palgrave pivot

THE EVOLUTION OF BRITISH COUNTER-INSURGENCY DURING THE CYPRUS REVOLT, 1955–1959

Preston Jordan Lim

The Evolution of British Counter-Insurgency during the Cyprus Revolt, 1955–1959

Preston Jordan Lim

The Evolution of British Counter-Insurgency during the Cyprus Revolt, 1955–1959

palgrave
macmillan

Preston Jordan Lim
Schwarzman College
Tsinghua University
Beijing, China

ISBN 978-3-319-91619-4 ISBN 978-3-319-91620-0 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91620-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018944943

Cover illustration: Pattern adapted from an Indian cotton print produced in the 19th century

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Pivot imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

To my parents, for teaching me to be curious

Acknowledgments

I wrote the kernel of this book as a senior in the Near Eastern Studies department at Princeton University. Since then the work has grown in scope, but I remain deeply indebted to the faculty and mentors who guided me through those four wonderful years. Thank you to Dr. John Hughes, lifelong inspiration, for teaching me that timely motto, "Who Dares Wins." To Professor Michael Cook, for introducing me to the study of the Near East; to Professor Nilüfer Hatemi, for patiently teaching me Turkish; to Professor M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, for serving as a first-rate advisor; and of course to Professor Michael Reynolds, for teaching me the importance of military history, traveling with me to Azerbaijan and back, and serving as a wonderful mentor and friend.

Also, special thanks to the staff at Palgrave Macmillan for their guidance throughout the publication process.

Contents

1 Introduction 1

2 Using a Tank to Catch Field Mice: April 1955 to March 1957 17

3 On the Brink of Civil War: April 1957 to March 1959 45

4 A War of Perception: The Cypriot Government and Its Image During the Revolt 73

5 Conclusion 103

Bibliography 109

Index 117

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract This chapter provides a survey of Cypriot history during the British colonial period, focusing on the growth of Enosis during that time frame as well as on the limits of British rule. Though the outbreak of the Cyprus Revolt in 1955 caught many government officials by surprise, Greek Cypriot disenchantment with British rule had blossomed in the early twentieth century and found potent articulation through the leadership of Archbishop Makarios III and Colonel George Grivas. Despite the lack of historiographical focus on military developments during the Revolt years (1955–1959), this chapter argues that the richness of archival materials necessitates a new look at the military history of the revolt.

Keywords Makarios • Grivas • British Cyprus • Ottoman Cyprus

On May 23, 1958, Savvas Menicou, a 50-year-old Greek Cypriot laborer, was beaten to death. Menicou had just returned to his home village of Goufes, having spent the day working in the nearby town of Lefkoniko. A mob of local villagers surrounded Menicou as he stepped off from the bus and proceeded to beat him. They eventually bound him to a tree in a nearby churchyard, where they left his body, bloodied and lifeless.

P. J. Lim, *The Evolution of British Counter-Insurgency during the Cyprus Revolt, 1955–1959*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91620-0_1

James Trainor, a governmental coroner, in delivering his verdict on June 13, 1958, said that "I have been, I suppose, for the best part of 25 years associated with the law in which time I have met some rather grim cases, but never have I in that period met anything that approaches the savagery and brutality of this case." Trainor went on to describe the wounds sustained by Menicou, noting that the muscles of his upper arm and back had been "beaten into pulp." Menicou's murderers had included not only adults, but as Trainor noted, "among the youths of the age 12 to 20 there are a very large number with this murder on their conscience."[1]

Even before the lynching of Menicou, Lefkoniko had developed a notorious reputation among the Security Forces. In December of 1955, Lefkoniko was issued with the first collective fine of the emergency; the 4000 villagers of Lefkoniko had to come up with £2000 after a gang of schoolboys burned down the local post office.[2]

More egregious, however, was an attack on British soldiers that occurred on October 23, 1956. A group of soldiers of the Highland Light Infantry had taken to playing football on a certain field in Lefkoniko; after the game, the soldiers walked over to the drinking fountain, tired no doubt from the match. An electronically detonated bomb, placed beside the fountain, disemboweled one soldier immediately; a second soldier would die several days later and another four Highlanders were gravely injured.[3] The troops sent into Lefkoniko immediately after the explosion rounded up "more than a hundred people for questioning" and "did not conceal their anger"; Nancy Crawshaw, a journalist based in Cyprus for most of the Emergency, contends that "the incident culminated in the familiar pattern of complaints of ill-treatment and claims for damages on the part of the villagers."[4]

Such events—the collective fine and the bombing of the Highlanders—fit well into the established paradigm of conflict between the Security Forces on the one hand and the rebels belonging to the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters[5] (EOKA) on the other. The EOKA was a Greek Cypriot nationalist guerrilla group fighting to achieve Enosis, or union with the Greek mainland. On April 1, 1955, the EOKA launched the Cyprus Revolt, exploding a number of bombs throughout the island. Over the course of the rebellion, the EOKA not only attacked British soldiers but also murdered 187 "traitors"[6]—Greek Cypriots who had worked for the government, had given information to the Security Forces, or ignored the EOKA's instructions. The death of Menicou was distinct,

however, in that Menicou was neither a member of the Security Force apparatus nor was he a traitor to the Enosist cause.

Instead, Savvas' wife, Rodhou S. Menicou, in a letter to the Human Rights Committee, published in the Greek Cypriot newspaper *Haravghi*, affirmed that Savvas was a nationalist and argued that Savvas had been murdered because of his leftist views:

> Those who had killed my husband began to spread the rumor that he was a traitor and this is why he was killed. Do not believe them…my husband was a leftist…he took many hours off his sleep in order to inspire into our children the love for Greece and the freedom of our Cyprus. And yet he was killed.[7]

At the same time, Ms. Menicou praised the Human Rights Committee for having "defended with zeal our people's human rights which have been violated and trampled upon by the colonialists."[8] She was neither pro-EOKA nor pro-British. Likewise, a *Haravghi* op-ed piece congratulated the Committee for "having raised a courageous voice of protest" against the British and entreated the Committee to "raise with the same resoluteness and courage your voice against such horrible crimes."[9] The Menicou murder then defies paradigms that cast the Cyprus Emergency as solely a struggle between the British on the one hand and EOKA rebels on the other hand. The Cyprus conflict was multifaceted. Concurrent with that struggle were a series of other conflicts: in this case, the conflict between the Left and Right, not necessarily caused by the EOKA; in addition, the Cyprus Revolt would see the killing of Greek Cypriot 'traitors' by the EOKA as well as intercommunal fighting between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

The Cyprus Revolt, which resulted in the end of British rule and the declaration in 1960 of an independent Republic of Cyprus, fit into a larger pattern of power transition that has gripped the island since ancient times. Cyprus lies within 40 miles of Turkey's southern coast and measures about 150 miles from east to west and 60 miles from north to south.[10] Given its key location with respect to various ancient Mediterranean trade routes, it is no surprise that Cyprus historically enjoyed only fleeting periods of independence. Mycenaean Greeks had settled in Cyprus by the late Bronze Age, but over the next several centuries, Cyprus would endure Assyrian, Ptolemaic, Egyptian, Roman, Lusignanian, and Venetian rule, before finally being conquered by the Ottomans in 1571.[11]

Cyprus never actually belonged to the Kingdom of Greece, Greece only having gained independence in 1830. In 1878, the Ottomans, after three centuries of rule, ceded to the British the right to occupy and administer Cyprus, though the island remained under nominal Ottoman sovereignty. Following the Ottoman entry into the Great War on the side of the Central Powers, the British annexed Cyprus in 1914 and a decade later, in 1925, made it a Crown Colony.[12] Despite the War Office's high hopes for Cyprus' strategic potential, however, the island remained an underfunded colonial backwater. The island had few adequate port facilities and given the excellent facilities available in the Suez Canal zone, there was little need, at least militarily speaking, for the British government to invest heavily in Cyprus.[13] In practice, Cyprus had only a "negative strategic significance…for the British Empire"[14]; it was important to keep Cyprus out of enemy hands because of her proximity to Egypt, but Cyprus herself had little military utility.

On the eve of the Cyprus Revolt, the island was home to roughly 500,000 inhabitants. 79.5% of the population was Greek Cypriot and 17% was Turkish Cypriot, with the remaining 3.5% consisting of smaller minority groups—Maronite Catholics, Jews, Armenians, and British expatriates.[15] Turkish and Greek Cypriots often lived in mixed communities. As David French rightly notes, "there were 112 villages in which Turkish Cypriots were clearly preponderant, 369 in which Greeks were preponderant, and 146 which were labeled as mixed."[16] The British government, in what might be characterized a continuation of the Ottoman *millet* system, did not seek to radically change the educational, religious, and cultural institutions on the island. Schooling continued to be conducted on a communal basis, with Greeks attending Greek schools and learning about Greek history and culture; likewise, Turkish youth attended Turkish schools.[17] Greek Cypriots often traveled to Athens and Turkish Cypriots to Istanbul for their university education. The English School in Nicosia, founded in 1900, was a significant exception to the pattern of communal education, but by and large, Greek and Turkish Cypriots were socialized within their respective communities.

Enosist aspirations ran deep and emerged long before the opening explosions of the Cyprus Revolt. Historians have exposed as fabrication the popular legend that holds that when Sir Garnet Wolseley, the first British High Commissioner, arrived in Cyprus, he was greeted by Archbishop Sofronios, who immediately declared the Greek Cypriots' desire for Enosis.[18] Yet even if nationalist historiography has obscured the

record in certain respects, it is clear that by the close of the nineteenth century, "for the mass of the Greek laboring poor, the desire for freedom came to be expressed in the demand for enosis."[19] In 1915, in an effort to compel Greece to join the Entente, Britain even offered Cyprus to Greece, but the pro-German King Constantine's vacillations prevented what might have been an early solution to the Cyprus problem.

1931 marked a turning point in the struggle for Enosis. As G.S. Georghallides argues, the period from 1926 to 1931 as a whole was one of crisis for the administration. In addition to struggling from the worldwide economic crisis, Cypriots—particularly Greek Cypriots—were frustrated by Governor Sir Ronald Storrs' seeming unwillingness to devolve administrative power. Indeed, the constitution, which Georghallides terms "the main instrument of the autocratic administration,"[20] had remained unchanged since 1882. In October of 1931, Greek Cypriots marched on Government House and, in part due to insufficient police protection, managed to burn down the residence. The British reacted harshly, calling in troop reinforcements from Egypt, dissolving the Legislative Council, and imposing a collective fine of £66,000 upon the Greek Cypriot community. Dominick Coyle contends that "by any criteria, the British used a sledgehammer to crack a not too large, if obdurate, nut."[21]

During the Second World War, thousands of Greek and Turkish Cypriots served in the Cyprus Regiment and many saw combat in France, Greece, Italy, or in North Africa.[22] British recruitment appeals to the Greek Cypriots to fight for Greece and for liberty fostered the false expectation that the Cypriots would gain Enosis after the war. Immediately after the war, a plebiscite organized by the autocephalous Cypriot Orthodox Church resulted in 96% of eligible voters favoring Enosis.[23] Though Church bishops undoubtedly compelled many to vote in favor of Enosis, there could be no doubt that a significant proportion of the Greek Cypriot population actively desired Enosis. As the Greek Cypriots constituted a clear majority on the island,[24] this was a significant result.

Then in 1950, Michael Mouskos, a bishop who had spent time studying at Boston University, became Archbishop Makarios III. With his assumption to the archbishopric, Makarios also became ethnarch of the Greek Cypriot people, and thus assumed not only a spiritual but also a political role. His fervent stance on Enosis was in many ways inseparable from his belief in God. In their edited volume on Cypriot church history, Varnava and Michael convey the contextuality and uniqueness of Makarios.

They characterize his welding of political and religious power as "ironic," for Makarios was arguably harking back to long-discarded Ottoman practice, under which ethnarchs had wielded considerable power.[25]

Of course, the Cypriot Orthodox church had long mixed religious with political responsibilities. Makarios III certainly was not the first archbishop to stray from clerical issues; Archbishop Kyrillos II, who started his primacy in 1910, for example, was a noted "political brawler."[26] As Ioannis Stefanides notes, the Orthodox Church became increasingly wedded to nationalist cause during the late Ottoman and certainly the British periods. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, nationalist ideology had already become part of the "prevailing orthodoxy" of the general population.[27] Still, it must be emphasized that Makarios combined and exercised political and religious power in ways that few other ethnarchs had and as such, represented an unprecedented challenge to British rule.

An equally important figure was Colonel George Grivas, a Cypriot who had served in the Greek Army, fighting during the Second World War as well as in the Greek Civil War. Grivas had met Makarios while in Athens; he believed strongly in the value of armed struggle. In June of 1953, Makarios authorized Grivas to ship arms into Cyprus. In January 1955, the British destroyer *HMS Comet* intercepted the Greek boat, the *Ayios Georghios*, as the crew was delivering arms to Cypriot rebels on shore. The interception was brilliantly executed, but by 1955, preparations for an armed struggle were already well in place. Finally, in the early hours of April 1, 1955, a series of bomb explosions rocked Aphrodite's Island. The Cyprus Revolt had begun.[28]

Throughout the course of the revolt and particularly between 1955 and 1957, EOKA rebels succeeded in sabotaging military equipment, assassinating and ambushing British soldiers and policemen, and sharply limiting the extent of British prestige and control throughout the island. The EOKA's tactical success was almost certainly a function of its superb organization. As French notes, the EOKA grew from a "small, militant organization into a mass movement supported by a much larger penumbra of part-timers who fulfilled roles in other parts of the insurgent organization."[29]

Under Colonel Grivas, the EOKA adopted a cellular structure. EOKA rebels established cells in Cyprus' major cities, in the small villages that dot the island, and in the Kyrenia and Troodos mountain ranges. Grivas communicated his orders to each cell leader through courier and placed a premium on maintaining control; horizontal communication, between