

British Intelligence and the Origins of the EOKA Insurgency

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ABSTRACT

This article explores why the British security forces on Cyprus failed to nip the EOKA conspiracy in the bud before the start of its armed insurgency in April 1955. Using material in the recently released Foreign and Commonwealth Office 'migrated archive', together with information found in Colonial Office files in the National Archives that have hitherto been largely ignored, it shows that their failure was the result of a complex set of circumstances. Not only was the local Special Branch under resourced, but the British looked for trouble in the wrong place. They expected a repeat of the 1931 riots, not the campaign of armed terrorism that EOKA was planning.

Introduction

On the night of 30 March-1 April 1955, 16 bombs exploded in Nicosia and several other main towns on the island of Cyprus. The insurgent organisation, EOKA (*Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* or the National Organisation of Cypriot Combatants), proclaimed that it was acting to induce the British to grant Enosis, that is union between Cyprus and Greece. The colonial authorities on the island appeared to have been taken completely by surprise. But as recently as 25 January 1955 the security forces had intercepted a Greek-owned caique, the *St George*, carrying a cargo of arms and explosives as they were being landed on a beach near Paphos and arrested a group of Cypriot nationalists who were ready to receive them. If the security forces and intelligence services were sufficiently alert to carry out these arrests, the question remains why they could not detect the whole conspiracy on the island and break it up before the bombing campaign began. A number of answers have been suggested. The official history of MI5 dismissed any such possibility by insisting that there was a lack of intelligence available to the British because the Cyprus police Special Branch was under-resourced and poorly organised.¹ A second explanation is that the capture of the *St George* induced a sense of complacency amongst the

¹ Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm. The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), p.472. This is broadly the argument of the most detailed study of British intelligence on Cyprus, Panagiotis Dimitrakis, *Military Intelligence in Cyprus. From the Great War to the Middle East Crisis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), pp.74-77.

authorities, who now believed that the possibility of an armed insurrection had been neutralised. They believed that demands for Enosis emanated from Greece and, provided they could stem flow of arms from the mainland, there was no possibility of a rising starting on the island organised by Greek Cypriots themselves.² This argument has been extended a step further to suggest that the British knew of the arrival of plotters from Greece who were planning an armed insurgency but, in a machiavellian twist, they allowed them to proceed because they hoped that an armed insurrection organised from amongst the majority Greek Cypriot community would compel the Turkish Cypriot minority to side with them.³

The first two of these explanations contain elements of truth, but neither are complete. The third explanation is little more than fantasy. Historians in the past have been handicapped by the fact that, unbeknownst to them, the British government had retained a number of files that might have shed light on some of these issues, files that were part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 'migrated archive'.⁴ This article will draw upon material from the 'migrated archive', together with information found in Colonial Office files in the National Archives that have remained largely unexamined, to offer a more complete explanation of why the British failed to nip in the bud the insurgency that began on Cyprus in the spring of 1955.

Enosis, Makarios and Grivas

When the British arrived on Cyprus in 1878 it was part of the Ottoman Empire. The British took control of the island's administration in an attempt to prop-up that Empire and thereby safeguard the route to their own Indian empire. They believed that once on the island they would enjoy a commanding naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean. In fact they were mistaken because Cyprus lacked a good deep water harbour. Fortunately for them, however, only four years later they also occupied Egypt, where Alexandria suited their needs perfectly. The British did not annex the island until 1914, when Turkey joined the First World War on the side of

² Nick van der Bijl, *The Cyprus Emergency 1955-1974* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2010), p.32; Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire* (London: HarperCollins Publishers. Kindle Edition, 2013), Kindle locations 6589-6611); Stephen Dorril, *MI6. Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), p.551; David M. Anderson, 'Policing and communal conflict: the Cyprus emergency, 1954-60', in David M. Anderson & David Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonisation. Politics, nationalism and the police, 1917-1965* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp.178-179; Nancy Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt. An Account of the Struggle for the Union with Greece* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), p.112.

³ Makarios Drousiotis, 'The Greco-Turkish 'Para-State' and Cyprus 1947-1960', Hubert Faustmann & Nicos Peristianis, (eds.), *Britain in Cyprus: colonialism and post-colonialism 1878-2006* (Mannheim: Bibliopolis, 2006), pp.221-222.

⁴ Anthony Badger, 'Historians, a legacy of suspicion and the "migrated archives"', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 23, Iss. 4-5, (September 2012), pp.799-807. The files can be found in TNA FCO 141.

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their enemies, and it did not become a Crown colony until 1925. Until the early 1950s Cyprus was an imperial backwater. The main reason the British remained was to deny it to any other power. It was only in the early 1950s, by when they had been forced out of Palestine and Egypt, that they rediscovered Cyprus as a strategic asset.⁵

But by then developments on the island were calling into question for how much longer the British would be able to remain. By the end of the Second World War about four out of five Cypriots were Greek-speakers and they were becoming increasingly insistent that they wanted Enosis rather than to remain British subjects. Their demands had spilled over into violence already once in the past. In October 1931 a demonstration of over 5,000 people against government attempts to raise taxes and in favour of Enosis broke-out into rioting. The rioters burnt down the Governor's mansion, disorders spread across the island and order was only restored after the arrival of troops from Egypt and Malta. Half a dozen Greek Cypriots died and 30 were injured.⁶ The 1931 riots were seared into the collective memory of the British administration and formed an essential element in all of their thinking thereafter.

In 1950 the political leader of the Greek Cypriot community was Archbishop Makarios III, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church on the island. Makarios was deeply committed to the Enosis cause. He was a consummate politician who understood that if the British were unwilling to grant Enosis freely then they would have to be coerced into doing so. He therefore pursued two parallel policies. Overtly, he lobbied peacefully and energetically for Enosis on the island, in Athens and overseas; particularly at the United Nations.⁷ Covertly, he began to plot an armed insurrection. In 1952, during a visit to Athens, Makarios and a group of like-minded individuals had established the Liberation Committee. A year later they swore a binding oath to pursue Enosis. Makarios automatically became the political leader of this new underground movement. Its military leader was Colonel George Grivas. Grivas had been born on Cyprus, but had left to become a regular officer in the Greek army. He had seen active service against the Turks in Asia Minor in the

⁵ Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, 'Cold War Pressures, Regional Strategies, and Relative Decline: British Military and Strategic Planning for Cyprus, 1950–1960', *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 73 Iss. 4, (October 2009), pp.1146-47.

⁶ Henry Frendo, 'The naughty European twins of empire: The constitutional breakdown in Malta and Cyprus 1930-1933', *The European Legacy*, Vol. 3 (1998), p. 50; Diana Markides and G. S. Georghallides, 'British Attitudes to Constitution-Making in Post-1931 Cyprus', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 13 (1995), pp. 65-6; Maj-Gen. Sir Charles W. Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (London: Macmillan, 1934), pp. 331-66; Robert Holland and Diana Markides, *The British and the Helleness. Struggle for Mastery in the Eastern Mediterranean 1850-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.186.

⁷ Andrew R. Novo, 'The God Dilemma: Faith, the Church, and Political Violence in Cyprus', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 31, Iss. 2, (October 2013), p.197.

early 1920s, and against the Italians and Germans in 1940-41, before going underground for the remainder of the Axis occupation. At the end of that period he had emerged as the leader of an extreme right-wing organisation, Khi, sometimes also known as the 'X' organisation, to join the fight against the Greek communists.⁸ Grivas put his experience of underground warfare to good use in the cause of Enosis. He visited Cyprus in July 1951, and again between October 1952 and February 1953.⁹ The result was that on his return to Athens he was able to put before the Liberation Committee a comprehensive plan for an armed insurrection on the island. Through a combination of wide-scale sabotage operations supported by guerrilla bands operating in remote locations in the Troodos Mountains and the Kyrenia range, and riots in the major towns, he would undermine the prestige of the administration and force the British to accede to their demands.¹⁰ Makarios was reluctant to sanction the shedding of blood and hoped that a brief sabotage campaign would suffice to persuade the British to be more reasonable. It was only after the Greek government had failed to raise the Cyprus question at the United Nations in December 1954 that he finally gave Grivas permission to proceed.¹¹

Grivas had already begun to make the necessary preparations. Two arms shipments had reached the island, the first in March 1954 and the second in October.¹² Grivas himself returned to the island in November 1954 and began to recruit and train the men who would conduct the sabotage campaign. Most were young men, and often teenagers. They were either members of two right-wing youth organisations sponsored by the Orthodox Church, OHEN (Orthodox Christian Union of Youth) and PEON (Pan-Cyprian National Organisation of Youth), or of PEK (Pan-agrarian Union of Cyprus), the right-wing farmers union.¹³ A handful were Greek Cypriot students studying at the University of Athens who had received a small amount of

⁸ Charles Foley (ed.), *The Memoirs of General Grivas* (London: Longman, 1964), pp.17-18; Andreas Varnavas, *A History of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA*, (Nicosia: Foundation of the EOKA Liberation Struggle 1955-1959, 2004) pp.33-34; Andreas Karyos, 'EOKA, 1955-1959: a Study of the Military Aspects of the Cyprus Revolt (Ph.D., Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 2011), pp.41-4, pp.49-50.

⁹ Charles Foley & W. I. Scobie, *The Struggle for Cyprus* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1975), pp.12-15; Foley (ed.), *Memoirs*, pp.16-17.

¹⁰ Foley (ed.), *Memoirs*, pp.204-207.

¹¹ Foley & Scobie, *The Struggle for Cyprus*, p.15, p.20, p.24; Edward Johnson, 'Keeping Cyprus off the agenda: British and American relations at the United Nations, 1954-58', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 11, Iss. 3, (2000), pp.229-35; Dionysios Chourchoulis & Lykourgos Kourkouvelas, 'Greek perceptions of NATO during the Cold War', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol.12, Iss. 4, (2012), p.500.

¹² TNA FCO 141/4116. Meikle to Fletcher-Cooke, 26 March 1955; Foley (ed.), *Memoirs*, pp.18-19.

¹³ Foley, *Memoirs*, pp.18-19; TNA FCO 141/4115. Note on the Pan Agrarian Union of Cyprus (PEK), 15 February 1955; TNA CO 926/352. Special Branch, Orthodox Christian Union of Youth (OHEN), 21 July 1955; TNA CO 926/455/CIC(55)27(Final). CIC, The nature of EOKA, its political background and sources of direction, 18 October 1955.

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paramilitary training from a reserve officer in the Greek army and from two former members of the anti-Nazi Greek resistance.¹⁴

Grivas and British intelligence

The suggestion that the British knew of the conspiracy but deliberately allowed the plotters to proceed can be dismissed. In the early 1950s the British were transforming Cyprus into their main military base in the Middle East. Above all they wanted tranquillity on the island so they could complete their work quickly. Furthermore, after permitting Grivas to come to the island twice, by 1954 they had recognised him for the menace he was and banned him from coming a third time. The police knew of Grivas's visit to the island in July 1951 because he and his wife had applied for visas, which on this occasion were granted 'provided the husband abstains from any political activities. I understand that he is the leader of the well-known "X" organisation in Greece.'¹⁵ In his report on the political situation on the island for July 1951 the Governor reported that

On 8 July the arrival of General George Theodorou Grivas, a leader of the "Hites" (extremist Right-Wing organisation in Greece), gave rise to rumours that he had been invited here by the Ethnarchy to advise on the organisation of the National Youth movement on the model of the Hites organisation in Greece. So far, however, he has spent his whole time at Kalopanayiotis village where he has been taking the waters in company with his brother (who is a doctor established in Cyprus), and there is no evidence to indicate that his visit has any other object.¹⁶

As the police had failed to detect the real purpose of his visit he was granted a second visa in October 1952.¹⁷ But by June 1954, when Enosis agitation on the island had increased markedly, the police decided that his presence was undesirable. In the opinion of the Police Commissioner

This George Grivas is a potential menace. He was one of the leaders of the Greek "Hites" -- a militant nationalist organisation and, according to reports in 1950, a fanatical supporter of Enosis. In 1949 when there was trouble between nationalists and communists here the former started a "Hites" (or "X") organisation to counteract the activities of communist thugs who had

¹⁴ Karyos, 'EOKA, 1955-1959', pp.57-58; Varnavas, *Liberation Struggle of EOKA*, pp.38-9; TNA FCO 141/4313. Private Secretary[?] to COSHEG, 12 December 1955.

¹⁵ TNA FCO 141/4774. Application for the grant of a visa to an alien/aliens for entry into Cyprus, 4 June 1951.

¹⁶ TNA CO 537/7457. Governor to Colonial Office, 10 August 1951.

¹⁷ TNA FCO 141/4774. Application for the grant of a visa to an alien/aliens for entry into Cyprus, 6 September 1952.

been assaulting nationalists. It was reliably reported at the time that George Grivas had been asked to come here and help with the organisation. He did not come but was a visitor in 1952 and 1953 and there was unconfirmed information that he had come at the invitation of the nationalists to "organise" nationalist youth.¹⁸

When Grivas returned in November 1954, he had to do so in secret. The British had no wish to give him a free hand to plot against them.

SIME and SIS

The charge that the British were complacent bears closer examination. A report prepared in the government secretariat in 1949 on the Cyprus National Party insisted that although the party was hostile to the British, 'In the past the Nationalists have lacked that quality commonly known as guts possibly because they felt within their own ranks the absence of true leadership so necessary to the success of the team.' Despite their aggressive rhetoric, it 'is most unlikely that the Nationalists would ever resort to organised revolt in order to obtain their objective'.¹⁹ The authorities did believe that Greek Cypriots were capable of erupting into more or less spontaneous rioting on the model of 1931. But they did not think that they were capable of preparing and carrying out a well-organised campaign of underground violence without encouragement and assistance from outside the island and British intelligence resources were largely directed towards uncovering the sources of that assistance.

Both the Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) gathered information on threats that might damage British security on Cyprus. The former had a Security Liaison Officer (SLO) permanently stationed on the island. His role was not to duplicate the job of the police but to advise the local government on security matters and, 'to bring to the colony any information which might imply control of indigenous organisations from the outside.'²⁰ He was part of MI5's regional organisation, Security Intelligence, Middle East (SIME). Its headquarters had moved to Cyprus in the early 1950s and it was a clearing house where intelligence received from SLOs stationed in other British possessions in the Middle East was gathered, analysed, collated and then issued in the form of appreciations to the Director General of MI5 in London as well as to local regional military commanders and others who needed to know.²¹ The SIS had two sources of information. It had a

¹⁸ TNA FCO 141/4774. Application for the grant of a visa to an alien/aliens for entry into Cyprus, 22 June 1954.

¹⁹ TNA FCO 141/4281. K.E.K. (*Kypriakon Ethnikom Komma*) or The Cyprus National Party, 22 June 1949.

²⁰ TNA KV 4/472. Liddell diary, 29 November 1950; TNA KV 4/473. Guy Liddell diary, 7 August 1951.

²¹ TNA KV 4/235. Kellar to Jenkins et al, 29 May 1947; TNA KV 4/235. Magan to ? [T. A. Robertson], 24 September 1947; TNA KV 4/238. Magan to Stephens, SIME. Record Note, 28 April 1951.

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station in Athens where it ran a number of agents.²² It also controlled the Government Communications Head Quarters (GCHQ), the euphemism used to conceal the identity of the British government's code-breaking organisation. Much of its work remains shrouded in secrecy, but it is apparent that it was able to read at least some Turkish diplomatic codes in the early 1950s.²³ Given the importance that the British attached to Greek policy in relation to Cyprus, it would be surprising if its code-breakers did not also attack Greek diplomatic wireless traffic.²⁴ When the British moved their Middle East HQ to Cyprus in 1954, the Directors of MI5 and MI6 agreed that SIME would merge its headquarters with the SIS's equivalent in the region, CXME.²⁵ The result was that from 1954 onwards there was a single organisation able to collate intelligence from outside the island on the nationalist threat.

In a press release announcing the interception of the *St George*, the authorities insisted that the police had been able to intercept it on the basis of 'Information given to the Police locally'.²⁶ This was deliberately misleading because the authorities were anxious to conceal the fact that the information had in fact been supplied by the SIS from sources outside the island. At the beginning of November 1954 the Colonial Office informed Sir Robert Armitage, the Governor of Cyprus, that they had learnt 'from American sources' that agents of the National Committee for Cyprus (a cover name for the Liberation Committee) had 'recently sent a shipment of 500 guns (types unspecified) "via rescue boats" owned by Versleos [Vernikos?]. Guns were transferred to caiques for delivery to Cyprus contacts of Committee.'²⁷ At the end of the month the Colonial Office again received information, this time from an unnamed source being run by SIS in Athens, that an arms smuggling operation was about to take place near Paphos. The information was passed with the

²² Dorril, *MI6*, p.551; Keith Jeffery, *MI6. The History of the Secret to Intelligence Service 1909-1949*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp.674-675; Bijl, *Cyprus Emergency*, p.22 claims that MI6's agents included senior members of the Greek administration and senior army officers but cites no evidence in support.

²³ TNA KV 4/474. Liddell diary, 10 October 1952.

²⁴ David Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 23, Iss. 5, (Oct. 2008), p.690 suggests that they were doing so in the 1960s. Evidence that such work was also happening in the 1950s is attested to by the fact that in 1956 GCHQ were reluctant to release one of their Greek-speaking staff for service on Cyprus as an interrogator. See TNA FCO 141/4314. Colonial Office to Harding, 26 June 1956.

²⁵ TNA KV 4/436. Extract from SIME's monthly Report for December 1953.

²⁶ TNA FCO 141/4115. Armitage to Colonial Office, 27 January 1955.

²⁷ TNA FCO 141/4115. Colonial Office to Governor, 4 November 1954; TNA PREM 11/1247. Lennox-Boyd to Churchill, 11 December 1954. The exact nature of this American source is uncertain, but information may have been supplied by the CIA. They did provide the British with information about Makarios' fund raising activities during his visit to the USA in 1952. (TNA CO 926/11. British Embassy Washington to Foreign Office, 30 October 1952). The British certainly thought it worthwhile to keep the CIA informed about events on the island, and in March 1955 gave them, and the Turkish intelligence service, a memorandum on the capture of the *St George*. See TNA FCO 141/4116. SLO to Fletcher-Cooke, 29 March 1955.

warning that 'We would wish, in order to safeguard informant, to put out the impression that action resulted from information gained in Cyprus and not repeat not in Greece.'²⁸ The information was accurate. Armitage put in place a combined police, army, navy and RAF operation, which had the effect of scaring off the cacique's captain, who threw his cargo overboard and escaped.²⁹

It was striking testimony to the efficiency of SIS that at the beginning of December 1954 the Foreign Secretary, Sir Anthony Eden, could tell the Prime Minister that since 1952, SIS

has received a number of independent reports that a certain Colonel Grivas, a Greek of Cypriot origin, who during the war founded the "X" organisation in Greece, has formed an underground movement in Cyprus for the union of the Island with Greece. The activities of this organisation included gun-running. The information which we received last week from "C"'s new informant confirms this. According to this man, Grivas is now in Cyprus and as the last gun-running expedition was to take place at Paphos it seems possible that Grivas and his organisation located in the hilly country in the west of Cyprus which is within striking distance of Episcopi, the new British headquarters.³⁰

(The identity of the informant was unclear, but in February 1955 an underground newspaper, *Enosis*, identified him as, 'A renegade Cypriot named Kouliandris who works for the British Embassy in Athens.')

On 10 December the substance of the SIS appreciation of the threat to the island was transmitted to Armitage. It was coupled with a request that he report everything he knew about the plotters, and what steps his government was taking to stymie their activities.³²

The Cyprus Special Branch

The answer to the first question was not very much. The Cyprus police, like many other colonial police forces, was hamstrung at every turn by lack of money, with the result that it was small and poorly resourced. It was an indication of the weakness of their own intelligence machinery that, try as they might, the Cyprus authorities could

²⁸ TNA FCO 141/4115. Colonial Office to Governor, 24 November 1954.

²⁹ TNA FCO 141/4115. Governor to Colonial Office, 25 November 1954; TNA PREM 11/1247. Armitage to Colonial Secretary, 26 November 1954; Foley & Scobie, *The Struggle for Cyprus*, p.28.

³⁰ TNA PREM 11/1247. Eden to Churchill, 7 December 1954. 'C' was the cover-name for the head of SIS.

³¹ TNA CO 926/503. *Enosis*. Organ of the Struggling Cypriots, 10 February 1955.

³² TNA FCO 141/4115. Colonial Office to Governor, 10 December 1954.

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not confirm the reports emanating from SIS from sources on the island.³³ Until the eve of the insurgency the Cyprus police lacked a separate and dedicated Special Branch. Instead each of the force's six District Superintendents was responsible for collecting and reporting security intelligence, with the result that Cyprus did not have a central office under a senior officer who could give guidance and direction to the collection, collation and dissemination of security intelligence.³⁴ In the early 1950s the Commissioner of Police, J. H. Ashmore, had opposed the establishment of a separate Special Branch, not because he was complacent about the dangers facing the British administration, but because he believed that the most serious menace would take the form, not of an underground conspiracy, but of more or less spontaneous riots on the model of 1931. The island's local defence committee spent much of its time preparing plans to counter just such an eventuality and Ashmore insisted that any extra funding should be spent on increasing police manpower, improving training and providing the force with the transport and dedicated telephone lines linking police headquarters in Nicosia with all divisional police stations that they would need to meet a fresh outbreak of rioting.³⁵ Amongst the new equipment he purchased were four specially protected riot vans for use in the main towns.³⁶ Even so, poor pay and pensions, inadequate housing and low prestige meant that the police still had considerable difficulty in recruiting able men.³⁷ Events in December 1954 suggested that Ashmore's priorities might have been right. More or less spontaneous riots did take place in Nicosia and Limassol following the UN's refusal to vote in favour of Enosis. Despite the expansion of the force there were still too few policemen to cope and troops had to be summoned. In Limassol three rioters were wounded when soldiers opened fire.³⁸ This only served to focus police efforts in the opening months of 1955 still more closely on the threat from serious rioting. Police in each

³³ TNA FCO 141/4115. Governor to Colonial Office, 6 November 1954; TNA FCO 141/4115. SAS(P) to Fletcher-Cooke, 7 November 1955; TNA FCO 141/4115. Meikle to all officers in charge Divisions, 6 November 1954.

³⁴ TNA CO 926/98. Muller to Governor, 23 October 1952.

³⁵ TNA FCO 141/4108. Minutes by Governor, 26 October 1946; TNA FCO 141/4108. Minute by C. Donald, 29 October 1946; TNA FCO 141/4108. Minute by Donald to Hon. Colonial Secretary, 26 February, 25 April & 7 June 1947; TNA FCO 141/4110. Minutes of the meeting of the Defence Committee held at Government House, Nicosia, on 16 January 1948; TNA CO 537/2768. Governor to Creech Jones, 27 September 1948; TNA CO 537/6245. Governor to Creech Jones, 23 January & 21 June 1950; TNA CO 537/6245. Governor to Secretary of State, 31 August 1950.

³⁶ TNA CO 537/6245. Wright to Creech Jones, 23 January & 21 June 1950.

³⁷ Georgina Sinclair, *At the End of the Line. Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame, 1945-80* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); TNA CO 537/5440. Report of the Police Adviser to the Colonial Secretary, 28 December 1949; TNA CO 1045/678. Colonial Office, Colonial Reports. Cyprus, 1954 (London: HMSO, 1955); TNA CO 926/500. G. H. Robins, Annual Report on the Cyprus Police Force for the year 1954 (Nicosia: GPO, 1955), 28 July 1955; Anderson, 'Policing and communal conflict', p.191; TNA CO 1037/11. Report of the Cyprus Police Commission, 1956, 27 April 1956.

³⁸ TNA CO 926/412. Armitage to Colonial Office, 18 & 19 December 1954; TNA CO 926/412. Report on operations in aid of the civil power at Limassol on 18 and 19 December 1954; TNA CO 926/209. Political situation in Cyprus during the month of December 1954.

division held weekly riot drill training sessions and control rooms were established at Police Headquarters in Nicosia and at Divisional Headquarters, but the biggest single deficiency remained.³⁹ The force was still too small to cope with normal policing duties, never mind major disturbances.⁴⁰

In view of the priority Ashmore gave to improving his force's ability to deal with public order problems, resources devoted to improving security intelligence were bound to be curtailed and it was not until 1954 that a separate Special Branch was established.⁴¹ Its head, George Meikle, was well-qualified in one respect in that, unusually amongst British government officials, he could speak both Turkish and Greek. But in other respects he was less well-qualified in that he had no prior experience of Special Branch work, although he did attend a training course in London run by MI5. The Security Service also sent a training officer to Cyprus in early 1955 to provide a short course for some of his subordinates, and also lent some officers to assist in establishing the new organisation, including lending it a registrar who performed the essential but unglamorous task of overhauling its records and filing system. But it was not until February 1955 that the branch really began to function and to recruit informers, and its registry was still disorganised when the first EOKA bombs exploded.⁴²

The work of the nascent Special Branch was impeded by two problems that beset the police not only on Cyprus, but in many other British colonies. Whereas in Britain policemen were servants of the communities they policed and could usually expect at least a modicum of support from the public, such was not the case on Cyprus. There, as in other colonies, the police existed to maintain the authority of the colonial state.⁴³ A commission sent to the island in early 1956 to investigate the shortcomings of the police force highlighted what this meant when it suggested that a

lack of public confidence in the Force, and the failure of the Force to establish good relations with the public in general, may well have been one of the

³⁹ TNA CO 926/412. Armitage to Martin, 28 February /1955.

⁴⁰ TNA CO 926/500. G. H. Robins, Annual Report on the Cyprus Police Force for the year 1954 (Nicosia: GPO, 1955), 28 July 1955.

⁴¹ TNA CO 1035/98. MacDonald to Governor, 21 August 1954; TNA CO 1035/98. Lyttelton to Acting Governor, Cyprus, 6 October 1954.

⁴² TNA CO 926/98. Governor of Cyprus to Lyttelton, 12 February 1953; TNA CO 968/434. Extract from record of the Second Conference of Colonial Police Forces held July 1954; TNA CO 1035/98. Note on action taken to strengthen the Intelligence Organisation in Cyprus, nd, but. c. August 1955; TNA CO 1035/98. Final Report by the Security Adviser to the Cyprus Police Special Branch, nd but c. 30 April 1955.

⁴³ TNA CAB 129/76/C(55)89. Lord Chancellor, Security in the Colonies, 22 July 1955; TNA CO 926/424. Minute by Jeffries, 4 March 1955.

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causes of the almost complete absence of information coming in through the Police about the development of underground political activity.⁴⁴

The fact that the force also contained a disproportionately large number of Turkish Cypriots did nothing to diminish Greek Cypriot suspicions that the police were institutionally biased against them.⁴⁵ Second, Cyprus was descending into a crisis at a time when policy-makers in London felt their position everywhere was under a threat from communist subversion.⁴⁶ Cyprus had a thriving communist party, AKEL (Progressive Party for the Working People), which the authorities on the island had long seen as a serious danger.⁴⁷ In 1948 a Colonial Office official preparing a review for ministers on political developments in the colonies told a colleague on Cyprus that

we should find it useful if you could give us regularly any facts or inferences which may come to notice about the activities of the Communist Party in Cyprus. It is considered particularly important at the present moment for us to be well-informed here on the extent to which internal troubles of any kind in the Colonies generally can be said to be fermented by Communist Organisations either inside or outside the Colony.⁴⁸

The result was that much of the colony's exiguous domestic intelligence resources were directed at AKEL, rather than at the nationalists. By April 1953 MI5's representative on Cyprus had amassed a card index containing the personal details of 5,500 known or suspected communists on the island, but only 1500 known or suspected nationalist agitators. Each card contained details of the suspects name; maiden name or wife's own name; aliases; sex; nationality, both at present or at birth; religion; date and place of birth; addresses with dates; identity document; reasons for carding; action to be taken; physical description with a photo if available; last employment; and known associates.⁴⁹

The upshot was that the police could gather little more than gossip from local sources, but it too highlighted the fact that if there was trouble, it would emanate from Athens. In September 1954 a former Greek Cypriot member of the Governor's

⁴⁴ TNA CO 1037/11. Report of the Cyprus Police Commission, 1956, 27 April 1956.

⁴⁵ TNA CO 926/500. G. H. Robins, Annual Report on the Cyprus Police Force for the year 1954 (Nicosia: GPO, 1955), 28 July 1955; Andrew R. Novo, 'Friend or foe? The Cyprus Police Force and the EOKA Insurgency', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 23, Iss. 3, (2012), p.415.

⁴⁶ Rory Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies. British Intelligence and Counterinsurgency* (London, Hurst & Co., 2013), pp. 80-82.

⁴⁷ Dimitrakis, *Military Intelligence in Cyprus*, pp.49-60, pp.66-68.

⁴⁸ TNA CO 968/434. Bennett to Richards, 30 April 1948.

⁴⁹ TNA KV 4/436. A. N. Druce, Defence Security Officer, Nicosia, 25 April 1953; TNA KV 4/436. Sample Cards, nd.

Executive Council warned a Colonial Office official that it was possible that ‘that irresponsibles [sic] from Greece might get into the island and perpetrate some violent act.’⁵⁰ Armitage himself reported in October that there were unconfirmed reports of arms smuggling from Greece, ‘coupled with rumours of intending infiltration of Greek saboteurs’.⁵¹ In November two reports reached the police indicating the possibility that underground groups organised and trained in Greece might soon appear on the island. A visitor from Greece had insisted that if Enosis was not achieved

commandos will come from Greece secretly to organise and carry out acts of sabotage and would organise Cypriots to collaborate with them. The informant did not know whether this was likely to have the backing of the Greek Government or of certain organisations in Greece but he had clearly been influenced by Athens Radio towards believing that there were organisations in Greece ready to carry out this sort of work.

The second informer said that he had heard from high figures in politics and other prominent people

that unless a reasonable solution is reached on the Cyprus question a number of aged and infirm Greek ex-service officers, who were amongst those who recently gave blood and swore to fight for the liberation of Cyprus, would, after consultation with some people in Cyprus, parachute into various places in the island and “act.”⁵²

The Commissioner of Police conceded that the information had been passed to the police in good faith, but believed that

their sources may have put it out with the intention of fostering a “war of nerves” or of demonstrating the emotional attitude of some sections of the Greek population towards Cyprus. The probability of some irresponsible activity of this sort has not, however, been overlooked. Attempts are being made to check the information and assess its value.⁵³

The reports were dated 12 November, only two days after Grivas had landed on the island.

⁵⁰ TNA FCO 141/4280. Morris to Armitage, 8 September 1954.

⁵¹ TNA CO 926/209. Political situation in Cyprus during the month of October 1954.

⁵² TNA FCO 141/4103. Ashmore to Fletcher-Cooke, 12 November 1954.

⁵³ TNA FCO 141/4115. Extract: Commissioner Police, Report, 18 November 1954.

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Armitage's reaction to the peremptory order he received from London on 10 December asking him to report on the steps he was taking to prevent any plot coming to fruition was to hold a meeting with his senior officials to co-ordinate measures to intercept the smugglers and arrest any reception committee waiting for them. The meeting agreed that the next time information was received that a caique was on its way, Special Branch would send plain clothes officers to likely landing areas, the army would man a chain of half a dozen radar stations around the island, the navy would summon radar-equipped warships to monitor the situation at sea, and the RAF would 'put up a spotting plane but the reconnaissance shall be as brief as possible so as not to scare the smugglers away.'⁵⁴ Their operations would be co-ordinated from a central control room in Nicosia manned by the police, and the three services, and supervised by a senior officer of the administration.⁵⁵ In the meantime police and customs officers were told to watch for suspicious vessels and plans were prepared in co-ordination with the services to intercept any that approached the coast. Grivas's description and photograph was circulated and the police began enquiries to discover whether he was on the island. But they drew a blank.⁵⁶ After the meeting of senior officials held to examine SIS reports of gun running and the landing of saboteurs, John Fletcher-Cooke, the island's Colonial Secretary and head of its civil service, concluded that

there has not been a thread of evidence locally in support of the allegations contained in the information received from Athens covering the following points:-

- (1) That arms have already been landed in Cyprus;
- (2) that arms were going to be landed in Cyprus on the 24th – 25th of November;
- (3) that agents have already been or are about to be smuggled into Cyprus;
- (4) that there is some organisation preparing for sabotage here. I do not say that none of these things have happened or are happening; I merely emphasise that there has not been any evidence at all collected locally in support of these reports from outside Cyprus.⁵⁷

His interpretation was not that the island's domestic intelligence service had failed to find the evidence because of its inherent defects, but that SIS had been duped, for

⁵⁴ TNA FCO 141/4115. Minutes of a meeting held in Government House at 10 AM on Friday, 10 December 1954, to discuss measures to deal with the smuggling of saboteurs and arms into Cyprus.

⁵⁵ TNA FCO 141/4115. Fletcher-Cooke to Robins, 14 December 1954.

⁵⁶ TNA FCO 141/4115. Governor to Colonial Office, 11 December 1954.

⁵⁷ TNA FCO 141/4115. Fletcher-Cooke to Morris, 13 December 1954.

it would have been the easiest thing in the world for the informant at the Athens end, if he knew that a caique was due to come to Cyprus on an ordinary smuggling run (i.e. not arms but say cigarette papers which is a favourite with smugglers here) to suggest (in return for financial remuneration) that the caique was in fact carrying arms.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, when another report was received from Athens indicating that a landing would take place between 19 and 21 January 1955, the Commissioner of Police put the plans for 'Operation Purse-net', into action.⁵⁹ On 16 January he issued orders that contained a detailed description of the caique, the map reference of the probable landing beach, the signals that the reception party on shore would use to guide it to the beach and the probable time that unloading would begin.⁶⁰ The security forces were in position every night from 19 to 24 January and observed a series of flashing green lights from the shore, but the *St George* did not appear until 25 January.⁶¹ An RAF reconnaissance aircraft spotted it at 15:30 hours, and it was then tracked by radar on the destroyer *HMS Comet*. It reached a beach near Paphos at 21:17 hours. The police gave the crew and reception party forty minutes to begin unloading before arresting them. The *St George* tried to break out to sea but was intercepted by *Comet*, whose crew boarded the vessel and arrested three crewmen. The police had already arrested two of the crew and all of the eight men of the reception party.⁶²

Fletcher-Cooke's scepticism had been confounded, but although the arrest of the ships' crew and the reception committee yielded a good deal of intelligence about the smuggling operation itself, it produced little information about conspirators on the island.⁶³ This was partly because extracting intelligence from the prisoners and their documents was a slow business. As Robins explained, 'the staff to carry out the interrogation and translate statements and to examine documents is extremely small.'⁶⁴ At the beginning of February MI5 sent two trained interrogators to the island, but they did not arrive until 8 February and even then they could not break down their most valuable prisoner.⁶⁵ The leader of the reception party was Socrates

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ TNA FCO 141/4115. Meeting at Police HQ, Nicosia, on 13 January 1955.

⁶⁰ TNA FCO 141/4115. Police Operation Order "Purse-Net", 16 January 1955.

⁶¹ TNA PREM 11/1247. Lennox-Boyd to Churchill, 19 January 1955; TNA PREM 11/1247. Lennox-Boyd to Churchill, 20 January /1955; TNA FCO 141/4115. CX/Middle East to Cyprus, 22 January 1955; TNA FCO 141/4115. CX/Middle East to London, 23 January 1954; TNA FCO 141/4115. CX/Middle East to London, 25 January 1955.

⁶² TNA FCO 141/4115. CX/Middle East to London: Armitage to Colonial Office, 26 January 1955; TNA ADM 1/26100. Cmdr R.C. Burton, *HMS Comet*, to Flag Officer Middle East, Cyprus, 26 January 1955.

⁶³ TNA FCO 141/4115. SLO to the Chairman Cyprus Intelligence Committee, 10 March 1955.

⁶⁴ TNA FCO 141/4115. Commissioner of Police to Fletcher-Cooke, 28 January 1955.

⁶⁵ TNA FCO 141/4115. Commissioner of Police to Fletcher-Cooke, 9 February 1955.

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Lozides, a thirty-year old lawyer. His interrogator found in him an 'intelligent man, who was caught out at no point and too plainly believed with unqualified sincerity in his cause. I found in him no indication whatever of a thug or paid adventurer.'⁶⁶ He admitted that he had first landed in Cyprus three months previously, but misleadingly insisted that he had landed alone.⁶⁷ He made no mention of Grivas, and his silence left his interrogators with the impression that, with Lozides in their hands, they had captured the organiser of the armed conspiracy on the island.⁶⁸ The interrogators also focused much of their work on a fruitless effort to extract information from their prisoners that would implicate the Greek government in the conspiracy, information they hoped to be able to use to discredit the latter if they raised the Cyprus question once again at the United Nations.⁶⁹

But when they did extract information about conspirators on the island, they acted.⁷⁰ Lozides had been General Secretary of PEK, the men who had composed the reception committee were all members of that union, and now evidence emerged that its current General Secretary was also implicated in the conspiracy.⁷¹ Special Branch therefore concluded that PEK was at the centre of the conspiracy, and on 27 January the police raided its offices in eight different towns, captured a large haul of documents, and arrested four further suspects whom Lozides admitted he had recruited.⁷² But they subsequently had to be released when no evidence could be found to implicate them.⁷³ None of the prisoners mentioned Grivas or implicated him at any point in their activities. By mid-March the SLO and Special Branch knew that they were confronted by an efficient organisation in Greece that had already despatched cargoes of arms and explosives to Cyprus. It had ample funds, Lozides was the leader of the underground conspiracy on the island, and its aim was to use violence to mobilise popular support for Enosis. But information about how many people were involved in the conspiracy, and where their arms and explosives were stockpiled was vague. Perhaps only 50 people were deeply implicated, but as many as

⁶⁶ TNA FCO 141/4115. Anon, Final interview with Socrates Lozides on 16 February 1955.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ TNA FCO 141/4115. Ray, Digest of information obtained by interrogation up to 24:00 hours on 28 January 1955, 29 January 1955.

⁶⁹ TNA FCO 141/4115. CX/Middle East to Fletcher-Cooke, 27 January 1955; TNA FCO 141/4115. Colonial Secretary to Armitage, 1, 3 & February & 19 March 1955; TNA FCO 141/4116. Armitage to Colonial Office, 14 May 1955.

⁷⁰ TNA FCO 141/4115. Ray, Digest of information obtained by interrogation up to 24:00 hours on 29 January 1955, 30 January 1955.

⁷¹ TNA FCO 141/4115. Ray, Digest of information obtained by interrogation up to 24:00 hours on 26 January 1955, 27 January 1955; TNA FCO 141/4115. Ray, Digest of information obtained by interrogation up to 24:00 hours on 27 January 1955, 28 January 1955.

⁷² TNA FCO 141/4115. Minute by Robins, 28 January 1955; TNA FCO 141/4115. Robins to Hon. Colonial Secretary, 2 February 1955; TNA FCO 141/4115. Armitage to Colonial Office, 3 February 1955.

⁷³ TNA FCO 141/4115. Armitage to Colonial Office, 12 February 1955.

800 might have had some degree of involvement. Information about their whereabouts was even less precise. Their conclusion was that

It can be said that the organisation, which evidently exists in Greece with a counter-part in Cyprus, is daring and highly organised, imbued with a high sense of security, apparently well supplied with funds, and potentially a grave threat to security.⁷⁴

It was only in late March, just days before the start of EOKA's campaign, that, 'a source from which we hope to get more details in due course', revealed the link between PEON and the conspiracy. The same source revealed the extent of Makarios's involvement.⁷⁵ But this was too little and too late. Special Branch had proven itself to be incapable of providing the actionable intelligence that the police would have needed to nip the EOKA insurgency in the bud.

Conclusion

The charge laid at the door of the administration that they knew of the EOKA conspiracy but, for their own nefarious purposes, deliberately allowed the conspirators to go about their business unhampered, cannot be substantiated in light of the new evidence found in recently released FCO's files. But the charge that the British intelligence system on the island was under-resourced must be admitted, although the fact that the authorities were apparently slow to establish an independent Special Branch was not because they were complacent. Like most colonial police forces in the immediate post-war period, the Cyprus police was small and poorly equipped. The 1931 riots were seared into the collective memory of the administration. When they thought of trouble, they anticipated it would take a similar form. Their first priority was, therefore, to ensure that they had a police force capable of dealing with major public order disturbances. The riots of December 1954 in Nicosia and Limassol only served to encourage them to redouble their efforts, and preparations to counter a repetition of such disturbances continued into early 1955 even after the *St George* had been intercepted. This was not an entirely mistaken set of priorities, for Grivas did indeed plan to organise riots in the island's towns.

Nonetheless, the immaturity of the Cyprus Special Branch did contribute to a major intelligence failure. The work of SIS ensured that the authorities were well informed about those parts of the Enosis conspiracy that emanated from Greece. However, that very success also encouraged them to see Athens, rather than Cyprus itself, as the epicentre of the preparations for any revolt. Some senior officials on the island were sceptical of reports linking arms smugglers from Greece and conspirators

⁷⁴ TNA FCO 141/4115. Armitage to Colonial Office, 19 March 1955.

⁷⁵ TNA FCO 141/4116. Meikle to Fletcher-Cooke, 26 March 1955.

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within the Greek Cypriot community. But their scepticism was dissipated by the interception of the *St George* and the arrest its crew and the reception committee. Even so, Special Branch was too immature to bring to the conspiracy on the island the same level of practised efficiency that the SIS exhibited in Athens. The result was that the information that the police extracted from its prisoners was both incomplete and produced too late to be acted upon, and Grivas was able to complete his preparations more or less undisturbed.