Warfare in the Mountains to Wage War in the City: The Cypriot War of Independence and Lessons for Contemporary Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism

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Abstract

The Cypriot War of Independence is a critical case study for contemporary counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT) studies. Given COIN and CT's ongoing significance, policymakers and practitioners benefit from theories developed from a wide range of case studies. Theories constructed from diverse examples are more likely to be useful and avoid the pitfalls of a narrow perspective. In the case of the Cypriot War of Independence, the hybrid rural-urban approach of the Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA) confounded British counterinsurgency efforts. While Britain failed in its COIN campaign in part due to a misreading of the insurgency's nature, key insights into contemporary COIN can be learned from this failure. Unfortunately, the immediate need for COIN and CT frameworks in the post-9/11 era led to theories that were geographically limited and insufficiently grounded in the cases selected. A closer engagement with the Cypriot War of Independence can serve as a corrective for existing COIN and CT theory.

> *No one complained of cowardice when we ambushed trucks or killed soldiers from concealed positions in the mountains, but, in principle, there is no difference between mountain guerrilla attacks and street killings by the brave boys who formed our close-range execution teams.[1]—General Georgio Grivas*

In his memoirs, General Georgios Grivas—the individual most crucial in launching and successfully executing the Cyprus Liberation Struggle—noted a key feature that beguiled

the British in their efforts to stamp out the insurgency: the campaign was not limited to one area.[2] Various British army commanders and governors, many with experience elsewhere in the British Empire, expected to face a classic rural insurgency. General Grivas, however, defied their expectations. Instead, *Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* (EOKA) or the *National Organization of Cypriot Fighters*, attacked targets of opportunity across Cyprus and, contrary to the counterinsurgency doctrine of the day, focused much of their effort in the country's cities. EOKA's success can be seen in the fact that the British, who initially refused to engage with Greek Cypriot demands, were ultimately forced to make significant concessions at the London and Zurich Agreements in 1959.[3] Although Britain did not meet all of EOKA's demands, the insurgents' success, despite the disparity in force, constitutes an outstanding military success. It also provides an important case study on a topic that, although currently in vogue, is too often viewed through a narrow lens: counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT).

The Cypriot War of Independence is a critical case study for contemporary counterinsurgency and counterterrorism theory. Given COIN and CT's continued relevance, policymakers and practitioners benefit from frameworks grounded in a wide range of historical case studies. Theories constructed from such a range are more likely to be useful and avoid the pitfalls of narrow thinking.[4] In the case of the Cypriot War of Independence, EOKA's hybrid rural-urban approach confounded British counterinsurgency efforts. While Britain failed in its COIN campaign partly due to its misreading of the insurgency's nature, key insights into contemporary COIN can be learned from this failure. Unfortunately, in the post-9/11 environment, the immediate need for COIN and CT led U.S. policymakers and military theorists to develop frameworks grounded in a narrow geographic focus and insufficient engagement with diverse case studies. A closer examination of the Cypriot War of Independence not only adds value to the field but also offers a much-needed corrective to existing theories on COIN and CT.

A Narrow Field: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Studies

Counterinsurgency and counterterrorism have become synonymous with twenty-first-century warfare. However, both fields suffer from a limited pool of case studies and an overly narrow perspective. U.S. experiences during the Cold War and the post-9/11 period have largely dictated and determined the discourse on these two fields.[5] While some non-American examples, such as Britain in Malaysia or France in Algeria, are occasionally referenced, their contribution to the discourse remains limited. Further complicating this systemic study of the topics is that research in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism typically occurs in spurts, which limits the field's ability to develop a more comprehensive theory. The most prominent example of this issue came after the United States' experience in Vietnam, when policymakers neglected the lessons of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism in favor of focusing on conventional operations.[6] Unfortunately, policymakers today seem primed to repeat this issue. In the emerging era of great power competition, where conventional warfare once again seems probable, the lessons of counterinsurgency and terrorism theory from the past two decades appear to be under threat.[7]

This flux in focus on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism studies, however, presents an opportunity to develop a stronger theory on the subject. In the post-9/11 period,

when COIN and counterterrorism were in focus, policymakers' goal was to quickly distill historical insights into actionable policy. This perspective was most evident in *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, which David Petraeus, James F. Amos, and their team of research assistants quickly developed in 2006 to provide an actionable plan for soldiers stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan.[8] While *FM 3-24* was, on the whole, far superior to what existed before, the need to rush its implementation meant that the authors could not spend sufficient time critically analyzing the case studies that served as the basis for the doctrine. The insights gained from individuals like David Galula in Algeria were, at best, romanticized and, at worst, distortions of his individual experience.[9] Likewise, the "hearts and minds" approach, which scholars and practitioners generally attribute to the British experience in Malaysia, largely ignored the context of the Malaysian Emergency. Specifically, scholars do not place enough emphasis on the kinetic operations it required, let alone the forced relocation of significant numbers of people.[10] In short, while *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency* represented an important development in counterinsurgency theory, Amos, Petraeus, and their team were limited by the tight timeline required to produce and implement it in the field. What is now needed are correctives grounded in detailed case study examinations of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts at a truly global level.

It is through case studies that theory is most effectively developed and continually tested. Clausewitz, more than perhaps any other writer on warfare, recognized and emphasized this point. As Hew Strachan noted:

> Clausewitz consistently stressed that strategy in reality had to trump theory, that contingency in war demands decisions which are instinctive because those who take them have to respond to the situation in front of them. The function of theory is to alert them to the possible implications of those decisions, so that the past informs the present to shape the future.[11]

Theory, in other words, must constantly give way to practice and be tested against it. In the absence of conflict, the best way to develop theory is through a detailed examination of historical case studies. Since theory is ultimately based on what case studies we utilize, those cases should be from as broad a range as possible. Thus, an examination of the Cypriot War of Independence offers a valuable example for alerting policymakers to the potential consequences of their actions, specifically by demonstrating that urban insurgency is neither a new phenomenon nor necessarily as significant as scholars like David Kilcullen have suggested in recent works.[12]

Urban Guerrilla Warfare: Something Old, Something New

During the Cold War, governments in the Western bloc were primarily concerned with combating communist insurgencies. Mao Zedong provided not only an analytical framework but also an example of how a predominantly rural insurgency could topple a nominally democratic government.[13] Fidel Castro's success in Cuba, a scant distance from the United States, and Che Guevara's popularization of the *foco* strategy, which relied on a dedicated revolutionary cadre to lead the rural masses, reinforced this trend.[14] Western politicians, academics, and practitioners focused their efforts on defeating rural communist insurgency movements at this time.[15] When urban insurgencies did occur, such as in Algiers, they were

treated as exceptions, and analysts still tended to focus on the rural aspects of these campaigns.[16]

Another major factor also contributed to the West's rural-centric view of insurgency: decolonization. Decolonization further reinforced the perception that insurgency was a primarily rural phenomenon. Most of the territories conquered by the imperial powers were rural, and chronic underinvestment in infrastructure only reinforced this trend. From France's *tache d'huile* tactics in nineteenth-century Algeria to Britain's bombing campaigns against Iraqi villages in the 1920s, imperial powers invariably considered dissent and unrest to be a rural phenomenon.[17] Imperialist powers believed that it was here, away from the urban centers where they had concentrated their strength, that dissent and insurgency were most probable. This assumption would later influence Britain's reaction to the unrest in Cyprus, a point to which we will return.[18]

The post-Cold War and the end of the Soviet Union did not, as Francis Fukuyama proclaimed, mark the "end of history" or the triumph of liberalism around the globe.[19] However, it did cause conflict among scholars and policymakers to reprioritize their analyses. The United States, now acting as a global police force, found itself confronting conflicts that its decades-long preparation for conventional war with the Soviet Union had not adequately anticipated. In Somalia, the United States encountered the problem of facing an urban-based insurgency.[20] Nor was the U.S. alone: Russian forces faced stunning setbacks in Grozny as part of their efforts to subdue Chechnya's efforts to break away from the Russian Federation.[21] These were not isolated phenomena. In a post-Cold War, globalized world, many scholars have argued that warfare is becoming increasingly urban.[22]

For much of the twentieth century, this was not the case: cities were a secondary theatre for armies. While battles like Stalingrad, Manila, and Berlin have captured the popular imagination, these battles were the exception rather than the norm. Even in those cases, urban combat represented only a fraction of overall military strength. In the twenty-first century, however, we are seeing armies increasingly engage in operations where cities, rather than being secondary targets, are the focus of the operations. The Iraqi Army's campaign against ISIS, specifically the siege of Mosul, is but one example of this phenomenon. Warfare, in short, is going urban, even if the reasons for it remain debated amongst scholars and practitioners.[23]

While the urbanization of warfare is clear in conventional operations, the trend is less evident in guerrilla warfare and insurgent movements. David Kilcullen has argued that increased global urbanization and new technologies are driving a similar shift in irregular warfare.[24] This perspective, however, may be influenced by Kilcullen's own combat experience, as well as the broader American experience in Iraq, and is not reflective of trends within warfare at a global level. Even within the American experience, the Taliban remained largely a rural insurgency until its return to power in 2021.[25] This does not mean that scholars should disregard the possibility of insurgencies operating in an urban environment. Such movements have occurred in the past and will undoubtedly occur in the future. Likewise, rural insurgencies have long existed and will continue, which is why EOKA, an insurgency movement that operated in both rural and urban locales, is a vital case study for the field.

Background to a Revolt: The History of Cyprus after 1878

The history of Cyprus is significant because, despite its contested nature, all sides in the 1950s drew upon it to justify their political actions.[26] Cyprus, like most of the territories of the Ottoman Empire, was multi-confessional at the start of the nineteenth century. By the time of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, however, Orthodox Christians had come to constitute the majority of the island's population—a trend that continued throughout the nineteenth century.[27] They were not, however, a population isolated from international events.

Specifically, nationalism emerged as a political force in the nineteenth century, and much of the intellectual class of the Orthodox population of Cyprus identified with the burgeoning Greek identity and nation-state founded in the southern Balkans. When several prominent Cypriots left the island to fight in the Greek War of Independence, the Ottoman authorities responded by massacring many prominent Greek Cypriots, including members of the religious leadership.[28] This had two long-term effects on the island. First, for much of the Orthodox population, it reinforced their nascent sense of Greekness—if they were to be persecuted for their identity, they might as well fully embrace it. Second, it started the process of turning the Church of Cyprus against the Ottoman establishment. Religious institutions possessed a privileged position within the Ottoman state, with authorities relying on religious officials to maintain order over the various groups of the empire.[29] The Church of Cyprus, until this point, had performed this function effectively, albeit with occasional dissent. The massacre of much of its leadership, however, would help turn the Church of Cyprus towards the forces of nationalism.

The Church of Cyprus's pivot towards nationalism coincided with changing political circumstances. In 1878, Britain gained de facto control of the island from the Ottoman Empire in exchange for political support. British rule brought considerable economic and social development to Cyprus, but did not eliminate the desire for *Enosis* (unification of Cyprus with Greece) between Greece and the Orthodox population, which had largely embraced a Greek identity.[30] Furthermore, British efforts to introduce economic and social reforms were consistently disadvantaged by the island's relative poverty and Britain's unwillingness to invest resources from elsewhere to fully develop Cyprus.[31] Over the next 70 years, both Cypriots and Greeks made numerous moves, for various reasons, to bring about *Enosis*. British efforts to stamp out *Enosis*, however, just amplified demands amongst Cyprus's Greek-speaking population. So long as the British Empire was at its apex, there was little Greece, or the Cypriot Greeks, could do to achieve *Enosis*. The end of the Second World War, however, left Britain in a more vulnerable position—one in which Greece, even amid its own civil war, could begin to champion Cyprus's cause.[32]

Greece's emergence as an effective advocate of the Cypriot cause at the international level coincided with intensified Greek Cypriot support for *Enosis*. A 1950 referendum by the Church of Cyprus confirmed this sentiment, which returned results of approximately 96% of Greek Cypriots in favor of union.[33] Critically, the Turkish Cypriot population and other minorities in Cyprus did not participate in the vote. While the specific percentage of Greek Cypriots that favored *Enosis* is certainly up for contestation, given that the referendum was unofficial and organized by the pro-*Enosis* Cypriot church, the broader sentiment of the Greek Cypriots was clearly supportive of *Enosis*.[34] EOKA would work to maintain this

support of the Greek Cypriot population, both through various benevolent acts and coercive measures, throughout the Cypriot War of Independence. The individual who would lead EOKA, however, stood bestride both the Cypriot people and their Greek patrons: Georgios Grivas.

Georgios Grivas was not the typical leftist revolutionary figure that dominated Cold War-era counterinsurgency efforts. By most accounts, Grivas was not an overtly charismatic individual.[35] Besides the Greco-Turkish War and a limited role in the Greek resistance in the Second World War, he was a traditional military officer.[36] The Greek resistance, being primarily a center-left organization formed in response to the excesses of the Metaxas regime immediately before the war, meant that his overall conduct was further restricted.[37] Nevertheless, while Grivas was not an individual who had an exceptional amount of insurgency experience that he could draw upon, his firsthand experience during the Second World War and his fighting against the Democratic Army of Greece in the Greek Civil War proved invaluable.

Grivas, furthermore, was an individual who possessed a remarkable fatalistic determination once he set himself to a task. It was a trait that would serve him well when he began coordinating with Archbishop Makarios for the Cypriot War of Independence, as the material situation was not favorable to success. EOKA, at the beginning of their preparations for the Cypriot War of Independence, only possessed limited means. On Grivas' own account, this material strength amounted to: 3 Brens (British), 3 Beretta machine-guns (Italian; one in poor condition), 4 Thompson sub-machine-guns (American), 17 automatics, stens (British) and marcips (German), 47 rifles (of various origins and ages), 7 revolvers (ditto), 32,150 rounds (various calibers), 290 hand grenades, 20 kilos explosive, with fuse.[38]

This amount of weaponry did not constitute a large arsenal, especially given that the British garrison immediately before the start of EOKA's activity numbered 6,000 British soldiers. Nevertheless, Grivas and Makarios, at least initially, recognized that the Cypriot War of Independence was not one that would be won by strictly military means.

Before the Cyprus War of Independence formally began in April 1955, Grivas outlined his plans for the revolt much earlier. He noted:

> To draw the attention of international public opinion, particularly of the allies, through acts of heroism and sacrifice, to the Cyprus question, which could in this way cause trouble for them, if it is not solved to our satisfaction. To demonstrate our firm resolve and will, through constant and serious harassment of the English in Cyprus, that we shall not recoil from any sacrifice, but to the contrary, we shall keep on until we achieve our aim. The fight shall continue until international diplomacy— UNO [United Nations Organization]—and especially the English are forced to consider the Cyprus issue and IMMEDIATELY offer a solution in accordance with the aspirations of the Cypriot people and of the Greek Nation as a whole.[39]

The size of EOKA relative to the British forces on the island—let alone those of Great Britain and its empire—meant that a strict military victory was impossible. Instead, the only way that Cyprus could realistically gain success was through obtaining the support of the international community, and specifically the newly empowered United Nations. EOKA, in turn, prioritized actions that would attract international attention. Grivas noted the priorities of EOKA as follows:

A. By carrying out acts of sabotage against government installations and military garrisons.
B. By the surprise action of a small number of flexible combat groups against the English army.
C. By organizing the population into passive resistance.
Considering the difficulty of carrying out a systematic and large-scale irregular armed campaign and also bearing in mind the fact that the terrain is not suitable for large guerrilla groups, the main activity has to be the first one, that is, sabotage.[40]

EOKA's operational priorities dictated where it conducted its activities. Most government and military facilities were near the urban centers of Cyprus. Furthermore, the urban cores were more likely to have a greater journalist presence, which would convey EOKA's message to the world.[41] Attacks against isolated outposts in rural Cyprus benefited from the lack of concentrated British forces but suffered from the disadvantage that journalists were unlikely to be present to report on them—limiting EOKA's ability to broadcast its message to the broader world.

While urban operations were the most important for EOKA in gaining international attention, this did not mean they gave up fighting in the rural areas of Cyprus. The terrain and size of Cyprus, as Grivas noted, were not ideal for guerrilla operations.[42] Two issues, however, meant that EOKA could not concentrate its forces solely in the cities, even if those were the areas where they gained the most ground toward their goal of international recognition. The first issue was the disparity in strength between EOKA and the British authorities, as British forces significantly outnumbered EOKA throughout the conflict. Operating in the countryside produced two advantages to offset the British numerical advantage. First, it forced British forces to disperse their efforts. Authorities constantly attempted to strike Greek Cypriot insurgents in the countryside, launching large-scale envelopment maneuvers to eliminate the EOKA forces. Several of these operations were successful; most notably, a series of operations in the late spring/summer of 1956, which, although commonly framed as a failure due to an incident where a forest fire killed 21 British servicemen, served to halt EOKA operations. [43] Nevertheless, these operations simultaneously took soldiers away from the urban centers where EOKA could conduct its sabotage operations.

Second, EOKA realized that in order for their message to be taken seriously—and to maintain operational security for rural forces—the Greek Cypriot population needed to be united behind them. This reality made EOKA's rural operations critical, as the population of Cyprus was still predominantly rural in the 1950s. Grivas and EOKA used British cordon-and-search operations in villages to inflame anti-British sentiment. In the fall of 1955, EOKA published a leaflet that read: "Do not stand the humiliation of the army of the Gauleiter of Cyprus entering your villages, putting you into wire-fences and searching your houses and your wives. Every village must organize its own defense against such attacks of the barbarians and receive them with any means it has at its disposal."[44] The attempt to inflame rural Greek Cypriot sentiment—by referencing the British as *gauleiters*, despite many Greek Cypriots having fought in the Second World War, and by implying that the searching of women was a violation of patriarchal norms—was blatant. Nevertheless, this positive messaging, combined with EOKA's efforts to silence Greek Cypriots opposed to the insurgency, helped maintain support in the countryside.[45]

The inability of Britain to deploy adequate soldiers to cities, combined with EOKA's campaign to silence collaborators, led British authorities to increasingly rely on civilian police from the Turkish minority to control the cities. This is often considered the best possible scenario in a COIN situation, as it leads to a normalization and legitimization of the government by adhering to the rule of law.[46] The problem with this tactic, however, was that tensions between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots rose during this time: the former sought *Enosis* with Greece, while the latter received support and encouragement from Turkey to block such an endeavor.[47] Furthermore, Grivas' cultivation of the Greek Cypriots, both genuine and coerced, resulted in few Greek Cypriots joining the police after their large-scale resignations in 1955. This left the Turkish Cypriot minority, and to a lesser extent other groups, to carry out policing. Britain, in employing the Turkish Cypriot population for law enforcement, inadvertently intensified tensions between the two communities, as EOKA strikes against government facilities increasingly resulted in Turkish Cypriot casualties, and over time, EOKA came to see the Turkish Cypriots as a potential threat.[48] This development, in turn, led to the increased formalization of Turkish Cypriot paramilitary organizations on the island, which—like EOKA with Greece—received support from Turkey. Indirectly, these developments helped EOKA's short-term goal of demonstrating the unjustness of the colonial regime, as struggles between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot populations made it clear to all parties concerned that the current situation was untenable.

Lastly, Grivas and EOKA cultivated a resource that proved both powerful and difficult for the British to counter: Cyprus's youth. From the outset of the revolt, Grivas emphasized their importance to the struggle. In his memoirs, he noted:

> There were two other factors to which I attached prime importance: public support and the organization of a youth movement. I knew that with these on our side, applied with the proper strategy, the size of the material forces against us would be irrelevant. The use of young people in a battle of this kind was entirely my own idea. I know of no other movement, organization, or army which has so actively employed boys and girls of school age in the front line. And yet there is every reason to do so: young people love danger; they must take risks to prove their worth.[49]

In short, Grivas sought to make the Cypriot youth the foundation of the resistance and place them in dangerous situations. Grivas had EOKA target both elementary and secondary school students through two publications: *Upbringing of Youth* and *Reveille*, respectively. An article from the *Upbringing of Youth* in 1958 illustrates how this indoctrination operated:

> One must be a soldier of peace as long as Freedom and Justice are not abused. But when these two goods are at risk, then maintaining peace amounts to cowardice, indignity and dishonesty. And the Cyprus people has seen these two goods being viciously trampled upon by its oppressors.[50]

The article was representative of the journal's overall tone. Romanticizing the struggle as part of a broader historical struggle fought by the Cypriot (and Greek) people, it was a powerful message.

EOKA's employment of the youth placed the British in a dilemma: although children were actively participating in the insurgency, targeting them risked provoking the sort of reaction that aided EOKA's cause. British disciplinary measures against pro-EOKA students typically included corporal punishment, most notably caning and whipping. The British ultimately stopped these measures in late 1956, but the damage had been done; such abuse

against the Cypriot youth further turned the Greek Cypriots away from the British.[51] In short, British efforts to suppress youth participation in EOKA only further alienated the Greek Cypriot population from the British authorities.

For all of EOKA's success in overcoming Cyprus's geographic constraints to build an effective resistance, the organization had three critical weaknesses. The first was structural: operations were entirely centralized under Georgios Grivas. As Grivas later admitted, "The lack of sufficient experienced assistants compelled me to centralize command, though I did my best to diminish the disadvantages attached to such a system." [52] While Grivas' centralization of control gave EOKA a clear purpose and function and guaranteed unity of action, it also meant that it was highly vulnerable. Grivas himself acknowledged, "Had I been eliminated, the whole struggle would have collapsed because no one could have taken my place."[53] Grivas' propensity to overemphasize his own importance aside, given his importance to the struggle, it is unclear if EOKA could have survived such a loss.

The second weakness of EOKA was demographic. While Grivas worked to consolidate control over the Greek Cypriot population, there were still minority groups that he could not control and who were opposed to his efforts, most notably the Turkish Cypriots. Grivas and EOKA recognized that the Turkish Cypriot population posed a potential obstacle, given their opposition to *Enosis*, and initially sought to avoid antagonizing or directly targeting them.[54] While increasing tensions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots may have served the immediate goals of EOKA, these tensions had long-term consequences, most notably, resulting in the division of the island in 1974 that continues to the present.

The third weakness that EOKA faced was ideological. While its push for *Enosis* possessed mass appeal amongst the Greek Cypriot population, there were significant sections of the population that were not believers in the right-wing ideology espoused by Grivas and EOKA. Before the revolt, the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) was one of the most popular parties in Cyprus, winning a plurality in the 1953 municipal elections.[55] While not opposed to *Enosis*, AKEL preferred a gradual approach to Cyprus' political status. This distinction provided a potential lever that the British could have used to divide the Greek Cypriots. Fortunately for EOKA, British authorities, particularly concerned about communist influence, viewed AKEL as the greater threat before the launch of EOKA's insurgency on 1 April 1955. Although Britain's focus eventually shifted toward countering EOKA, AKEL continued to be perceived as a primary threat. Governor Harding, in describing his decision to ban AKEL in late 1955, well after EOKA had commenced its insurgency campaign, noted:

> It was the communists who, since the war, led the way in resorting to riot, sabotage and physical intimidation in the pursuit of their political aims. It was they who developed the whole paraphernalia of 'struggle' against established authority – the mass demonstrations, political strikes, daubing of slogans, seditious propaganda and monster petitions … In this strategically important Island, Communist activity has an especially sinister significance for the free world.[56]

In short, Cold War ideology caused the British to miss a potential opportunity to divide the Greek Cypriots. Instead, their actions inadvertently helped unify the island's left- and right-wing factions over time.

British COIN: Tactical Solutions to Strategic Problems

While EOKA's tactics presaged contemporary insurgency and terrorism movements by recognizing that success would not be won on the battlefield but through eroding the enemy's will, British COIN efforts likewise reflected a common trend among governments: holding broad strategic aims while lacking—or being unwilling to apply—the necessary means to achieve them. British officials convinced themselves that they could not surrender Cyprus for geostrategic reasons.[57] The loss of bases in the Suez Canal made it essential, in their view, to retain a position in the Eastern Mediterranean to preserve Britain's force projection capabilities. While Cyprus lacked a deep-water port, its airfields offered the potential to project military power across the Middle East. Furthermore, given Britain's burgeoning relationship with Turkey amid the development of the Baghdad Pact, British officials feared that allowing *Enosis* with Greece would jeopardize their ties with Ankara.[58] What British officials failed to note, however, was that by making Cyprus a Turkish concern, they inadvertently magnified Turkey's interest in the island. Britain, in other words, helped create the very scenario it feared.

British efforts to quell the Cypriot revolt have often been criticized. James Corum famously described Britain's counterinsurgency as that of a "blundering elephant."[59] In other words, Britain acted irrationally and without adequately considering the means to solve the problem. Other analysts, while perhaps not as pithy as Corum, likewise rated the British performance substandard, at best.[60] Recent writings, most notably those of David French and Preston Jordan Lim, take a more nuanced perspective.[61] While they note the problems of the British counterinsurgency effort, they also acknowledge that Britain did possess a plan, and while it ultimately failed, it was considerably better than previous analysts gave credit. In part, this discrepancy is due to the fact that Grivas' memoirs, while useful in gaining insight into EOKA and its strategy, were, as Corum notes, "at times hyperbolic and historically inaccurate."[62] As such, in looking at the British counterinsurgency effort through additional sources, primarily those of Britain itself, it becomes clear that a plan did exist, but it was undermined by ultimately not attaching means to an end.

Britain's strategy for winning the 'hearts and minds'—the often-quipped British approach to counterinsurgency—was flawed in that Britain focused its efforts on winning over the minds, but not the hearts, of the Cypriots. British efforts to convince Cypriots of the benefits of remaining in the British Empire focused almost exclusively on the economic and social benefits that it would bring to the island's inhabitants. Field Marshall Harding, the individual in charge of Cyprus for much of the emergency, noted soon after arrival that:

> There will be an open conflict involving a full-scale emergency campaign in which improvement in social and economic conditions would be equally important as the principal political and psychological weapon. In either case, we shall have to break up EOKA and the Communist organisation to achieve a lasting solution.[63]

Harding later acquired a negative reputation due to the authoritarian manner in which he approached the Cypriot War of Independence.[64] Even if that reputation was not entirely undeserved, Harding recognized that the key to British success on the island was not repressive measures, but rather providing an alternative—and better—future than what EOKA offered with *Enosis*. The problem with Harding's approach was that while it arguably appealed to the minds, it did not appeal to the hearts of the Greek Cypriots who desired *Enosis*.

The inability of the British to successfully stop the Cypriots from creating enough disruption to force alternative arrangements points to an issue that confounds COIN experts and has no easy answer: the time to stop the Cypriot War of Independence was years, if not decades, before *Enosis* took hold in the minds of the Greek Cypriots. Although the story of Archbishop Sophronios greeting the first British High Commissioner with a demand for *Enosis* in 1878 is a fabrication, it does not detract from the fact that the Cypriot Church became nationalistic in the aftermath of 1821.[65] Critically, when British authorities acquired de facto rule of the island in 1878, they did nothing to change the Ottoman policy of allowing religious institutions to control education.[66] As the Cypriot Church sought *Enosis*, it aligned its education system with that of Greece, which only magnified the spread of pro-*Enosis* sentiment among the population. In 1935, the British first attempted to counter this development by making English a mandatory subject in primary schools in Cyprus, but the effort floundered due to a lack of funding.[67]

Harding, upon assuming the role of High Commissioner in 1955, likewise saw education as a key element in defeating EOKA. His efforts to counter what he perceived as radicalization in schools took two forms. First, he closed schools where coercive acts had occurred and dismissed teachers identified by the authorities as promoting *Enosis*.[68] These efforts, however, treated the symptom more so than the root cause—a fact Harding recognized. As such, he proposed that the British Cypriot authorities establish a secular education system, detached from the control of either the Greek or Turkish Cypriots. As Harding noted in an appeal:

> I trust that you and your colleagues will agree with me that we must now deal vigorously with the root causes of the current troubles. We must also show by our deeds that we are at least as much concerned with helping the youth of this island to a better future as we are with carrying out the stern measures which the present disorders demand.[69]

This effort, however, encountered the same problem as the 1935 initiative: a lack of funding. Britain wished to maintain control of Cyprus but consistently proved unwilling to pay the cost required to secure it. They were not the first—nor the last—state conducting COIN to face such a problem.

British finances and the shifting politics of the 1950s further compromised the country's ability to use force to impose a solution to the Cypriot Question. The British use of force during the Cypriot War of Independence has often drawn condemnation from academics, who have unfavorably compared it to Britain's approach in Malaysia. What is commonly overlooked in these assessments, however, is that the British military was effective in several instances, either significantly curtailing EOKA's operations or forcing the group to declare a unilateral ceasefire.[70] The problem, however, was less about military efficacy and more about two compounding factors: an international environment that made the use of force increasingly problematic, and the limited material resources available to Great Britain. From a military standpoint, the end of conscription in 1957 meant that British forces could no longer maintain the numerical superiority they had previously enjoyed on the island.[71] Quite simply, they ran out of time to eliminate EOKA as a threat before their capabilities declined.

Ultimately, Britain's inability to present an effective political solution to the Cypriot Question meant that its military efforts, though occasionally effective, were overtaken by political events. The clearest example of this came when British forces in Cyprus achieved

a significant breakthrough immediately before the formalization of the London and Zurich Agreements in 1959. Specifically, British intelligence established the location of Grivas.[72] Given the centralization of EOKA's operations under Grivas, as discussed earlier, eliminating Grivas would likely have significantly disrupted, if not outright destroyed, the organization. However, locating Grivas came too late in the Cypriot War of Independence to have a meaningful effect.

The problem, as MI5 agent Peter Wright argued in his autobiography, was that effective intelligence was not linked to political policy until late in the conflict.[73] British High Commissioners and forces on the island, well before the armed phase, were operating with relatively narrow budgets, especially for non-kinetic initiatives. As a result, Britain's intelligence apparatus, the Special Branch, had to rely on local informants. Since most Greek Cypriots refused to cooperate with British authorities—due to patriotism, intimidation, or both—the Special Branch often had to accept the cooperation of informants who were, in fact, EOKA spies.[74] Only later in the conflict did British authorities, recognizing the deteriorating civil relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots and shifting international opinion, begin seriously coordinating intelligence and military operations. By then, it was far too late to alter the course of the conflict.

For all the faults of Britain's approach to the Cypriot Question, it did ultimately achieve its minimum goal for the island. As part of the London and Zurich Agreements, Britain retained the right to maintain military bases on the island—a right reaffirmed in the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee.[75] Maintaining these bases, and thereby preserving its ability to project power in the region, had been Britain's primary aim from the beginning and the key reason for opposing Cyprus' *Enosis* with Greece.[76] Great Britain, in short, achieved the goal that it had at the outset.

Britain ultimately achieved its goal of maintaining a military presence in Cyprus by focusing on an absolute victory, rather than one of compromise, but in doing so, it undermined both its own and its allies' long-term position in the region. The Baghdad Pact, one of the critical reasons Britain sought to involve Turkey in Cyprus, is considered by historians to be one of the least successful Cold War alliances, largely due to the internal tensions within its membership.[77] Britain's engagement with Turkey over Cyprus further weakened NATO's southern flank, a far more important and stable alliance.[78] Even during the Cold War, Cyprus' independence and Archbishop Makarios' ties to the USSR caused significant concern within Britain and the United States.[79] In short, while Britain may have maintained its minimal goals, it ultimately created lasting issues and complications that it could have easily avoided.

Lessons Not Learned and Conclusion

Britain's approach to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism in Cyprus illustrates several enduring myths that continue to shape modern doctrine—despite the fact that these lessons are now over seventy years old. As the Cypriot case shows, the barrier between counterinsurgency and counterterrorism is not as pronounced as much of the literature suggests. The British focused their efforts on both "hearts and minds" strategies and more direct measures. Yet the common refrain that the British school of counterinsurgency emphasizes a hearts and minds approach is misleading; at best, it emphasizes the minds. Additionally, the fact that the British method included a strong kinetic aspect cannot be

ignored. Lastly, while the employment of ethnic minorities may appear to be the only option available, it can aggravate tensions in the long term.

There are also important lessons to be learned from EOKA's approach to insurgency. The idea that war is becoming more urban, while not without merit, should not be taken for granted. Although EOKA conducted an extensive urban campaign, it also operated in rural areas in ways that forced British forces to disperse and adapt, complicating their counterinsurgency efforts. This highlights how combining urban and rural operations can confound conventional forces, as seen in Cyprus. Furthermore, EOKA's experience shows that conventional military officers, such as Grivas, though not typically seen as ideal insurgents, are often drawn into insurgent campaigns, a pattern which has become increasingly common in the contemporary world.

These points are worth emphasizing because they directly apply to the insurgency the United States faced in Iraq. In many ways, the United States replicated many of the same issues the British encountered in Cyprus. The overarching goal of "democratizing" Iraq, though noble in intent, left the United States fighting for an objective that was nearly impossible to achieve given its resource constraint.[80] This issue became especially problematic as political attention shifted elsewhere. Furthermore, the United States' employment of Sunni tribesmen in Anbar Province as part of the Sunni Awakening, while tactically effective against al-Qaeda in Iraq, exacerbated sectarian tensions in the long term. These tensions, in turn, provided the Islamic State with a body of soldiers from which to recruit.[81]

Lastly, the tactics used by insurgents in Iraq bore a remarkable similarity to those employed by EOKA. Attacks in urban areas, particularly in the so-called Green Zone, helped publicize the insurgency to the world.[82] While these urban operations were critical for challenging the perception of American strength, rural attacks served to divide coalition forces. The United States' need to commit significant forces to Anbar Province and supplement them with local tribes as part of the Sunni Awakening illustrates this point.

Furthermore, Grivas demonstrates how a military officer with minimal insurgency training can nonetheless be an effective leader. Counterinsurgency and insurgency are two faces of the same coin.[83] The former Ba'athist officers of the Iraqi Army, who ended up forming the backbone of the Iraqi insurgency, lacked prior insurgency experience. However, the Ba'athist officers had fought a protracted insurgency in northern Iraq against the Kurdish population.[84] In short, the political decision to dismiss the Ba'athist officers in Iraq provided the foundation for an insurgency movement—something an examination of the Cyprus Emergency ably demonstrates.

The Cypriot War of Independence is not the only insurgency case study that deserves incorporation into counterinsurgency and counterterrorism literature. The field benefits most from studying a broad range of movements. Naturally, there is a temptation to focus on case studies that appear immediately relevant to one's specific task. This perspective, however, is fraught with challenges and can lead first to ineffective theory, and then to ineffective practice. A brief examination of EOKA's insurgency and the British efforts to counter it demonstrates that many of the issues present in the literature and theory of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism are not new—and that a critical engagement with the past can enrich the field.

Endnotes

[1] Georgios Grivas, *The Memoirs of General Grivas: Guerrilla Warfare and EOKA's Struggle*, ed. Charles Foley, trans. Alexandros A. Pallis (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 47.

[2] The name itself, Cypriot Liberation Struggle/Cypriot War of Independence, is problematic due to ongoing politicization of the conflict in contemporary politics. This paper generally uses the term Cypriot Liberation Struggle/Cypriot War of Independence due to it being the accepted term in the Republic of Cyprus, although it acknowledges that other terms are applicable depending upon the context.

[3] For an analysis of EOKA's transformation post-Zurich see: Andreas Karyos, "The Unitary Democratic Front of Reconstruction: EOKA's Transformation from an Armed Movement to a Political Formation," ed. Anastasia Yiangou and Antigone Heraclidou, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2018), 112–26.

[4] For an example of how limited case studies can create misperceptions regarding contemporary war, see: Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

[5] Carter Malkasian, "Strategies of Counterinsurgency and Counter-Terrorism after 9/11," in *The New Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Hal Brands (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 918–45. This issue applies to related subfields, like Special Operation Forces, as well. See: James Horncastle, "Unfamiliar Connections: Special Forces and Paramilitaries in the Former Yugoslavia," *Special Operations Journal* 2 (2016): 12–21.

[6] For an example of an individual who attempted to carry on those legacies see: Larry E. Cable, *Conflict of Myths: The Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

[7] For an explanation of the current shift see: Alexander Boroff, "What Is Great-Power Competition, Anyway?" *Modern War Institute*, April 17, 2020, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/great-power-competition-anyway/.

[8] David Petraeus and James F. Amos, "FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency," 2006.

[9] Joseph MacKay, *The Counterinsurgent Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2023), 156-92.

[10] Paul Dixon, "'Hearts and Minds'? British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 353–81.

[11] Hew Strachan, "Clausewitz," in *The New Makers of Modern Strategy: From the Ancient World to the Digital Age*, ed. Hal Brands (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 116–44, 141.

[12] David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013).

[13] The specter of Maoism was such that American officials believed that China possessed the ability to brainwash individuals to the cause. See: Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (New York City: Vintage Books, 2019).

[14] Vera Carnovale, "'We'll Be like Che' Foquismo and Sacrificial Ethics within the Latin American Revolutionary Activism," *Globalizations* 20, no. 8 (November 17, 2023): 1540–54.

[15] Most famous and influential of these texts was: Robert Grainger Ker Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1966).

[16] David Galula is particularly noteworthy in this regard as an individual who has continued to provide inspiration for American COIN with an admittedly ahistoric examination of Algeria and other case studies. See: David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1964).

[17] Jacques Frémeaux and Bruno C. Reis, "French Counterinsurgency in the Era of the Algerian Wars, 1830–1962," in *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*, ed. Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1830–1962. David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990), 19-20.

[18] David French, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955-1959* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015), passim.

[19] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), *passim*.

[20] Marshall Ecklund, "Task Force Ranger vs. Urban Somali Guerrillas in Mogadishu: An Analysis of Guerrilla and Counterguerrilla Tactics and Techniques Used during Operation GOTHIC SERPENT," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 15, no. 3 (2004): 47–69.

[21] Mark Galeotti, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine* (Oxford: Osprey, 2022). 62-78, 105-20.

[22] Stephen Graham notes that "warfare, like everything else, is being urbanized." See: Stephen Graham, *Cities under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London: Verso, 2010), 16.

[23] Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*. Anthony King, *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century*, vol. Medford, MA (Polity Press, 2021). Richard J. Norton, "Feral Cities," *Naval War College Review* 56, no. 4 (2003): 1–10. Gian Genile et. al, *Reimagining the Character of Urban Operations for the U.S. Army: How the Past Can Inform the Present and Future* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2017).

[24] Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, *passim*.

[25] Hassan Abbas, *The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan after the Americans Left* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 11-73.

[26] This politicization extends to the historiography, as the states placed considerable pressure upon academics in their respective territories to create narratives that adhered to the country's perspective. As such, while there are some exceptional works and scholars in Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece, such as Andreas Karyos, the ongoing pressure that academics face in said countries means that this work primarily relies on those secondary works in English.

[27] Robert F. Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6-7.

[28] Holland, 5-6.

[29] Karen Barkey and George Gavrilis, "The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and Its Contemporary Legacy," *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1 (2016): 24–42.

[30] William Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

[31] French, *Fighting EOKA,* 17.

[32] For a detailed account of the Greek Civil War see: Andre Gerolymatos, *An International Civil War: Greece, 1943-1949* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

[33] Andreas Varnavas, *A History of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA (1955-1959)*, trans. Philippos Stylianou (Nicosia: The Foundation of the EOKA Liberation Struggle 1955-1959, 2004), 23.

[34] Official plebiscite results seen in: Νικου Κρανιδιωτη, *Πορεια Στο Χρονο* (Αθήνα: Ίδρυμα Α. Γ. Λεβέντη, 1981), 19.

[35] French, *Fighting EOKA.*

[36] Preston Jordan Lim, *The Evolution of British Counter-Insurgency during the Cyprus Revolt, 1955–1959*, 1st ed. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 9.

[37] Gerolymatos, *An International Civil War: Greece, 1943-1949*, 109.

[38] Grivas, *The Memoirs of General Grivas: Guerrilla Warfare and EOKA's Struggle*, 28.

[39] Grivas, Appendix 3.

[40] Grivas, Appendix 3.

[41] Jonathan Stubbs, "Making Headlines in a State of Emergency: The Case of the Times of Cyprus, 1955-1960," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 1 (2017): 70–92.

[42] Grivas, *Memoirs of General Grivas*, 21.

[43] Grivas, 81.

[44] "TNA FCO 141/3709," November 21, 1955.

[45] Although EOKA later claimed they only targeted individuals who actively coopted with the British, EOKA's campaign of silence was much more expansive than it claimed. For an analysis of this point, see: French, *Fighting EOKA,* 158-70.

[46] Petraeus and Amos, "FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency."

[47] Daria Isachenko, *The Making of Informal States : Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdniestria / by Daria Isachenko*, Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 39

[48] Britain's role in weaponizing the Turkish Cypriot population was generally one of a lack of understanding and a need for any Cypriot individuals, rather than a deliberate plot. Still, the implications of such a policy were not lost on British officials at the time. See: Jan Asmussen, "Conspiracy Theories and Cypriot History: The Comfort of Commonly Perceived Enemies," *The Cyprus Review* 23, no. 2 (2011): 127–45.

[49] Grivas, *Memoirs of General Grivas,* 38.

[50] Cited in: Varnavas, *A History of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA (1955-1959)*, 68.

[51] Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60* (London: MacMillan, 1990), 136.

[52] Grivas, *Memoirs of General Grivas,* 224.

[53] Grivas, 224.

[54] Grivas, 70-1.

[55] Vassilis Protopapas, "The Rise of a Bi-Polar Party System, Municipal Elections 1940–1955," in *Britain in Cyprus: Colonialism and Post-Colonialism 1878–2006*, ed. Hubert Faustmann and Nicos Peristianis (Mannheim: Bibliopolis, 2006), 269–94.

[56] John Harding, "TNA CO 141/3646," December 14, 1955.

[57] Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency,* 1-7.

[58] Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History*.

[59] James S. Corum, *Training Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency: A Tale of Two Insurgencies* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2006), 31.

[60] Michael Dewar, *Brush Fire Wars: Minor Campaigns of the British Army since 1945* (New York City: St. Martin's Press, 1984). Andrew R. Novo, "Friend or Foe? The Cyprus Police Force and the EOKA Insurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 3 (2012): 414–31. A Novo, "On All Fronts: EOKA and the Cyprus Insurgency, 1955-1959" (Oxford, Oxford University, 2010).

[61] French, *Fighting EOKA*; Lim, *The Evolution of British Counter-Insurgency.*

[62] Corum, *Training Indigenous Forces.*

[63] John Harding, "TNA WO 32/16260," October 5, 1955.

[64] Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959*, 135.

[65] Andrekos Varnava and Michalis N. Michael, "Archbishop-Ethnarchs since 1767," in *The Archbishops of Cyprus in the Modern Age : The Changing Role of the Archbishop-Ethnarch, Their Identities and Politics / Edited by Andrekos Varnava and Michalis N. Michael.*, ed. Andrekos Varnava and Michalis N. Michael, Cyprus Historical and Contemporary Studies (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 1–17.

[66] Barkey and Gavrilis, "The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and Its Contemporary Legacy." *passim.*

[67] Panayiotis Persianis, "The British Colonial Education 'lending' Policy in Cyprus (1878 - 1960): An Intriguing Example of an Elusive 'Adapted Education' Policy," *Comparative Education* 32, no. 1 (1996): 45–68.

[68] French, *Fighting EOKA,* 179.

[69] John Harding, "TNA CO 1045/678," December 16, 1955.

[70] Grivas portrayed these ceasefires as a strategic calculation, rather than one imposed. See: Grivas, *Memoirs of General Grivas,* 83.

[71] "Defence Policy Approved: Conscription To End With 1939 Class," *Times (London, England : 1788)*, no. 53819 (1957): 4.

[72] Peter Wright, *Spy Catcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer* (New York City: Viking, 1987), 155-9.

[73] Wright.

[74] French, *Fighting EOKA,* 126.

[75] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Greece, "Treaty of Guarantee," 1960, https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty_of_guarantee.pdf.

[76] Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History*. Kindle Edition.

[77] *Encyclopedia of the Cold War / Ruud van Dijk [and Others] Editors.* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 57

[78] Fotios Moustakis, *The Greek-Turkish Relationship and NATO* (London: Frank Cass, 2003). *passim.*

[79] Henry Kissinger, *Introduction of Soviet Troops to Cyprus* (Department of State, 1974), http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/introduction-soviet-troops-cyprus/docview/1679066775/se-2?accountid=13800.

[80] Hamid Alkifaey, *The Failure of Democracy in Iraq : Religion, Ideology and Sectarianism / Hamid Alkifaey.*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and Government ; 25 (New York: Routledge, 2019), 167-82.

[81] Lars Erslev Andersen, "The Locals Strike Back: The Anbar Awakening in Iraq and the Rise of Islamic State," in *Reconfiguring Intervention* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 187–205.

[82] For an example, see how Asaib Ahl al-Haq's attacks in the Green Zone helped further turn US opinion. See: Yochi J Dreazen, "Breaking Up with Iraq Is Hard to Do," *National Journal*, 2011.

[83] John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), *passim.*

[84] For an examination of this campaign see: Michael J. Kelly, *Ghosts of Halabja : Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish Genocide* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), *passim.*