 1955 till Cyprus won its independence in 1960. It should be noted that EOKA was viewed as security threat by the British authorities on Cyprus. In September 1955, the three parties' -Britain, Greece and Turkey- met in London to discuss the Cyprus issue. Britain based its case on three important issues. Firstly British title to Cyprus was recognized under the Treaty of Lausanne (1923); secondly, that Cyprus was considered pivotal in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern defense systems. Britain required "possession and use of the whole island and its facilities." The Conference ended in failure.

From November 1955 to January 1956 Lord Harding, the Governor of Cyprus and Archbishop Makarios met to discuss the political future of Cyprus. The main question for the British was whether Makarios condemned the use of violence in Cyprus. The British considered "the Archbishop's slippery tactics pos[ing] a delicate problem as regards termination of the talks." With Harding-Makarios negotiations failing to achieve their stated objective, the British exiled the Archbishop to the Seychelles islands in the Indian Ocean.

In February 1959 the London-Zurich agreements established the basic structure of the Republic of Cyprus and a Treaty of Guarantee between Cyprus and United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey. The Treaty of Guarantee would ensure the independence, territorial integrity and constitution of the new

state of Cyprus. Britain retained the right to maintain two bases on Akrotiri and Dhekelia. Cyprus became an independent nation where it became a member of the United Nations and British Commonwealth.



## 5. The 1974 Coup

The Greek Junta along with elements of the National Guard in Cyprus staged a coup on July 16, 1974 which led to the overthrow of Makarios and the installation of Nikos Sampson as the President of Cyprus. Sampson announced the stated goals of the regime. Some of these included: restoring law and order, the staging of free and honest elections in the near future, solving of the “Cypriot problem through reinforced inter-communal talks” and “foreign policy based on friendship and cooperation with all nations: Cyprus will remain non-aligned...”

The western powers and even the Soviet Union were outraged with Sampson becoming president and supported Makarios as the legitimate leader of Cyprus. Britain drew the attention to both the Greek and Turkish Governments that under Art.3 of the Treaty of Guarantee 1960 that the three powers (United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey) were responsible to uphold the independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus. The British Government asked that the Greeks to withdraw their 650 officers from the island and give a clear statement respecting Cyprus’ independence. The coup gave Turkey the pretext it needed to invade on July 20, 1974 leading to a partition of Cyprus into a Greek and Turkish part.

In conclusion the modern history of Cyprus has been marked by political turbulence and foreign occupation. The issue of enosis with Greece dominated Greek-Cypriot thinking for many years after finally being abandoned in the mid-1950s. In April 1955 EOKA's guerilla campaign resulted in Cyprus' independence from British rule in 1960.



Stavros Terry Stavridis was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1949 of Greek parents. He migrated to Australia with his parents in September 1952. Stavros has a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) in Political Science/Economic History and B.A (Hons) in European History from Deakin University and M.A in Greek/Australian History from RMIT University. His MA thesis is titled "The Greek-Turkish War 1919-23: an Australian Press Perspective."

Stavros has nearly 20 years of teaching experience, lecturing at University and TAFE (Technical and Further Education, the equivalent of Community College in the US) levels. He has presented papers at international conferences in Australia and USA and has also given public lectures both in Australia and on the West Coast of the US. Many of his articles have appeared in the Greek-American press.

He has worked as a historical researcher at the National Center for Hellenic Studies and Research, Latrobe University, Bundoora, Victoria, Australia. He is currently on sabbatical and lives with his wife in Portland, Oregon.

Stavros' research interests are the Asia Minor campaign and disaster, Middle Eastern history, the Assyrian and Armenian genocides, Greece in the Balkan Wars 1912-13 and the First World War and history in general.

