

# Conspiracy Theories and the Decolonisation of Cyprus under the Weight of Historical Evidence, 1955 - 1959

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## Abstract

*A commonly held Greek Cypriot opinion is that the EOKA struggle failed to achieve its objective of enosis because of some dark machination. According to this view, the 'heroic' struggle of EOKA was frustrated either because of the inept handling of the Cyprus problem by the Greek government and/or Makarios or because of some international intrigue which undermined the 'fair' demand for enosis resulting in the reluctant independence of 1960. This paper will assess these claims in light of the available historical evidence and demonstrate that they are fundamentally flawed. It will argue that no conspiracy took place in the 1950s against the Greek Cypriots and that independence was a consequence of the forces that were set in motion in 1955. Finally it will discuss both the reasons for the proliferation of such theories and whether there is a need for mainstream history to respond to such theories.*

**Keywords:** Greek Cypriot attitude, conspiracy theories, EOKA struggle, criticism, historical evidence

The decolonisation of Cyprus was a complex and tortuous process which did not turn out as the Greek Cypriots, the majority ethnic group on the island, had hoped for. On 1 April 1955, the Greek Cypriot paramilitary organisation EOKA<sup>1</sup> launched a campaign that aimed to end British rule and unite Cyprus with Greece. However, the outcome of the EOKA struggle was the establishment of an independent bi-communal republic with Turkish Cypriot partnership under the international guarantee of Britain, Greece and Turkey.<sup>2</sup> In response to the frustration of *enosis* (union with Greece), which was a long cherished Greek Cypriot national aspiration, different conspiracy theories have emerged to explain how events led to the reluctant republic which was established in 1960. However in the academic literature which examines the EOKA struggle there is no substantial discussion of such conspiracy theories.<sup>3</sup> This is due to lack of archival

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1 Εθνική Οργάνωση Κυπρίων Αγώνιστών (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters).

2 The Turkish Cypriots were the minority ethnic group. In 1956 out of a total population of 528,879 the Greek Cypriots were 416,986 (78.8%) while the Turkish Cypriots were 92,642 (17.5%). *Cyprus Population Estimates, October 1956*, Cyprus Government (Nicosia, 1957).

3 For example see, N. Crawshaw (1978) *The Cyprus Revolt*, London: Allen and Unwin; H. Faustmann, (1999) 'Divide and Quit? The History of British Colonial Rule in Cyprus, 1878-1960', PhD thesis, University of Mannheim; E. Hatzivassiliou (1997) *Britain and the International Status of Cyprus, 1955-59*, Minneapolis:

evidence to sustain such theories rather than an academic oversight. Thus, although mainstream scholarship rejects conspiracy theories as an interpretive narrative for understanding the EOKA struggle, these theories have and still influence Greek Cypriot popular perceptions of how the Cypriot independence was achieved despite the false assumptions they make. The present paper will investigate the claims of two of the most dominant conspiracy theories pertaining to the decolonisation of Cyprus and examine them mainly in light of primary documents and scholarly interpretations of the period under investigation. It will argue that these theories are flawed because they are not consistent with the historical record and the evidence available. The final part will discuss briefly the reasons behind the proliferation of such theories and reflect on the question of whether mainstream historians should challenge them.

A conspiracy theory that one encounters when studying the EOKA struggle from a Greek Cypriot perspective, is the one which claims that the treaties of Zurich-London, which established an independent Cyprus, were the result of either the Greek government or Makarios selling out on the vision of *enosis*. According to this theory the two culprits could have achieved *enosis* if they had not settled for independence. This theory was advocated by Grivas himself, but also by other EOKA contemporaries and their supporters.<sup>4</sup> It argues that the signing of the agreements was not only a mistake, but the result of a plot to undermine the 'heroic' struggle of EOKA which aimed to achieve *enosis*. However this theory contradicts the historical record and glosses over the actual conditions which led the Greek government and Makarios to accept the compromise of Zurich. Greece had always been reluctant to get involved in the Cyprus affair. After the end of the Second World War successive Greek governments maintained a cautious attitude on the issue of Cyprus. When the Greek Cypriots sent a delegation to Greece to raise awareness about the plebiscite, that was held in January 1950 which called for *enosis*, behind close doors the delegation was told: 'Today Greece breathes with two lungs; one British, the other American. Therefore she cannot afford to

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University of Minnesota and (2002) *The Cyprus Question, 1878-1960: The Constitutional Aspect*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota; C. Nicolet (2001) *United States Policy Towards Cyprus, 1954-1974: Removing the Greek-Turkish Bone of Contention*, Mannheim: Bibliopolis; R. Holland (1998) *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; DW. Markides (2001) *Cyprus, 1957-1963: From Colonial Conflict to Constitutional Crisis. The Key Role of the Municipal Issue*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

4 G. Grivas (1961) *Απομνημονεύματα Αγώνος ΕΟΚΑ, 1955-1959* [Memoirs of the EOKA Struggle, 1955-1959], Athens, pp. 374-386. At different points Grivas suggests that the conduct of the Greek diplomacy was suspicious and dishonest. Papagathagelou, a priest who was involved in EOKA asserts that *enosis* was 'sold out' for nothing, implying that there was betrayal from the Athens government and Makarios; P. Papagathagelou (1995) *Η Μαρτυρία Μου, Πως έζησα την προπαρασκευή και τον αγώνα της ΕΟΚΑ* [My Witness, How I lived the preparation and the struggle of EOKA], Nicosia: Έκδοση Ιδρύματος Απελευθερωτικού Αγώνα ΕΟΚΑ 1955-59 [Foundation of the Liberating Struggle of EOKA 1955-1959], p. 509. Leonidou, asserts that the lack of firmness by the Greek government neutralised the advantages gained by the EOKA struggle, an argument essentially reproduced from Grivas' memoirs; L.F. Leonidou (1997) *Γεώργιος Γριβας Διγενής* [Georgios Grivas Dighenis], Nicosia: L. Leonidou, p. 481.

be suffocated because of the Cyprus problem'.<sup>5</sup> Makarios, who after he became Archbishop in 1950 launched a sustained effort to convince the Greek government to recourse to the UN on behalf of Cyprus, was met with similar comments both in 1951 and in 1952.<sup>6</sup> Characteristically Sophocles Venizelos the foreign minister of Greece told Makarios: 'I will not allow you to direct the foreign policy of Greece'.<sup>7</sup>

Only when Field Marshal Papagos came to power in November 1952 did the Greek government adopt a more assertive policy on Cyprus. Even then that was partly in response to Eden's refusal to talk to Papagos about Cyprus which infuriated deeply Papagos and paved the way to the first Greek recourse to the UN.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless Papagos did not approve of paramilitary action in Cyprus against the British. Papagos' secret police kept a careful watch on Grivas' clandestine activities and even issued an arrest warrant against him.<sup>9</sup> It was only when the diplomatic options were thoroughly exhausted that Papagos finally acquiesced to violence.<sup>10</sup> Yet according to Kranidiotis the Field-Marshal on his death bed appeared to have second thoughts about the struggle but by then he was too infirm to act on them.<sup>11</sup>

Why were successive Greek governments cautious in embracing the cause of Cyprus? The reasons behind this caution were grounded in the Cold War realities and the greater strategic needs of Greece. The Greek civil war (1946-1949) had been won with American and British aid. Therefore Greece was reluctant to antagonise Britain, which clearly wanted to retain Cyprus, and the US, which did not want disunity among its allies, by raising the Cyprus problem. Greek reliance on its British and American allies did not end with the conclusion of the civil war but continued unabated because of the 'menace from the north'. This was a fusion of the old regional rivalries with other Balkan states and the Cold War polarisation. Yugoslavia had aided the communist guerrillas during the civil war but even more dangerous was the Bulgarian threat. Bulgaria traditionally coveted an outlet to the Mediterranean in the shape of Salonica, the second biggest Greek city, and for this reason invaded Greece on three different occasions in 1913, 1916 and 1941. The fact that Bulgaria was now a Soviet satellite turned Greece's northern border into a long vulnerable defence line. The need to defend this border dominated early Greek Cold War

5 Quoted in P. Terlexis (1968) 'Greece's Policy and Attitude towards the Problem of Cyprus', New York University PhD, pp. 90-91.

6 Athens to Foreign Office, no. 25, 26 March 1951, FO 371/95133; E. Averoff (1986) *Lost Opportunities: The Cyprus Question*, New Rochelle, New York: A.D. Caratzas, p. 10.

7 Quoted in P. Terlexis, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

8 I. Stefanides (1999) *Isle of Discord*, New York: New York University Press, pp. 47-66.

9 Grivas, *Memoirs*, p. 18; A. Azinas (2001) *50 Χρόνια Σιωπής* [50 Years of Silence], Nicosia: Airwaves Ltd., pp. 275-276.

10 N. Crawshaw (1978) *The Cyprus Revolt*, p. 99; S. Xydis (1967) *Cyprus: Conflict and Conciliation*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, p. 72.

11 N. Kranidiotis (1981) *Δύσκολα Χρόνια* [Difficult Years], Athens: Estia, p. 97.

strategy, which was bent on the preservation of the *status quo*, and made imperative the need to join NATO in order to counterbalance the pressure on its northern border.<sup>12</sup>

There were also domestic considerations in Greece that militated against an adventurous foreign policy. After the civil war there was urgent need to restore the economy and rebuild the country's damaged infrastructure. Economic weakness was coupled with chronic political weakness. Since the end of the civil war the country was ruled by a string of weak coalition governments which did not have the political capital or will to embark on such an ambitious project, especially given the fragile international position of Greece.

Finally Greece had to nurse a burgeoning but delicate Greco-Turkish friendship that was partly stimulated by the common Soviet threat and their simultaneous accession into NATO. In the early 1950s, officially at least, Turkey showed little interest in the Cypriot issue even though Turkish emotion was brewing both on the island and in Turkey itself.<sup>13</sup> In this sense it was wiser for the Greek government to avoid agitation over Cyprus lest it would provoke the interest and latent rivalry of Turkey.

In the greater scheme of things Cyprus was only one of the many issues which preoccupied Greek foreign policy. Raising the Cyprus issue would alienate Greece within NATO at a time when NATO membership was considered to be the cornerstone of Greek foreign and security policy. The Greek Cypriots consistently failed to appreciate that Greece had other objectives and policies beyond the Cyprus problem. They could not understand why Greece was reluctant to bend its entire foreign policy toward this end and refused to acknowledge the possibility that Greece might lack the capacity to achieve this aim. The attitude of Premier Constantine Karamanlis, who essentially handled the Cyprus problem after the death of Papagos until the signing of the agreements is telling: 'I will not blow up Greece for their sake! The Cypriots must cease to think that they can dictate to me the policy of Greece. I determine Greek policy and the limits within which it operates'.<sup>14</sup> This was consistent with the attitude of previous Greek prime ministers who were reluctant to antagonise Britain and risk Greece's national interests for the sake of Cyprus.

As the EOKA struggle started to unfold the cautious stance of the Greek government proved to be correct. Greece was too weak to promote the cause of *enosis*. Efforts in the UN to secure favourable resolutions proved to be in vain. Instead Britain was capable of blocking such moves. The futility of the UN strategy was underlined further by the fact that it was not an international court of justice which could issue legally binding decisions. Britain aiming to counterbalance the Greek claims introduced Turkey as an interested party in the dispute. This eventually transformed

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12 E. Hatzivassiliou (2006) *Greece and the Cold War, Frontline State, 1952-1967*, London: Routledge, pp. 5-11.

13 Political situation report September 1953, CO 926/20.

14 A. Vlachos (1986) *Μια φορά κι ένα καιρό ένας διπλωμάτης* τόμος 4 [Once upon a time there was a diplomat, Vol. 4], Athens: Estia, p. 233.

the whole issue into a full-blown international dispute but also led Britain to increasingly rely more on Turkey to maintain its position in Cyprus. As a result Britain made concessions to the Turkish side which undermined the Greek Cypriot demand for *enosis* and eventually outflanked entirely the EOKA struggle.

A crucial turning point was the statement on double self-determination that was made in the House of Commons on 19 December 1956 by the Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd:

'Any exercise of self-determination should be effected in such a manner that the Turkish Cypriot community, no less than the Greek Cypriot community, shall, in the special circumstances of Cyprus, be given freedom to decide for themselves their future status. In other words, Her Majesty's Government recognise that the exercise of self-determination in such a mixed population must include partition among the eventual options.'<sup>15</sup>

The aim of this statement was to make the Radcliffe constitution, which was to be submitted for the consideration of the Cypriot communities, more palatable to the Turkish Cypriots and use the spectre of partition as a stick against the demand for *enosis*. If partition would be included in the possible outcomes of a plebiscite, then the Greek Cypriots could choose to remain under British sovereignty, while it would offer the necessary safeguard to enable the Turkish government to give its consent.<sup>16</sup>

The introduction of the idea of double self-determination struck a mortal blow to the idea of *enosis* for two reasons. Firstly, it outflanked the demand for *enosis* because insistence for the application of the principle of self-determination could now lead to partition. This undermined the EOKA struggle and made its continuation counter-productive because it was more likely to lead to partition rather than *enosis*.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, Britain by acknowledging that partition was a possible outcome for the future of Cyprus, even if it was an expedient tactic rather than genuine intention, encouraged Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots to work toward that objective. After the release of Makarios in the spring of 1957, Turkey progressively hardened its attitude on the Cyprus issue and started to demand partition as the only possible outcome of this dispute.<sup>18</sup> At the same time the Turkish Cypriots launched their own counter-campaign for partition which complicated the political situation on the island immensely.<sup>19</sup> After the emergence of the Turkish demand for

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15 *House of Commons Debates* vol. 562, cc 1268.

16 Minute by Sir John Martin titled Partition, 7 June 1956, CO 926/277.

17 E. Hatzivassiliou (1997) *Britain and the International Status of Cyprus, 1955-59*, p. 98.

18 Ankara embassy to Foreign Office, no. 288, 24 March 1957, CO 926/949; RGC 10344/38E Foreign Office to Ankara, no. 799, 9 April 1957, FO 371/130095; RGC 1072/38G Ankara to Foreign Office, no. 362, 9 April 1957, FO 371/130138; RGC 10344/35B From Ankara to Foreign Office, no. 313, 29 March 1957, FO 371/130095.

19 RGC 1782/44, Turkish News Bulletin, 3 May 1957, FO 371/130164; DW. Markides (2001) *Cyprus, 1957-1963: From Colonial Conflict to Constitutional Crisis*, p. 16; Lennox-Boyd to Harding, no. 1308, 14 August 1957, CO 926/615.

partition *enosis* became impossible. Short of an overwhelming military victory – which was beyond EOKA's capacity anyway – against both the British Security Forces and the Turkish Cypriots, *enosis* was no longer feasible.

The tipping point for the Greek side, which forced the switch to independence as a compromise in order to avert an even worse solution, was the Macmillan plan. Briefly the plan envisioned the separation of the island's population into two nominal communities – Greek and Turkish Cypriot – which were given equal rights. Both communities were accorded 'self-government and communal autonomy' which translated into a separate House of Representatives for each community. Members of either community would have the right to double nationality, Greek or Turkish, while retaining the British one. The most problematic provision was the legal standing which was conceded to Turkey in Cypriot internal affairs. Both Greek and Turkish governments were given the right to appoint special representatives, to help in the administration of the island. This meant that Turkey acquired a legal stake in Cyprus. Matters pertaining to foreign policy, internal security and defence were reserved to the Governor, who would seek the advice of the Greek and the Turkish representatives on such matters.<sup>20</sup> At the end of a seven-year period, Britain would ask Greece and Turkey to share sovereignty of the island, except for the military enclaves reserved for strategic reasons, thus leading to a tridominium.<sup>21</sup>

The pending implementation of the Macmillan plan left the Greek government and Makarios with few options. There was little that could be achieved in the UN. As the British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd told his Greek counterpart Evangelos Averoff, no recourse to the UN could change the British position which was to press ahead with the implementation of the plan: 'We have no other choice but to apply it. Do you wish to accept it? We shall be happy. If you do not, we shall implement it with the Turks as best we can. Sooner or later a part of the population will help us. In one way or another we must close this problem'.<sup>22</sup>

Continuation of the EOKA struggle now bore the danger of partition because further violence in Cyprus could trigger the British decision for the division of the island. When the Cyprus Committee was established in April 1957, its mission was 'to review the implications of a Partition of Cyprus'.<sup>23</sup> The Turkish Cypriots, however, were a majority at virtually no part of the island because of its ethnic composition, which meant that any partition would involve substantial forced migration across superficially created borders.<sup>24</sup> Yet all British plans after the Radcliffe constitution included the promise of partition in order to gain Turkish endorsement. Nevertheless,

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20 Draft White Paper on Cyprus, 9 May 1958, CAB 129/93 C 102 (58).

21 Minute 2, 13 May 1958, CC 42 (58) CAB 128/32.

22 S.G. Xydis (1973) *Cyprus Reluctant Republic*, The Hague: Mouton, p. 236.

23 Cabinet Cyprus Committee, 'A note by the Secretary', C.Y. (0) (57) 1, 4 April, CAB 21/4267.

24 A Memorandum on Possible Schemes for the Partition of Cyprus, Secretariat, Nicosia, 10 November 1956, CO 926/277.

the cabinet concluded that outright partition remained a last resort option in the face of protracted terrorism, reasoning that the British government 'could not carry indefinitely the burden of sole responsibility for the administration of the island'.<sup>25</sup> This reasoning was reiterated on 22 January 1958: 'If terrorism broke out again in Cyprus, we could not afford indefinitely to devote military resources to its repression'.<sup>26</sup> This warning was conveyed to the Greek government and Makarios in February 1958 when a British delegation travelled to Athens for consultations and was later repeated in May 1958.<sup>27</sup> It is also pertinent to point out that when the Cabinet discussed the Macmillan plan in May 1958 it concluded that:

'If, however, the plan failed and it became necessary to seek a final solution of the problem of Cyprus on other lines, we should regard ourselves as bound by our previous assurances in regard to the application of the principle of self-determination'.<sup>28</sup>

In other words if EOKA was to resist the plan through widespread violence destabilising the island further it would force the British to divide the island and retreat. By 1958 if not earlier, the EOKA struggle had become a liability and was more likely to contribute to the partition of Cyprus rather than its union with Greece.

The Karamanlis administration now had two options: either to risk an all out war with Turkey or to climb down from the demand of Cypriot self-determination. A war with Turkey had too many risks and it was not clear what the attitude of Britain would be. Additionally, it would definitely further alienate Greece within NATO if not lead to its expulsion. There was no guarantee that Bulgaria and the Soviet Union would not try to take advantage of this situation. Furthermore it was far from clear if Greece could impose a conclusive military victory on Turkey in order to force it to accept *enosis*. Clearly the risks were too great and the possible gains did not outweigh the sacrifices Greece would have to exert. For Karamanlis there was only one option and that was to abandon the demand of *enosis* and seek a compromise solution. Makarios was more reluctant to accept the realities of the issue but eventually declared his support for an independent Cyprus in order to avert the implementation of the Macmillan plan. Once the Archbishop gave his blessing to this compromise Karamanlis seized the opportunity of the Greco-Turkish rapprochement that started to blossom in December 1958, when Averoff and his Turkish counterpart Fatin Zorlu met secretly to discuss the Cyprus issue.

The treaties of Zurich-London were the price the Greek side had to pay in order to avoid the Macmillan plan which was so detrimental to the Greek Cypriots. The accusation that either the

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25 Minute 6, CC 51 (57) CAB 128/31, 11 July 1957.

26 Minute 5, CC 8 (58) CAB 128/32, 22 January 1958.

27 Record of conversation between the Governor of Cyprus and Archbishop Makarios, in Athens 13 February 1958, RGC 1782/9, FO 371/130132; Record of meeting with Greek Prime Minister, 12 February 1958, RGC 10319/66, FO 371/136306; Foreign Office to Athens embassy, telegram no. 622, 7 June 1958, PREM 11/2262.

28 Minute 2, CC 42 (58) CAB 128/32, 13 May 1958.

Greek government or Makarios could do something more but instead chose to 'betray' the Greek Cypriots and the cause of *enosis* must be dismissed as false. The advocates of this theory must explain what more could be done. Grivas said that he was prepared to fight to the last man,<sup>29</sup> but as it has been argued above such self-consuming heroism would merely accelerate the advent of partition since there was no chance of victory. Politics after all is the art of the possible and this must be borne in mind when the treaties are explained away as 'treason'. Understandably the treaties were not to the liking of the majority of the Greek Cypriots but this does not answer the question: what else could be done? The other problem with this theory is that there is no real motive for either the Greek government or Makarios to simply accept these agreements if indeed they had the power not to do so. Why would any Greek government balk at the prospect of *enosis*? An adequate motive for this action must be provided. The treaties simply reflected the weakness of the Greek side and not some dark conspiracy which for an unspecified reason chose to frustrate *enosis*. The only conspiracy, if this word can be used, which merits further study is the case whether there was substantial disagreement between the Archbishop and the Greek government regarding the agreements. This has been discussed elsewhere but it suffices to say that despite the reluctance of the Archbishop to sign the agreements, in the end he did so declaring afterwards that he chose the lesser evil.<sup>30</sup>

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The second conspiracy is more popular and is slightly harder to refute because it contains some grains of truth. According to this theory the only reason why *enosis* was not achieved is because of some dark international conspiracy. The blame is shifted on the international community and often more specifically on Britain. For example in a book published under the auspices of the EOKA foundation (Ίδρυμα Απελευθερωτικού Αγώνα ΕΟΚΑ) the author claims that the British foreign policy diverted the Cyprus problem from its 'natural course'.<sup>31</sup> Claims of international conspiracies and British machinations are fairly common in Greek Cypriot media and are probably the most popular explanation since it glosses over a complex issue and any need for introspection and critical approach to this period of Cypriot history. In a nutshell the argument is that the 'fair' demand for *enosis* was ignored by the British who did their best to block *enosis* by conspiring against the Greek Cypriots primarily through the employment of 'divide and rule' tactics. Although this argument emotionally resonates in Greek Cypriot society it is misleading

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29 Grivas, *Memoirs*, p. 293.

30 D. Assos (2009) 'Makarios: A Study of Anticolonial Nationalist Leadership, 1950-1959', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London. Refer especially to chapter 8. *Makarios*, pp. 216-217.

31 A. Varnava (2002) *Ιστορία Του Απελευθερωτικού Αγώνα Της ΕΟΚΑ, 1955-1959* [History of the Liberating Struggle of EOKA], Nicosia: Ίδρυμα Απελευθερωτικού Αγώνα ΕΟΚΑ 1955-59 [Foundation of the Liberating Struggle of EOKA 1955-1959], p. 381.

and offers a biased and simplistic understanding of the causes and processes that led to the reluctant independence of 1959. Essentially the end point of independence was not the result of a British conspiracy but a case of a political strategy that went wrong resulting in unintended consequences.

Grivas himself wrote that 'through military action we did not seek to defeat the English but to coerce a political solution according to our desires'.<sup>32</sup> This comment goes to the heart of the strategy which the EOKA struggle had to implement. In retrospect the aim of the EOKA struggle was rather sophisticated which required political prudence and an impeccable sense of timing. That is an important factor to be borne in mind when assessing the reasons why it failed. Essentially the aim of EOKA's violence was to nudge the British from the position of 'never' they had publicly taken in the summer of 1954 to negotiations that would pave the way to *enosis*.<sup>33</sup> Therefore the campaign was a balancing act between striking a sense of urgency to the British over Cyprus and avoiding the destruction of Greco-British relations. It was a given that ultimately a solution to the problem would be the result of Greco-British negotiations. For this reason Makarios wanted to avoid bloodshed and insisted only on a 'sabotage only' campaign and even envisioned a fairly brief campaign that would be over within six or so months. At no point did he anticipate a struggle of almost four years and all the bloodshed and ill-will that came with it.<sup>34</sup>

There were two important flaws in this strategy which contributed significantly to the undoing of *enosis*. The first one was to ignore Turkish objections to *enosis*. The Greek Cypriot leadership overlooked Turkish Cypriots anxiety regarding their welfare in case Cyprus became part of Greece. It was almost an article of faith that the Turkish Cypriots simply had to accept their fate as the minority, and the possibility that Turkey might develop interest in the political future of the island was dismissed. The common belief among Greek Cypriots that the Turkish Cypriots were driven to violence because of British encouragement or that Turkey became interested in Cyprus only because of Britain's policy, is naïve to say the least. Given the legacy of Greco-Turkish conflict and rivalry, that dated back to the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s and lasted until the 1920s, Cyprus could not escape from its shadow. The Turkish Cypriots were always uncomfortable about the possibility of *enosis*; it was the Greek Cypriots who failed to heed their concerns.<sup>35</sup> Turkey was bound to oppose *enosis* for a combination of reasons. Britain's diplomacy

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32 Makarios, p. 573.

33 *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 484, c.508, 28 July 1954.

34 E. Hatzivassiliou (2005) *Στρατηγικές του Κυπριακού, Η δεκαετία του 1950* [Strategies of the Cyprus Question: The 1950s], Athens: Patakis, pp. 267-268; D. Assos, 'Makarios: A Study of Anticolonial Nationalist Leadership', see chapter 4.

35 The celebrated Greek Cypriot plebiscite in favour of *enosis* that took place in 1950 was opposed by the Turkish Cypriots but this fact has been casually overlooked by the Greek Cypriots. See, *Turks of Cyprus Protest: Against the Desire for Union With Greece*, CO 537/6235; Dr Fazıl Kuçuk's (Cyprus Turkish National Party president) telegram to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 13 December 1949; CO 67/352/2.

did not conjure up the Greco-Turkish rivalry, even though in the beginning of the struggle it tried to goad the Turkish government toward a more confrontational attitude.<sup>36</sup> However, with the outbreak of violence Cyprus was destined to become a cause for renewing old animosities and hatreds.

The second flaw was the underestimation of British insistence to remain on the island. Britain had no intention to abandon Cyprus in the mid-1950s. In fact the struggle broke out at a time when Cyprus was considered to be a fundamental aspect of British policy in the Middle East. British strategic planning perceived Cyprus as its last foothold in the vital area of the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. In 1950 the Chiefs of Staff committee unequivocally urged the full retention of the island under British sovereignty if Britain was to retain its position in the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> The strategic value of the island had increased even further by 1954, with the transfer of the Middle East Headquarters there.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover the resort to violence was resented by Britain as it had raised the embarrassing issue of Cyprus. In fact the campaign of EOKA damaged Greece's image in London, as the British policy makers now regarded Greece as a weak and unreliable ally compared to Turkey. In the 1950s Turkey became an increasingly important ally to Britain because of its geographical location. Bordering with Soviet Union, Turkey was considered an important bulwark against Soviet efforts to penetrate into the Middle East. In addition, Turkey was a senior member of the Baghdad Pact, an anti-Soviet alliance which Britain hoped to use to extend its influence and prestige in the Arab world. As a result Britain in the face of Greek Cypriot violence and what it perceived to be Greek unreliability turned to Turkey as the perfect foil to Greek demands. It was expediency rather than pure Machiavellian 'divide and rule' tactics which guided British policy on Cyprus. The aim was to preserve Cyprus in the face of an embarrassing demand and the means to do it was to highlight Turkish reservations and counter claims. For this reason the Tripartite Conference that took place in 1955 was engineered in such a way as to demonstrate the impossibility of *enosis* on account of Turkish objections. It was also expediency which led to the systematic employment of Turkish Cypriots in the British security forces, a practice which was resented deeply by the Greek Cypriots and led to accusations of 'divide and rule'. It was primarily done because of the exodus of Greek Cypriots from the police force after the outbreak of violence and the increased need for more policemen that forced the Cyprus government to turn to the Turkish Cypriot community.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 25 July 1955, C.P. 94(55) CAB 129/76.

37 Strategic importance of full sovereignty in Cyprus, 25 May 1950, DEFE 11/30.

38 Cyprus: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Minister of State, 21 July 1954, C (54) 245, CAB 129/69.

39 D.M. Anderson (1993) 'Policing and Communal Conflict: The Cyprus Emergency, 1954-1960', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 21, pp. 177-207.

The opposition of Britain to *enosis* was perhaps the single most important factor militating against Greek Cypriot designs. It must be stressed that all the British measures which subsequently were interpreted as part of a conspiracy were in fact the reaction of an imperial administration nursing an injured prestige which chose to obstinately dig in its position of no change. Turning to Turkey for succour was not part of a conspiracy but an act of necessity to preserve what it considered to be its vital interests. The theory of collusion does not hold in face of the deterioration of Turko-British relations after the release of Makarios in the spring of 1957 which lasted until the acceptance of the Macmillan plan by Turkey in August 1958. During this period Turkey adopted a more aggressive stance *vis-à-vis* Britain demanding the immediate implementation of partition. At the same time the Turkish Cypriots through their own paramilitary campaign attempted to demonstrate the impossibility of peaceful co-existence of the two communities. In the Macmillan plan Britain conceded too much to the Turkish side not because of some pre-arranged agreement, but because it had come to rely too much on Turkish goodwill to preserve its position in Cyprus. The British government became a prisoner of its early promises to Turkey which were made in order to gain Turkish support to British designs in Cyprus. When Turkey turned against Britain by demanding partition the British government was forced to make even more concessions in order to regain the support of Turkey. It was British *weakness vis-à-vis* Turkey that led to the Macmillan plan and not collusion.

In refuting the conspiracy theory that Britain had designed a Machiavellian scheme which defeated the heroic struggle of EOKA it is important to bear in mind that despite some important qualifications the British administration *did* offer to the Greek Cypriots the promise of unitary self-determination at some unspecified moment in future, during the negotiations of Makarios with Field Marshal John Harding. The reasons for the collapse of the talks have been discussed elsewhere and they will not be discussed here.<sup>40</sup> However it needs to be stressed that in hindsight the rejection of this offer was the most important turning point in the EOKA struggle for *enosis*. It was the only time the British talked exclusively to the Greek Cypriot leadership conceding theoretically at least the possibility of unitary self-determination. After the collapse of the talks the British government resolved that it could not deal with the Greek Cypriots or the Greek government anymore. Thus Makarios was deported, Harding oversaw a vigorous anti-terrorist campaign that sought to suppress EOKA and subsequent proposals from the Greek government were ignored. Instead Britain sought the support of Turkey in its Cyprus policy which sealed the fate of *enosis* forever. It is for this reason that the negotiations of Makarios with Harding were such an important turning point for the EOKA strategy. Effectively it was the only chance the Greek Cypriots were given to secure unitary self-determination through talks with the British, which was

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40 DW. Markides (1995) 'Britain's "New Look" Policy for Cyprus and the Makarios-Harding Talks', January 1955-March 1956, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 23, pp. 479-502.

the original aim of the EOKA struggle. With the failure of the talks the Greek Cypriot strategy became derailed and 'the prospect of Cypriot self-determination had faded into the realms of political make-believe'.<sup>41</sup> The refusal of the British government to negotiate with the Greek Cypriots again – from now on the consent of the Turkish Cypriots would be sought first, combined with the weakness of Greece to promote the cause of *enosis* – meant that the EOKA struggle had no chance of achieving its aim.

It is of course counterfactual to argue that the talks were a lost opportunity but it is pertinent to point out that some British officials were thinking that it was wise to 'tell the Turks that 18 per cent of the [Cypriot] population cannot have an unqualified veto on the remaining 82 per cent'.<sup>42</sup> Even Harding would later come to the conclusion that self-determination was the only permanent solution of the Cyprus problem.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Eden, himself, admitted that the rejection of Greek Cypriot majority was not entirely down to Turkish objections but due to domestic pressure.<sup>44</sup> Thus it is possible to argue that had the Greek Cypriots accepted the offer they could have secured *enosis* through the back door, especially if we consider the gradualist British pattern of decolonisation.

The Harding proposal demonstrated that there was no conspiracy and that the British were willing, albeit with considerable qualifications, to consider Cypriot self-determination. Makarios' refusal, which was not due to ineptitude but mostly due to distrust of the British and a maximalist outlook which prevented him from securing an interim deal with long term prospects, had a direct and tangible bearing on the outcome because it antagonised the British while not having enough military force to achieve its declared purpose. In other words the Greek Cypriots were not the hapless victims of British designs but through their own actions and choice contributed to the undesirable independence.

Appearances suggested that there was some form of collusion between the British and the Turks. The preoccupation of British policy to secure Turkish assent to its plans and the uneven treatment of Turkish Cypriot violence compared to how ruthlessly EOKA was hunted down understandably fed Greek Cypriot suspicions. However in reality British policy was merely the response to the Greek Cypriot violence. Resorting to violence was a massive gamble given the British attitude of 'no change'. This gamble failed the moment the Harding proposal was turned down. From that point onwards the British government frustrated with the Greek Cypriots

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41 *Ibid.*, p. 501.

42 Ward, minute, 28 February 1956, RG 1081/327, FO 371/123871.

43 Appreciation by the Governor of the situation on 4 April 1956, PREM 11/1251. 'Against this background I conclude that the basic principle for any real attempt to reconcile the conflict of interests must be the application of self-determination to Cyprus in our own time and on our own terms. The time should be dictated mainly by our own military requirements.

44 R. Holland (1998) *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959*, p. 113.

pursued a solution to the Cyprus problem according to its interests aiming to neutralise the *enosis* demand with an increasing involvement of Turkey. British policy itself was undermined by subsequent Turkish demands for partition. The actual aim of Britain was to continue ruling Cyprus by using Turkish demands as a counter balance to the Greek claim for *enosis* and did not want or hoped for an independent Cyprus. Once *enosis* was ruled out as a possible solution the EOKA struggle was doomed to failure. As a result the Zurich agreements reflected the failure of the EOKA strategy and the subsequent weakness of the Greek side to achieve its aim against the direction of British policy.

Conspiracy theories have always been part of the public discourse in Cyprus, a place where urban myths, Chinese whispers and conspiracy theories blend seamlessly into each other. The prime reason behind the proliferation of such theories lies in the nature of Greek nationalism which had prevailed in Cyprus. When the EOKA struggle began the majority of the Greek Cypriots genuinely thought that the manifest destiny of Cyprus was to be part of Greece. This was especially true for the members of EOKA but also its leadership. A Greco-centric education system for decades had inculcated Greek consciousness to Greek Cypriot students. In combination with the rise of a militantly nationalist Church leadership in the late 1940s *enosis* became a by-word for a worldly deliverance from all worries. In many respects the *enosis* movement by the mid-1950s had become a secular millenarian movement which anticipated its eschatological salvation, union with Greece, with an almost religious zeal. Therefore the culmination of the EOKA struggle was a psychological blow to the Greek Cypriots who had neither sought nor fought for independence. Conspiracy theories offered a way of reconciling their belief in *enosis* as the natural course of history with the reality on the ground. *Enosis* was denied because of some dark conspiracy.

The ideological apparatus of the newly found republic partly encouraged the proliferation of conspiracy theories as a means of deflecting attention from the flaws of the EOKA struggle and as a legitimisation process. Since the majority of the Greek Cypriot politicians who were in power in the 1960s, 1970s and even beyond were also intimately involved in the struggle it was in their interest to cultivate an uncritical adoration of the EOKA struggle. Especially after the departure of the Turkish Cypriots from the state apparatus in 1964, the use of the EOKA struggle as the foundation myth for a virtually Greek Cypriot Cyprus republic was entirely unchallenged. Yet in this narrative the most vexing question remained unanswered. If the struggle took place for *enosis* why was Cyprus an independent state and not part of Greece? The narration of the struggle in school text books, in the state's propaganda, rhetoric and commemoration always glossed over this critical question thus giving plenty of scope to the general public to explain this contradiction by inventing conspiracy theories. Vague references to impersonal international forces which opposed the 'fair' demand of *enosis* encouraged this speculation.

According to Eco the need for a conspiracy stems from a 'deep, private frustration'. A conspiracy theory offers a way out of this frustration because 'there can be no failure if there really is' a conspiracy theory. The failure of the struggle was not because of the fault of any Greek Cypriot

or their leadership. Through a conspiracy theory the frustration of *enosis* is ascribed to a superior dark force which absolves its victims from any guilt and instead raises them to the status of martyr. Fittingly the EOKA narrative stresses the victimization of the Greek Cypriots and venerates as martyrs of the nation all the fighters who lost their lives during the struggle. In the same vein the proliferation of conspiracy theories reflects the collective low self-esteem of Greek Cypriot society and a lack of confidence to accept reality for what it is. Power struggles are hardly 'fair'. Every action has a reaction and violence not only causes counter-violence but often it has unpleasant unintended consequences. There was nothing unique about the case of Cyprus nor was it the only colony to go through a tortuous decolonisation process. Most importantly there was nothing inevitable about *enosis* and like any other political aim it was not achieved because of the mistakes made in the execution of its strategy. Because the Greek Cypriot 'lacks steady nerves asks himself: Who's behind this plot, who's benefitting? He has to find an enemy, a plotter, or it will be, God forbid, his fault'.<sup>45</sup>

Should historians engage with such conspiracy theories? Is there any merit in debunking theories which clearly do not conform to scholarship standards and do a disservice to the study of history? Normally mainstream historians tend to steer away from such theories because academics generally have a low opinion of such theories which are often thought as irrational and unscientific. Although the theories themselves might not be serious the pronounced impact they have had in public perceptions of the past of Cyprus is not a trivial issue.

The most obvious flaw of these theories is that from a methodological point of view they are fundamentally flawed. At their heart lies selective memory and partial reading of the past which is often used as an ideological battleground to justify current political debates. Evidence does not drive the theory but it is the other way round as evidence is usually tweaked to fit the theory. Evidence which disproves the theory is conveniently overlooked or played down. In other words such theories constitute a bad form of history since they contravene the methodological foundation of its study and from a purist point of view they should not be left unchecked. Historical truth does matter and for this reason these theories need to be tackled because they obscure our understanding of the past. This is not to say that the concept of historical truth is unproblematic or that truth no matter how one may define it is easy to establish. Yet certain interpretations should be dismissed as false or else we open the doors to a pernicious relativism where anything goes. That is not the aim of history and for this reason the historian has a duty to separate the metaphorical dross from the gold.

The second point which is especially pertinent to the Cypriot context is that conspiracy theories have a disproportional influence on non-academic historical knowledge. The belief that at some point a conspiracy changed the course of history is still widespread in Greek Cypriot society. Because of the reluctance of the historians to challenge this attitude the popular understanding of

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45 U. Eco (2001) *Foucault's Pendulum*, London: Vintage Random House, p. 619.

Cypriot history has been dominated by conspiracies and a simplistic binary world view where the non-Greek Cypriots are often perceived as potential plotters or enemies of the nation. Whereas in other countries conspiracy theories are on the fringe of historiography in Cyprus they are virtually embedded in the public discourse and their proponents even challenge scholarly historical interpretations. Interpretations which call for self-criticism and a cool appraisal of the EOKA struggle are dismissed by EOKA supporters as yet another conspiracy which aims to undermine the national identity of the Greek Cypriots. In the current debate on the revision of school history text books the proponents of no change, which incidentally are supporters of EOKA, implicitly accept that some conspiracy took place. By opposing any change they want to preserve a distorted view of history where conspiracies take precedence over rational and empirical interpretations of history. Behind such theories lies a reluctance to accept the findings of scientific historical inquiry and a deep seated anti-intellectualism which prefers to view history in emotional terms.

As it was argued above the Zurich-London treaties were the result of the weakness of Greece and the Greek Cypriots to achieve *enosis*, and not of some conspiracy of the Greek leadership. Greece was too weak and had lost too much favour to be heeded by Britain which was anxious to placate Turkey over its Cyprus policy. On the other hand EOKA, despite the sacrifices it had made and was willing to make, was locked in a struggle that it could not win and was only going to exacerbate the situation. Neither Karamanlis nor Makarios had a serious incentive to betray the struggle. On the contrary both leaders received unfair criticism for this decision. Faced with the dilemma to choose between more bloodshed and even partition on one hand and an independent Cyprus on the other they made the right decision. It was a realistic appraisal of the critical conditions that led to independence rather than a conspiracy to thwart *enosis*. The second conspiracy analysed earlier is also patently false despite the fact that Britain did use Turkey to block *enosis*. This was not a conspiracy but instead it was in line with the publicly declared British policy in Cyprus. The British aim was to hold on to Cyprus and once violence broke out and its position on the island became difficult, it resorted to the expediency of using Turkey against the Greek claim. However Britain failed to achieve its objective, to retain Cyprus, when Turkey started to demand partition. Faced with the twin opposition of Greece and Turkey, Britain was forced to change its attitude and accept the necessity of abandoning Cyprus. If this was a conspiracy it was a badly executed one which failed in its putative aim. In reality the decolonisation of Cyprus was the result of Greek Cypriot strategy going awry in the face of superior conflicting forces. Crucially its end was unintentional, a compromise born out of necessity between all interested parties as everybody settled for less than they had hoped for.

Therefore it is important for historians to begin addressing conspiracy theories which relate to the history of the Cyprus problem. The study of history is not only for academic debate in the ivory towers of the university. The mission of academia is also the diffusion of knowledge to the general public and the history of Cyprus cannot be an exception to this rule. Cypriot history has been abused a lot in the past by different groups and agents, each seeking to appropriate it according to some political agenda. The time is ripe to reclaim the history of Cyprus and set it free

from all sorts of falsehoods and distortions of truth which have kept it in captivity. It is not an easy task and such an effort is bound to meet resistance but even the longest journey must begin at some point.

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