

# The Exceptional Case of the British Military Bases on Cyprus

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The arduous process of the decolonization of Cyprus formally came to an end in 1960, when the Treaty of Establishment created the Republic of Cyprus. The treaty provided for the specific status of the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs), which remained under British control, recognized by the Cypriots as sovereign British territory. The Annexes to the Establishment Treaty grant the UK a variety of rights and facilities regarding, for example, the use of Cyprus roads or ports or overflight in Cyprus airspace or the installation of lights and aids to navigation on the territory of Cyprus. These are the rights resulting from Annex A to the Treaty of Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus.<sup>1</sup>

Under Article 1 of the treaty, SBAs enjoy a privileged, *sui generis* status, only comparable to the United States' rights in the Panama Canal and the Guantánamo base in Cuba.<sup>2</sup> The British have undertaken a series of obligations by way of self-commitment. These aimed to delimit British sovereignty areas, within a strictly military framework which could be termed as *sui generis*. Therefore, the SBAs do not file reports to the United Nations Organization; they are a special kind of military bases, subordinated to the UK Ministry of Defence.

Since their establishment, many paradoxical and unusual states of affairs have arisen as a result of the presence of British bases on the island. In January 2008, the British Sovereign Areas became the first part of sovereign British territory to adopt officially, unlike the United Kingdom, the euro, due to the introduction of the euro in the Republic of Cyprus and the fact that Cypriot citizens live within those areas. A well-known case in point in the Cyprus press was that of the ship which ran aground in the vicinity of the bases in October 1988; the passengers on board, 70 illegal immigrants from Syria, Iraq and Sudan, sought asylum from the United Kingdom. Despite the risk of setting a precedent encouraging prospective asylum seekers to do the same, the British authorities eventually granted asylum to some of them while deporting the rest. This matter has since been specifically addressed in the 2003 Protocol regulating relations with the bases, signed in view of Cyprus's accession to the EU, thereby confirming the historical paradox of the

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United Kingdom exercising state sovereignty rights within the jurisdiction of another sovereign state.

Another peculiarity of the continued operation of the Military British Sovereign Bases on Cyprus territory is the fact that within their territory a number of villages inhabited by a Greek-Cypriot population exist, whose jurisdictional status, as it will be shown later, remains unclear to date.

The presence of British bases (the biggest one located within the boundaries of the Limassol district and the other one in the Larnaca district, in the southern part of the island) is regarded by many Cypriots as an unwelcome colonial remnant restricting the national sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus, although protests against their continued presence have waned in recent years. Furthermore, the Cypriots have never officially asked for the agreements to be revised; however, as will be shown in the following analysis, the provisions concerning the status of the bases expose one important facet of post-colonial power relations, disguised, as some well-esteemed experts have already noted, through legal language and euphemisms. More concretely, the crucial and detailed provisions re-contracting empire, for example, have not been included in the main text of the Treaty of Establishment but skilfully moved to the long annexes to it. Special care was taken to acquire rights to the use of air-fields, given the strategic vision of Cyprus as the 'unsinkable submarine' of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Phenomenon of Military Presence on Foreign Soil and the Colonial Heritage**

Military presence on foreign soil is an old phenomenon, dating back to antiquity. It has usually taken the form of *ad hoc* or long-term bases for military forces, which may be the result of leases, stationing of troops, United Nations resolutions, bilateral or multilateral defence and peace agreements and so on.

Before the Napoleonic Wars, Britain acquired what was really the first truly global network of bases, involving numerous *points d'appui*. At its peak, the British Empire had already developed its main naval base network: Gibraltar, Cape Town, Mauritius, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malta, Suez, Aden among them. The entire Mediterranean littoral has been an area of competition over basing access for a long time. During the peak of the Cold War, US main naval and air bases at Rota (Spain), Sigonella (Sicily), La Maddalena (Sardinia), Naples, Piraeus, Souda Bay (Crete) and Izmir (Turkey) were balanced by Soviet access to Annaba (Algeria), Tripoli (Libya), Alexandria and Port Said. Even after the end of the Cold War bases remained important, although the strategic considerations behind the installation of the military bases may now have acquired an altered meaning.<sup>4</sup>

A controversial issue relating to the military bases, especially those of post-colonial powers in former colonies, is whether they run counter to the principle of self-determination, especially internal self-determination, as some experts argue that military bases constitute the supreme form of state sovereignty that should be respected by all means. Others, on the contrary, argue that if a state has gained the right to station its forces within the frontiers of another state with the consent of the host state, that state has exclusive jurisdiction over its own forces but no sovereignty over any part of the host state.

In the post-war era, several international law experts began to draw a distinction between external self-determination and internal self-determination. Whereas the right to self-determination has a long legal and ethical tradition behind it and is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations (Articles 1, 55 and 73) and this right is also specifically invoked in the UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) concerning decolonization adopted in 1960, the principle of internal self-determination constitutes a recent phenomenon in international law<sup>5</sup> and is grounded in the need to consolidate the rights of a group of people with common national or ethnic characteristics, who make up the majority of the resident population but are nevertheless forced to tolerate a compromise of fundamental rights.<sup>6</sup>

The United Kingdom is considered the first state in the world to adopt the principle of internal self-determination in the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), which recognized the rights of the native Maori tribes of New Zealand. Another classic case in point would be that of South Africa, where the black majority was ruled by the white minority, as a result of Apartheid.

International law is divided over the legal status of the term 'self-determination'. Some experts do not consider self-determination to be a right but a non-binding principle, whereas others believe that self-determination has in the meantime evolved into a kind of *jus cogens* for international law and UN practices hitherto have made national self-determination a genuine norm of international law.<sup>7</sup> Against this background, foreign military bases and military installations of all kinds are regarded in general as inconsistent with self-determination in the various UN bodies' resolutions, rulings and decisions.<sup>8</sup>

The increasingly enhanced status of self-determination in international law is due to the fact that, according to the UN Charter, the principle of self-determination is an essential prerequisite for the maintenance of international peace and security (Articles 1 and 2). In line with the reasoning mentioned above, these can be secured only through respect for the principle of equality and the rights of peoples, including their right to self-determination (Article 55, para. 1). Universal consensus on these principles is also reflected in adherence to the premises of the UN Charter, proclaimed in the very first articles of all treaties establishing defence and military alliances and organizations in the post-war period, such as the Treaty of Brussels, the Western European Union Treaty and the North Atlantic Treaty.<sup>9</sup>

In 2001 the UN Special Committee on Decolonization adopted a resolution on New Caledonia, a French overseas dominion, incriminating France. According to the Noumea Accord, New Caledonia was in the process of gradually becoming independent from France. Nevertheless, France maintains military bases on the island. The resolution calls for the removal of all military installations from the island, on the grounds that they violate the principle of self-determination of the people of New Caledonia.<sup>10</sup>

In 2002 the Special Committee on Decolonization approved a text incriminating New Zealand because of the military facilities the latter maintains on the Tokelau Island in the Pacific Ocean, a dependent territory of New Zealand since 1926. The text calls for the immediate removal of all military facilities on the island.<sup>11</sup>

Britain has also invoked the right to self-determination in the past, and has continued to do so to date.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the cases of the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar, the

United Kingdom hailed UN General Assembly resolutions 2070, 2231 and 2353, adopted between 1965 and 1968 and calling for the Gibraltar people's right to self-determination,<sup>13</sup> allowing the United Kingdom to hold the referendum whereby the population voted to remain under British rule.

On the other side, in 1946 Egypt denounced before the United Nations Security Council the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, under which Britain had retained the right to station troops in the Suez Canal Zone, as incompatible with Article 103 of the UN Charter and respect for peoples' right to self-determination. By the same rationale, Tunisia also appealed to the Security Council, denouncing the Bardo Treaty (1881) and the La Marsa Convention (1883), which transferred part of the sovereignty of the Tunisian protectorate to France. Western colonial countries challenged the right of those countries to appeal to this organ, arguing that the UN was not competent to adjudicate the dispute. This claim did not stand the test of time and the treaty denunciations were put on the agenda.

In the course of time, the two issues were settled in favour of the peoples under colonial rule. Egypt expelled Anglo-French forces in the 1950s; Tunisia was recognized by France as an independent state in 1956, while the naval base that the latter maintained in the port of Bijerta was forced to shut down in 1963, following persistent pressure by Tunisia. The British bases operating in Libya, Algeria and Malta followed suit.

In another instance, under the 2023/XX/1965 resolution, the General Assembly deplored the maintenance of military bases in Aden, denouncing them as an obstacle to the liberation of its people from colonial domination, and strongly recommending their 'immediate and complete removal'. More specifically, Aden, a region in South Yemen, became a British colony in 1937, while the surrounding region became known as the Aden Protectorate. In 1963 Aden and the protectorate joined forces in an anti-colonial uprising, forming the Federation of South Arabia. Due to the special strategic importance of the region, the British maintained a military base there, which they tried to hold on to by waging a four-year war against the native population. In 1967, however, they were forced to recognize the independence of the new state and leave the country, also evacuating the base.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the United Kingdom's once near astonishing network of overseas naval bases and access began to diminish in the 1980s. The Cyprus bases were among them, where there were some aircraft or helicopters permanently stationed, although Phantoms and Lightning fighters were sometimes deployed there as well as a larger force of two infantry battalions and an engineering group.<sup>15</sup>

As some well-informed experts have noted,<sup>16</sup> in sharp contrast to the neighbouring countries which have managed to uproot the British from non-sovereign bases located within their territory, the Republic of Cyprus seems to have adopted the line of least resistance. Thus, Cyprus remains the only part in the world where the United Kingdom is still retaining Sovereign Base Areas, with its military presence guaranteed by a multilateral treaty of guarantee. It follows that the Republic of Cyprus is the only UN member state to have had its sovereignty subject to limitations arising from the Treaty of Establishment and of Guarantee of 1960.

### The Historical Evolution of the SBAs

In 1978 Cyprus came under the control of Great Britain, as the latter could use it as a *de facto* base to maintain its life-line policy from London to India. In 1925 Cyprus was declared a British Crown Colony. From the 1950s onwards, the Cypriots began intensively claiming their right to self-determination, which resulted in an anti-colonial struggle in 1955–59 organized and carried out by EOKA, the National Organization of Cypriot Combatants. EOKA, regarded and labelled by the British as a terrorist organization, took over, with the help of some Greek army officers, the leadership of the Enosis movement among the ethnically Greek population of Cyprus.<sup>17</sup>

In order to achieve the so-called Enosis goal, the liberation of the island from the British colonial yoke and its incorporation into Greece, a big anti-British campaign was launched. Anti-colonial activities started with acts of sabotage and demonstrations by young people clearly intended as gestures of defiance; they continued with assassination, raids on police stations and British army authorities using bombs and hand grenades, with few casualties and slight damage. The British retaliated with mass arrests and deportations of individuals suspected of involvement in the EOKA organization.<sup>18</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, London decided to grant Cyprus independence, retaining in return sovereign control over two main airfields, along with use of all kinds of communications ancillary to the operation of the airfields, or public services such as electricity, water, telegraphic and postal services.<sup>19</sup> However, the issue of the military bases on Cyprus dates back to the early 1920s and is related to broader British geo-strategic aspirations in the Southern Mediterranean Basin and the Middle East. Cyprus was considered as a set-off to any hostile naval bases which would be developed in the eastern Mediterranean on the flank of the Suez Canal route or on the coast of southern Asia Minor and Syria. However, there were some difficulties as Cyprus had no adequate harbour, but as long as it remained in British hands, it could not be used against them.<sup>20</sup>

After the riots of 1931, in 1936–37 the British re-examined the issue of the development of the island as a defence base, but the whole venture seemed very expensive at the time. Apart from that, British experts estimated that in the case of a war and apprehended emergency Egypt would offer to the empire all facilities and assistance, including the use of ports, airports and means of communication. Cyprus offered advantages in the way of accommodation and climate which did not appear to exist elsewhere. The development of a naval base at Famagusta entailed the protection of the whole of Cyprus, which would be a permanent additional military commitment. Cyprus was only 70 miles from the coast of Asia Minor. If Turkey came under the domination of a hostile first-class air power, the position of Cyprus would be geographically weak and therefore the installation of a base there would affect British political relations with Turkey and its neighbours.<sup>21</sup> The Greeks and the Greek-Cypriots also had naive expectations in the 1920s and 1930s that the British would consent to the union of Cyprus with Greece in return for a military base on the island.<sup>22</sup>

During the Cold War, Cyprus was a key part of the NATO security mechanism against the Soviet Union. In particular, it was a crucial link in the axis that stretched from West Germany to Turkey in an arc that surrounded the Soviet Union's south-western border. From 1947 onwards, Cyprus became a listening post. The British

transferred personnel and equipment from Palestine to the Agios Nikolaos Station near Famagusta, later renamed the 9 Signal Regiment, which was devoted to operating this equipment, with thousands of intelligence staff employed to decipher and analyse the encrypted messages and signals at Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) in Cheltenham. As Brendan O'Malley and Ian Craig have noted,<sup>23</sup> in the context of the UKUSA Agreement, which dates from the end of the Second World War and outlines an intelligence agreement between the US and Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, up to 20,000 people were employed worldwide in British signals intelligence. The Cypriot signals staff handled tens of thousands of classified documents each day. They not only intercepted 'traffic', but also monitored the direction from which signals came, the pattern of destinations to which they were being sent, and controlled the movement of transmitters to chart the movement of enemy military units, aircraft or ships.

In the early 1950s, as the British wished to preserve their privileged role in the region, while acting within the framework of NATO strategic planning, they proposed at their own initiative the establishment of a full-fledged command within NATO, integrating Greek and Turkish armed forces. Initially this would be named MEC (Middle East Command) and would later be renamed MEDO (Middle East Defence Organization). The plan for setting up MEDO was eventually abandoned in 1952, as the British managed to have a British army officer appointed to the post of Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean (CINCMED) in the separate Mediterranean Command, integrating Greek and Turkish naval forces. Initial planning had included the possibility of basing the command headquarters in Cyprus, but in the end Malta was chosen instead. Opting for Malta was probably due to British opposition, which had already, at a preliminary level, raised objections to that possibility in particular, and Greek participation in the Middle East Defence Organization in general, fearing that NATO's structure would set the stage for Greek claims in favour of the unification of Cyprus with Greece.<sup>24</sup>

In 1953 the issue of installing military bases on Cyprus resurfaced on the occasion of a proposal for the installation of a NATO airbase in Akrotiri, singled out as the most convenient site for a number of technical reasons (accessibility, infrastructure, proximity to other facilities). This proposal did not come to fruition either because of the high cost an installation of this kind would incur but also due to the intention of the British to exploit it solely for their own benefit.<sup>25</sup>

During the whole turbulent decade of 1950, the Greek government, being under massive pressure from the Greek public opinion and opposition pushing for a more active role regarding Cypriot national aspirations and the demand for Enosis, made some proposals to the British government related to the future of Cyprus. The Greek government was ready to agree to place at Britain's disposal some strategic bases in Cyprus and in other parts of Greek territory, if London agreed to cede Cyprus to Greece.<sup>26</sup>

Final settlement of the issue was to take place in 1960 in the London–Zurich Treaty, which established the Republic of Cyprus. The question of the military bases and facilities outside of the bases turned out to be the dominant issue of negotiations aimed at establishing the Republic of Cyprus after British colonial rule in 1959–60, although the British decision to maintain sovereign areas at that time seems to have been dictated by domestic political factors rather than strategic considerations. The

final agreement specified that, should Britain one day cede sovereignty, it could only do so to the Republic of Cyprus.<sup>27</sup>

The British, backed by the representatives of the Turkish-Cypriot community,<sup>28</sup> presented their military requirements from a position of strength as the rulers of the island. The rationale prevalent in negotiations was that the British would have all they deemed necessary in return for granting independence. Namely, Britain agreed to surrender sovereignty over the island only if its military demands were met. Therefore the negotiations aimed at granting independence to Cyprus were paralysed many times. For an entire year, the Greek Cypriots and the British negotiated on the area of the bases, settling in the end for a total of 99 square miles equivalent to 2.75 of Cyprus territory overall and expanded rights over an area totalling 256 square kilometres (Akrotiri area and the area of Dhekelia–Pergamos–Xilofagou–Agios Nikolaos) including some Cypriot villages in the Sovereign Areas. It is implicit that the bases are proof of the British presence on the island as a guarantor power of independence.<sup>29</sup>

British officials who negotiated the Treaty of Establishment in 1959 were concerned about the issue of the inclusion of Cypriot inhabitants within the Sovereign Areas and the implications it might have in the future.<sup>30</sup> As shown below, these fears would prove well-founded.

In the following decades, the Royal Air Force base at Akrotiri developed into the largest British base of its kind in the world and was used both to survey and to defend NATO's southern flank. Additionally, the communications and surveillance centres at Britain's disposal were capable of intercepting unidentified aircraft in the eastern Mediterranean. Of the retained sites of supreme strategic importance on the level of intelligence, surveillance and communication for NATO and the UK were the Mount Olympus, the RAF Troodos and the Cape Greco.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1960 negotiations, it was arranged that the United Kingdom would pay at five-year intervals an amount of financial aid to Cyprus for the use of the facilities, sites and installations associated with the operation of the bases (but not for the bases themselves). Indeed, until 1965 Britain paid £12 million. In 1965, after the bi-communal riots, London informed Nicosia that further payment was to be suspended unless equal distribution among the two communities could be guaranteed.<sup>32</sup> In the following years, the United Kingdom repeatedly refused to reassume the payment of that aid.<sup>33</sup>

In the mid-1970s, the British seemed – obviously for economic reasons – ready to give up the territories but they faced the strongest opposition from the US, as Kissinger, then secretary of state, saw Cyprus as a tool for the defence of Israel. He strongly believed that the elimination of the British bases, especially their intelligence-gathering, could have a destabilizing effect on the region as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

When the Berlin Wall was torn down in 1989, there was some temporary euphoria that this would have an immediate positive effect, since it was assumed that Cyprus's military and spying installations would become redundant in the post-Cold War era. This proved illusory. Cyprus's strategic value increased, as it became part of the US Middle East strategy towards the so-called rogue states and oil supplies.<sup>35</sup>

When the United Kingdom joined the European Community in 1973, the Cyprus Sovereign British Areas were specifically excluded from the accession treaty. 30 years later, when Cyprus joined the European Union, Protocol No. 3 annexed to the EU

Accession Treaty specified that the EU *acquis communautaire* did not apply to them, except to the extent necessary to ensure the continued implementation of agreed arrangements in force.<sup>36</sup> More specifically, after negotiations between the Republic of Cyprus, the United Kingdom and the European Commission, it was agreed that even though the territory of the British bases was not part of the European Union, certain aspects of the *acquis communautaire* would apply.<sup>37</sup>

Within the framework of its arbitration in the Greek–Turkish conflict over Cyprus and in order to facilitate the solution, as it was put by the Annan Plan in 2004, the United Kingdom offered to surrender, as part of the Annan Plan, 45 out of the 99 square miles of territory taken up by the bases to the two ‘constituent states’ (the larger part assigned to the Greek-Cypriot one) with a view to modifying the percentages under the control of the two states. The gesture was hailed as a good and generous concession of territory to Cyprus. Meanwhile, the British have sold to the Cyprus government 30 of the 40 small sites of facilities they possessed outside of the bases, and are still asserting, that the 2004 offer remains valid.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Political and Legal Dispute over the Operational Framework of British Bases**

The legal framework for the British bases and their *sui generis* status is clearly defined in the annexes to the Treaty of Establishment of 1960, as supplemented by the diplomatic notes exchanged between Britain and the Republic of Cyprus on 16 February 1960, coming into force upon signature.<sup>39</sup>

In accordance with the issues addressed in the diplomatic notes, the United Kingdom undertook the following commitments on the British bases in Cyprus:

- (i) Not to develop the Sovereign Base Areas for other than military purposes.
- (ii) Not to set up and administer ‘colonies’.
- (iii) Not to create customs posts or other frontier barriers between the Sovereign Base Areas and the Republic.
- (iv) Not to set up or permit the establishment of civilian commercial or industrial enterprises, except insofar as these are connected with military requirements, and not otherwise to impair the economic, commercial or industrial unity and life of the island.
- (v) Not to establish commercial or civilian seaports or airports.
- (vi) Not to allow new settlement of people in the Sovereign Base Areas, other than for temporary purposes.
- (vii) Not to expropriate private property within the Sovereign Base Areas except for military purposes on payment of fair compensation.

The bases have no territorial waters. Section 3 of Annex A to the Treaty of Establishment obligates the Republic of Cyprus ‘not to claim as part of its territorial sea’ waters lying close to the land boundary of the bases. Co-ordinates delimiting these territorial waters are specified in the same Annex to the Treaty (Section 3.2). However, according to the new Law of the Sea enacted in 1982, the United Kingdom cannot lay claim to the recognition of shelf or economic zone, since this right is attached to a coastline, and only states with full sovereignty can have a coastline.

As legal experts have noted,<sup>40</sup> the fact that the British have engaged themselves to follow these commitments is evidence of the limited sovereignty of the military bases; they not only limit UK sovereignty, but do so in a considerable way. The rights belonging to the UK under the Treaty, while far-reaching rights indeed, are not inherent rights linked with sovereignty and are simply recognized by Cyprus; they are functional rights linked with the purpose of the establishment of the bases, to ‘the security and effective operation of the military bases’ and for military purposes only. In Appendix O of Command Paper 1093 of 1960, which was the object of an Exchange of Notes between Cyprus and the UK and is therefore a binding treaty instrument, Her Majesty’s Government declared that their intention would be of military or defensive nature. This declaration has been deposited with the official depositary of international treaties, the United Nations.

In the same appendix, ‘The future of the Sovereign Base Areas’ is also elaborated on. It simply but clearly states that, when the British decide to give the bases away, they could not do so but to the benefit of the Republic of Cyprus. In other words, the UK cannot dispose of the British Military Bases in Cyprus (BMBC) as it wishes. Consequently, its sovereignty over the BMBC is to be considered as sensibly limited.

Apart from that, the SBAs consist of those portions of the colony of Cyprus which were not established by the Cyprus Act 1960 as the independent sovereign Republic of Cyprus, and which remain within Her Majesty’s sovereignty and jurisdiction. They are to be regarded as *constituting a colony* acquired by conquest or cession. Yet it is also confirmed that the UK cannot claim full sovereignty over the SBAs, as administering powers do not enjoy full sovereignty over their colonies. Thus, the UK seems to have violated a series of international law principles. Focusing on the Treaty of Guarantee, a first violation stems from the fact that the Treaty has been concluded in perpetuity, without possibility of alteration. That could be regarded as a derogation of the Republic of Cyprus’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right of the Cypriot people to self-determination, as set out by the above-mentioned UN General Assembly Resolution 1514, since the Cypriots never got the chance to vote on the approval of their own constitution or on the texts surrounding it. Furthermore, the case of Cyprus constitutes a situation of incomplete decolonization. Indeed, the UK, by keeping a portion of the Cypriot territory in 1960, even though by an allegedly valid treaty in legal terms, has violated its obligation to decolonize the entire territory of the island of Cyprus.

The fact that the UK did not approve the proclamation of the Republic of Cyprus unless British sovereignty over the bases was secured – that is, they demanded that the newly established republic exercise the sovereign right of ceding sovereign rights even before it came into being – is adequate proof of British post-colonial behaviour. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom itself does not treat the bases as a colony in legal terms,<sup>41</sup> as attested by the fact that the British government avoids submitting reports to the United Nations based on Article 73 of the United Nations Charter, which obligates colonial powers to do so for all of their colonies. If Britain did so, then international rules for the termination of the colonialist regime would also apply in Cyprus.

Since the establishment of the SBAs, many areas of cooperation but also of contention regarding the manner in which the bases function have emerged. In the context of cooperation, both the Sovereign British Areas administration and British volunteer associations and personnel have conducted charity work, rescue and

recovery operations, served emergency and health care assistance to the overall Cypriot society as well as contributed to fire-fighting in Cyprus by providing technical assistance and cooperation.<sup>42</sup>

Besides areas of cooperation and mutual assistance, there are numerous points of friction, as the Sovereign Areas Authorities very often exceeded the rights granted to them by the Treaty of Establishment. Accordingly, objections to the actual status of the bases have been raised from time to time.

In many cases, the British carried out military exercises in locations that hazarded the safety of surrounding villages. The Cyprus government objected and put pressure on the UK authorities to abandon specific military exercises.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, there is also conclusive evidence that the United Kingdom may have stored nuclear weapons at Akrotiri in the 1960s to fulfil their nuclear commitment to the Central Eastern Treaty Organization (CENTO), although the British government has always remained tight-lipped about the issue.<sup>44</sup>

To some extent, the British bases operate in a manner that exceeds their jurisdiction, relying on decrees issued by their administrator, in accordance with the colonial model, hardly compatible with the spirit of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), which by a UK decision was extended to include the territory of the British bases, but with the exception of the First, Fourth, Sixth, Seventh and Twelfth Protocols.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the SBAs have their own legal and judicial system that is independent of the system in place in the Republic of Cyprus. By virtue of Article 4 of the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia Order in Council 1960, the administrator of the SBAs is given power to 'make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Sovereign Base Areas'. In line with the declaration to this effect made by the United Kingdom government in paragraph 3(2) of Appendix O of the Treaty of Establishment, the laws applicable to the Cypriot population of the SBAs are 'as far as possible the same as the laws of the Republic' (so-called mirroring legislation). According to the Powers and Duties (Officers of the Republic of Cyprus) Ordinance 2002, based on paragraph 3(4) of Appendix O of the same treaty, officers of the Republican government are delegated to carry out many powers and duties imposed under SBA legislation.

In addition, the declaration by Her Majesty's Government regarding the administration of the Sovereign Base Areas, being those areas mentioned in Article I of the treaty, clearly states that 'there will be no discrimination by the authorities of the Republic against those [Cypriot habitants] who live or work in the Sovereign Base Areas'.

For example, by virtue of the Treaty of Establishment, apart from the residents of British bases, each and every citizen of the Republic of Cyprus is entitled to access and unhindered communication on the territory of British bases where Cypriot villages lie, unless there are specific security reasons, which, however, need to be clearly specified. Despite this clear provision, the tactic deployed at British bases is to deny at any time road access to the base areas and to place restrictions on the use of properties located in the SBAs, only invoking general security reasons. Another issue of contention with serious environmental implications and a negative impact on the quality of life and the welfare of Cypriot citizens living in the base areas has been the installation of huge telecommunication masts in Akrotiri, raising health and environmental concerns at the same time.<sup>46</sup>

Due to constant mass protests against the operation of the bases, in November 2006 the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, headed by the Swiss Andreas Gross, visited the population in the base area of Akrotiri as part of a process of drawing up a report on the Situation of the Inhabitants of the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, submitted to the Council of Europe in April 2007.

The report confirmed the inhabitants' grievances. Although it notes that the British authorities in charge of the administration of the SBAs by and large treat the local population in a respectful manner, it also considers that the principle of the non-discriminatory application of the Convention must apply to the inhabitants of the SBAs, whose rights should be protected in the same way as those of all other Cypriots. Additionally, the Assembly commends the United Kingdom for granting the inhabitants of the SBAs the right of individual application to the European Court of Human Rights in 2004. However, it also notes that the First Protocol has not been extended to the SBAs and that the Cypriot inhabitants of the SBAs enjoy neither the full panoply of rights of Cypriot nationals nor of nationals of the United Kingdom.<sup>47</sup>

As a result, in January 2014 London conceded an agreement to the Republic of Cyprus aimed at overturning some features of the *status quo* created by the agreements of 1960 and British policy in the bases for the residents and owners of property in the bases. Under the agreement the largest part of the bases' territory (78 per cent of the territory of the British bases, stretching over about 200 out of a total of about 255 square kilometres) is to be integrated into planning zones, thus allowing their development; all property within the bases, private and not, will be incorporated into planning zones with the exception of properties used for the military needs of the British, with the Republic of Cyprus being responsible for the zoning and other development in accordance with the practice and policy of the Republic of Cyprus. Cypriot and EU citizens and third country nationals are entitled to acquire real estate in the area of the British bases, and this implies the unrestricted exploitation of property by the current owners.<sup>48</sup> The reference to the 'effective use of the Sovereign Base Areas as military bases' indicates Nicosia's perpetual fear that the United Kingdom might claim some parts of the natural gas and oil assets discovered in 2011 in Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (Aphrodite Blocks).

The most significant aspect of the operation of the bases, which exceeds the institutional framework agreed, is the deployment of the bases in UK military operations (Lebanon, Rwanda, Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Libya and the Balkans) or those of the USA as an intermediary station for operations in the Middle East, to which UK armed forces based there have provided extensive support.<sup>49</sup> The risk hiding here is that the deployment of the bases for undertaking aggressive action both by the United Kingdom and the armies of other states could result in the bases, and therefore the island as a whole, becoming embroiled in hostile military action with other states, perhaps even those with relations of amity with the Republic of Cyprus.

This tactic on the part of the UK amounts to a violation of institutional obligations undertaken in the Treaty of Establishment, under which all international obligations and responsibilities of UK governments should also have the approval of the government of the Republic of Cyprus, insofar as they have an impact on the

Republic of Cyprus, while issues related to the operational needs of UK military forces should be settled through negotiations among the three guarantor powers.<sup>50</sup> None of the two obligations has ever been honoured by the United Kingdom.

The operation of the so-called Echelon surveillance system in British bases is yet another case where the operational framework for the bases, as laid down in relevant agreements, has been exceeded. The creation of the Echelon system arose from the UKUSA Agreement mentioned above, in whose framework Cyprus had played an important role, contracted at the beginning of the twenty-first century among Anglo-Saxon countries: USA, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, using the former UKUSA infrastructure. The agreement provided for joint action by these states in the field of counterespionage, along with the division of the planet into surveillance zones. The co-ordination centre for Europe and Africa (GCHQ) was based in the English area of Cheltenham. The agreement is supported by 13 public American intelligence agencies, including the National Security Agency, capable of detecting 'suspicious' information in telephone communications and the transmission of text messages via telex, fax and radio-waves.<sup>51</sup>

In 1999 the European Parliament assigned British journalist Duncan Campbell to draw up a report on cases of American espionage against Europeans. The report confirmed suspicions that in recent years the CIA had indeed spied systematically on European companies trading in 'sensitive' strategic sectors, even though in this case the term 'strategic' took on a broad and expansive interpretation. According to the report, as early as the 1970s satellite dishes had been installed in Cyprus with a view to collecting information by intercepting communication among NATO member states, including Greece and Turkey.<sup>52</sup>

A recent Wikileaks document revealed that the US government believes that if the British were to lose their Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus then this would pose a threat to their US security interests in the eastern Mediterranean. The US seems to have used intelligence gathered from the military bases in Cyprus to help Lebanese authorities track down Hezbollah militants. The UK protested that 'in both cases, intelligence product is intended to be passed to third-party governments'. What the UK actually feared was the possibility of being complicit in unlawful acts, or the Cyprus government finding out.<sup>53</sup>

According to the agreements and the exchanges of notes associated with the Treaty of Establishment, the bases can be used only by the United Kingdom of Great Britain except for the benefit of preferences in respect of import duties or charges granted from time to time to the countries which belong to the Commonwealth. However, the USA has never been a member of the Commonwealth, while the interventions of the USA and its close allies in the different countries have actually exceeded by far the privileges granted to the Commonwealth countries.

Against this background, the United Kingdom's decision to impose the protocol stipulating that the bases were not considered as territory of the EU could be interpreted in various ways, as one could argue that, thanks to it, the UK would not be accountable to anyone. It also explains why the United States has been very interested in the British military bases on Cyprus, although it possesses numerous other facilities in the Near East, and even at Souda Bay in Crete. One could also suppose that activities may take place there which might not be possible somewhere else. For instance, in the neighbouring base of Incirlik near Adana, the Turkish authorities

decide in relation to their own interests, as was seen during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War<sup>54</sup> and during the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

On the other hand, those incidents have highlighted once again the strategic importance of Cyprus. The region's drift toward fundamentalism and the increasing presence of Russian naval forces in the region indeed create an incentive for America to get active in order to defend its security interests and NATO's south-eastern flank.

Moscow's decision to dispatch a *permanent fleet* of five or six combat ships to the Mediterranean Sea, with frigates and cruisers and the aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov* making up the core of the fleet, as a task force to defend Russia's interests in the region, has precipitated a new complex and very explosive geopolitical and economic equation near to the very fragile NATO south-eastern wing.<sup>55</sup>

## Notes

The author would like to thank Sozos Theodoulou and Marina Hila for their comments and Jacob Landau for inspiration.

1. For this particular annex but also for the body of legal texts included in the treaty, along with protocols and other official documents attached to it, see the documentary reader by N. Macris (ed.), *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus and Selected Subsequent Acts*, Peleus Monographien-Reihe, Vol.24 (Mannheim-Möhnesee: Bibliopolis, 2003), pp.23–4.
2. S.-C. Theodoulou, *Bases militaires en droit international: le cas de Chypre*, Peleus-Monographien-Reihe, Vol.34 (Mannheim and Möhnesee: Bibliopolis, 2006), p.9.
3. Specifically, the annexes contain other areas that Britain acquired in addition to the sovereign bases, the so-called 'Sites and Installations' and British discretionary rights granted for the effective operation of the bases. Sometimes 'consultation with the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus' is required to operationalize such rights, at other times, some 'notification' of the authorities is enough for their exercise. For instance, without consultation or notification the UK authorities can use roads, ports and other facilities freely for the movement of troops to and from the UK, the bases, the sites, the installations and the British training areas in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus (Annex B, Part II, 1960: Section 4.1). Without consultation or notification, the UK can fly military aircraft in the airspace of the Republic, having no restriction other than due regard of air traffic and Cypriot life and property (Annex B, Part II). C. Constantinou and O. Richmond, 'The Long Mile of Empire: Power, Legitimation and the UK Bases in Cyprus', *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.10, No.1 (2005), pp.66–71
4. R. Harkavy, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers, 1200–2000* (Routledge: New York, 2007), pp.1–6.
5. Covenants on the Rights of Man, 19 Dec. 1966 and the UN Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States 1970.
6. S. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
7. R. Emerson, 'Self-determination', *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol.65, No.3 (1971), pp.463–4; D. Galbreath, 'Dealing with Diversity in International Law: Self-determination and Statehood', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol.9, No.4 (Dec. 2005), pp.539–50; and O. Kimminich and S. Hobe, *Einführung in das Völkerrecht*, 7th edition (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 2000), p.113; and P. Groarke, *Dividing the State: Legitimacy, Secession and the Doctrine of Oppression* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); K. Knop, *Diversity and Self-determination in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); K. Zourgui, *Die innere Selbstbestimmung der Völker im Spannungsverhältnis von Souveränität und Entwicklung*, Studie des Düsseldorfer Instituts für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (2005); R. Stavenhagen, 'Ethnic Conflict and Human Rights: Their Interrelationship', *Security Dialogue*, Vol.18 (1987), pp.512–13.
8. See the following resolutions and decisions: (1) General Assembly 34 Press Release GA/9379 69th Meeting (PM) 10 Dec. 1997, 'Vote on Military Activities by Colonial Powers' (The draft decision on military activities by colonial powers in territories under their administration was adopted document A/52/621), (2) United Nations General Assembly A/55/575 (20 Oct. 2000), 'Economic and other

- activities which affect the interests of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories – Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, Point 7: Military activities and arrangements by colonial Powers in territories under their administration’, (3) The General Assembly (10 Dec. 1997) Meeting 69: 52/78 ‘Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples’ (Draft: A/52/L.64 and Add. 1). Only the United Kingdom and the United States voted against this particular resolution, (4) United Nations General Assembly A/56/554 (21 Nov. 2001), ‘Economic and other activities which affect the interests of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples: Report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee’, (5) Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs Supplement No.7, Vol.V, Article 76.
9. B. Elsner, *Die Bedeutung des Volkes im Völkerrecht: unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der historischen Entwicklung und der Praxis des Selbstbestimmungsrechts der Völker* (Berlin: Duncker und Humboldt, 2000), p.6 ff.
  10. UN Press Release GA/COL/3057 03/07/2001, ‘Special Committee on Decolonization 10th Meeting (AM), Decolonization Committee Seeks Dialogue for Peaceful Progress Towards Act of Self-Determination in New Caledonia’.
  11. UN Press Release GA/COL/3069 (2002), ‘Special Committee on Decolonization 10th Meeting: Decolonization Committee Approves Three Texts on Military Installations, Nuclear Weapons, Economic Activities in Territories’.
  12. See the official texts on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website. For the Falkland Islands: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename = OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c = Page&cid = 1007029394365&a = KCountryProfile&aid = 1018965238550>.  
Also for Gibraltar: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename = OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c = Page&cid = 1007029394365&a = KCountryProfile&aid = 1018965242498>.
  13. See the official view of the British government on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename = OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c = Page&cid = 1007029394365&a = KCountryProfile&aid = 1018965242498>.
  14. See P. Calvocoressi, *World Politics since 1945*, 9th edition (Harlow *et al.*: Pearson, 2009), pp.323–45; and J.-M. Balencie and A. de la Grange, *Exegermenoi Kosmoi: Antartika, militsies, tromokratikes omades* (Athens: Typothito – George Dardanos, 2003), pp.476 ff. Original title: *Mondes rebelles: Guérillas, milices, groupes terroristes* (2001).
  15. Harkavy, *Strategic Basing*, pp.142–9.
  16. K. Kyriakides, ‘The Sovereign Base Areas and British Defence Policy since 1960’, in H. Faustmann and N. Peristianis (eds.), *Britain in Cyprus: Colonialism and Post-Colonialism 1878–2006*, Peleus Monographien-Reihe Bd. 19 (Mannheim and Möhnese: Bibliopolis, 2006), pp.516–19.
  17. E. Hatzivasilieou, *Stratigikes tou Kypriakou. I Dekatita 1950* [Strategic Plans on Cyprus. The 1950s] (Athens: Patakis Publisher, 2005), pp.233–80.
  18. Foreign Office Archive in Public Record Office (hereafter PRO): CO 926/415–19 and 454–9, *Sabotage and Incidents in Cyprus in 1955, The Nature of EOKA, The Nature of PEKA-Political Committee of Cypriot Struggle* (it was another ‘subversive organization’ operating in schools).
  19. PRO: CO 926/592, *Report of the Cyprus Colonial Authorities to London (Secretary of State of Colonies) 27 January 1958* and CO 926/593, *Report of the Cyprus Colonial Authorities to London (Secretary of State of Colonies) 2 August 1959*.
  20. PRO: FO 371/9897, *Memorandum by Headlam-Morley and Mr Childs respecting Cyprus 18 December 1924*.
  21. PRO: CO 67/270/26, *Report on the Potentialities of Cyprus as a Naval, Military and Air Base, 9 July 1936* and *Memorandum of the Committee of Imperial Defence 29 July 1936* and CO 67/278/7, *Development of Cyprus as a Defence Base*.
  22. PRO: FO: CO 67/228/1, *Panhellenic Propaganda, Dispatches from the British Embassy in Athens to London in August, September and October 1929*.
  23. B. O’Malley and I. Craig, *The Cyprus Conspiracy* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp.80–81.
  24. PRO: FO 371/107500 (1953), *Brief for Visit by Secretary of State to Greece (Confidential)*. Subject: *Greece and M.E.D.O. Historical Archives of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, File 23, sub file*

- 411, *Dispatch from the Embassy of Greece in Turkey to the Hellenic Directorate for the North Atlantic Treaty, Reg. No. 49621, 16 September 1952*. Signed: Contoumas (Confidential).
25. Eisenhower Library, Papers of Lauris Norstad (SACEUR of NATO 1956–64) Box 38, *Personal for Twining from Turner, 12 December 1953*.
  26. PRO: CO 67/368/8, *Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Greek Ambassador May 1951 and Extract from Letter dated 23 March from Ernst Davies in Paris to Sir Strang*; and CO 926/188, *Dispatch from British Officer in Cyprus L.C. Glass to London about a talk with Greek Consul, Mr. Roufos on 6 August 1956*.
  27. R. Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus 1954–1959* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp.330–31.
  28. A. Gazioglu, *Two Equal and Sovereign Peoples. A Documented Background to the Cyprus Problem the Current Partnership* (Nicosia North: Cyprus, 1999), pp.75–7
  29. For negotiations over bases, see H. Faustmann, 'Divide and Quit: British Colonial Policy in Cyprus 1878–1960. Including a Special Survey of the Transitional Period: February 1959–August 1960', *Mateo Monographien Band 8, Mannheimer Texte*: <http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/verlag/diss/faustmann/Abstractfaust.html> (University of Mannheim: Mateo, 1999), pp.331–407; and H. Richter, *Geschichte der Insel Zypern III, 1959–1965*. Peleus Vol.37 (Ruhpolding: Rutzen-Verlag, 2007), pp.13–52.
  30. PRO: CO 926/593, *Report of the Cyprus Colonial Authorities to London (Secretary of State of Colonies) 2 August 1959*.
  31. A. Constantinos, 'Britain, America and the Sovereign Base Areas from 1960–1978', in H. Faustmann and E. Solomou (eds.), *Independent Cyprus 1960–2010. Selected Readings* (Nicosia: University of Nicosia Press, 2011), pp.140–41.
  32. *Ibid.*, pp.147–9.
  33. Although there are several resolutions (30 June 2005 and 1 March 2007) of the House of Representatives of the Cyprus Republic calling for that, the Cyprus government has never submitted an official request to the United Kingdom on this issue.
  34. W. Mallinson, '1976: British Cyprus and the consolidation of American Desires in the Eastern Mediterranean', *Defensor Pacis*, Vol.21 (2007), pp.20–22.
  35. W. Mallinson, 'A Partitioned Cyprus 40 Years after Qualified Sovereignty. Reality versus Morality', *Defensor Pacis*, Vol.7 (2001), p.52.
  36. A. Syrigos, *Shedio Annan: Oi klironomies tou parelthontos kai oi prooptikes tou mellontos* [Annanplan: The Heritage of the Past and the Future Perspectives] (Athens: Patakis-Publisher, 2005), pp.276–9.
  37. Even in the European Constitution, the United Kingdom managed to secure a special provision for the bases: Protocol No.3, Article IV-437 paragraph 2, element e; Article IV-440 paragraph 6, element b: 'this Treaty shall apply to Akrotiri and Dhekelia, the sovereign base areas of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Cyprus, only to the extent necessary to ensure the implementation of the arrangements originally provided for in the Protocol on the Sovereign Base Areas of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Cyprus'.
  38. Source from Cyprus Foreign Ministry, interview Oct. 2011.
  39. *Draft Treaty of Establishment between the United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey* (1960): Annex A concerning the Sovereign Base Areas and Annex B (parts I–VI); excerpt from the court decision in the 'Graham Thomas Preece v. Estia Insurance and Reinsurance Co. S.A. case, dated 27 July 1991'; Civil Appeal No. 7656/1991. The rationale of the aforementioned decision was subsequently adopted in two decisions (Case No.1147/1990 'Andreas Socratous v. Episkopi Improvement Council', dated 13 May 1992; Case No.1128/1999 'Caramondani Desalination Plants Ltd v. Ormidia Improvement Council', dated 13 June 2000).
  40. See the lecture given by Professor Alain Pellet (member and former president of the United Nations International Law) Commission on the legal status of Sovereign Military Bases in Cyprus (Cyprus, 8 March 2011), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwGZIFG8gVQ>; and Theodoulou, *Bases militaires*, pp.60–73.
  41. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *The Overseas Territories Security, Success and Sustainability*. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by Command of Her Majesty (June 2012), p.12.
  42. Y. Tirkides and K. Georgiou, 'Assessment of Social and Economic Relations with the Sovereign British Area', in A. Theophanous and Y. Tirkides (eds.), *Reflections on the Relations between Britain and*

- the Republic of Cyprus and the Case of the British Sovereign Base Area* (Nicosia: Intercollege Press, 2007), pp.43–5.
43. Archive of the Foreign Ministry of the Cyprus Republic: FA 1/1173, *British Forces. Exercises not Provided by the Establishing Treaty*.
  44. N. Claude, 'British Nuclear Weapons in Cyprus in the 1960s. The Evidence from the Archives', *The-tis*, Vol.7 (2000), pp.373–6.
  45. Joint report on the issue by the Parliamentary Committees for Foreign Affairs and Legal Issues, entitled 'British Bases: Political and Legal Aspects', 9 June 2005.
  46. Tirkides and Georgiou, 'Assessment', pp.48–9.
  47. Council of Europe: Doc.11232 (4 April 2007), Situation of the Inhabitants of the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia: Report on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. Rapporteur: Mr. Andreas Gross, Switzerland, Socialist Group.
  48. Arrangement between the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland relating to the regulation of development in the Sovereign Base Areas Full Text: <http://www.cyprusnewsreport.com/?q=node/7412>.
  49. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *The Overseas Territories*, p.22.
  50. Treaty Concerning the Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus: Article 8 (1), Article 10 (a).
  51. See the revealing book by B. Wagner, *Business ist wie Krieg Führen* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2004), pp.75–8.
  52. *Report to the Director General for Research of the European Parliament* (Scientific and Technical Options Assessment Programme Office) on the development of surveillance technology and risk of abuse of economic information. Report by Duncan Campbell, IPTV Ltd Edinburgh, Scotland: April 1999. Also see <http://www.antimedia.net/echelon>.
  53. Source: <http://cryptome.org/2012/01/0060.pdf>.
  54. S. Bolukbasi, 'Behind the Turkish–Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.29, No.1 (1999), p.26.
  55. Those activities of the Russian warship task force in the Mediterranean, in connection with the civil war in Syria, stand out from the usual training routine of the Russian army. They have no precedent in Russia's recent history in terms of the size of the forces involved, the measures employed, the territorial span, the number of exercises, or the scheduling and mode of carrying out the drills. The last combat-readiness tests on this scale were carried out by the Soviet army in the 1980s, as the Soviet Union maintained its 5th Mediterranean Squadron in the Mediterranean from 1967 until 1992. It was formed to counter the US Navy 6th Fleet during the Cold War, and consisted of 30–50 warships and auxiliary vessels between different periods. In the post-Cold War period, Russia sent ships to the region in 1995–96 and in December 2008 until January 2009. The intensity of recent Russian navy activities in the Mediterranean and the military means engaged are comparable, in due proportion, with the activities of the Soviet fleet during the Vietnam war. See A. Wilk, 'Russian Army Justifies its Reforms', *Centre for Eastern Studies—Commentary*, 26 July 2013.