

Britain, America and the Sovereign Base Areas from 1960-1978

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Abstract

Government documents from the British National Archives, currently within the public domain, have revealed that Britain's preferred policy in 1974 was the total withdrawal from its two Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus. However, the United States – in particular controversial US Secretary of State Dr Henry Kissinger – attached such importance to Britain's continued military presence in Cyprus, that British Foreign Secretary James Callaghan opted not to pursue Britain's preferred policy, exemplifying the extent to which Whitehall, despite Britain's growing financial difficulties, would allow British defence policy to be dictated and subjected to pressures from across the Atlantic.

This article looks at the history of the British Sovereign Base Areas from 1960 until 1978, their significance to the respective British governments and how American foreign and defence policy affected British decision-making vis-à-vis its geopolitically vital military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Keywords: Sovereign Base Areas, Britain, America, Cyprus, Kissinger

On the 1 January 2008, the two British Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus, Akrotiri and Dhekelia, became the first part of sovereign British territory to adopt the Euro. Unlike the Republic of Cyprus, the Sovereign Base Areas are not part of the European Union, but due to the introduction of the Euro in the Republic of Cyprus this decision was made in line with Britain's policy of 'harmonising their [the Sovereign Base Areas] laws as far as possible with those of the Republic of Cyprus'.¹ This unusual and undeniably anachronistic state of affairs exists today because, 131 years after Britain's first strategic involvement in Cyprus, Britain still retains sovereignty over ninety-eight square miles – a quarter of the size of Hong Kong – of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus.

On 4 June 1878, at the Congress of Berlin, Cyprus was leased to Britain by the Ottomans so that Britain could use Cyprus as a *de facto* base in order to continue the traditional British policy of protecting the ailing Ottoman Empire from Russian encroachment. British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli believed Britain had acquired a *place d'armes* "from which Britain's interests

1 *The Times*, 'Euro Reaches Field that is for ever England', by Michael Theodoulou, 27 December 2007.

could be secured". Nonetheless, within four years, Cyprus had been upstaged by Britain's acquisition of Egypt, which provided the British Empire with far superior military bases. The island became a financial loss and of little intrinsic interest.²

In 1923, under Article 20 of the Treaty of Lausanne, the newly-founded Republic of Turkey renounced any claim to sovereignty over Cyprus in favour of Britain and two years later Cyprus was declared a British Crown Colony. Britain's retention of the island can reasonably be described as an imperialistic move, as Cyprus had become strategically insignificant, exemplified even twenty years later, by its military non-involvement during World War Two.³

However, the Cold War and the emergence of the West's dependence on Middle Eastern oil changed everything. In 1948, British troops left Palestine and due to the increased Egyptian hostility towards Britain's base in Suez, which in 1954 forced Britain to agree to withdraw its troops from the Suez Canal base by June 1956, Cyprus suddenly became what it had always threatened to be – strategically vital – with the island becoming the new home of Britain's Middle East Headquarters.⁴ Additionally, up until 1949, there existed a very real threat of a Communist takeover in Greece, with the subsequent possibility of Soviet encroachment in Cyprus, which further added to the importance of the island.⁵

Whilst the retention of Cyprus in the 1920s may have amounted to an imperialistic move, resisting Greek Cypriot claims for *Enosis* (union with Greece) in the 1950s could not be described as such. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden notoriously claimed:

"No Cyprus, no certain facilities to protect our supply of oil. No oil, unemployment and hunger in Britain. It is as simple as that to-day."⁶

However, Eden's Chiefs of Staff disagreed with this over-simplification. Retaining Cyprus was a matter of prestige and the only visible sign of British determination to maintain its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.⁷

2 TNA: FO 371/130112, RGG1051/23G, 'Policy on Cyprus', Bermuda Conference, 21 March 1957.

3 A good analysis of the value of Cyprus to the British government from 1878-1915 is given by Andrekos Varnava in "Cyprus is of no use to Anybody", *The Pawn, 1878-1915*, which can be found in H. Faustmann and N. Peristianis (eds.) (2006) *Britain in Cyprus. Colonialism and Post-Colonialism 1878-2006*, Mannheim and Moehensee: Peleus, Studien zur Archæologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns, Band 19, Bibliopolis, pp. 35-60.

4 J. Darwin (1988) *Britain and Decolonization: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-war Period*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 206-214 and S. Dockrill (2002) *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, p. 18.

5 TNA: FO 371/67084, R13462/G, 'Cyprus: Question of Cession to Greece', Minute by Foreign Office official Charles Johnston, 24 October 1947.

6 *The Times*, 2 June 1956.

7 TNA: DEFE 4/87, 'Nos 51-60', Chiefs of Staff Committee, Minutes of 58th Meeting, Chief of Imperial General Staff, Sir Gerald Templar, doc.165, 12 June 1956.

Two years later, in September 1957, Whitehall and Washington conducted secret, informal and exploratory talks at the US Embassy in London over the future of Cyprus.⁸ This was the first time that such Anglo-American talks had taken place and was the first time Washington suggested it favoured a specific solution to the 'Cyprus Question'. A few months earlier, in March 1957, Whitehall indicated to Washington that Britain no longer needed the whole island as a base, but only required bases on the island, so it was agreed that the criteria for a solution should be:⁹

1. Britain to retain sovereign control over essential military facilities;
2. To prevent Communist subversion; and
3. To maintain peace and stability in Cyprus.¹⁰

Washington favoured independence as the "ultimate solution" as it could be "guaranteed by a number of NATO powers".¹¹

A few months earlier, Washington had expressed its concern to Whitehall, over fears that in the light of Britain's experience in Egypt that Britain might pull out of Cyprus altogether.¹² The US wanted the military installations on Cyprus to be controlled by a reliable ally, namely Britain.¹³ A National Security Council paper drafted in 1957 reveals that Washington's primary interest in Cyprus was indirect in that it involved three NATO allies, Britain, Greece and Turkey, and that their continued failure to reach an agreement over Cyprus and its consequence of weakening the Alliance, was interpreted with a degree of concern by some officials in Washington.¹⁴

Independence and the Sovereign Base Areas

Geopolitics played a decisive role in structuring the type of 'independence' that Cyprus gained in 1960 and it was during the pre-independence negotiations that both Whitehall and Washington set about securing their own strategic interests on the island. According to some sources,

8 TNA: CO 926/627, 'NATO Interest in Political Situation in Cyprus', unsigned tel.811, from the Foreign Office to the permanent British NATO delegation in Paris, doc.285, 12 September 1957.

9 TNA: FO 371/130112, RGG1051/25G, 'Policy on Cyprus', Bermuda Conference, 26 March 1957.

10 TNA: CO 926/627, 'NATO Interest in Political Situation in Cyprus', 'Minutes of a Meeting with Paul-Henri Spaak, Secretary-General of NATO', Paris, 18 October 1957.

11 *Ibid.*

12 TNA: CO 926/977, 'Facilities Required by UK Armed Forces in Cyprus', British Ambassador in Moscow, William Hayter to the Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, R.C. Chilver, doc.215, 4 June 1957.

13 *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955-1957, XII*, 309, Memorandum, 289th Meeting, National Security Council, 28 June 1956.

14 Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas, United States, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Records 1952-1961, National Security Council Series, Briefing Notes Subseries 6003, Box 28, doc.9, Supplement to National Security Council 5718, 'US Policy toward Settlement of the Cyprus Dispute', 18 July 1957.

Washington became active participants in the post-Zürich/London negotiations, “but shied away from acknowledging” it, by securing:¹⁵

1. A politically stable Cyprus, linking Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom in a co-operative relationship, and willing and able to resist Communists subversion, and
2. The continued availability to the West of the British military facilities on Cyprus.¹⁶

In fact, Britain’s negotiations over her military facilities in Cyprus became so protracted that Cypriot independence had to be postponed for almost six months.¹⁷ Ultimately, an agreement was reached on the detail and Cyprus gained its independence on 16 August 1960.

The independence agreements of 1960 allowed Britain to retain numerous defence sites and installations across the island, as well as two Sovereign Base Areas, 2.9 per cent, ninety-nine square miles of the island, as sovereign territory. With this development, Britain’s policy-decisions on its former colony became inextricably linked to the two Sovereign Base Areas. The value of these military facilities was not only viewed as being important in Whitehall. In Washington too, the strategic significance of these bases became increasingly evident. By 1970, the Sovereign Base Areas could:

“... accommodate the Headquarters of Near East Air Force and of Near East Land Forces. There are some 5,500 RAF personnel serving with NEAF and about 2,500 Army personnel with Near East Land Forces. Together with United Kingdom-based civilians and dependents there are some 26,000 British personnel serving in Cyprus and a large proportion of them are resident in the Sovereign Base Areas. The most important military installation in the Sovereign Base Areas is the RAF airfield at Akrotiri on which two Vulcan squadrons and one Lightning squadron are based ...”¹⁸

The Royal Air Force (RAF) base at Akrotiri is the largest such British base in the world and is used to survey as well as defend NATO’s southern flank. Additionally, the communication and surveillance centres at Britain’s disposal are capable of intercepting unidentified aircraft in the Eastern Mediterranean. Of the Retained Sites at Britain’s disposal, three were regularly identified

15 Frontline Diplomacy: The US Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, eds. Marilyn Bentley and Marie Warner, CD-Rom, Arlington, VA: Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training 2000. William Chase, Political Officer, US Embassy Ankara 1955-1959 interviewed by Charles Kennedy, 24 July 1990.

16 *FRUS, 1958-1960, Volume X*, part 1, National Security Council Report: ‘Statement of US Policy toward Cyprus’, 6003, 9 February 1960, pp. 819-828.

17 ‘Independence Postponed: Cyprus 1959-1960’, by Hubert Faustmann, which can be found in H. Faustmann and N. Peristianis (eds.) (2006) *Britain in Cyprus, Colonialism and Post-Colonialism 1878-2006*, Mannheim and Moehensee: Peleus, Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns, Band 19, Bibliopolis, p. 413.

18 TNA: DEFE 13/961, ‘Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, Cyprus’, ‘The Purpose Served by the Sovereign Base Areas’, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence for the Royal Air Force, John Brynmor, doc.EI, 9 July 1970.

throughout the 1960s and 1970s as virtually indispensable:

1. *Mount Olympus*, home to various radars which provide all-round radar coverage essential to the air defence of the Sovereign Base Areas, and provision of early warning for national and NATO forces. Also, it houses communications equipment necessary for the Joint Air Traffic Control Centre at Nicosia and to the services radio relay and internal security networks. It is the most powerful station in the area and provides invaluable supplementary information to that obtained from stations in Greece and Turkey. Further, it provides intelligence gathering and surveillance facilities which contribute to US and NATO assessment agencies, helps to reduce the freedom of action of Russian maritime and air forces, and is considered irreplaceable as the UK derives benefits from their input to the Anglo-American global effort out of all proportion to the size of that input.
2. *RAF Troodos*, which functions as the support base for Mount Olympus and houses very important intelligence facilities and radio equipment vital to the air defence of Cyprus which cannot be located at Olympus for technical reasons.
3. *Cape Greco*, which houses the NATO ACE HIGH Tropospheric Scatter Station and provides the air defence to the Sovereign Base Areas as well as being important to NATO as, for example, it provides communication with the NATO Area Control Centre in Turkey.¹⁹

Britain's position in relation to its facilities on Cyprus was summarised in 1967, when the Wilson government determined that if the Sovereign Base Areas were given up "we would have difficulties negotiating new arrangements" for Cape Greco and Mount Olympus.²⁰ A few years later, the Heath government was less equivocal, in that Cape Greco, Mount Olympus and RAF Troodos could not be retained without the Sovereign Base Areas, thereby complicating any considerations Britain might have had of withdrawing from Cyprus.²¹ Crucially, both the Wilson and Heath governments concluded that if Britain were to withdraw from the Sovereign Base Areas, its position *vis-à-vis* these Retained Sites would also become untenable.

Britain's rights, governed by the Treaty of Establishment, essentially allow Britain to use the whole of the island as a military base.²² These comprehensive rights have been described as "more

19 Cited in: TNA: CAB 130/703, 'Interdepartmental Working Group on Cyprus', 'The Importance to Britain of Military Facilities in Cyprus', Note by the Ministry of Defence, 17 October 1973.

20 TNA: CAB 148/81, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, Report by the Defence Review Working Party, 2 June 1967.

21 TNA: CAB 130/703, 'Interdepartmental Working Group on Cyprus', 'The Importance to Britain of Military Facilities in Cyprus', Note by the Ministry of Defence, 17 October 1973.

22 TNA: AIR 20/10126, 'Cyprus: Air Defence of Sovereign Base Areas', 'Loose Minute', S.5224/S.9, Senior Executive Officer, Head of Section 9, Air Ministry, L.G. Perry, 28 June 1962.

extensive as those accorded to a sending state under the standard NATO arrangements”.²³ However, because the Retained Sites are scattered across the island, and because the Sovereign Base Areas rely upon fresh water, food, labour supplies and services from the Republic of Cyprus, administrators of the Sovereign Base Areas have always been instructed to establish and maintain good relations with Nicosia.²⁴

Brigadier Francis Henn, Commander of the British Contingent in the United Nations Force in Cyprus in 1974, believed that these extensive rights afforded to Britain were tied into a responsibility to protect the Republic of Cyprus. Henn believed there was a tacit assumption that the retention of the Sovereign Base Areas:

“... afforded Britain a capability to fulfil its responsibilities under the Treaty of Guarantee comparable to that allowed to Greece and Turkey by the terms of the Treaty of Alliance.”²⁵

James Callaghan, who was the British Foreign Secretary in 1974, also recognised that Britain’s presence in the Sovereign Base Areas meant they had a continuing responsibility, but he did not reach the same conclusion as Henn.²⁶ This issue remains the subject of much debate. What remains unquestionable is that throughout all the political and military crises that were to erupt across the island from 1960-1974, Whitehall’s military priority remained the defence of the Sovereign Base Areas and Retained Sites.²⁷ In fact, the continued failure to reach a settlement to the seemingly insoluble Cyprus Problem helped facilitate Britain’s policy of retaining the Sovereign Base Areas as encapsulated in a letter written by the British Minister for Public Works, Julian Amery to the then Defence Secretary, Lord Carrington in 1970, in which Amery stated that:

“As long as there is tension between Turks and Greeks I think we have little to worry about in terms of our tenure of the Sovereign Base Areas ...”²⁸

23 Quote from Klearchos Kyriakides in his paper ‘The Sovereign Base Areas and British Defence Policy Since 1960’, which can be found in H. Faustmann and N. Peristianis (eds.) (2006) *Britain in Cyprus, Colonialism and Post-Colonialism 1878-2006*, Mannheim and Moehnsee: Peleus, Studien zur Archæologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns, Band 19, Bibliopolis, pp. 511-534.

24 TNA: FO 371/152927, ‘Sovereign Base Areas’, Directive from the Secretary of State to Air Marshal Sir William MacDonald, Administrator of Sovereign Base Areas, RC1192/213(c), 5 August 1960.

25 F. Henn (2004) *A Business of Some Heat: The United Nations Force in Cyprus before and during the 1974 Turkish Invasion*, Barnsley: Pen and Sword, p. 11.

26 TNA: FCO 9/2186, ‘Relations between UK and Cyprus’, letter from James Callaghan’s Private Secretary, Anthony Acland to the head of the Southern European Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Alan Goodison, doc.13, 28 February 1975.

27 TNA: DEFE 11/460, ‘Cyprus’, Report by Major-General Carver on Peace-Keeping Operations in Cyprus, 14 February-15 July 1964, attached to a covering letter, paragraph 4, 27 October 1964.

28 TNA: DEFE 13/854, ‘British Base Areas in Cyprus’, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Julian Amery to Secretary of State for Defence, Lord Carrington, 29 September 1970.

1960-1965

From the moment Britain had secured the Sovereign Base Areas, Whitehall pursued a policy of maintaining harmonious relations with Nicosia. Nonetheless, wanting to avoid the risk of offending one of the two communities in the ever increasingly intractable Cyprus Problem, Britain showed little concern for events on the island. In fact, as suggested by Julian Amery, it could quite reasonably be argued that Whitehall actually benefited from the perpetuation of the Cyprus Problem. In May 1971 Prime Minister Edward Heath commented that Britain had more interest than most countries in maintaining stability on the island, but that despite the cost and political disadvantages of the continued absence of a solution to the "Cyprus Problem", the "situation in Cyprus does not suit us too badly."²⁹

Even so, within four years of independence, Britain gave serious thought to giving up one of her bases. The following considerations were made in the context of the Acheson Plan, when the possibility of ceding Dhekelia was discussed as an alternative to Turkey obtaining a military base in the Karpass. (There were four Acheson Plans that were all essentially based upon the premise that the majority of the island should unite with Greece with some form of concession being made to Turkey.) Documents released in the British National Archives reveal that the British Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home, himself contemplated this possibility. Ultimately, both Douglas-Home, his Secretary of State, Rab Butler and the Ministry of Defence felt this was not a good idea and should only be used as a last resort and in the end the idea was rejected for practical and constitutional reasons.³⁰ Under the agreement that Britain has with Cyprus, if Britain should ever wish to divest itself of the Sovereign Base Areas, sovereignty or control of this land has to be transferred to the Republic of Cyprus.³¹

29 TNA: PREM 15/2028, 'Extension of UNFICYP Mandate', 'Cyprus', Prime Minister, 15 May 1971.

30 TNA: FCO 9/65, 'UK Policy: Cyprus', Foreign Office/Commonwealth Office draft paper, 'Cyprus', Annex E, 'A NATO Base in Cyprus?', doc.18, which includes a brief synopsis of the events of 1964 and concludes that a NATO base forming part of a solution on Cyprus to be 'remote', from the former British representative at Geneva Lord Hood to British Ambassador Ralph Murray, Athens, 28 March 1967.

31 "... In the event, however, that the Government of the United Kingdom, in view of changes in their military requirements, should at any time decide to divest themselves of the aforesaid sovereignty or effective control over the Sovereign Base Areas, or any part of, it is understood that such sovereignty or control shall be transferred to the Republic of Cyprus", 'Exchange of Notes Between the United Kingdom and Cyprus Concerning the Future of the Sovereign Base Areas Referred to in Article 1 of the Treaty of 16 August 1960 Concerning the Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, Nicosia, 16 August 1960'. Signed on behalf of the Republic of Cyprus by Archbishop Makarios and Dr Fazil Küçük and agreed to by British Governor Sir Hugh Foot: "I have the honour further to state that the Government of the United Kingdom are in full agreement with the views contained in that Note." Quoted in N. Macris (2003) *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus and Selected Subsequent Acts*, Mannheim and Moehnsee: Peleus, Studien zur Archæologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns, Band 24, Bibliopolis, pp. 89-90.

A report compiled by the Ministry of Defence's Chief of Staff Committee reveals that although the Sovereign Base Areas are British, NATO was privy to the Cape Gata Radar in Akrotiri and the RAF control/reporting radar station at Cape Gata, as information from here was used for the air defence of NATO's south-eastern flank. Amongst the Retained Sites, NATO was also privy to the RAF Communications and Radar stations in the Troodos Mountains and on Mount Olympus, the NATO Communication Station at Cape Greco and the RAF Radio Relay System.³²

With Nicosia not rejecting the idea of a Turkish base within the Sovereign Base Areas in the context of the Acheson negotiations, the possibility of having Dhekelia under NATO management was also considered by Whitehall.³³ However, with the rejection of the idea of ceding Dhekelia came the realisation, much to the *chagrin* of Washington, that as nothing happened in Cyprus without the co-operation of Cyprus' President Archbishop Makarios, who since 1960 had espoused a non-aligned foreign policy for the Republic of Cyprus, the possibility of having the base under NATO management was remote.³⁴ Nonetheless, Washington had managed to secure the next best thing, as the Sovereign Base Areas were, as we have seen, used for NATO purposes.³⁵ During a question and answer session at the Ministry of Defence in December 1973, two references were made equating Mount Olympus and the Sovereign Base Areas with NATO facilities:

“... no public acknowledgement is given to the use by NATO of our facilities in Cyprus due to [sic] Cyprus Governments' susceptibilities.”³⁶

Washington's interest in and willingness to help Whitehall in maintaining its bases continued to develop as a withdrawal from Dhekelia was also raised during the 1965 Defence Review consultations. The following year, the question of abandoning Dhekelia was answered

32 TNA: DEFE 11/455, 'Cyprus', Chiefs of Staff Committee, 'Possible Use of Facilities in the Cyprus Base by NATO', Note by the Secretary, signed J.R. Hallett, Colonel for the Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 'Top Secret' Report, Annex to COS 236/64, doc. 3430, 12 August 1964. At a meeting on 11 August 1964, the Chiefs of Staff examined which facilities in the Sovereign Base Areas and Retained Sites in Cyprus could be offered by Britain to NATO should Cyprus be united with Greece. Included within this report, is an outline of the existing facilities in Cyprus which NATO used at the time.

33 TNA: DEFE 11/456, 'Cyprus', tel.2152, British High Commissioner in Nicosia, Sir Alec Bishop to the Commonwealth Relations Office, 25 August 1964.

34 NARA: RG39, CFPE, 1964-1966, Political and Defence, Cyprus, airgram A-156 from Robert Schott, First Secretary at the US Embassy in Nicosia to the State Department, 1 December 1964.

35 TNA: AIR 2/18887, 'Defence Review: Sovereign Base Areas', 'loose minute', doc.E133, Chief Press Secretary, Civil Service Department, Air Ministry, D. Longland, 13 August 1973.

36 TNA: DEFE 68/90, 'Cyprus Policy after the Defence Review', session 3, attended by C.A. Whitmore, Assistant Under Secretary of State (Defence Staff), Air-Vice Marshall J. Gingell, Assistant Chief of Defence Staff Policy and Rear Admiral F.W. Hearn, Assistant Chief of Personnel and Logistics, 9 December 1973.

negatively by the Defence Review Working Party.³⁷ It was argued that there was no great financial advantage to giving up Dhekelia, that it would be bad for service morale (as people would have to be moved to areas where they would not enjoy similar amenities), it would cause large-scale local redundancy of civilian labour and would ultimately, and most crucially, lead to a deterioration in Anglo-Cypriot relations.³⁸ As we have seen, since independence, the importance of maintaining harmonious relations with Nicosia had been of paramount importance to officials within Whitehall, who believed that the Cyprus Government would not welcome the large amount of local redundancies the loss of Dhekelia would inevitably lead to.

As Britain had been told by Dean Acheson, the US President's special representative to Cyprus in 1964, that Ankara's primary concern was a base on the island rather than the welfare of the Turkish Cypriots, Britain considered giving up Dhekelia as part of a political solution to the Cyprus Problem.³⁹ Washington, however, opposed such a venture on strategic and intelligence grounds, which might constitute another reason why Dhekelia was never given up.⁴⁰

Interestingly, in 2004, in the context of the Annan Plan and during the intensive negotiations which followed the Copenhagen European Council, Whitehall had come to believe that the issue of territorial readjustment had become key for both Cypriot communities and needed to be resolved if there was to be a settlement. Britain, therefore, gave urgent consideration to whether it could in some way "help to bridge the remaining gap", and decided to inform the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan that Britain would be prepared to cede 45 square miles of its Sovereign Base Areas, just under half of the total area of the SBAs. Crucially, the areas involved did not contain military infrastructure, and the offer would consequently not have an adverse impact on the functioning of the Sovereign Base Areas and would only become valid if an agreement on the UN's proposals was reached.⁴¹

The abovementioned developments highlight the varied importance afforded to the Sovereign Base Areas by British Governments, depending on the prevailing defence, foreign and economic policies at the time. During Harold Wilson's tenure as British Prime Minister from 1964-1970, he oversaw considerable defence budget cuts as well as Britain's landmark retreat from its military bases East of Suez.⁴² During this period the strategic importance of the bases often

37 TNA: CAB 148/29, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 'Roundup of Forces,' 16 November 1966.

38 TNA: CAB 148/54, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 11 October 1966 and TNA: CAB 148/25, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 18 November 1966.

39 TNA: DEFE 11/457, 'Cyprus', Secretary of State, Rab Butler, PM64/98, undated doc.1A.

40 NARA: RG59, CFPE, 1964-1966, Political and Defence, Cyprus: telegram, from the US Embassy in London to the State Department, 28 November 1966.

41 Foreign Affairs Committee Publications, Session 2003-2004, Minutes of Evidence, Annex 1 Written Statement to the House of Commons on the UK's Offer of Sovereign Base Area Land, Letter to the Chairman of the Committee from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. Jack Straw, dated 15 March 2004 [www.parliament.co.uk], accessed on 1 November 2009.

42 S. Dockrill (2002) *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*. New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, pp. 43-226.

marched in line with the gradual decline of overall British political power, especially with regards to Cyprus. The intercommunal violence that erupted across the island in late 1963 which continued in 1964 saw a reversal of the roles hitherto played by both Britain and the US, mirroring the respective historical development of the ever decreasing influence and ever increasing influence enjoyed in international affairs by Britain and America respectively.

1965-1974

The Sovereign Base Areas are not only used for NATO purposes. From 1970 onwards American U-2 planes could be seen taking off from Akrotiri in order to supplement Israeli reconnaissance efforts just west of the Suez Canal. Initially, Washington's approach to use the bases was received with a 'cool' reaction from Whitehall, as Britain was concerned about how these missions would be viewed in the Arab world. It required several days of urging from 'high levels' within the Nixon administration before Britain finally allowed the US to use Akrotiri. British agreement was ultimately given on condition that Makarios and all other parties concerned raised no objection – they did not.⁴³

Shortly afterwards, members of the press began to realise what was going on and as Nicosia came under increasing criticism from the left-wing press and the United Arab Republic, Washington observed that Britain was becoming more and more nervous about the situation. Washington decided to voluntarily withdraw the U-2 planes before it appeared they were doing so under pressure, as this would enhance its position to ask to use the bases again in the future. Documents declassified in US National Archives suggest that it was Whitehall which viewed the American presence with greater concern than Makarios.⁴⁴ This supports the belief that Makarios' presence did not adversely affect US interests. Despite his vacillation over the siting of a Voice of America station in 1963, which eventually led to its establishment in Rhodes, Makarios granted Washington access to the Sovereign Base Areas, co-operated with the US in receiving hostages from the Middle East, as well as granting Washington extensive facilities across the island.⁴⁵

In 1972, Britain received a bill from Makarios for the use of the bases, potentially jeopardising Britain's continued military presence on the island.⁴⁶ Whitehall's initial response was one of little

43 NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1970-1973, DEF 15, CYP-US, from Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Alfred Atherton to Under-Secretary, 'Background on Use of Akrotiri Base for our U-2 Flights', 22 October 1970.

44 NARA: RG59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970-1973, DEF 15, CYP-US, memorandum for National Security Adviser Dr Henry Kissinger, 'Our U-2 Aircraft on Cyprus', 10 December 1970.

45 NARA: RG59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970-1973, Political and Defence, Cyprus, Box 2224, memorandum for President Richard Nixon before his meeting with Makarios, 22 October 1970.

46 NARA: RG59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970-1973, Political and Defence, Cyprus, unsigned telegram, from the US Embassy in Nicosia to the State Department, 3 April 1971, which reveals that Whitehall committed a tactical mistake as it was Britain which pressed the Cyprus Government for payment as they were requesting

concern, as the Sovereign Base Areas are sovereign territory, which means that no rent was to be paid under the signed agreement:

“During the 1960 negotiations, Cyprus dropped earlier claims for payment for sites and facilities. Instead, she accepted the United Kingdom proposal to determine at five-year intervals, after full consultation with the Cyprus Government and taking all factors into account, the amount of financial aid to Cyprus to be provided in the succeeding five years. This was set out in an Exchange of Notes which provided for £12 million of aid up to 1965, paid in instalments tapering to £1.5 million in the final year. No subsequent determinations have been made.”⁴⁷

In fact, Nicosia was told in March 1965 that further payment was dependent upon progress toward an intercommunal settlement, as this was the only way Britain could guarantee equal distribution of the aid amongst the two communities, thereby demonstrating and ensuring British impartiality. Additionally, the then Foreign Secretary, George Brown, gave Ankara an undertaking that no further aid would be given to Cyprus unless such equal distribution could be guaranteed.⁴⁸

The following year, a second request for payment was made, in which the Cypriot Government asked for £76.5 million for the use of facilities and services, not the Sovereign Base Areas, on Cyprus for the period of 1 April 1965 to 31 March 1972. A second request was made for a subsequent annual payment of £11.48 million as of 1 April 1972.⁴⁹ Consequently, Whitehall asked the Chiefs of Staff to re-evaluate the strategic importance of Cyprus. In their view Cyprus:

1. Provides intelligence gathering and surveillance facilities which contribute to US and NATO assessment agencies and help to reduce the freedom of action of Russian maritime and air forces.
2. Having the Sovereign Base Areas secures a strategically valuable site from Moscow.
3. Cyprus is crucial for the support of the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and the effective use of the CENTO air route.⁵⁰

CENTO, originally known as the Baghdad Pact (after the military coup in Iraq in 1958, Iraq withdrew from the alliance and the name Baghdad Pact was dropped), was modelled on NATO and its members were Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Britain. Its aim was to contain the Soviet Union by having a line of allied states on the Soviet border. Washington encouraged Britain's

some Sovereign Base Areas' land near Famagusta in order to develop a tourist project (Golden Sands), after which the Makarios Government decided to issue a counterclaim.

47 TNA: AIR 20/12691, 'Cyprus Emergency', 'Cyprus – Financial Claims for Facilities', November 1974.

48 TNA: PREM 15/31, 'PM Meeting with Foreign Minister Kyprianou, July 1970', see Appendix R.

49 TNA: FCO 46/1017, 'Importance of Military Facilities in Cyprus to the UK', B. Stanbridge, Air Commander, Secretary, Chief of Staff Committee, 13 September 1973.

50 TNA: FCO 46/1017, 'Importance of Military Facilities in Cyprus to the UK', Chief of Staff Committee, Defence Policy Staff paper, 'The Strategic Importance of Cyprus', 24 September 1973.

participation in CENTO in order to keep Soviet interests out of the Mediterranean, but America's opposition to colonialism and its close relationship with Israel meant that Britain had to take responsibility for making CENTO militarily viable.⁵¹ In 1964, as part of Whitehall's CENTO commitments, the CENTO Military Committee approved the "Joint Campaign (Requirements) for the CENTO Area – 1966/67" which meant that Britain had a nuclear deterrent in the region, as four squadrons of Canberra medium bombers were located in Cyprus.⁵²

The first point mentioned in the Chiefs of Staff evaluation had become increasingly important during the 1960s, as Moscow significantly increased its naval power in the Mediterranean.⁵³ At the same time Britain's force was substantially reduced and the French, despite maintaining a naval force, did not submit it to NATO command. By 1967 a total of forty-six Soviet ships could be found in the Mediterranean, including "some of the latest guided missile cruisers and about ten submarines together with numerous support ships".⁵⁴ Additionally, the Chiefs of Staff found that:

- (a) Western Europe and the US are becoming increasingly dependent on oil produced by countries in the vicinity of Cyprus which gives the island increased importance.
- (b) Certain intelligence gathering facilities in Cyprus are irreplaceable and the UK derives benefit from their input to the Anglo-American global effort out of all proportion to the size of that input. The nature of the facilities is such that they should be located in sovereign territory and for technical reasons both Sovereign Base Areas are needed for their protection.
- (c) The nuclear bomber force declared to the CENTO, must be located in Cyprus in order to achieve maximum effect on the regional members of the alliance.
- (d) Akrotiri airfields provide an excellent base for the conduct of air reconnaissance and maritime support operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. The ground radars and air defence fighters in Cyprus provide a valuable extension of NATO's air defence system.⁵⁵

The geopolitical importance of Cyprus to Britain and the West was therefore clear. In December 1973, Whitehall informed Nicosia that the presented claims were not legally well-

51 S. Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

52 TNA: DEFE 13/539, 'Defence Expenditure Study No. 3 – CENTO and Cyprus in the Mid-1970s', doc.21, Assistant Under-Secretary of State (Policy), Ministry of Defence, F. Cooper, 13 June 1967.

53 F. Vali (1972) *The Turkish Straits and NATO*, California: Hoover Institution Press, p. 114.

54 Former US Ambassador to NATO, Harlan Cleveland, in an address to the National Press Club, 23 August 1967 and R. Weinland (1972) 'Soviet Transits of the Turkish Straits: 1945-1970 – An historical note on the establishment and dimensions of the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean', *Centre for Naval Analyses*, Professional Paper No. 94, 14 April 1972, Virginia, US.

55 TNA: FCO 46/1017, 'Importance of Military Facilities in Cyprus to the UK', Chief of Staff Committee, Defence Policy Staff paper, 'The Strategic Importance of Cyprus', 24 September 1973.

founded, as all payments under the Treaty of Establishment were being honoured and that any resumption of payment should be made in accordance with the 1960 Exchange of Notes.⁵⁶ However, Foreign Secretary, Lord Home believed that Britain would need to resume financial assistance to ensure continued use of the Sovereign Base Areas. Consequently High Commissioner Stephen Oliver was instructed to inform Nicosia that although the claim was legally not well-founded, Britain did not rule out discussing the matter.⁵⁷ Of course Britain had actually paid the Cyprus Government £12 million over a five-year period ending on 31 March 1965, but this was for the sites, installations and other facilities Britain had on Cyprus, and not for the Sovereign Base Areas.⁵⁸ According to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Britain tacitly recognised that this was what the payment had been made for but "... at the time ... naturally we did not admit it to the Cypriots".⁵⁹

1974

On 9 May 1974, with Edward Heath having now been replaced as Prime Minister by Harold Wilson, British policy was once again set on course for a defence review. Stephen Oliver was instructed to deliver a message from Wilson to Makarios, informing him that due to Britain's serious economic situation, it could not, for the time being, discuss the financial request made by the Archbishop. Makarios was sympathetic, but explained that he too, was under pressure from his Minister of Finance, Mr. Patsalides, and put it to Oliver whether Britain could pay the Cypriot Government the sum of £10 million.⁶⁰ In his message to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the High Commissioner recognised that the future of the Sovereign Base Areas and the Retained Sites depended "ultimately on the goodwill of the Cyprus Government".⁶¹

56 TNA: CAB 148/131, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, Britain pays £1 million per annum for certain services and facilities and TNA: AIR 20/12691, 'Cyprus – Financial Claims for Facilities, November 1974'.

57 TNA: CAB 148/13, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 14 December 1973.

58 Originally, Britain retained thirty-four sites on Cyprus, but by 1973, these had been reduced to seventeen, the others having been handed over to the Republic of Cyprus. Information on the Retained Sites is contained within the Treaty of Establishment which was signed in Nicosia on 16 August 1960 as part of Cyprus' independence agreement and is cited in full by Nicolas Macris (2003) in *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus and Selected Subsequent Acts*, Mannheim and Moehensee: Peleus, Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns, Band 24, Bibliopolis, pp. 18-123.

59 TNA: FCO 46/1017, 'Importance of Military Facilities in Cyprus to the UK', WSC6/548/4, Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 6 September 1973.

60 TNA: DEFE 11/729, 'Defence Review: Cyprus', Stephen Oliver to Under-Secretary Southern European Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Charles Wiggin, 13 May 1974. The letter was written by Prime Minister Harold Wilson on 20 April 1974.

61 TNA: DEFE 11/729, 'Defence Review: Cyprus', British High Commissioner Stephen Oliver to Under Secretary at the Southern European Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Charles Wiggin, 13 May 1974.

We now know that prior to Labour's return to government, a paper was prepared proposing annual payments of up to £2.5 million from April 1974 to March 1980 as well as a retrospective sum of £10 million which was to be paid to the Cyprus Government. This changed following the general election in February. Once Wilson committed himself to the defence review, it would have been unwise for Britain to commit itself to facilities which it might not want to hold onto for much longer.⁶²

In 1974, Britain found itself in a situation of "unparalleled economic crisis".⁶³ To many within Whitehall, the idea of withdrawing from Cyprus was most appealing, as the annual maintenance cost of the Sovereign Base Areas amounted to £58 million. Upon closer inspection, Britain would not have saved all this money, as £35 million was being spent on local expenditure. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office had already concluded that Nicosia would therefore make claims of compensation for this revenue loss in addition to the already mentioned outstanding claims.

As Britain considered approaching the European Community for help, officials within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office recognised the possibility that this would upset US Secretary of State Dr Henry Kissinger, who attached great importance to the presence of the Sovereign Base Areas in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was later suggested that withdrawing from the Sovereign Base Areas would only save Britain very little money, whilst significantly damaging American interests and thereby adversely affecting the 'special relationship':

"Unless the Americans will foot the bill (which they will presumably be reluctant to do on foreign policy as well as financial grounds) we may have no alternative but to turn to the Nine."⁶⁴

In early 1974, stories began to emerge that Britain was not only contemplating withdrawing from its bases, but was considering handing them over to Washington. Consequently, Makarios gave several press interviews, in which he refuted these claims by advancing the fact that the Treaty of Establishment precluded Britain from handing over the bases to anyone other than the Republic of Cyprus.⁶⁵ The Archbishop's attempts at pacifying the left-wing press were dealt a severe blow when, in April, American marines and helicopters landed in the Sovereign Base Areas, in order to help with the Suez Canal clearance operation. Washington had requested Whitehall's agreement to this in March and Callaghan revealed that Washington unofficially also asked to station U-2 reconnaissance aircraft in the Sovereign Base Areas in a separate operation to "monitor the

62 TNA: AIR 20/12691, 'Cyprus Emergency', 'Cyprus – Financial Claims for Facilities', November 1974.

63 H. Wilson (1979) *Final Term, The Labour Government, 1974-1976*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 13.

64 The quote is from: TNA: FCO 9/1693, 'Cyprus and the EEC', Head of Planning Staff and Assistant Under-Secretary of State, J.E. Cable to Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, John Killick, 28 August 1974. In 1974, the European Economic Community comprised nine member states and was often referred to as 'the Nine'.

65 TNA: WO 386/12, 'Intelligence Summaries', 5-18 February 1974.

disengagement between Israel and Egypt". As in 1970, Britain demanded the consent of all concerned before agreeing. Foreign Secretary Callaghan told the Ministry of Defence that if the press questioned whether Britain was considering renting part of the Sovereign Base Areas to the US on a permanent basis, "we can deny this firmly on the record".⁶⁶

On 31 May 1974, the United Nations Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, announced the disengagement of Syrian and Israeli troops from the Golan Heights. Dr Kissinger had been instrumental in these negotiations and was greeted by a standing ovation in Congress when he returned from the Middle East. Damascus would not accept an official document showing restrictions on its forces deployed against Israel, which meant that the reductions of Syrian forces had to remain a secret. Kissinger told the British Ambassador in Washington, Peter Ramsbotham that reconnaissance would be needed, and that the US hoped to use Cyprus for this. An approach to Britain would be made at some point in July. Kissinger secured a secret agreement from Syrian President Assad that Damascus would not encroach over the demarcation line, and had therefore been able to assure Israel that no such attacks would be made. He had committed Washington to using its veto at the UN against any resolution condemning any retaliatory Israeli attacks, if the Syrians were to encroach. It was therefore crucial to Kissinger's authority and reputation amongst the Israelis that he was, at all times, aware of developments across the demarcation line.⁶⁷ He needed Cyprus in order to best achieve this.

Media criticism of the American presence in Cyprus, when the obvious place for their deployment in their operation was Egypt, did not relent. The conclusion reached by many observers was that:

"... from the British point of view the American presence would be a source of much needed financial aid, and from the American point of view a base from which to monitor the Soviet Fleet in the Mediterranean."⁶⁸

Makarios did manage to calm some of the speculation, when in a press conference on 4 May 1974, he stated that the Cyprus Government had in fact given its consent to the American presence in the Sovereign Base Areas in order to contribute to the Suez clearance operation.⁶⁹

Washington knew full well that any visible sign of her military activity on the island was undesirable and despite British denials of their presence, ensured that US personnel would not be seen wearing American uniforms.⁷⁰ The need for American access to Britain's facilities had

66 TNA: DEFE 11/729, 'Defence Review: Cyprus', doc.54, Callaghan, 1 May 1974.

67 TNA: DEFE 11/729, 'Defence Review: Cyprus', guidance tel.54, 'US military presence in the British Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus', James Callaghan 'to immediate certain missions', 1 May 1974.

68 NARA: Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, National Security Council Files: Subject Files: 'Mediterranean Policy', memorandum from Robert Osgood, Harold Saunders and Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 27 February 1970.

69 TNA: WO 386/12, 'Intelligence Summaries', 23 April 1974-1976 May 1974.

70 NARA: RG39, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-1973, Cyprus, Defence, tel.1261, from the US Embassy in Nicosia

increased since 1960 and in 1974, CIA Director William Colby and US Defence Secretary, James Schlesinger told Kissinger at a 'British Defence Review Breakfast', that not only were the facilities on Cyprus important, they were unique. Colby explained that the intelligence facilities were crucial not just to the Eastern Mediterranean, but to the whole area and that he could not envisage how they could be replaced.⁷¹

In the summer of 1974, British policy on the Sovereign Base Areas changed dramatically, as Whitehall seriously considered a 'total withdrawal' from Cyprus. Cabinet Secretary Sir John Hunt has since revealed that the starting point for this discussion was made by British Foreign Secretary James Callaghan.⁷²

Regrettably, it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the Cyprus crisis of 1974, but suffice it to say that during the summer of 1974 Turkey used a Greek-sponsored *coup d'état* against Cypriot President Makarios as a pretext to invade and ultimately occupy a third of the island, during which Callaghan's perceived frustration at Britain's military impotence and inability to adequately effect the situation without American consent, led him to believe that Britain's presence in the Sovereign Base Areas was more of a burden to Britain than an asset. Ironically, therefore, it was Britain's Foreign Secretary who now constituted the greatest threat to the continued existence of Britain's colonial footprint on Cyprus.

Following Callaghan's decision, the Defence Review Steering Committee commissioned several papers looking at the option of total withdrawal. Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Intelligence) Lieutenant-General Sir David Willison was also instructed to determine what the minimum intelligence requirement in Cyprus might be upon total withdrawal.⁷³ One conclusion was that the Sovereign Base Areas were "more a liability than an asset" and that Cyprus' military importance was declining. On 23 August Callaghan exclaimed: "I see no future in Cyprus for us ... So, let's not be too long about getting out". Callaghan summarised Britain's role during the 1974 Cyprus crisis as having been in a position of "responsibility without power".⁷⁴

Having observed Britain's military impotence, despite the presence of the Sovereign Base

to the State Department, 24 July 1970. On 24 August 2007, in Bangkok, Thailand, the author met with Bill Ridlinghafer, who was stationed in Akrotiri from 1974-1975, to fly one of the U-2 planes. Bill Ridlinghafer confirmed the fact that the American pilots were aware of the covert nature of their presence in the Sovereign Base Areas.

71 DNSA, KT01412, MemCons, Kissinger with Cabinet Secretary Sir John Hunt, Chief of Defence Staff Michael Carver, British Ambassador in Washington Peter Ramsbotham, US Secretary of Defence Dr Schlesinger and CIA Director William Colby, 12 November 1974.

72 *The Southern Flank in Crisis, 1973-1976*, Record of a meeting at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, WSC10/14, doc:98, 1515, 8 November 1974.

73 TNA: DEFE 11/729, 'Defence Review: Cyprus', 'Value of Intelligence Collecting Facilities in Cyprus', doc:E24, No.7155/6, Secretary/CNS, 5 June 1974.

74 *Southern Flank in Crisis*, Record of a meeting of Heads of Mission, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, WSC3/548/3, doc:89, 10 September 1974.

Areas, withdrawing Britain from its prominent position appeared the most advisable next step.⁷⁵ On 5 September 1974 the Cabinet was presented with the Committee's findings and four days later the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee agreed that Britain's:

"Preferred course would be the total withdrawal of [British] forces from Cyprus which should, if possible, be presented in the context of a satisfactory settlement to the Cyprus Problem."⁷⁶

The withdrawal was to be completed by 31 March 1976.⁷⁷ Wilson knew that any decision on Cyprus could only be made in the context of Britain's relationship with the US in the intelligence field. In August, Wilson had told the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee to consider how a total withdrawal from Cyprus would affect Anglo-American relations.⁷⁸ Callaghan also acknowledged that a serious discussion with Washington was needed, adding that:

"... if the Americans attached importance to the continuance of our intelligence facilities in Cyprus a way might be found for them to help in meeting the cost."⁷⁹

Wilson flew to Washington to discuss Britain's plans with Kissinger and US Secretary of Defence James Schlesinger. Kissinger strongly opposed a withdrawal from Cyprus and did not feel it would help achieve a political settlement. Washington made it very clear to Britain that for political reasons it would not agree to a British withdrawal from Cyprus. Concerned with the West's declining influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, Kissinger was anxious for Britain to retain her 'strategic nuclear deterrent' in Cyprus.⁸⁰

The role played by Washington, especially Dr Kissinger, in forcing British foreign and defence policy to re-evaluate the situation with reference to American interests, is quite

75 *Ibid.*

76 *The Southern Flank in Crisis, 1973-1976*, Draft paper by Deputy Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence, Sir G. Arthur, DP 13/441/1, 'The Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus', WSC10/14, doc.82, 20 August 1974.

77 TNA: CAB 148/145, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, note by the Secretary, 18 October 1974.

78 TNA: CAB 148/145, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 1 August 1974.

79 TNA: CAB 148/145, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 9 September 1974.

80 TNA: CAB 148/145, Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 'Bilateral Consultations', 14 November 1974 and TNA: CAB 164/333, 'UK Forces in Cyprus': E. Broadbent, Ministry of Defence, to D. Maitland, 1 November 1968: Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent, in relation to Cyprus, consisted of a squadron of Canberra aircraft. These had tactical nuclear capability, were affiliated to the Central Treaty Organisation and were stationed at Akrotiri. Between January and March 1968, the Canberra force was replaced with Vulcan aircraft. For an account of the defence review's 1974 assessment of Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent, see: TNA: DEFE 69/464, 'Nuclear Matters: Defence Review, 1974', Doc. E29, loose minute, 18 November 1974, DUS (P) to Secretary of State, 'Defence Review: Strategic Nuclear Deterrent', attached is 'Note by the Cabinet Office', 'The Strategic Nuclear Deterrent', 15 November 1974 and doc.4, '1974 Defence Review – Nuclear Weapons', 15 May 1974, ACNS, P. 144/10, attached in 'Nuclear Matters, Part I, The UK Strategic Nuclear Deterrent, The Present UK Polaris Force'.

astounding.⁸¹ In November, Callaghan informed Kissinger of Britain's decision not to withdraw from Cyprus:

"We shall not in present circumstances proceed with our preferred policy of withdrawing from the Sovereign Base Areas altogether ... The fact that the US Administration and you personally attach such importance to our presence in Cyprus ... was the determining consideration."

Callaghan added that he was "not entirely happy" about this, as in the recent Cyprus crisis, the Sovereign Base Areas had been a complicating factor:

"... as you know, I have been unhappy about my position of responsibility without power. I hope this outcome will give you satisfaction and the feeling that, in matters of this sort, we continue to give full weight to the views and interests of the US wherever we can, even at some cost, [sic] be reconciled with our own."⁸²

1975-1978

Be that as it may, less than six months later, officials within the Ministry of Defence were advocating a reduction of a third of Britain's expenditure *vis-à-vis* the Sovereign Bases whilst maintaining that complete withdrawal should remain Britain's preferred policy.⁸³ A Ministry of Defence document from 1976 confirms that despite Callaghan's decision to yield to Washington's wishes in 1974, the Ministry of Defence's planning continued to be, "unknown to the Americans and contrary to FCO advice", based on the assumption that Britain would withdraw from Cyprus by 1979. Provision was made for the possibility that should the political circumstances not be conducive to such a move, withdrawal could be postponed until 1981.⁸⁴

Not only did Britain plan to withdraw by 1979, but the Ministry of Defence's 'Long Term Costing' had made no financial provision for a British presence after 31 March 1979.⁸⁵ "No hint"

81 TNA: DEFE 68/90, 'Cyprus Policy after the Defence Review', brief for the visit of US Defence Secretary Dr Schlesinger from 24-26 September 1975, by Howard Banks.

82 *The Southern Flank in Crisis, 1973-1976*, letter from Callaghan to Kissinger, tel.2427, Callaghan to Britain's Ambassador in Washington, Sir Peter Ramsbotham, 'Defence Review: Cyprus', WSC10/14, doc.101, 26 November 1974.

83 TNA: DEFE 13/1085 'Defence Review: Consultation with Allies, 1975-1976', Doc.9, from A.P. Hockaday, DUS (P) Ministry of Defence to Roy Mason, Secretary of State for Defence, 14 February 1975, 'The Defence Review – Consultation with Allies', attached draft Overseas Policy and Defence Paper, OPD (75), 'Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Defence'.

84 TNA: DEFE 68/373 'Cyprus – Policy', doc.11/2, 353/14, William John Anthony Wilberforce, head of the Defence Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to Richard Adam Sykes, Superintending Under Secretary, Defence Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Future British Military Commitment in Cyprus', 16 July 1976.

85 TNA: DEFE 68/373 'Cyprus – Policy', doc.E4, R.K. Guy, Brigadier, Principal Staff Officer to the Chief of

should be given that Britain might one day withdraw, were the instructions sent out by the Ministry of Defence.⁸⁶ Further, by the end of 1976, the planned rundown of forces, as stipulated by the Defence Review, had been completed, which meant that expenditure in Cyprus was now at a minimum necessary to protect the Sovereign Base Areas and to support the intelligence facilities in their present scale.⁸⁷

Although the completed rundown had saved a considerable amount of the former expense, the annual cost of maintaining the Sovereign Bases remained at around £42 million a year.⁸⁸ This prompted officials within the Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office to suggest, that although the American stance on withdrawal was unlikely to have changed, the issue of cost should be raised with Washington.⁸⁹ On 5 October 1976 officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence and Treasury met in the office of Sir John Hunt, Secretary of the Cabinet. This meeting was prompted by a draft Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Defence and Overseas Policy Committee paper which impelled Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister Dr David Owen to support the idea of approaching the US. The meeting concluded with the decision to promote discussions with Washington and that these should not centre on Britain's financial difficulties but on the possibility of a political settlement on Cyprus and its consequences for the Sovereign Base Areas.⁹⁰

Four months later Dr David Owen presented the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee with two papers outlining Britain's long-position on the Sovereign Base Areas. These included the possibility of relocating the intelligence gathering facilities in Cyprus and whether the territory that would be given up in such a move could be used in securing a political settlement on the

Defence Staff, Ministry of Defence, 'Cyprus – Future UK Military Commitment', attached 'Draft, Letter to [Anthony Crosland], the Foreign Secretary', Attachment 2, TO 2032/4, 15 June 1976.

86 TNA: DEFE 68/373 'Cyprus – Policy', doc.E3, Miss M.S. Wilkin, Defence Secretariat Division II, responsible for overseas defence policy, draft answers, note for supplementaries and background note, PQ4724B, 'Background Note', 7 June 1976.

87 TNA: FCO 9/2500 'Cyprus: Annual Review for 1976', Diplomatic Report No.106/77, WSC 014/1, from the British High Commissioner to Cyprus, Donald McDonald Gordon, to British Foreign Secretary Anthony Crosland, 4 January 1977.

88 TNA: DEFE 71/260 'Sovereign Base Area Administration – Military Policy – Joint US/UK Study on the future of the Sovereign Base Areas', doc.E37, paper from the Ministry of Defence 'Cyprus: The Military and Financial Implications of a Reduced British Presence', Annex to a letter from Philip Adams, Chief Officer, Sovereign Base Area Administration, Episkopi to Assistant Secretary Edward Pendlebury, Head of S4 (Air), Ministry of Defence, 14 June 1977.

89 TNA: DEFE 68/373 'Cyprus – Policy', doc.E25, 449/14, Clive Whitmore, Assistant Under Secretary (Defence Staff), 'Cyprus: Review of the Long-Term Position in the Sovereign Base Areas', attached is OPD (76), Cabinet, Defence and Overseas Policy, 'Cyprus: HMG's Long-term Position in the Sovereign Base Areas', Memorandum by the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Crosland, 7 September 1976.

90 TNA: DEFE 11/916 'Cyprus: Policy/Defence Review', doc.E78, Note of a meeting held in Secretary of the Cabinet Sir John Hunt's room, Cabinet Office, 'Cyprus: Retention of the Sovereign Base Areas', 5 October 1976, 4.30 pm.

island. Almost simultaneously, the Chiefs of Staff presented British Prime Minister James Callaghan, at his request, with a paper outlining the fact that there were no overriding military reasons preventing Britain's withdrawal from Cyprus and that the current military presence was maintained to ensure the continued supply of information which Britain:

“... derives from its intelligence relationship with the US, the intelligence obtained on Cyprus being our major contribution to reciprocal arrangement with the US.”⁹¹

As Britain needed to obtain “American agreement or acquiescence to any withdrawal”, the visit at the end of February of Clark Clifford, President Carter's special emissary to the Eastern Mediterranean, to London presented Whitehall with the perfect opportunity of broaching the subject. British Foreign Secretary Anthony Crosland was instructed to inform Clifford that Britain's preferred policy remained the complete withdrawal from Cyprus and that if Britain were to stay “in all or part of the Sovereign Base Areas we would look for an American monetary contribution to our costs”. Crosland communicated the first point, but “no mention of a US financial contribution was made”. In a subsequent meeting between Dr Owen, who had now replaced Anthony Crosland as British Foreign Secretary and his American counterpart Cyrus Vance, it was agreed to hold Anglo-American talks, which would proceed from the standpoint of which intelligence facilities in Cyprus the Americans deemed essential.⁹²

The talks were scheduled to take place in June, and in preparation a steering brief was drafted to ensure:

“... that nobody on the British side forgets that what the talks with the Americans are all about is money and that the origin of the proposal to approach the Americans was the need to relieve the growing pressures on the defence budget which the cost of the Cyprus commitment was imposing”.

Britain's aims were:

“... to find ways and means of achieving maximum reduction in the cost to ourselves of maintaining our presence in Cyprus [and] if we cannot withdraw, to secure a substantial American contribution to the cost of the continuing British presence.”⁹³

91 TNA: DEFE 71/260 'Sovereign Base Area Administration – Military Policy – Joint US/UK Study on the future of the Sovereign Base Areas', doc.E59, 'Future policy towards Cyprus', from B.M. Norbury, Assistant Secretary, Head of Defence Secretariat Division I2 (responsible for NATO policy and strategy as well as overseas defence policy), Ministry of Defence, attached doc.E57, 'Background', Defence and Overseas Policy Papers 77(4) and (5), 16 December 1977.

92 *Ibid.*

93 TNA: DEFE 71/260 'Sovereign Base Area Administration – Military Policy – Joint US/UK Study on the future of the Sovereign Base Areas', doc.E41, from Clive Whitmore Assistant Under Secretary of Staff, Head of Defence Secretariat Division II, Ministry of Defence to the Secretary of State 'The Future of the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas', Defence and Overseas Policy (77), 13, 22 June 1977.

By now the Americans had been made aware of the fact that Britain wanted a financial contribution and Washington had already made it clear to Prime Minister Callaghan, during his visit to the US in March, that they were “not happy about the idea”. As a result of which the steering brief advocated that Britain commence the negotiations with an opening bid at two-thirds of the cost, with the hope of obtaining Britain’s desired target of 50 per cent.⁹⁴

The concept of Britain retaining sovereignty over a territory which the US financially contributes to in exchange for its use is certainly not an unprecedented scenario in the history of the ‘special relationship’. In the 1960s, Britain and the US negotiated a 70-year lease (with a 50-year opt-out) for Diego Garcia, an island in the middle of the Indian Ocean, in exchange for a discount on Polaris nuclear submarines which Britain purchased from the US. As a result, the island remains ‘British only in name’ whilst the 3,000 American military personnel stationed on Diego Garcia have turned the island into a sprawling US military base.⁹⁵ The talks which could have created a ‘Diego Garcia-type’ arrangement on Cyprus began in June 1977.

As Britain had tried to focus attention away from its financial difficulties by focusing on the possibility of using the bases in conjunction with a political solution, this was the issue first addressed. The US delegation revealed that it could not “foresee circumstances in which the surrender of all or part of the Sovereign Base Areas to the Cypriots would be a helpful gesture towards a peaceful settlement in Cyprus”. Whilst the possibility of modest reductions following a settlement was conceded, Washington warned that any attempt at reduction in advance of a settlement would have destabilising political consequences.

On the issue of cost sharing, Washington initially stated that they would “seriously consider” it, as the loss of the facilities on Cyprus would have a serious irreparable impact on intelligence. It was later believed that this was done in the context of a letter written by the US Secretary of Defence Dr Harold Brown to his British counterpart, Fred Mulley in April, during which he declared that the US wished to extend the capability of an intelligence gathering facility jointly operated by the US and Britain, parts of which were located in each of the bases, called COBRA SHOE OTHR. Dr Brown made it clear that the US was prepared to finance this project, but as it would commit Britain to a presence in Cyprus beyond 1979, the British response was that the subject should be discussed during the June talks. The subject was never raised.

Ultimately, Washington’s response, taken at the ‘highest level’, to Britain’s cost sharing proposal was negative. Reports later picked up by the Ministry of Defence from Washington, suggested that the US Intelligence Agencies were ‘extremely reluctant’ to make a financial contribution and that it was thought that the greatest opposition to the idea came from the Pentagon.⁹⁶

94 *Ibid.*

95 *The Times*, ‘Analysis: beautiful Diego Garcia makes forces blush’, by Robert Beeston, Foreign Editor, 21 February 2008.

96 TNA: DEFE 71/260 ‘Sovereign Base Area Administration – Military Policy – Joint US/UK Study on the

Despite the obvious disappointment at this negative outcome, just a few months later, Britain's Foreign Secretary was receiving advice from high ranking officials in the Ministry of Defence that although Britain would have to accept the US response as final, the door needed to be kept open for future discussions. Nonetheless, it was finally accepted that, realistically, it would not be possible to implement the 1974 Defence Review proposal of a complete withdrawal from Cyprus and that Britain now needed to make, for the time being, financial provisions for the next five years.⁹⁷

Over thirty years later, Britain still retains its colonial footprint in Cyprus in the shape of the Sovereign Base Areas. The extent to which this remains an obligation to Washington and whether the US does now financially contribute to the continued existence of the Sovereign Base Areas will remain a matter for speculation until the relevant documents become available. However, according to the documents that have been released and declassified in the British and US National Archives, what we can now deduce is that Britain wanted to withdraw from Cyprus in 1974, continued to advocate a policy of complete withdrawal until 1977, and that it was American insistence which ensured they did not, exemplifying the extent to which Whitehall allowed British defence policy to be dictated and subjected to pressures from across the Atlantic.

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