

**A Long-Drawn-Out Game of Chess: The Secret Negotiations about the British Bases (1959-1960)**  
**[Ένα Μακρόσυρτο Παιχνίδι Σκακιού: Οι Αλόρρητες Διαπραγματεύσεις για τις Βρετανικές Βάσεις (1959-1960)]**

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The newly published monograph by Achilles C. Emilianides sheds light to the negotiation which led to the final status and land size of the Sovereign British Areas (SBAs) within the territory of the Republic of Cyprus for the United Kingdom's (UK) military and defence requirements. Through a vast collection and presentation of primary archival sources, the author eloquently illustrates the political timeline, main figures, and the negotiating positions of each side during the intense and robust negotiations that ensued after the signing of the Zurich and London Agreements in February 1959 until 1 July 1960 when the final agreement was reached which allowed the Republic of Cyprus to be proclaimed an independent state on 16 August 1960. The author has managed to compile and capture the essence of the tense negotiations for this issue during the transitional period. The book is divided into five complementary chapters which provide unique clarity for the sequence of events and the positions of each side during negotiations.

The five chapters cover the following topics: 1. Introduction, 2. The issue of the size of the SBA's at the London Joint Committee, 3. The Conference in London (January 1960), 4. The Negotiations in Nicosia, and 5. The final compromise. Given the very concise length of the monograph, I will refrain from presenting each chapter separately, as the reader can effortlessly go through the book in one go and explore the main issues discussed in the book.

Noteworthy, the book helps the reader realise that the period that elapsed from the signing of the Zurich and London Agreements and the actual signing of the

establishment of the Republic of Cyprus was, indeed, quite long and protracted. Over the period of 18 months, and specifically until 16 August 1960 when Cyprus was proclaimed an independent State, a very important issue which stalled this announcement was the finalisation of the agreement on the size, scope and status of the SBAs that were to remain on the island.

I would be remiss if I did not refer to the foreword by Ambassador (ret.) Tasos Tzisionis, a Cypriot diplomat with unique insights and knowledge on the issue of the SBAs and more broadly on the UK policy vis-à-vis the Republic of Cyprus. As Ambassador Tzisionis points out, the book serves also as a manual for conducting negotiations. In this sense, the lessons identified and the lessons learned are still valid, in any sort of negotiation, between States, companies and the private sector. The author himself, an acclaimed law professor, practising lawyer and academic, also points out in the introduction that this publication contributes mostly to the political and diplomatic history of the period.

Having said this, what is important to grasp and realise is the fact that the – about to be– new founded State of the Republic of Cyprus had no experience whatsoever in conducting complex international diplomatic negotiations with no government machinery or bureaucracy in its disposal whatsoever. On the contrary, the UK had an abundance of diplomatic and international legal experiences to that end. Hence, it is critical to understand that the conduct of the negotiation in question required perseverance, resilience, clear tactic, and strategy. It is also noteworthy to mention some key figures who were involved in this negotiation from the parties: Mr Zenon Rossides from the Cypriot side, a lawyer who was later to become the first and longest serving Cypriot Ambassador/Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and Julian Amery MP, from the side of the UK, who was Under Secretary for Colonies at the time of the negotiations. In the past, Amery had served in the secretive Special Operations Executive (SOE) during WWII and maintained close ties with the British intelligence establishment (SIS/MI6) throughout his political life.<sup>1</sup>

From the sources that the author provides, it is clear that Makarios and Rossides had a clear desired end state of the negotiations with regards to the SBA, and there was not a concern about the possible postponement of the official establishment of the Republic. In this sense, the burden of time pressure was on the UK, which want-

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<sup>1</sup> More on Julian Amery's ties with the intelligence establishment and its support to covert operations in Richard J. Aldrich, Rory Cormac, *The Black Door: Spies, Secret Intelligence and British Prime Ministers* (London: William Collins, 2017).

ed to finalise all aspects as quickly as possible. We should not forget that the UK was on the dawn of its 'wind of change' policy, as proclaimed by Harold Macmillan, for accelerating the granting of independence to a number of colonies after 1960.

The desired end state of the negotiations, from the point of view of Makarios/Rossides was: a) the minimisation of the territory of the British Bases to the minimum extent possible, b) fewer inhabited villages within the administrative boundaries of the British Bases and c) a guarantee that in the event that the UK would relinquish the territory of their Bases, the territory would be given to the Republic of Cyprus and not to any other third State. Mr Rossides' opening position was that the SBAs should be 36 sq. miles without any inhabited villages. The UK's initial requirements in March 1959 was for 170 sq. miles. Eventually, the agreement was reached for 99 sq. miles.

I would therefore argue that the added value of this publication is that it provides a fresh perspective to this mostly unknown chapter of the 18-month transitional period, prior to Cyprus' independence, as the tendency is to adopt a merely legal perspective and associate the issue of the SBAs with the discussions for the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus and the Treaty concerning the Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. This publication differs, as it offers a vivid political diary of the negotiating process, which also includes what other Cypriot political figures were discussing with foreign diplomats/emissaries in the background.

Very interestingly, the author illuminates what former President and at the time transitional Minister for Justice Glafkos Clerides and some others were conveying in private to the US Consul in Nicosia, either by expressing their disagreement with Zenon Rossides' negotiating tactics, referring to them as 'intransigent Cypriot positions' or that Rossides was 'a bad influence to Makarios' or even proposing alternative ideas for circumventing official proposals submitted by Rossides at the negotiating table.

Another important dimension which merits mentioning was the unified stance between Makarios and Küçük, as expressed in certain instances of the negotiation. At important moments in the discussion, the support offered by Küçük to the arguments presented by Makarios and Rossides came as a surprise to the other parties and had a disrupting effect to the UK strategy. Throughout the book, Emilianides provides various cases in which the Cypriot representatives acted jointly, for example when they submitted a joint memorandum with regards to the issue of the administration of the SBAs. Because of this growing tendency, the UK side asked, on

numerous occasions, the Governments of Greece and Turkey to provide advice to Makarios and Küçük respectively. The unified stance of the Cypriot side constituted a critical element –especially at the culmination of the negotiations at the beginning of 1960– and was a catalyst for reaching a compromise a few months later.

The issue of the UK SBAs in Cyprus has attracted over the years, and rightly so, important academic and political attention due to its wider legal and international implications. International relations and politics are not static. What transpired during those negotiations, and the outcome with regards to the land size and scope of the British Bases in Cyprus is still pertinent today. When assessing whether the Cypriot positions –for example to include as few inhabited villages as possible in the territory of the SBAs or to limit the territory of the Bases as much as possible or to have a safeguard clause in case the UK ever decided to relinquish the SBA’s territories in the future– we should remind ourselves of the history of the Republic of Cyprus over the past six decades.

Indeed no one could have predicted back in 1959-1960, when Rossides was conveying his ‘intransigent’ (according to some members of the Cypriot political establishment) positions, the local and global developments that would have since occurred and how that negotiation and its outcome would have diachronic relevance. Among those developments, there was the pressing need for the non-military development of the Cypriot villages and areas in the administrative boundaries of the British Bases, the safeguarding of the status of the inhabitants residing in the said areas following the UK’s exit from the European Union (Brexit), the recurring issue of the return of part of the territory of the SBAs as part of the negotiations for the Cyprus settlement, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case for the Chagos Archipelago brought forward by Mauritius for which the Republic of Cyprus had an active interest and engagement, just to name a few.

It is, I believe, noteworthy to stress how the UK viewed the importance of the SBAs after the issue was settled. The Foreign Office directive to the first UK High Commissioner to the Republic of Cyprus, Sir Arthur Clark, is quite telling. As the principal objective, the directive stated that the newly appointed High Commissioner was responsible for:

the maintenance of such friendly relations with the Government of the Cyprus Republic as to ensure that they do not dispute (i) the continued exercise by Her Majesty’s Government of sovereignty over the two areas in the Island of Cyprus known as the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia; (ii) the continued

exercise by Her Majesty's Forces of certain rights and the use of certain installations and sites within the territories of the Republic of Cyprus as prescribed under the settlement.<sup>2</sup>

The British Bases in Cyprus have been, since 2019, home of the 'largest Permanent Joint Operating Base and permanent deployment of British troops overseas' and with the recent upgrade of its facilities a 'modern, safe, 21st Century facility, capable of supporting operations for the next 20 years and beyond'.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the 'long game of chess', as Sir Hugh Foot eloquently described the negotiation that took place in 1959-1960 vis-à-vis the UK SBAs, will continue to be part of the Cyprus-UK relationship and conundrum for the foreseeable future.

Consequently, Emilianides book also serves as an important reminder and compass for the need to have an inherent strategic foresight for issues of high importance and magnitude that are associated with the sovereignty, national security, and survivability of a State.

**Andreas Eliades**

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<sup>2</sup> 'Instructions to UK High Commissioner in Nicosia', TNA, FO 371/160387.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Defence and Defence Infrastructure Organisation, 'RAF Akrotiri Opens Newly Renovated Runway' (28 March 2017), available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/raf-akrotiri-opens-newly-renovated-runway>. Also, Sian Grzeszczyk Alex Walters, 'It's Time To Future-Proof' British Bases in Cyprus, Army Chief Says' Forces Net (24 September 2021), available at <https://www.forces.net/news/time-future-proof-british-bases-cyprus-army-chief-says>.