

Challenges to British Imperial Hegemony in the Mediterranean 1919-1940

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Abstract

This thesis is about challenge and control, a constitutive dynamic which helped shape Britain's inter-war Mediterranean Empire. The challenge came in the form of a significant external threat from Italy and the constant high level of internal dissent within the colonies. This study questions how British governments were able to deal with these challenges and suggests that this affected their ability make effective policy decisions in response.

In the Mediterranean the external pressure and international threat to empire was best represented by Fascist Italy, with imperial ambitions of their own and belief that Britain could fetter their growth and their ambitions. Italian activity in the Mediterranean circumscribed British activity in the region, and exacerbated colonial tensions. In response to Italian aggression Britain consistently pursued a flawed policy of appeasement. In this period the Empire was subject to significant challenge but was not in decline. The British state faced economic constraints and a changing international environment which was less favourable to the maintenance of its Empire but it retained the ability to respond to these threats. This study focuses on the colonies of Malta and Cyprus as examples of colonial dissent and finds that Britain exerted high levels of control, which they attempted to conceal through illusory constitutions and a constant resort to a state of exception. This thesis suggests that the inter-war Mediterranean Empire was under greater pressure than is generally acknowledged and that this explains the tight control it was under and the way it was governed.

Although British governments were able to easily combat local unrest in Malta and Cyprus through the temporary use of basic military force, they preferred to use changing constitutional and legal arrangements to keep both of these colonies under their control in the long-term. The self-representation they granted was illusory and the British were able to utilise a 'state of exception' at will to maintain their control. The legal fiction of these colonial constitutions had a fading legitimacy as the entire ideological basis of imperialism faced challenge in the inter-war period. The policy was however implemented differently in Malta and Cyprus. While there was rancour and anger in Malta, its strategic importance, and the constant input of funds helped limit the level of dissent and consequently the level of repression. In Cyprus a more robust and martial approach, an authoritarian turn made by the local administration resulted in a divided and stunted polity. The British government maintained imperial hegemony in the Mediterranean through the use of military power and authoritarian rule.

The British response to inter-war threats in the Mediterranean provide a salient example of the way in which empires, subject to internal and external pressures respond with violence, and flawed policy solutions.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Introduction

On the 5 November 1931, A.J. Dawe an official with the Colonial Office, at the time on special assignment in Malta wrote to the governor of Cyprus, Sir Ronald Storrs:

My Dear Sir Ronald, I feel I must send you a line to say how much I sympathise with you in the time of strain through which you have been passing. May I also send my congratulations on the splendid way in which you have dealt with the rising?¹

Dawe had been seconded to the Maltese Royal Commission set up to investigate the suspension of an election and the Constitution, after significant interference in the electoral process by the Catholic Church hierarchy based in the Vatican. He was writing in sympathy because the Cypriots had burnt down Government House in Cyprus (which included the official residence of Storrs) as the first act of an island-wide outbreak of violence.² At the time both Malta and Cyprus faced significant challenges to imperial government and were subject to the suspension of law. This letter links two places of concern in this study and touches upon its central themes; how the inter-war British Mediterranean Empire was challenged by both internal dissent and external pressure from Italy and the ways in which the British Government dealt with these challenges and retained control of its imperial possessions. This study suggests that the Mediterranean Empire was subject to both greater challenge and greater control than is often acknowledged.

Building on the insight of scholars such as Antoinette Burton and Lisa Ford, this thesis seeks to highlight the extent of dissent and unrest in Malta and Cyprus, the nature of sovereign power given to ‘subjects’ of the colonies and the limits to the devolution of power particularly when it conflicted with British imperial self-interest. Burton argues that dissent is constitutive, that it creates empire.³ This thesis tests this argument and considers the dissent, the ‘uneven ground’ as Burton calls it, of the central and eastern Mediterranean. It will look at the acquisition of the Mediterranean Empire and the range of challenges it faced once in control. The British response to these challenges, the imposition of control through the use of short-term violence and long-

¹ Letter from AJ Dawe to Sir Ronald Storrs date 5 November 1931, Ronald Storrs, Middle East politics and diplomacy, 1904-1950 the papers of Sir Ronald Storrs (1881-1956) from Pembroke College, Cambridge, microform ; 1999. Reel 13, Box IV, Folder 3

² Government House was the official residence of Storrs and housed his significant collection of art and antiquities, but also accommodated the Secretariat and other government offices.

³ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 2015), p 12.

term legal arrangements will also be considered. Via Giorgio Agamben's reworking of Carl Schmitt's theory of the 'state of exception', it will argue that these methods exposed the nature of the power relationships in the colonies. This work concludes that these interactions were a shaping force in empire; that the dynamics of contestation and response were what created the nature of empire in Malta and Cyprus.

A commonly held view amongst historians such as John Darwin and Robert Holland about the decline of the British Empire is that it was rapid and that it occurred after World War Two. This thesis does not accept these arguments.⁴ Following Burton, this study accepts the idea that the British Empire did not follow a simple path of rise and decline with a period of untrammelled imperial hegemony between the two.⁵ It will proceed on the more nuanced position that the effects of World War One, while not causing decline, were still broad and far-reaching and that the challenges to empire during the inter war period multiplied. As John MacKenzie argues, the desire for empire remained strong in Britain and its government and it utilised the means available to it for its maintenance.⁶

The inter-war years have been described as the '20 years' crisis'.⁷ It was politically unstable and dominated by a worsening strategic environment, particularly during the 1930s as Germany, Italy and Japan threatened the post war settlement. Contrastingly, the crises in inter-war Malta and Cyprus were dealt with easily by British administrators. The Empire still had the resources and the military apparatus to put down such dissent. But there were serious underlying problems. These included economic problems, international pressures and anti-colonialism. All are important, but this thesis will focus in particular on the international threat to the Mediterranean Empire from a resurgent Italy and the internal pressures building in Malta and Cyprus.

In the Mediterranean, Fascist Italy steadily moved towards a position of expansionism and belligerence. Italy was the most direct international threat to Britain's Mediterranean Empire. Due to its position it had the potential to compromise Britain's route to its very important

⁴ One example of the continued influence of the British empire, even after WW2 was the Maltese government's move to integrate with Britain which was supported by the Maltese population in a referendum. See Simon C Smith, "Integration and disintegration: the attempted incorporation of Malta into the United Kingdom in the 1950s," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35, no. 1 (2007). and Dennis Austin, *Malta and the end of empire* (Cass, 1971).

⁵ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*.

⁶ John M. MacKenzie, "The First World War and the cultural, political and environmental transformation of the British Empire" (paper presented at the *The British Empire during the Great War: Colonial Societies/ Cultural Responses*, Singapore, 20 February 2014)., Ashgate, In press, 2016

⁷ Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939; An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London,; Macmillan & co. ltd, 1946).

eastern colonies. Britain had a Mediterranean Empire long before Italy. First Gibraltar (1713) then Malta (1814), Cyprus (1878) and Egypt (1882) all became part of the British Empire (formally or otherwise) before, in 1912, the Italians occupied the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (Libya) and the Dodecanese Islands.⁸ After the First World War the British added the mandate of Palestine to its possessions in the region. When the Fascist Italian government came to power in 1922 they sought to build up their empire and to dominate the Mediterranean Sea. Actual Italian power was limited, but in combination with Germany and Japan they presented a thorny problem for British governments, which responded to this predicament with an appeasement policy toward Italy and a series of compromised decisions.

In this difficult regional environment the British had to deal with a second challenge to their Mediterranean Empire in the inter-war period; nationalist and anti-colonial unrest and dissent. This thesis will examine Malta and Cyprus as exemplars of this dissent. They were superficially similar but were marked by important differences. Malta had a long history as the strategically valuable, pre-eminent naval base in the Mediterranean and it retained its status as a 'fortress colony' even after the threat of aerial bombing developed.⁹ Malta had an ethnically homogenous Catholic population subject to significant cultural influence from their neighbour Italy. This influence resulted in linguistic diversity; Maltese, Italian, and increasingly English were used on the island. Italian was the language of religion, the university and the law linking it to the upper class while a large working class used Maltese as their daily language. Maltese workers were clustered around the dockyards, making them susceptible to downturns in imperial naval spending. Complicating the British position, the dissent generated by periods of economic depression was often harnessed or co-opted by nationalist elites to further their own agendas.

Unlike Malta, Cyprus did not provide the strategic advantage many had envisaged for it when it was acquired in 1878 but some British officials still held out hope for its strategic value after World War One.¹⁰ It had Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot populations who spoke local Greek and Turkish, or both languages, and followed different religions. The colony was subject to external cultural and political influence from both Greece and Turkey. Cyprus had a large rural and agrarian class, which eked out an existence in a dry climate. As in Malta the concerns of this

⁸ Nicholas Doumanis, *Myth and Memory in the Mediterranean : Remembering Fascism's Empire* (Houndmills, Hampshire New York, N.Y.: Macmillan ; St. Martin's Press, 1997).

⁹ Henry Frenco, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony : The Maltese Experience*, Maltese social studies (Valletta, Malta: Midsea Books, 1979).

¹⁰ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915 : the inconsequential possession*, Studies in imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p 117.

class were harnessed towards elite political ends, but also by the island's strong Communist Party which was anti-colonial. Despite some differences, ethno-religious, social, and class differences were all subject to influence from the anti-colonial left and elite nationalist right in both places.

Meeting the challenge from both external influence and internal dissent was the British government and its colonial administration which strived to maintain control. John Darwin has noted that 'imperial governance was by necessity a series of compromises'. The practice of empire, he argued, 'required the continual adaptation of methods of rule'.¹¹ This 'continual adaptation' was a key part of British rule in both Malta and Cyprus. Both were Crown colonies (Cyprus after 1925), subject to the rule of a governor, with an elected representative body below them. As incidents occurred in both colonies, these bodies and the constitutions that set them up were revoked and, sometimes reintroduced. Local representation was suspended whenever the population seriously threatened British interests or control and power was quickly concentrated with the governor, who was able to wield power and direct military resources in an arbitrary manner, with limited oversight from London.¹² The extended use of this method of control in Cyprus after 1931 led to journalist Richard Crossman calling Cyprus in the 1930s an 'amiable police state'.¹³

With the use of short-term violence and long-term control through the suspension of law in mind, this study will consider the tools of analysis offered by Said's *Orientalism*, Agamben's *State of Exception* and Burton, Benton and Ford's work on theories of sovereignty, and discuss their applicability to the British Mediterranean during the inter-war years.¹⁴ This study seeks to highlight the unexpectedly high level of unrest, dissent and challenge to British imperial hegemony in this region and the military and legal response from Britain. It argues that the nature of empire in Malta and Cyprus was indeed shaped and created by this dynamic of challenge and response. Beyond the short-term use of military force, the British government and colonial administrators skilfully employed legal and constitutional structures to suppress dissent and maintain their control of these colonies while maintaining the illusion that the local

¹¹ J. Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (Penguin Books Limited, 2012), p xiii.

¹² A Secretary of State would not lightly overrule the advice of a governor and the day-to-day governance was 'effectively devolved to the governor and the colonial government'. - M. Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968: A Guide to the Records of the Colonial Office in the National Archives of the UK* (Institute of Historical Research, 2015), p 16-21.

¹³ See Robert Holland, "Never, never land: British colonial policy and the roots of violence in Cyprus, 1950-54," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 21, no. 3 (1993): pp 148-76.

¹⁴ A. Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (University of California Press, 1998); L. Benton and R.J. Ross, *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850* (NYU Press, 2013); L. Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788-1836* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

inhabitants had self-government. This self-interested retention of real political power was central to the British Empire in the Mediterranean, as it was in the rest of the world.

This study has broader implications as it demonstrates the way in which colonial powers or empires react quickly and almost instinctively with violence (both physical, psychological and cultural) and the suspension of law to subdue internal unrest. This is often followed by legal change and reform, including constitutional, to secure their long term interests. This was not a universal approach and indeed in places such as Egypt and Mesopotamia greater devolution of power did occur, but in those cases violent repression was either too costly, or unnecessary to secure Britain's long-term interests. In this study Britain reacted to the threats both internal and external with multiple policy failures. These were the appeasement of Italian aggression, the complex constitutional approach in Malta, and the authoritarian turn in Cyprus. Of the three policies, the use of 'illusory constitutions' in Malta was the least damaging. Britain maintained strict control, but allowed local politics to continue in some form and did not introduce the same level of repression seen in Cyprus. The British policy response to Italy was flawed and divisive. The appeasement of Italian aggression made Britain look weak and only encouraged further action by Italy. The need for constant appeasement also meant that all decisions that could affect Italy had to be made within that paradigm, a dynamic which compromised British action in the region. Ironically because Britain was forced into a weak position against Italy it took a hard-line approach in Cyprus. The 'authoritarian turn' in Cyprus after 1931 saw a departure from a 'self-government' approach the introduction of martial law and repression. This period caused long-term damage to the Cypriot polity; the generation of Cypriots subjected to this authoritarianism were politically active during the island's violent partition in 1974.

Theoretical Contexts

Empire and Imperialism

A consideration of imperial motivations allows this study to consider why Britain acquired Malta and Cyprus and built up a Mediterranean Empire. Many scholars have tried to explain the

motivations for the rapid expansion of Empire and it has been described as ‘one of the most vigorous and prolific debates of the twentieth century’.¹⁵

The Lenin/Schumpeter debates are well known and need not be covered at length here, other than to note that material factors were central to the rise and maintenance of Britain’s empire.¹⁶ Cain and Hopkins’ concept of ‘gentlemanly capitalists’ is also well covered territory and, while revealing, does not speak to the central political and juridical concerns of this study.¹⁷ Gallagher and Robinson’s identification of the importance of political and strategic considerations to imperialism is relevant in relation to Malta and Cyprus, but it cannot stand alone.¹⁸ In the Mediterranean the mechanics of empire cannot solely be explained by strategic factors or ‘men on the spot’.¹⁹ The concerns of the Foreign and Colonial Office officials, as recorded in the archival documents used in this study, were indeed often linked to strategic questions. On the broader scale however there were important empire-wide economic drivers that need to be acknowledged.²⁰ Malta and Cyprus were proximate to the route to India and the Far East and geostrategic concerns were always a factor in their control. Such strategic decisions were made in pursuance of higher order concerns, and the economic was chief among these. Given this, the strategic understanding of Gallagher and Robinson arguably dovetail with other materialist

¹⁵ Roy H. Vogt, "Reviewed Work: Economics and Empire 1830-1914 by D.K. Fieldhouse," *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue canadienne d'Economique* 8, no. 1 (1975): p 139.

¹⁶ Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Imperialism : the highest stage of capitalism; a popular outline* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965)., Joseph Alois Schumpeter, *Imperialism and social classes* (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1951).

¹⁷ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850," *Economic History Review* 39, no. 4 (1986). and P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly capitalism and British expansion overseas II: new imperialism, 1850-1945," *Economic History Review* 40, no. 1 (1987). and for an example of post-modern Marxist thinking on imperialism see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 2000). Critics argue that the theory is actually very traditional and as such it is susceptible to the same criticism directed at Hobson; a preoccupation with high imperialism (1870s to WW1), monocausal analysis, a preoccupation with the metropole and a failure to acknowledge that the Empire was in part an imaginative construct. David Cannadine, "Review: The Empire Strikes Back," *Past & Present*, no. 147 (1995): p 194.

¹⁸ Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: the official mind of imperialism* (London,: Macmillan, 1961); John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953). In utilising their theory account should also be taken of Dane Kennedy’s cautionary note that Gallagher and Robinson were so influential that at times the intellectual hegemony they created was stultifying. - Dane Kennedy, "The Imperial History Wars," *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 01 (2015): p 8.

¹⁹ Robinson and Gallagher focussed on the periphery and the ‘official mind’ which was based on the opinion of those on the periphery see John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade". John Galbraith believed that turbulent frontiers had drawn in regional governors, the ‘men on the spot’, and that they had expanded their territory without approval and sometimes in direct opposition to instructions from the central government. John S. Galbraith, "The "Turbulent Frontier" as a Factor in British Expansion," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, no. 02 (1960): p 150.

²⁰ A discussion of these archival documents and other original sources in contained in the methodology section of this introduction. For a criticism of Robinson and Gallagher in relation to the importance of economic factors see E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, History of civilization (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987). P 68-69

explanations of imperialism. The economic and strategic factors can operate together, and this study asserts that this was the case in the central and eastern Mediterranean.

John Galbraith and David Fieldhouse's notion of the turbulent frontiers and the periphery have some applicability to Malta, where the disruption of the French Revolutionary Wars led to its occupation, and to Cyprus which was occupied at a time of international tensions.²¹ More recently however the metropole/periphery dichotomy has been challenged, with Antoinette Burton for instance arguing that the metropole and the periphery should be placed in the same analytic field.²² This study does this while still paying attention to the specific and local dynamics of imperial power by demonstrating how both the colonisers and colonised interacted to produce the local contours of colonial rule. In the case studies presented here it was not a simple or consistent imposition of an empire-wide model of rule upon a supine colonial body politic. There was a two-way interaction, where Maltese and Cypriot politics and resistance altered British policy.

In the case of Malta and Cyprus a combination of strategic and economic factors explain the motivations behind their acquisition. Malta was acquired during the Napoleonic period, when France threatened Britain's naval hegemony. As a fortress island, it protected Britain's trade routes and lines of communication to the east right through until World War Two. Cyprus on the other hand was acquired as part of a move by Britain to stifle Russian advances in Anatolia. These were moves of high politics associated with the Russo-Turkish war, and the rearrangement of borders in the Balkans occurring in the Treaty of San Stefano and at the Congress of Berlin. The defensive alliance with the Porte was also vital to protecting Western Asia from domination by Russia. Initially, the British believed that Cyprus could be a base from which they could launch operations in Asia Minor and Syria. These strategic ambitions, were not met as it became clear that Cyprus would not perform an important role in the empire, particularly once Egypt had been occupied.²³

Looking at empires over time poses some difficulties, not least of which is the prevailing 'rise and fall' narrative which remains very attractive to historians of empire. As Antoinette Burton in *The Trouble with Empire* notes, the 'rise and fall narrative of British imperial power has proven

²¹ D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914*, World economic history (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973). John S. Galbraith, "The "Turbulent Frontier" as a Factor in British Expansion", p 150.

²² A. Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain*. and see James Thompson, "Modern Britain and the new imperial history," *History Compass* 5, no. 2 (2007): p 456.

²³ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 85-87.

amazingly resilient' but she correctly argues that it is problematic, pointing to the assumption in the rise and fall narrative that the time in between was a:

flatland upon which power unfolds until decolonization finally happens rather than an uneven terrain routinely subject from the start to the response of a variety of actors, as well as to the unforeseen contingency of historical circumstance.²⁴

Burton does not accept the image of a subdued and cowed empire where untroubled British administrators sipped gin and tonics on the veranda, played tennis at Government Cottage in the Troodos Mountains of Cyprus, or joined British officers at the members only Malta Union Club in Valletta. She says that 'the trouble with British imperial histories is that they are not written with dissent and disruption in the lead'. She argues for a much messier picture, an empire which was 'kinetic and volatile and protean', that was 'as reactive and defensive as it was prohibitive or belligerent'; she calls it an 'impossibly contentious empire'.²⁵ Burton's work supports the idea of considering protest, arguing that 'an emphasis on the power of protest not only highlights indigenous agency, but illuminates the limits of imperial power, official and unofficial as well'.²⁶

This study accepts the central thrust of this argument. Protest, dissent and violence are the focus of the chapters on Malta and Cyprus. This resistant activity revealed the nature of the power in the colonies. In particular it illuminated Britain's methods of control. Burton suggests that turbulence, pushback and friction were not incidental, but were the 'very manufacturers of the modern colonial state and the diverse forms it took, often in response to local agitation and turbulence and disorder on the ground'.²⁷ This was the dynamic in Malta and Cyprus where the constitutional changes in each place were a direct result of agitation and disturbance. Burton talks about the constant challenges for British leaders to stay ahead of unrest and resistance, which could not be quelled. The agents of empire were

compelled to develop what were essentially defensive security complexes to counter the threat posed by them [enemies of empire], both perceived and real. Meanwhile, imperial confidence was perpetually aspirant, and the imperial project itself was perpetually on the backfoot.²⁸

The British administrators of the Mediterranean Empire were indeed confident and aspirant, and their desire for the retention of Empire is a theme in this study. But there was, in the

²⁴ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 4, 8.

²⁵ To capture this dynamism she suggests a consideration of when hegemony was obtained, and 'how it was scripted as ascendant at the very moment when it was not'. A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 1, 8, 12.

²⁶ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 8-9.

²⁷ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 12.

²⁸ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 14.

Mediterranean during the inter-war period, a disconnect between this confidence and aspiration, and the increasingly difficult circumstances (both local and international) which came to bear.

Burton says that imperial subjects reacted with 'protest, resistance, rebellion, insurgency, or evasion'. That they 'saw the theatre of imperial modernity for what it was', a mask for land and capital theft, and the desire for world domination. That they actively resisted, and that this was more than colonial agency, it was 'eyes-wide-open realpolitik'.²⁹ She acknowledges that they most often lost, and even that not all violence was anti-colonial, problematizing contemporary nationalist historiographical encodings of these events. This aligns with violent situations in Malta in 1919 and Cyprus in 1931, where a nationalist elite agenda was mingled with and co-opted more basic concerns for food, and living standards.

Although there is clear evidence of political opposition and dissent, not all people in Malta and Cyprus felt that their interests were best served by resistance. As Robinson argued more than forty years ago, 'the financial sinew, the military and administrative muscle of imperialism was drawn through the mediation of indigenous elites from the invaded countries themselves'. He also noted that 'if the ruling elite chose resistance there was usually a counter-elite to opt for collaboration, or vice versa'.³⁰ In Malta cooperating elites were opposed by a powerful pro-Italian nationalist movement, whereas in Cyprus the co-option of elites was complicated by both the European identity of the Cypriots and the Ottoman system of rule which led to the British rejection of the Orthodox Church's offer of opt-option and the introduction of new structures of government.³¹ Robinson makes the common point that the amount of force available to colonial rulers was small, and that agents of imperialism had to work through indigenous collaboration. Government proconsuls were able to 'manufacture a small indigenous elite of collaborators and set them in subordinate authority'. He acknowledged that 'although good government and modern development were objectives of colonial rule, its first concern was to keep control'.³²

Robinson described the need to balance patronage among supporters which meant that European administrators were 'up to their eyes' in local politics. Their political management was what he called 'the true genius of colonial administration'. The local politics of the colonies was the part of the agitation, the uneven terrain, the trouble in the empire that Burton has highlighted. Collaborators existed, but they were opposed, and the political conflict between

²⁹ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 14-15.

³⁰ Ronald Robinson, "Non-European foundations of European imperialism: sketch for a theory of collaboration," *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* 120(1972): p 120-21.

³¹ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 26.

³² Ronald Robinson, "Non-European foundations of European imperialism", p 133.

them was a part of the concern for those running the empire. Robinson noted that successful nationalists achieved a ‘combination of modern elite grievances with popular rural discontent which the imperial system of overrule had striven so ingeniously to prevent’.³³ This combination existed in key moments in Maltese and Cypriot politics. In Malta, the rural element was replaced with the working class, but the result was the same. In discussion of collaboration, there is also the obvious point that colonial ‘subjects’ faced with the reality of colonialism would cooperate with authorities to further their own interests, while recognising they were the subject of imperial domination. Burton argues that colonial people were sceptical about the legitimacy of imperial modernity and were unflinching in their assessment of its violence, even when they chose ‘collaboration, coexistence and cooperation’.³⁴

The ‘trouble’, the political and social resistance in Malta and Cyprus in the 1920s and 1930s, was met with control and long term strategies which differed in each place, but shared common elements as well. Chief among these was the repeated use of martial law and constitutional suspension, a legal state which has been considered by Giorgio Agamben.

The State of Exception and Sovereignty

The British sought moral legitimacy in Malta and Cyprus through the purported devolution of power but never allowed this to conflict with their own interests and control. Agamben’s notion of the ‘state of exception’ assists in the analysis of legal mechanisms and to reveal the nature of the power relationships in the colonies.

Agamben adapted the concept from the German political thinker Carl Schmitt, a German jurist writing in the 1920s and 1930s, who wrote about the effective wielding of political power and was responsible for drafting the *Gleichschaltung* legislation in 1933.³⁵ Schmitt developed the idea of the state of exception and what he saw as the limit of constitutional government. A state,

³³ Ronald Robinson, "Non-European foundations of European imperialism", p 133-37. Robinson was referring specifically to nationalists in Sudan.

³⁴ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 15.

³⁵ As one commentator notes, one must not try to separate or fail to acknowledge the link between Schmitt the Weimar jurist philosopher and Schmitt the legal theorist of the Nazi *Machtergreifung*. See Richard Wolin, "Carl Schmitt, political existentialism, and the total state," *Theory and Society* 19, no. 4 (1990): p 392. Schmitt’s most well-known paper, *The Concept of the Political* was published in 1927 but his most famous phrase ‘sovereign is he who decides the exception’ was in his 1922 essay *Political Theology*. See C. Schmitt et al., *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2008). Originally in German as *Der Begriff des Politischen* in 1927, C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Duncker & Humblot, 1922). Translated into English in C. Schmitt, G. Schwab, and T.B. Strong, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (University of Chicago Press, 2010). And G. Agamben and K. Attell, *State of Exception* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

he argued, must employ extra-constitutional means to preserve itself against internal disorder and the sovereign alone retains the power to declare a state of exception to legal normalcy.³⁶

Agamben reworked the Schmittian constitutional *problematique*.³⁷ Crucially, Agamben says that the state of exception is 'the transformation of a provisional and exceptional measure into a technique of government' and that it is the dominant paradigm in contemporary politics.³⁸ The crux of the theory is that a temporary constitutional exception is being used either constantly or so often that it becomes the real way in which power is exercised. This is central to this thesis, as the use of exceptional measures was a dominant paradigm in Britain's management of its unruly colonies in the Mediterranean.

There are two schools of thought on the legality of the state of exception.³⁹ They are firstly the integral position, where the exception is an integral part of positive law allowed for by constitutions and international law in the notion of derogation. It is a limited form of exception with prescribed boundaries.⁴⁰ The second notion is that the state of exception is external or extrajudicial, and untrammelled because no limit can be set on what is necessary to protect nations albeit for a limited time.

Agamben likes neither of these. He says it is neither internal nor external. He says that the state of exception is not a state of law, but a space without law, a 'zone of anomie', it is law's other. Applying biopolitical theory to the state of exception, he identifies the danger in the ability of the one person to both suspend and reinstitute the law, and to execute the law. This is a situation he believes that results in the 'juridico-political system' transforming into a killing machine.⁴¹ Agamben's ideas have gained some currency as legal scholars try to analyse current governments that rely heavily on special measures and emergency provisions to deal with dilemmas associated with the 'war on terror'.⁴²

The state of exception applies particularly well to the colonial context and to Malta and Cyprus where colonial administrators and the British government often resorted to orders in

³⁶ Richard Wolin, "Carl Schmitt, political existentialism, and the total state", p 396.

³⁷ Jef Huysmans, "The Jargon of Exception—On Schmitt, Agamben and the Absence of Political Society1," *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 2 (2008): p 172.

³⁸ G. Agamben and K. Attell, *State of Exception*, p 2.

³⁹ Stephen Humphreys, "Legalizing Lawlessness: On Giorgio Agamben's State of Exception," *European Journal of International Law* 17, no. 3 (2006).

⁴⁰ Part of this argument is that the integral position above stretches the notion of rights too much.

⁴¹ G. Agamben and K. Attell, *State of Exception*, p 86.

⁴² For instance see Louise Amoore, "Biometric borders: Governing mobilities in the war on terror," *Political geography* 25, no. 3 (2006). and Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political theory* 34, no. 6 (2006).

council, martial law, constitutional suspension and constitutional change. The form of exception used was not external and nor was it a 'space without law'. Whereas Agamben's conception of the zone of anomie is important to his context, in the colonial setting there is clearly a second layer in place, and a system of derogation (the integral position identified above), with another power (the British government, the Colonial Office, and parliament) floating above the governor.

The complication in the colonies is that although that second layer gave some supervision, and allowed for the reimposition of the law and basic rights, the supervising system did not count the inhabitants of the colonies as part of its polity. It therefore did not have the same concern for the measures undertaken by the sovereign (the governor or High Commissioner). That is to say the state of exception within the colonies would appear to have been inclusive and limited, but 'colonials', were not given the same political worth as those within the supervisory and dominant polity (British citizens). If sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception, then in the colonies this sovereign power rested with the governor and the structures above him, the Colonial Office, the Colonial Secretary, the British government and parliament.⁴³

This fluidity of sovereignty was the space within which the British government could operate, granting and withdrawing representation and imposing and relaxing control to placate and rule over Malta and Cyprus. For this thesis sovereignty is used in a broad sense and includes the partial grant of self-representation. So it will be argued that the self-governance mechanisms in Malta and Cyprus, although never amounting to formal sovereignty were within a continuum and so fit within the theoretical framework outlined here. Lauren Benton argues that empires had corridors and enclaves for instance trade routes or towns, where law and sovereignty were extended beyond their normal range. Benton uses sympathetic language: a troubled plateau of dissent is also the place in which sovereignty is uneven and layered.⁴⁴ Benton argues that sovereignty is complicated and she wants to separate territoriality from sovereignty and look at the patchy and layered way in which sovereignty was applied.⁴⁵ This layered technique of control, also identified by Agamben, operated successfully because of the nature of sovereignty in these colonies. In Malta, for instance, the self-governance and self-responsibility embodied in the

⁴³ As a matter of historical reality all governors in the inter-war period were indeed men and so, despite a preference for gender-neutral language, they are referred to as male throughout this thesis. Mandy Banton points out that the first female governor in the British Empire was not appointed until 1968 in Grenada. - M. Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968*, p 15.

⁴⁴ L. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p 2.

⁴⁵ L. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, p 281.

Legislative Council was undercut by the ability of the governor to bypass them through Orders-in-Council. The governor himself was subject to loose control from the Colonial Office and the political and executive structures above it. The layers in such a system are apparent.

Benton claims that Agamben's theory of the state of exception simplifies the complexity of sovereignty.⁴⁶ She argues that unusual sites and places where sovereignty was extended were not anomalies, but exemplars of the empire as it actually was, uneven and ambiguous. Nasser Hussein argues that the state of emergency helps to constitute the rule of law, because it is the opposite. He argues that 'the rule of law and emergency, norm and exception, the standard and that which contravene it, must be viewed as powerfully and intimately connected'.⁴⁷ Hussein's arguments are borne out in Cyprus and Malta where the use of emergency provisions, of suspension and reimposition of constitutions, and the use of martial law was common. The rule of law and its suspension were indeed connected in these places, as they were part of an overall method of control. Hussein's arguments work in the Cypriot and Maltese examples because, as already discussed the system of exception in these places falls within Agamben's 'integral position'.

Lisa Ford considered sovereignty in the contest between indigenous peoples and settler governance.⁴⁸ Looking at sites such as Georgia in the United States and New South Wales in Australia, she argues that the people living in these places took part in plural legal practices, a blend of 'common law culture and customary indigenous law'. Over time this became unacceptable to authorities who began a move to 'perfect settler sovereignty' wherein states exercised legal control over all people living in the territory.⁴⁹ Ford argues that 'the fluidity of sovereignty is nowhere more apparent than in jurisdictional practice – the response of governors, law officers and courts to indigenous violence against settlers'.⁵⁰ The analogous situation in the Mediterranean Empire was the ease with which the administration resorted to midnight raids to snatch and deport dissenters and made a general turn towards authoritarianism after the riots in Cyprus in 1931.⁵¹ Ford identifies the incomplete drive to dissolve sovereignty which allowed

⁴⁶ L. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, p 286.

⁴⁷ N. Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (University of Michigan Press, 2009), p 134.

⁴⁸ L. Ford, *Settler Sovereignty*. and L. Ford and T. Rowse, *Between Indigenous and Settler Governance* (Routledge, 2013).

⁴⁹ L. Ford, *Settler Sovereignty*, p 3. She also argues that the criminalisation of indigenous violence was a big part of asserting settler sovereignty, see p 208

⁵⁰ L. Ford, *Settler Sovereignty*, p 30.

⁵¹ For a description of these raids see - Letter written by Storrs to unknown recipient marked Private and dated 17 November 1931, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 13, Box IV, Folder 3. Deportation as a method of suppressing dissent was also used in Malta from 1934-37. See page 194 below.

resistance.⁵² Indigenous people were able to use the settler's legal and economic structures against them and that these interactions were constitutive.⁵³ In Cyprus the advocates for *enosis*⁵⁴ were quick to employ British legal systems against the colonial power. They were able to frustrate the representative system, taking seats in the Legislative Council and then refusing to vote, or blocking supply.

Malta and Cyprus had cultural links to Italy, Greece and Turkey with Cyprus retaining aspects of property law from the Ottoman Empire, while Malta had courts that still operated in Italian. In both places the education systems retained their cultural links to Italy in respect of Malta and Greece and Turkey in respect of Cyprus. The exercise of British sovereignty was however well established. English law was dominant and enforceable. For example in Malta an incident was sparked by the attempt on the part of the Catholic Church to exile a monk from Malta to Italy which was opposed by local supporters of British rule on the basis that religious laws did not apply in Malta.⁵⁵

In colonies such as Malta and Cyprus, the local population reacted and adapted, using the norm and the exception, the flexibility of sovereignty in an attempt to resist control and compliance. There were also many who chose collaboration with Britain. The focus of this study on resistance within the colonies does not seek to suggest that collaboration did not exist, as it clearly did. This cooperation was however not the solution to colonial governance and did not prevent the imposition of greater control. The British were often sceptical or suspicious of collaboration.⁵⁶ At times the collaboration was indeed opportunistic, and where it was altruistic and ideologically driven it could be counter-productive as when enthusiastic British proxies took more radical positions than the British themselves.

Orientalism and Subaltern Studies

There is an interaction between the British exertion of control and the Saidian construction of identity that occurred in the Mediterranean. The ideas of Edward Said provoke thought about

⁵² L. Ford and T. Rowse, *Between Indigenous and Settler Governance*, p 2. Benton describes the imposition of some law, and the preservation of some existing, a form of legal pluralism. See L. Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p 2-3.

⁵³ L. Ford, *Settler Sovereignty*, p 4, 11.

⁵⁴ Based on a Greek word *henōsis*, which translates to 'union'.

⁵⁵ This incident, part of the Maltese constitutional crisis of 1930, will be covered in much greater detail below.

⁵⁶ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict* (I. B. Tauris, 2014), p 87.

the way in which administrators thought about and (mis)understood the people of Malta and Cyprus and how this may have been a means by which they imposed their authority upon them.

As is well-known, Said considered the traditional academic field of orientalism and argued that those working within it had created a construct, an idea of the Orient, that was used to define the West and the East, the Occident and the Orient.⁵⁷ Said employed Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony to suggest that this construct was also a way of obtaining and maintaining positions of dominance over the Middle East. He argued that the 'East' was a construct of Western discourse which did not reveal anything about the real 'East'; that there is no knowledge only a discourse by which knowledge is interpreted and gathered. These arguments led to questions of agency and dialogue that post-colonial writers have grappled with.⁵⁸ The subaltern studies scholars in particular considered non-elites (subalterns), whom they consider agents of political and social change, in an effort to write 'history from below'. Gayatri Spivak and Ranajit Guha identify colonial subjects as subaltern when they undergo control from both the colonial rulers, and the local, generally collaborating elite. The existence of this group subject to control from elite members of their own community and from British colonial administrators is clear both in Malta and Cyprus.⁵⁹

Said's work remains relevant but is subject to qualification.⁶⁰ John MacKenzie argues that Said 'fails to recognise that the arts and dominant political ideologies tend to operate in counter-point rather than conformity'.⁶¹ He suggests that 'perhaps the greatest limitation on Said's analysis of Orientalism is the fact that he concentrates almost exclusively on elite texts'.⁶² MacKenzie's damaging claim highlights the agency, intelligence and exchange of authors and artists interacting with the Orient. He demonstrates that there was not a simple unified creation of a construct of the East through which the West could dominate.⁶³ Another important consideration for this study is the applicability of Said's theory; do Maltese and Cypriots fit into Orientalism; are they oriental, occidental, or something else?

⁵⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁵⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the subaltern speak?* (Springer, 1988).

⁵⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the subaltern speak?*, p 271-316. and Ranajit Guha, "On some aspects of the historiography of colonial India," (1982): p 18.

⁶⁰ Given the time that has elapsed there has been time for a considered response, identification of (acknowledged) shortcomings and settled categories of criticism. These include the lack of attention to popular culture and the lack of feminist perspective. See Robert Irwin, "Popular Culture, Orientalism and Edward Said," *Vienpoints. Orientalism's Wake: The Ongoing Politics of a Polemic* (2009). and M. Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶¹ John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism : history, theory, and the arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p 14.

⁶² John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism : history, theory, and the arts*, p 14.

⁶³ John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism : history, theory, and the arts*, p 213-15.

Todorova addresses the similar question of whether Balkanism and Orientalism are different categories. She argues that the Balkans were about ambiguity, a land of contradiction, of in-betweenness, where the people are not constructed as an 'other, but an incomplete self'.⁶⁴ The liminality of the Balkans was based on religion and race, a mix of Catholic and Orthodox believers and a 'mongrel' racial mixture, which still fell on 'this side of the fundamental opposition, white versus coloured'.⁶⁵ It was about the difference 'within one type' instead of the orientalist difference between types (oriental and occidental).⁶⁶

Todorova demonstrates that the Saidian concept of orientalism cannot be crudely imported into another area. In the case of Malta and Cyprus the British formed a simplified view based on their long histories and cultural features. Influenced by an education in the classics, many administrators saw Malta and Cyprus as crusader sites and associated them with religious notions of holy war and a clash of religions. The majority Greek Cypriot population in Cyprus led the British there to apply an Hellenic understanding to that site. Varnava, referring to the issue of the applicability of Orientalism to Cyprus, argues that London 'determined that the island belonged to the unitary ideal of the modern Greek world' created during the Enlightenment.⁶⁷ This study argues that there was a sense of cultural ambiguity regarding these places in Britain. These were not pale-skinned northern Europeans, but neither were they 'Middle-Eastern' either culturally or religiously. British decision makers were not as reflective as MacKenzie's authors and artists; they engaged with a simplified or mainstream view and so they were operating within a discourse. This led to error and mistake as they accepted an essentialised view of the Mediterranean islands which did not match the complex realities of those societies. As Burton suggests this error affected the ability of the British to predict or properly understand local dissent. She argues that empire was undefended against dissent because the imperial power had a 'blindness' that could be

attributed to orientalism or racism or whatever sets of belief account for the incapacity of will or self-governing deficits empire builders only too willingly attributed of those they attempted to colonise.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p 17-18.

⁶⁵ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p 19.

⁶⁶ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p 19.

⁶⁷ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 24- 26. Varnava distinguishes between the 'official mind and the broader view which is 'enmeshed with the views of the local authorities, settlers, travellers and others'. It is the official mind on which Varnava focuses and this study likewise is concerned with the view of officials and administrators.

⁶⁸ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 214-19.

The British very clearly identified the Maltese and Cypriots as something else, racially and politically inferior, subject to paternal custodianship and punishment and not ready for democracy and self-rule. They were small populations on the European fringe, without power and economically weak. Malta and Cyprus had mainstream European cultural influence which made them a European ‘subset’, liminal in a similar way to the Balkans. They were ‘related’ to Europeans but sat lower in the hierarchy of peoples, requiring according to the British, direction, rule and authority. It was not a case of exotic oriental versus occidental, shaping the self and the other, but it was cultural inferiority as a basis for rule, until some far off point of sufficient political development was reached; a milestone only able to be identified by the British themselves, and a condition which could not be rushed upon a colony.

The limit on the success of this control through the construction of knowledge was the extent to which such a discourse was accepted by the inhabitants. Those who ‘saw the theatre of imperial modernity for what it was’ would not and did not remain compliant.⁶⁹ What they saw were imperial powers that were subject to challenge.

Challenges and Threats to the British Empire

Despite its inadequacies as a totalising explanation of post-World War One Britain, ‘decline’ remains central to a discussion of the inter-war period. This study does not seek to engage in the debate about decline, but rather to extract from the discussion the weaknesses, threats and challenges to British imperial hegemony, which are its focus. In other words the debate around decline helps to analyse the ‘uneven terrain’ of the inter-war period, a phase during which the British Empire faced challenges.⁷⁰ Some of these challenges resulted from the threat posed by Italy while others relate to the internal challenge of colonial dissent. The empire was subject to constant challenge and this provoked a sustained effort to suppress dissent and unrest. In the inter-war period an initial post-war period of confidence and consolidation was followed by an increase in the number of challenges that faced the empire but these were not ramping up to some inevitable crescendo of imperial collapse. They were part of the noise, the trouble in empire.

Those embracing decline theory seek to chart the timing of that decline. Many argue that World War Two precipitated decline, and so their arguments relate to events from after the inter-war

⁶⁹ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 15.

⁷⁰ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 8.

period. Despite the clearly teleological impetus of these studies, they are still useful to this study as many of these later challenges were also present in the inter-war period. In most analyses of decline theory three major areas of pressure on the British Empire are identified. They are firstly Britain itself (the metropole), secondly the influence of international powers (international), and thirdly the sites of imperialism where empire finds resistance from nationalistic or communist movements (the periphery).⁷¹

Advocates of the metropolitan theory look to Britain itself and identify declining power, economic weakness and changing national interests after World War Two as the basis for decline.⁷² Other domestic factors were the perceived loss of interest in empire and a public indifference that made government spending on the retention of empire politically unpopular.⁷³ Robert Holland argues that the post-war middle class expanded and developed an attachment to the welfare state which again made them unwilling to maintain empire.⁷⁴ These theories identify the economy and imperial spending as one of the challenges to maintaining empire and these factors are equally applicable to the inter-war empire, especially during the austerity of the depression era.

This challenge played out in Malta where officials in the Foreign and Colonial Offices debated the appropriate level of spending in the colony.⁷⁵ They recognised that high spending was a panacea that placated the population by causing the standard of living and employment levels to rise. The cheaper alternative was to grant the population higher levels of self-representation. It was a trade-off between sovereignty and spending. Their choice of repeatedly granting (limited) self-representation suggests that the economic factor was important.

What can be termed the 'international' theories for the decline of empires are concerned with the 'contrast between a world of six or seven great powers before 1939 and the 'bi-polar' world after 1945, in which world affairs were dominated by two superpowers'.⁷⁶ The argument is that

⁷¹ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire : The Historical Debate*, Making contemporary Britain (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA :: B. Blackwell, 1991).

⁷² John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire : The Historical Debate*, p 5.

⁷³ John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson, and Anil Seal, *The decline, revival, and fall of the British Empire : the Ford lectures and other essays / by John Gallagher ; edited by Anil Seal* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁷⁴ R. F. Holland, *European decolonization 1918-1981 : an introductory survey* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1985).

⁷⁵ CO to Plumer, 'Labour and Economic Situation', 9 July 1919, CO41637, CO 158/410

⁷⁶ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire : The Historical Debate*, p 6., This type of argument is also found in Paul Kennedy, *The rise and fall of the great powers : economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000*, 1st ed ed. (New York, NY: Random House, 1987). An alternate view put forward by Owendale was that the Suez crisis was a small bump

Britain could not maintain the empire in the face of hostility to traditional imperialism from the USA and the USSR, the Suez crisis being an example of this theory in effect.⁷⁷ This study adapts the post-World War Two scenario and asserts that international pressure came to bear on empire after World War One as well. After the Great War the world was less amenable to the maintenance of large Victorian era empires. The United States of America gave qualified support to self-determination and did not approve of open imperialism in Europe. In the Mediterranean, Italy developed a more hostile posture towards Britain and made it much harder strategically and politically to control and preserve Britain's Mediterranean Empire.

The inter-war Anglo-Italian relationship has been the subject of much analysis. In earlier scholarship Norman Gibbs, Arthur Marder and Stephen Roskill advanced the idea that Britain would not countenance conflict with Italy because of the strategic dilemma of facing Germany, Japan and Italy – the 'global over-extension' thesis.⁷⁸ This is certainly supported by the evidence and in following chapters of this study there are repeated references by officials to the dilemma of facing three powers at once. Stephen Morewood argued that British military commanders believed they could defeat Italy, strategic problems notwithstanding.⁷⁹ In scholarship on Italy more specifically the view that Mussolini was an opportunist put forward by historians such as Gaetano Salvemini and Denis Mack Smith has been rejected by those such as Richard Bosworth who highlights the continuity of policy (to build an African empire) between liberal and fascist eras.⁸⁰ Massimiliano Fiore addressed the implication of this continuous policy and argued that there was an 'ongoing Anglo-Italian conflict in the Middle East from the 1920s onwards' and that although Mussolini was more antagonistic in the 1930s the relationship was tense from the

on the road of the Anglo-American relationship. See R. Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (St. Martin's Press, 1998).

⁷⁷ Both of these powers did of course exercise neo-imperialism (the practice of using economic, capitalist and cultural influence to influence or dominate a country and create a situation of *de facto* colonialism), so their hostility towards imperialism might be more accurately categorised as hostility towards imperialism where it conflicted with their national interest in the new cold-war paradigm. See J.P. Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (Taylor & Francis, 2005). In Iran in 1953 the USA were quite willing to support British imperialism, and indeed replace them as the predominant imperial power in that country - Mark J Gasiorowski, "The 1953 coup d'etat in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 03 (1987).

⁷⁸ Robert P Shay, "NH Gibbs. Grand Strategy. Volume 1, Rearmament Policy.(United Kingdom Military Series. History of the Second World War.) London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. 1976. Pp. xxvi, 859. \$60.00," *The American Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (1977). Arthur Marder, "The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36," *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 5 (1970). Stephen Wentworth Roskill, *Naval policy between the wars*, 2 vols. (London,: Collins, 1968).

⁷⁹ Steven Morewood, "Anglo-Italian Rivalry in the Mediterranean and Middle East, 1935–1940," in *Paths to War* (Springer, 1989). – Morewood specifically identifies Malta as a site of Anglo-Italian tension. See also Robert Mallett, "The Italian Naval High Command and the Mediterranean crisis, January - October 1935," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 4 (1999): p 78.

⁸⁰ G. Salvemini, *Mussolini diplomatico: (1922-1932)* (Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1952)., D.M. Smith, *Mussolini* (Knopf, 1982)., R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

mid-1920s onwards.⁸¹ Reynolds Salerno argues that the control of the Mediterranean was a ‘central concern’ for European powers, that it was a ‘vital crossroad, allowing the French and Italians to influence and often determine the nature and direction of Allied and Axis policy to an extent disproportionate to their nations’ military and economic strength’.⁸² In relation to Malta more specifically Douglas Austin questions the prevailing view that the British Government decided not to defend Malta if it were attacked by Italy. He suggests that the modernisation of the island’s defences was a constant concern for the government.⁸³

It is clear that during the inter-war period there was a direct challenge from Italy to British hegemony in the Mediterranean. Mussolini continued a liberal policy of Italian expansion and as Fiore points out this led to a continued tension in Anglo-Italian relations in the 1920s and 1930s, a point of real difficulty given the array of potential enemies that Britain faced. The pressure exerted by Italy constrained British decision-making. The interaction between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office will be discussed further in Chapter One but the importance of the relationship with Italy gave the powerful Foreign Office grounds, on many occasions, to override the Colonial Office and interfere in the management of the Mediterranean colonies.

The international environment had an effect on the cooperation or the acquiescence of the ruled, the third major area of pressure on empire. The peripheral or nationalist/anti-colonial theory of decolonisation argues that empire was disrupted by the ‘nationalism of its subjects, who were mobilized against colonial rule *en masse* and whose opposition made it unworkable’.⁸⁴ The peripheral theory emphasises the role of local nationalist political elites at the site of colonialism such as Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Archbishop Makarios III in Cyprus and Enrico Mizzi in Malta. Henri Grimal suggested that after World War One, the ‘idea of striving for independence’ gained momentum, until it had the force of an ‘irresistible tidal wave’ and it was this that forced the colonial powers to negotiate the surrender of the colonies.⁸⁵

Although historians such as Darwin and Holland downplay the role of nationalism in the dissolution of the British Empire it was an important part of the threat and challenge to British

⁸¹ Massimiliano Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East, 1922-1940* (Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), p 186.

⁸² Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, Cornell studies in security affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p 9.

⁸³ Douglas Austin, *Malta and British strategic policy, 1925-43*, Cass series--military history and policy, (London: Frank Cass, 2004), p 181.

⁸⁴ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire : The Historical Debate*, p 6.

⁸⁵ Henri Grimal, *Decolonization : the British, Dutch, and Belgian Empires, 1919-1963* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p 3-5. Another example of this genre is Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism : the last stage of imperialism* (London: Nelson, 1965).

imperial hegemony in the inter-war central and eastern Mediterranean and forms a central focus of this study.⁸⁶ Nationalist movements were crucial to unrest in both Malta and Cyprus. They were a major preoccupation for the Colonial Office in particular, and they complicated the relationship with Italy, Greece and Turkey. Nationalism is central to the question of imperial control. It was, as Burton suggests, more constant and troublesome than is always acknowledged. To effectively 'manage' its colonies the British government had to control these movements either through force or political manoeuvring. While many theories of decline concentrate on either metropole, international or nationalist factors there are a number of writers who combine these elements and form a fourth category for this discussion of challenges to empire.⁸⁷

Combination theories have been put forward by Niall Ferguson, John Darwin, and Ronald Hyam. Ferguson and Darwin follow the more common path of identifying World War Two as the critical event in the end of empire while Hyam looks back to World War One. Ferguson says that the biggest threat to the British Empire was other empires but he then combines this with the notion that the British Empire had a unique 'self-liquidating character'.⁸⁸ Ferguson suggests that the British themselves were no longer taking the Empire as seriously and were suffering a 'crisis of conscience'.⁸⁹ Ferguson's argument includes the threat from other empires, resistance on the periphery and the crisis of conscience in the 'metropole'. Darwin's theory pivots around 'the corrosive effects of the Second World War at every level of the imperial connection'.⁹⁰ He argues that the war led to economic disadvantage in the metropolis, which Britain tried to remedy by a renewed focus on extracting wealth from the colonies. This in turn led to a rise in nationalist sentiment, right at the time where internationally it became unpalatable to use military

⁸⁶ Darwin acknowledges that nationalist sentiment fatally damaged the 'ideological legitimacy of colonialism' but rejected the nationalist theory overall and Robert Holland argued that he says that 'ramshackle political coalitions in the underdeveloped world' were only one factor in the end of empires. See John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate*, p 110., R. F. Holland, *European decolonization 1918-1981: an introductory survey* / R.F. Holland (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1985).

⁸⁷ See for example Ronald Hyam, *Britain's declining empire: the road to decolonisation, 1918-1968* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p 403.

⁸⁸ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p xxii, 22, 292. - He argues that even when Britain was behaving despotically there was a powerful and consistent liberal critique from within British society. This meant that when a colonized society had sufficiently adopted British institutions, they would have a legitimate claim to political independence

⁸⁹ Niall Ferguson, *Empire*, p 328. - Ferguson's 'self-liquidating character' is picked up by Piers Brendon who writes that 'the Empire carried within it from birth an ideological bacillus that would prove fatal. This was Edmund Burke's paternalistic doctrine that colonial government was a trust. It was to be so exercised for the benefit a subject people that they would eventually attain their birthright -- freedom.' see Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), p xviii.

⁹⁰ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate*, p 118.

solutions in the name of colonialism.⁹¹ Darwin suggests that ‘perhaps more than most empires, that of the British was exposed to external influences: the ideological claims and religious appeals that attracted its subjects; the effects of economic competition and crisis; and (most dangerously) the appearance of geostrategic challenge’.⁹² These two statements have a particular resonance with Malta and Cyprus which had cultural influence from Europe, powerful religious institutions that were politically active, and were influenced by Italian activity in the Mediterranean. Finally, Hyam’s theory emphasises international factors more heavily and it differs from Darwin in its concentration on the inter-war period. He argues that Britain had reached a point where it was willing to relinquish colonies when asked. For Hyam the interesting question was ‘how the imperial power had got psychologically to the point where it was prepared to open the door to self-rule when nationalist leaders knocked and asked’.⁹³ The answer, he argued, is that:

The British Empire rose, flourished and declined in a particular set of international contexts. The way it operated depended not only on favourable geopolitical circumstances, but also on the feasibility of imperial control, in terms both of the acquiescence of the peoples ruled, and of the ability to match available resources to the maintenance and defence of a far-flung system. All of these pressures were under threat after 1918.⁹⁴

Hyam combines the international, nationalist and domestic challenges to empire that existed in the inter-war period. These challenges were however not the beginning of a teleological path which ended with the ‘wind of change’ in 1960.⁹⁵ It was instead a contest, where greater challenge was met with greater control resulting in compromised regional policy and authoritarian colonial governance.

John MacKenzie, in discussing decline theory, suggests that historians should not look for ‘myths of origin’ where the First World War becomes a sort of ‘catch-all explanation’. He suggested that it is not wrong to establish connections, but wrong to highlight them to ‘the exclusion of all others’.⁹⁶ The inter-war period, he argued, was not a final struggle, but a new

⁹¹ This idea of an increased intervention in a colony provoking resistance is referred to in other works, for instance Anil Seal in Gallagher, John, Ronald Robinson, and Anil Seal. *The Decline, Revival, and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and Other Essays* / by John Gallagher ; Edited by Anil Seal. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982 at p xii

⁹² J. Darwin, *Unfinished Empire*, p xiii.

⁹³ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's declining empire*, p 403.

⁹⁴ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's declining empire*, p 409.

⁹⁵ British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan gave the ‘Wind of Change’ speech to the Parliament of South Africa on 3 February 1960 in Cape Town. It is seen as important moment in the final phase of British decolonisation.

⁹⁶ John M. MacKenzie, "The First World War and the cultural, political and environmental transformation of the British Empire" (paper presented at the *The British Empire during the Great War: Colonial Societies/ Cultural Responses*, Singapore, 20 February 2014)., Ashgate, In press, 2016

dawn. In support he describes wide trends of new beginnings – migration and economic success – which amount to a sense of optimism, albeit he acknowledged the ‘economic Armageddon’ in the Great Depression.⁹⁷ This he claims could not have been foreseen and so logically did not affect the positive attitudes and belief at a time when officials looked forward to a return to imperial autonomy. So much so that MacKenzie calls this period ‘the golden age of imperialism’. Imperialism was alive and well because the British believed it was and acted accordingly to defend it. This aligns well with Burton’s suggestions that ‘imperial confidence was perpetually aspirant’.⁹⁸

The archival documents that form the basis for this study display this confidence, especially in the first half of the inter-war period, which MacKenzie seems to be referring to. His argument aligns with the ease of exertion of military power by the British in Malta and Cyprus throughout the entire period. In that region however the pressures begin to build after 1930 and the documents begin to show concern regarding Italy and internal dissent in the colonies. This concern is evident in their preoccupation with not showing weakness and maintaining prestige in the region. It suggests that the late inter-war climate was less conducive to the maintenance of empire and stronger methods were needed to maintain colonial control.

This thesis seeks to locate in these varying versions of decline theory the challenges and threats that are applicable to the inter-war Empire, while resisting the overtly teleological logic that ‘decline’ suggests. It takes note of and accepts that the traditional factors of economy and strategy were at work in the central and eastern Mediterranean and argues that the international pressure, the ‘geo-political’ circumstances were particularly important in the Mediterranean, as it was here that the communication network of the entire empire was most threatened. It argues that Italy in particular represented the biggest international threat to the preservation of the British Empire in the Mediterranean. This study also seeks to emphasise the importance of dissent and unrest within the colonies, never successful, but always present. Notwithstanding its dismissal as a causal factor in ‘decline’, internal dissent and unrest was a key component of the inter-war challenge to Empire.

This study engages with a field of study which, as the above discussion suggests, there are a variety of views. What was the state of the empire after World War One? Was it in decline,

⁹⁷ John M. MacKenzie, "The First World War and the cultural, political and environmental transformation of the British Empire" (paper presented at the *The British Empire during the Great War: Colonial Societies/ Cultural Responses*, Singapore, 20 February 2014).

⁹⁸ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 14.

newly resurgent, or the site of constant struggle? How did the British remain in control of their empire if things were as bad as some suggest. This work seeks to resolve these questions with a detailed consideration of a small part of that empire, which was indeed troubled by both international pressure and internal unrest. It discusses the ‘trouble’ in this part of the empire and closely analyses the methods by which the British were able to retain control. In so doing it can add to our understanding of the ‘terrain’ of Britain’s established empire, close to the centre and key to British strategic calculations for the near and far east. Findings from this case study can generate further questions. Was the atmosphere of challenge, dissent and unrest found throughout empire and are similar methods of control and suppression adopted by other imperial powers as they come under increasing pressure both external and internal?

Methodology

This thesis explores how the British controlled the inter-war Mediterranean Empire through an examination of primary source materials particularly the correspondence between British officials and politicians, the memoranda and reports, and the documents that passed between the metropole in London and the periphery in Malta and Cyprus. The Colonial Office and the Foreign Office in London and the Colonial governments in Valletta and Nicosia generated the bulk of the documents used in this study.

The Colonial Office (CO) dealt with formal colonies such as Malta and Cyprus (which became a colony in 1925 but was under the Colonial Office since 1880), while the Foreign Office formally dealt with places, such as Egypt that were part of the informal empire. However, the Foreign Office (FO) still had a great deal to say about the colonies. It had ‘formal responsibility for managing the external relation for the United Kingdom and its dependencies’ and had an important role in colonial affairs.⁹⁹ The Foreign Office was often the senior partner in discussions about the events concerning Malta and Cyprus. This was particularly so because each of these colonies had strong links to European countries.

The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office were tasked with advising the ministers and Cabinet and in carrying out policy and both offices generated masses of paperwork files. As each new issue arose, or item of correspondence came in from the colonies, a file would be produced, fed into the bottom of a hierarchy of clerks and moved up the chain often with a draft reply or

⁹⁹ M. Banton, *Administering the Empire, 1801-1968*, p 153.

further document. At this initial stage other departments would be consulted if necessary and this was often the case with the Foreign and Colonial Offices. At each stage of the hierarchy the officer would add their views in the form of minutes and at each step the officer would be able to dispose of the matter if they felt confident, meaning that the most senior officers saw perhaps only twenty per cent of the files generated.¹⁰⁰

In the case of the Colonial Office the greatest and most used set of files were called 'general correspondence'. They include official letters from the governor to the Secretary of State known as 'despatches', correspondence from other UK government departments, known as 'offices' and correspondence from individuals. The physical files varied but the most common form consulted used the 'split style' or 'jacket system', in which the files were divided between the documents and the minutes.¹⁰¹ The minutes contained candid discussions and comments between colleagues. They were internal, unguarded and often argumentative and together with the minutes and the documents they provide an insight into the decision making process and the views of those senior members of government who were intimately involved in the running of empire.¹⁰²

There are a range of useful sources outside of the National Archives. This study benefits from personal papers of officials operating in the Mediterranean at this time, particularly Sir Ronald Storrs, governor of Jerusalem and Cyprus. There are extensive online British newspaper archives; *The Times* and the *Illustrated London News* in particular have been used for this study. British Hansard is available both electronically and in hard copy and British Cabinet Papers have also been digitized and made freely available by the National Archives. All of these documents have to be read critically and Hyam cautions readers of government documents to bear in mind that 'politicians have to use the words they judge appropriate to persuading their hearers, whether colleagues, opponents, constituents, foreign allies or interviewers'.¹⁰³

What can also be said about many of these people is that they are the senior decision makers. To employ the theory of the state of exception, these were the people who effectively directed

¹⁰⁰ W.S.B. Strang, *The Foreign Office* (Allen & Unwin, 1955), p 155-6.

¹⁰¹ A. Thurston, *Sources for Colonial Studies in the Public Record Office: Records of the Colonial Office, Dominions Office, Commonwealth Relations Office and Commonwealth Office* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1995), Vol 1, p 41.

¹⁰² Indeed they could provide more insight than the government wished. The 'migrated' files of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) were originally created in the colonies, and were then sent back or 'migrated' to Britain prior to decolonisation. They were, controversially, finally released in 2011 after legal action seeking compensation in relation to the Mau Mau rebellion. For further information see David M Anderson, "Mau Mau in the High Court and the 'Lost' British Empire Archives: Colonial Conspiracy or Bureaucratic Bungle?," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011).

¹⁰³ R. Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p 33.

the sovereign (the Governor) who in turn made many of the arbitrary decisions that were implemented using orders-in-council or other methods. The documents they produced along with others sources mentioned above inform the structure of this thesis.

This thesis will set out the context for the Mediterranean colonies in this period before focussing on the external challenge posed by Italy to British control of the Mediterranean and then the internal challenge within Malta and Cyprus. It will therefore be in two parts where the first part concentrates on the way in which Italy limited the ability of Britain to operate in the diplomatic, political and strategic space in the Mediterranean. The second part will consider the ability to govern and maintain constitutional rule in the colonies of Malta and Cyprus situated in the central and eastern Mediterranean. Chapter One examines what it was that constituted the Mediterranean Empire and who was in charge of it. Chapters Two and Three looks at the external threat to the British inter-war Mediterranean Empire from the emergence of Fascist Italy. This existed in the broad strategic sense and as a blow to British prestige as an imperial power in the region. Chapters Four and Five consider challenges and responses at the colonial level in Malta and Cyprus and consider the methods by which Britain maintained its control of its colonial possessions. The structure will therefore be thematic, but will follow a loose chronological order.

Chapter 1 - The Mediterranean Empire and those that exerted control over it

In the inter-war period Britain's empire in the Mediterranean consisted of the long held colonies of Gibraltar and Malta, the more recently acquired Cyprus, the informal empire in Egypt and Mandatory Palestine. Britain had for many years maintained naval and strategic dominance in the Mediterranean, and protected the 'all-red route' to India, the Far East and its Australasian colonies. The aim of this chapter is to outline the nature of the empire in the Mediterranean, both those that were in its control, and those that were subject to that control. It will provide a broad outline of British politics and the attitudes towards empire, and a description of the Foreign and Colonial Offices, which were responsible for providing advice and carrying out policy in relation to empire. This chapter will then examine more generally the place of Malta and Cyprus in the British Empire, how they came to be acquired and the development of local politics in these colonies. Malta and Cyprus were central to the Mediterranean Empire and, along with Gibraltar, were unique in the empire because of their Europeaness. The discussion of British government and the colonies of Malta and Cyprus will contextualise the challenge to British hegemony in the Mediterranean and the struggle for preservation which will be the focus of subsequent chapters.

Who was in control? – British Politics and the machinery of government

Inter-war politics

In the British Empire decision-making occurred at a number of levels. In London politicians and their professional advisers made regional policy decisions, while at the colonial level policy was implemented by local administrations led by powerful Governors. These Governors and the local administration under them were accorded much independence but they were ultimately responsible to and took direction from the government of the day in London that emerged from the rough and tumble of British politics.

There are some central themes that emerge from a discussion of British inter-war politics. Firstly that the system continued to operate. At a time of extreme political ideologies, the British constitutional monarchy, based around a democratic parliament, maintained its legitimacy and its

longevity. It did not suffer the fate of many continental systems of government, a stability that can be attributed in part to the comparatively limited social impact of the depression.¹ It meant that the British state retained the capacity to exert power in its colonies, and also that extreme ideologies were not able to gain a significant foothold in the metropole.

Broadly speaking there were three main parties, the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the Labour Party that contested the politics of the inter-war period. There were of course many factions and splinter groups caused by divisive issues in British politics. Neville Chamberlain, for instance, considered himself a Unionist despite leading a conservative national government.² Of the three major parties however the Conservative Party was undoubtedly the most dominant. Operating independently, or as the stronger partner in a coalition or National Government, the Conservatives, led by Stanley Baldwin (1923-37), were traditionally pro-empire. Given their domestic dominance, the initial trend in inter-war government policy was to protect and maintain empire.

The dominance of the Conservatives was aided by the decline of the Liberal Party and the rise of the Labour Party.³ The Labour Party had two brief periods in power, but they were preoccupied with domestic politics, and were not in power long enough to make changes to imperial policy in the Mediterranean. In the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Liberal Party contested with the Conservative Party in a two-party system but the Liberals declined sharply around the time of the First World War. The Liberal Party were traditionally wary of imperialism particularly in the Gladstone era but they were not opposed to all forms of imperialism and they experienced division over events such as the Anglo-Boer War.⁴ Under Lloyd-George the Liberals began to move to a position of defence of empire. As the Conservatives were by far the most dominant party of the inter-war period the changes in government policy, when they came, were more a result of policy drift away from empire within

¹ M. Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain, 1870-1997* (Arnold, 1999), p 190.

² The Unionists were a legacy of the Liberal Unionist Party which was formed in 1886 from a faction of the Liberal Party after the split over Irish home rule. The Liberal Unionists, led by Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Hartington formed a decade long government coalition with the Conservatives (1895-1905) until merging with them in 1912. Some of the merged branches in Birmingham adopted the name 'Unionist' and both Austen and Neville Chamberlain ran as Unionists in the inter-war period. See I. Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party: A History* (I. B. Tauris, 2012).

³ Regarding the history and decline of the Liberal Party see P. Adelman, *The Decline Of The Liberal Party 1910-1931* (Taylor & Francis, 2014).

⁴ For more on the party's position on empire see Andrew S Thompson, "The language of imperialism and the meanings of empire: imperial discourse in British politics, 1895–1914," *The Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 02 (1997). See also Andrekos Varnava, "British and Greek Liberalism and Imperialism in the Long Nineteenth Century," in *Liberal Imperialism in Europe*, ed. Matthew P. Fitzpatrick (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p 226-7.

the Conservative party itself. This drift is what prompted Churchill's revolt against party policy toward India in the mid-1930s.⁵

When the First World War started, the Liberal Herbert Henry Asquith was Prime Minister, at the head of a Liberal-Labour-Irish coalition. The Irish Nationalists split from the Liberals after the government put down the Easter Rebellion in Ireland and Asquith made an offer to the Conservatives to join the coalition with the Liberals; a decisive moment.⁶ The Conservatives now formed part of the government and after a short time they withdrew support for Asquith causing his government to collapse. The Conservatives joined under a David Lloyd George (Liberal) led coalition. Asquith resigned from the government and a fatal and final split in the Liberals occurred as a number of MP's gathered around him.⁷

Labour left the coalition three days after the First World War ended on 11 November 1918. Prime Minister Lloyd George had electoral popularity but was a man without a party, as he could not reconcile with Asquith.⁸ The Conservatives brought their pro-Empire leanings to the coalition and the attitude of Lloyd George toward imperial matters began to change. Robert Holland rightly suggests that the empire underwrote the belligerence of the Lloyd-George coalition.⁹ This was the British political atmosphere at the crucial post-World War One moment when many nationalist movements within the empire were expecting change, but when British control over Malta and Cyprus did not waver. Although Labour had left, the Tories were happy to stay in coalition and so Lloyd George went to the polls in the 'coupon' election (14 December 1918).¹⁰ The short and rowdy campaign resulted in a comprehensive win for the Conservative dominated coalition.¹¹ Lloyd George was again Prime Minister, supported by Bonar Law.¹² Labour increased its popular vote from 400,000 to 2,374,000 which resulted in an increase in their MP's in Parliament from 42 to 49 but the un-couped Liberals were devastated, a

⁵ John Darwin, "The fear of falling: British politics and imperial decline since 1900," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36(1986): p 36.

⁶ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK Blackwell, 1993), p 167.

⁷ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, p 172.

⁸ M. Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain, 1870-1997*, p 182. - The Liberals were badly handicapped by this ongoing dispute for at least five years, and even then the dispute carried on through factions.

⁹ Robert Holland, "The British Empire and the Great War, 1914-1918," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p 125.

¹⁰ The first post-war election was known as the 'coupon' election. It was a name that Asquith derisively gave to the letter of endorsement given to Conservative and Liberal candidates who had the endorsement of Lloyd George and Bonar Law. See R. Harris, *The Conservatives - A History* (Transworld, 2011), p 268.

¹¹ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940* (Chicago: Univ. Pr., 1963), p 4.

¹² Bonar Law was in 11 Downing Street, from where he exercised great influence in their strong working relationship. He remained in Cabinet until resigning due to ill-health in May 1921. See Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940*, p 11.

continuation of the decline started by the split in 1916.¹³ The 1920s were characterised by both a surge in support for Labour but, conversely, by the electoral dominance of the Conservatives.¹⁴ From this position of dominance they were able to impose their traditional policy toward empire which focussed on its preservation and maintenance.

During this post-war term, things started to go awry for Lloyd George. He had to confront a post-war economic depression, conflict with Irish Nationalists and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ In 1922, he lost the support of the Conservatives when he brought Britain to the brink of war with Kemal Ataturk's Turkey after a confrontation between British and Turkish forces at *Çanakkale* (Chanak).¹⁶ Bonar Law, his erstwhile supporter, wrote an opinion piece in *The Times* arguing that Britain could not 'act alone as the policeman of the world'.¹⁷ After a meeting at the Carlton Club on 19 October 1922 the Conservatives withdrew from the coalition, ending Lloyd George's term as Prime Minister.¹⁸ After the split Bonar Law's Conservatives won a clear majority in the next election (15 November 1922), but he resigned due to throat cancer in May 1923. The King passed over the favourite, Curzon, and appointed Stanley Baldwin, whose term in office would be interrupted by the rise of the Labour Party.¹⁹

Having only been formed in the first years of the twentieth century, the Labour Party was, at its core, a party for British workers and intellectuals. It had a general disdain for imperialism borne of the same political thinking as Hobson, but this did not drive their political agenda. The anti-imperial position was not a priority in the Labour Party and it was not universally supported. The Fabian Society for instance supported the maintenance of empire at its current extent as a

¹³ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940*, p 7.

¹⁴ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, 236. In 1918, there was a fundamental political shift with the passing of the *Representation of the People Act* (1918) that massively increased the franchise for men and offered women (over the age of 30) the vote. It enfranchised five million more men and eight million women, bringing the electorate to 21 million people, many of whom were working class. One of the key moral arguments in favour of this change was the idea that many soldiers returning home from the war, would be unable to vote. This expansion of the franchise greatly assisted the rise of the Labour Party. See M. Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain, 1870-1997*, p 175.

¹⁵ I. Cawood, *Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), p 102.

¹⁶ For further information on Chanak see Stephen J Lee, *Aspects of British political history, 1914-1995* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996), p 303. and Robert D. Pearce, *Britain: domestic politics, 1918-39*, Access to history (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p 28. The other factors in Lloyd-Georges downfall included his style, (the Garden Cabinet, scandalous private life, selling honours), his 'softness' at Versailles, the Irish settlement, and the failure to guarantee minimum food prices. see Martin Pugh, *Lloyd George* (Routledge, 2014).

¹⁷ Correspondent, "The Near East - Pronouncement by Mr. Bonar Law - 'We Cannot Act Alone' - The Choice Before France", *The Times*, 7 October 1922, 1922, 11; Pugh suggests that the Conservatives became aware that, against their expectations, Lloyd George was seeking another term and that this was a factor in the calling of the Carlton Club meeting, see M. Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain, 1870-1997*, p 179.

¹⁸ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, p 224.

¹⁹ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford University Press, UK, 2001), p 224.

vehicle for spreading socialism under the British Flag as a form of civilising mission.²⁰ The Labour Party won the 1923 election but its government was short lived (22 January 1924 – 4 November 1924).²¹ During this term Ramsay MacDonald sought to implement a social programme and had no intention of jeopardising his chances of retaining office by interfering in empire.²² Labour lost the October 1924 election and so the Labour Government had had little chance for any impact on imperial policy in the Mediterranean or more broadly even if they had been willing to take an electoral risk over empire.

Baldwin led the new Conservative government with Austen Chamberlain as the new Foreign Secretary and Churchill back in Cabinet as Chancellor of the Exchequer.²³ Together they pursued a 'status-quo' foreign policy. Britain's foreign policy position in this period was heavily influenced by the outcomes from World War One. A 1926 Committee of Imperial Defence memo was very explicit about the position of Britain and its empire:

It may be well to emphasise at the outset the cardinal difference between our foreign policy and that of many other countries. Obviously the ultimate aim, if not the immediate, aim and object of the foreign policy of countries such as Germany, Hungary and Russia is to recover the territory lost in the war. Italy has her eye on the Aegean Islands and parts of Asia Minor. Japan may well hope someday to absorb Manchuria. We, on the other hand, have no territorial ambitions nor desire for aggrandisement. We have got all we want – perhaps more. Our sole object is to keep what we have and live in peace ... the maintenance of the balance of power and the preservation of the status quo have been our guiding lights for many decades and will so continue.²⁴

The desire for the status quo and 'keeping what they had' included the Mediterranean. This study explores the tension between that strong desire for preservation and the challenge (internal and external) to empire.

Baldwin's government was in power until the general election of 30 May 1929 when Labour won enough seats to form a second minority government. In this second term MacDonald's

²⁰ Bernard Shaw wrote a manifesto on this topic - Bernard Shaw, "Fabianism and the Empire: A Manifesto by the Fabian Society (London: Grant Richards, 1900)."

²¹ The early election came about due to a tactical error on a motion of confidence. See Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940*, p 186.

²² Nicholas Owen, "Critics of Empire in Britain," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. William Roger Louis (Oxford University Press, 1999), p 199.

²³ Part of Baldwin's political strength derived from his moderate politics, and his self-representation as a plain, man of the people. - Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940*, p 195.

²⁴ Committee of Imperial Defence, 'Memorandum on the Foreign Policy of His Majesty's Government with a list of British Commitments in their Relative order of Importance', 7 June 1926, 700-B, CAB 4/14 Appendix A p 1.

government was completely overwhelmed by the economic firestorm of the Great Depression.²⁵ The effects were felt soon after the Wall Street crash of 1929 and by mid-1932 'industrial production in many countries was only half that of 1928, and world trade had shrunk by one third'.²⁶ European trade reached \$58 billion in 1928, but was only \$20.8 billion in 1935.²⁷ The effects flowed on to Britain, which already had a weak manufacturing industry after the war:

textile production, which still provided 40 percent of British exports, was cut by two-thirds; coal, which provided another 10 percent of exports, dropped by one-fifth; shipbuilding was so badly hit that in 1933 production fell to 7 percent of its pre-war figure; steel production fell by 45 percent in the three years 1929-1932 and pig-iron production by 53 percent.²⁸

The depression formed a hinge 'connecting a decade of rapid growth to a more troubled decade of contraction, economic nationalism and resurgent internal conflict'. It helped to explain the changing nature of imperial policy during the inter-war period. The depression represented a real challenge to empire; it 'exposed the structural vulnerabilities of Britain's economy' as its hitherto stable export industries went into decline.²⁹

The severe economic circumstances also resulted in a Cabinet deadlock over government spending. On 24 August 1931, MacDonald went to see the King and came back to tell a stupefied Cabinet 'that though it was out, he was in'; he would lead a National Government with both Conservatives and Liberals.³⁰ This was the political formation that would dominate the political landscape in Britain in the new decade. MacDonald was expelled from the Labour Party but led the National Government until 1935.³¹ In the next election (27 October 1931) the National Government returned with a huge margin, 67% of the vote and 554 MPs.³² MacDonald resigned due to ill health in June 1935 and was replaced by Baldwin who was emerging as the 'key figure in leading the Conservatives away from their traditional role as defenders of empire'.³³ The National Government went on for another 8 years as the coalition also won the November 1935 election led now by Baldwin. It was this National Government that had to deal with the extremely difficult foreign policy environment of the 1930s including the Abyssinian crisis and

²⁵ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940*, p 357.

²⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The rise and fall of the great powers*, p 283.

²⁷ Paul Kennedy, *The rise and fall of the great powers*, p 283.

²⁸ Paul Kennedy, *The rise and fall of the great powers*, p 316.

²⁹ M. Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p 37.

³⁰ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940*, p 393.

³¹ Labour split like the Liberals before them but it was not as serious and they were able to recover as MacDonald's 'National Labour' rump became increasingly insignificant over time.

³² M. Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain, 1870-1997*, p 186.

³³ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, p 279.

had to manage crises in both Malta and Cyprus. Arguably, the colonial policy of this government initially reflected its political makeup. The dominance of the Conservatives within the National Government showed through in generally pro-empire policies which sought to maintain control, and install authoritarian government where needed.

The gradual assertion of power in the National Government by the Conservative Party was felt more in some parts of empire than in others. In the Mediterranean the British maintained a firm resolve to keep control of both Malta and Cyprus. Baldwin's government had to contend with the change in Italian attitude that began with the Abyssinian Crisis and the Foreign Secretary in that government, Sir Samuel Hoare, made a major foreign affairs misstep when, in December 1935, he came to an agreement with French Prime Minister Pierre Laval to appease Italy by giving it large sections of Abyssinian territory. This was a key event in the inter-war period and typical of the way in which Britain tried to manage Italian aggression.³⁴ It is an example of the way in which external (international) threats to Empire affected the ability of the British to make sound, strong or ethical decisions in the international arena. The public outrage over the Hoare-Laval pact along with the general failure in Abyssinian policy led to the resignation of Hoare and tarnished Baldwin's image. Baldwin recovered ground with his handling of the abdication and finally retired in May 1937. Baldwin had first come to office in 1923 and maintained a position as either influential coalition partner or Prime Minister for the majority of the inter-war period. Neville Chamberlain became the new Prime Minister in 1937 and was confronted with severe foreign policy problems from the beginning. Chamberlain dominated foreign policy, sidelining Anthony Eden (Foreign Secretary since the resignation of Hoare), Robert Vansittart (Permanent Under Secretary) and the Foreign Office. Without this expert advice he relied on a small number of sympathetic colleagues and followed the policy of appeasement until it failed. He was replaced by Churchill on 10 May 1940.

British inter-war politics was complex and convoluted, but as previously asserted there are some central themes. One of the early dynamics was the fall of the Liberal Party and the rise of the Labour Party. The Labour Party (excluding the Fabians) had a natural inclination against empire, but domestic policy was its priority, and it was not in power long enough to carry out its goals. The three-party dynamic assisted the Conservatives who were traditionally pro-empire, but who began to make concessions in the latter stages in an attempt to save the whole. While the depression limited the ability of Britain to spend money on the development of empire, it did not

³⁴ See Chapter 3 for more detail on the Hoare-Laval Pact

sweep ideologically extreme parties into power, as the social impact was more limited in Britain than in the continent. The depression did however promote the formation of the (Conservative dominated) National Governments.

Britain was under increasing foreign policy pressure from the continent in the 1920s and 1930s. The build-up of external pressure from Italy affected British policy in the Mediterranean, which was compromised and confused. The Abyssinian crisis was perhaps the high point of this, but it also affected policy in Malta, where Italian influence was at times unchecked in pursuit of broader appeasement objectives. The task of providing advice about this and other issues to these governments of all political persuasions and in difficult times was that of the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office.

The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office

The Foreign Office and the Colonial Offices were, for much of the interwar period, located in the same grand but cramped building on the southern side of Downing Street. The Colonial Office maintained responsibility for mandates and other colonies while the Foreign Office was responsible for relations with nation states and including those that were part of Britain's informal empire. The Foreign Office was a very important part of the government and along with Treasury was a 'leading department of state in inter-war Whitehall'.³⁵ The Colonial Office, had less prestige, was of lower status and had a less professional image than the Foreign Office.³⁶ After World War One, both the Foreign and Colonial Offices tried to maintain Britain's position in existing colonies and consolidate new territorial gains in a period of financial stringency, increasing international tension, and dissent amongst the people living in the colonies. The two bureaux often disagreed on policy. The Foreign Office thought that the Colonial Office was 'too legalistic' and interfered with good relations with other countries. In general, the Foreign Office was able to override the Colonial Office on issues that touched on both colonial governance and foreign policy.³⁷ After World War One, the Foreign Office took the lead in international matters and the Committee of Imperial Defence took on matters relating to defence.³⁸ However the Colonial Office still enjoyed general autonomy with regards to colonial matters and the Foreign

³⁵ BJC McKercher, "The Foreign Office, 1930–39: Strategy, Permanent Interests and National Security," *Contemporary British History* 18, no. 3 (2004): p 95.

³⁶ Aaron S Klieman, "The divisiveness of Palestine: Foreign Office versus Colonial Office on the issue of partition, 1937," *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 02 (1979): p 427.

³⁷ In 1935, for example, the Colonial Office was growing concerned about the effect of Italian propaganda in Malta and asked the Foreign Office to raise it formally with Italy. The Foreign Office did not agree to this request, as it did not want to compromise its relationship with Italy. See Maffey to Vansittart, 'Policy of His Majesty's Government in Malta', 28 March 1935, R2166, FO 371/19535

³⁸ A. Thurston, *Sources for Colonial Studies in the Public Record Office*, Vol 1, p 6

Office only intervened when it thought wider British interests were involved.³⁹ This was typically when an issue in a colony had implications for Britain's relationship with another nation state. The prominence of the Foreign Office in this study is in itself an indication that this scenario was common in both Malta and Cyprus which were both culturally linked to continental European countries, and further that the constant international challenge to the Mediterranean Empire was treated seriously.

The Foreign Office had a hierarchical structure, headed by the Permanent Under-Secretary of State. It was prestigious and it recruited from the upper classes of British society. Prior to World War One wealth and 'birth' were overt factors in selection and this selectiveness was maintained, albeit more subtly after the war.⁴⁰ In the 1920s the Foreign Office remained a part of the British establishment and a career there still had great social cachet.⁴¹ The Foreign Office's political department was divided into geographic departments. Of particular interest to this thesis are the Southern Department, which covered Italy, Greece and the Ottoman Empire; the Eastern, which covered Palestine; the Central that covered Germany; and the Egyptian Department.⁴²

The Permanent Under-Secretaries of the Foreign Office were very influential and changed less often than their ministers. Of particular interest to this study is Robert Vansittart who, in January 1930, was appointed to Permanent Under-Secretary, a position he held until December 1937.⁴³ Vansittart was 'an extremely powerful public servant' who was able to influence the politicians he served and thereby increased the importance of the bureaucracy in the decision making process.⁴⁴ He is described as promoting 'balance of power diplomacy' where diplomatic

³⁹ A. Thurston, *Sources for Colonial Studies in the Public Record Office*, Vol 2, p 279.

⁴⁰ Recruitment was based on performance in entrance exams which tested language to a high level. Most successful applicants had to undertake extensive study overseas prior to the exam using 'private means' to do so. The entrance exam was therefore an indirect filter for class and the composition of the office remained the same. See W.S.B. Strang, *The Foreign Office*, p 69.

⁴¹ M. Hughes and K. Theakston, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World, 1919-1939* (Routledge, 2006), p 47.

⁴² W.S.B. Strang, *The Foreign Office*, p 57-8. All political correspondence across the Foreign Office has been archived together in the National Archives in FO 371

⁴³ There were four foreign secretaries in the 1930s, all of whom Hyam describes as 'irresolute'. Sir John Simon was in office until 1935, when he was replaced with Hoare, who lasted only six months. He in turn was replaced by Anthony Eden who was in office from 1935 to 1938, and finally Viscount Halifax who was in office from 1938 to 1940. Of these four men only Eden was excluded from the accusations of being a 'guilty man' of the era of appeasement because he had resigned from the National Government. See R. Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire*, p 75., Michael Foot 'Cato', Peter Howard, Frank Owen, *Guilty Men* (Faber & Faber, 2011), T.L. Lewis, *Prisms of British Appeasement: Revisionist Reputations of John Simon, Samuel Hoare, Anthony Eden, Lord Halifax, Alfred Duff Cooper* (Sussex Academic Press, 2011), p 2.

⁴⁴ Andrew Holt, "No more Hoares to Paris': British foreign policymaking and the Abyssinian Crisis, 1935," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 03 (2011): p 1384. He had served in Egypt and Persia, so was alive to the imperial dimension, and the Mediterranean and the Middle East in particular. See BJC McKercher, "The Foreign Office, 1930-39", p 88.

initiatives were backed up militarily, economically and politically.⁴⁵ Vansittart was appointed by MacDonald and was Permanent Under-Secretary to both he and Baldwin, maintaining a consistent Foreign Office policy.⁴⁶ Vansittart was particularly concerned about German aggression and he was willing to compromise with Italy, to keep his focus on what he saw as the more serious threat. After Italy invaded Abyssinia, he supported the Hoare-Laval pact and this along with his differences with Eden and Chamberlain eventually brought about the end of his tenure. Eden described Vansittart as a 'ruthless worker for the views he held strongly' who was 'seldom an official giving cool and disinterested advice' but was rather 'a sincere, almost fanatical, crusader, and much more a Secretary of State in mentality than a permanent official'.⁴⁷

The Colonial Office left the War and Colonial Office to become a stand alone department in 1854. The Dominion Office was added to it in 1907 and they were separated again in 1925.⁴⁸ The dependencies were the responsibility of the Crown Colonies Division of the Colonial Office and were central to its work.⁴⁹ The Colonial Office recruited its staff from the Home civil service examinations and they were divided among three main offices, Personnel, Geographic and General.⁵⁰ The Geographic department, divided into seven regional departments, was traditionally the dominant part of the office, but the General section which included sections such as Labour, Health and Education grew increasingly important in the inter-war period.⁵¹ The Mediterranean department maintained responsibility for both Malta and Cyprus.⁵²

The Colonial Office often worked with other government departments. The Mandate of Palestine in particular was the source of so much communication between the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office, that Cosmo Parkinson (Permanent Under-Secretary of the Colonies

⁴⁵ BJC McKercher, "The Foreign Office, 1930–39", p 88.

⁴⁶ Vansittart shaped the culture of the department under him appointing such figures as Sir Ronald Graham and Sir Eric Drummond in Rome, Sir Eric Phipps in Berlin, his deputy Lancelot Oliphant and the heads of the departments such as Owen O'Malley (Southern Department), Orme Sargent (Central Department) and Ralph Wigram (Central Department). See BJC McKercher, "The Foreign Office, 1930–39", p 90.

⁴⁷ A. Eden, *Facing the Dictators: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon* (Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p 242.

⁴⁸ S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945: Metropolitan reorganisation, defence and international relations, political change and constitutional reform* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1996), p xxiii. The Dominions Office took on the conduct of diplomatic relations with settler colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. see A. Thurston, *Sources for Colonial Studies in the Public Record Office*, Vol 1, p 6.

⁴⁹ A. Thurston, *Sources for Colonial Studies in the Public Record Office*, Vol 1, p 6.

⁵⁰ A Creech Jones, "The Colonial Office," *The Political Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1943): p 23.

⁵¹ A Creech Jones, "The Colonial Office", p 21.

⁵² C. Parkinson, *The Colonial Office from Within, 1909-1945* (Faber & Faber limited, 1947), p 54. The 'Mediterranean' department did in fact have a number of different names over the period covered by this thesis. In 1931, for instance, it was titled the Ceylon and Mediterranean Department and it was responsible for Ceylon, Aden Cyprus, Malta and Gibraltar. See Great Britain. Office of Commonwealth Relations, *The Dominions Office and Colonial Office List for ..., Volume 70, Part 1931*, vol. 70 (Waterlow & Sons, Limited, 1939), p xvi.

1937-1940) expressed the belief that Palestine should have been managed by the Foreign Office.⁵³ In terms of personnel, the Colonial Office experienced a rapid change of Secretaries of State. In the inter-war period there were twelve changes in that office, with nine different people occupying the position. This can be contrasted with five changes in Permanent Under-Secretary which occurred in the same period. The Colonial Office believed in preserving local individuality in the colonies as there was a prevailing view that each colony had rightly developed an autochthonous and locally adapted administration.⁵⁴ This meant that the Colonial Office was less willing to apply uniformity in governance across the colonies and was more inclined to grant greater autonomy to local governors and administrations.

The position of Governor is very relevant to notions of sovereignty and control. They were appointed by the monarch on the advice of the Secretary of State, held a commission, had powers conferred and defined by the King's commission and received Royal Instructions conveyed through the Secretary of State. The Governor was the 'single and supreme authority responsible to and representative of His Majesty'.⁵⁵ Governors did not, however, have untrammelled power, as they were typically the head of an Executive Council, which was advisory rather than binding, and (apart from colonies which had advanced down the path of self-government) the Governor also presided over a legislative council. It was this second body which typically had elected 'non-officials' (i.e. local inhabitants) on it. Governors were subject to political pressure from the local population of the colony, mandate or protectorate, but in the face of some 'outrage', provocation or disorder, their power could be deployed without impediment. This ability to suspend systems of government and maintain a 'state of exception' at their discretion was central to British imperial control in both Malta and Cyprus. It was provided for in their colonial constitutions and was used on many occasions to circumvent troublesome local representatives. Malta in particular had a series of constitutions which oscillated between granting and withdrawing local representation.

Why was Malta part of the Empire and what role did it play?

Malta is a small archipelago in the central Mediterranean, which is situated approximately half way between Gibraltar and the Suez and roughly 80 kilometres south of Sicily.⁵⁶ It consists of the larger island of Malta (which has the capital Valletta) and the smaller northern island of Gozo.

⁵³ C. Parkinson, *The Colonial Office from Within, 1909-1945*, p 61.

⁵⁴ S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p xxvi.

⁵⁵ C. Parkinson, *The Colonial Office from Within, 1909-1945*, p 137.

⁵⁶ Malta covers an area of just 316 km² or 122 square miles.

Prior to the British occupation the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, a Roman Catholic military order, was in control of Malta and its highly fortified Grand Harbour.



Figure 1 - An Accurate Map of the Islands of Malta & Gozo, from an Actual Survey made by Order of the Grand Master (circa 1800) engraved by Mutlow.

The British acquisition of Malta occurred in the context of the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon led forces to Egypt and en route captured the island of Malta after the Knights of St John effectively capitulated. After defeating the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile, Lord Horatio Nelson led a naval blockade of the French in Malta from 1799 to 1800.⁵⁷ On 9 May 1799 while the blockade was ongoing Foreign Secretary Lord Grenville wrote to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty informing them of an agreement between Britain and the Emperor of Russia that if Britain should capture Malta it would be garrisoned by British, Russian and Neapolitan

⁵⁷ Although in command he was physically based in Naples where he was deeply involved in the politics of the court and famously pursuing an affair with Emma Hamilton. R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire : the British in the Mediterranean since 1800* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), p 11.

troops pending return to the order of St John of Jerusalem.⁵⁸ In a letter to the War Office a Knight asserted that ‘the Orders exist provisionally at Trieste’ and they could return Malta to its ‘ancient splendour’ with British Support.⁵⁹ Despite this plea the Knights were disappearing from relevance and they never regained their former position in Malta.⁶⁰

Malta finally fell to the British on 4 September 1800 but at first it seemed they would not stay there. The Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean fleet, Admiral Lord Collingwood, did not value the island and Prime Minister William Pitt would not compromise peace negotiations with the French for the sake of Malta.⁶¹ There is some contention about the views of Nelson with regard to Malta. Historians such as Desmond Gregory point to a letter written by Nelson to Earl Spencer in which Nelson argued Malta would be useless and expensive and should be kept only to deny the French.⁶² Yet archival documents show that six months later during the siege it was reported that Nelson was ‘strongly impressed with a very high opinion of the importance of the Island of Malta’.⁶³ Either the report was mistaken, or Nelson had come around to what was to become the prevailing view.

The advantages of Malta were certainly appreciated by others. Brigadier General Thomas Graham, an army officer in charge of operations against Malta, emphasised the importance and retention of that island. After the defeat of the French he wrote that ‘the real value and importance of Malta were not thoroughly understood at home otherwise the chance of its reduction could not have been left to the effect of blockade alone’.⁶⁴ He referred to Malta as being ‘considered an impregnable fortress with a glorious harbour’.⁶⁵ His long letter, full of concern, emphasised the dislike of the Order of St John felt by the Maltese, in the towns in

⁵⁸ Lord Granville to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 'Letter regarding garrison of Malta', 9 May 1799, WO 1/747 p 621.

⁵⁹ Knight of St John to WO, 'Memorial', 9 September 1799, WO 1/620

⁶⁰ The British did actually agree in the Treaty of Amiens (25 March 1802) to return Malta to the Knights but a new outbreak of hostilities with the French ended this move. See R.M. Martin, *History of the British Colonies. - London, Cochrane and M'Crone 1834-35* (Cochrane and M'Crone, 1834), p 144.

⁶¹ R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 12.

⁶² Desmond Gregory, *Malta, Britain, and the European powers, 1793-1815* (London Associated University Presses, 1996), p 66. For a copy of the letter see H. Nelson, *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson with Notes by Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas: January 1798 to August 1799. 3* (Henry Colburn, 1845), p 315.

⁶³ Major-General James St Clair-Erskine to Henry Dundas, 'Letter regarding the Siege of Malta', 16 October 1799, WO 1/296 p 595. St Clair-Erskine was commander of British Army forces in the Mediterranean.

⁶⁴ Throughout documents in this period the word ‘reduction’ is used to mean capture or conquer.

⁶⁵ Brigadier General Thomas Graham to Henry Dundas, 'Letter regarding retention of Malta', 19 September 1800, WO 1/291 p 285.

particular, and strongly advocated the retention of Malta.⁶⁶ The position advanced by Graham and others became the new policy. Orders given to Henry Pigot on 10 December 1800 read: 'Great Britain takes the Maltese Nation under its protection. Major General Pigot will not permit the pretensions of any other Sovereign or body of men to be brought forward or discussed'.⁶⁷ This effectively made Malta a de facto colony.

It was a small colony with a small population. A census taken in 1842 showed that in that year the population stood at 114,499 excluding members of the British Military, which if counted would bring the count to over 120,000.⁶⁸ The census also revealed that 44,192 (38.6%) people were from the 'lower classes of society without any ostensible means of subsistence' while only 813 (1.84%) were from 'the nobility and gentry, holders of land'.⁶⁹ These figures point to a very small elite and a very large number of disadvantaged, suffering from a profound inequity in the distribution of wealth. Among the elite of Malta were the educated professionals who graduated from the University of Malta.⁷⁰ These elites typically spoke Italian, a key marker of class in Malta.

Italian influence in Malta combined with older influences from the Middle East and Northern Africa. This resulted in an indigenous Maltese language, which was originally a non-literary vernacular.⁷¹ Maltese was an Arabic dialect, which was subject to Latinisation from 1090 onwards after the Normans conquered the island.⁷² It then steadily absorbed Italian and Sicilian. The Maltese vocabulary in modern times consists of words that are 32.41% Arabic origin, 52.46% Sicilian and Italian, and 6.12% English. Of these Arabic words are used more often as they denote basic ideas and functions.⁷³ Maltese was the first language of Arabic origin to be written in the Latin alphabet. In 1920 the 'Union of Maltese Writers' consisting of leading writers and poets in Malta was set up specifically to take on the task of creating a standard orthography.⁷⁴ In

⁶⁶ When the Maltese learned of the Treaty of Amiens they expressed their disdain for the Knights clearly in a statement given to the British. See R.M. Martin, *History of the British Colonies. - London, Cochrane and M'Crone 1834-35*, p 147.

⁶⁷ Abercrombie to Pigot, 'Instructions to Major General Pigot', 10 December 1800, WO 1/292 - Apart from one eighteen month interlude Sir Alexander Ball was Civil Commissioner in Malta from the time it was surrendered by the French up until his death in October 1809. See Desmond Gregory, *Malta, Britain, and the European powers, 1793-1815*, p 158.

⁶⁸ "Population of Malta - The Governor-General", *The Times*, 12 October 1842 p 6

⁶⁹ "Population of Malta - The Governor-General", *The Times*

⁷⁰ This University, which can trace its history as far back as 1592, was briefly abolished during the French interregnum but was re-established by Sir Alexander Ball, after the British gained possession of Malta. University of Malta, <http://www.um.edu.mt/about/uom/history>.

⁷¹ Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire : culture, politics and identity in Malta and the Mediterranean, (1912-1946)*, Maltese social studies (Venera, Malta: Midsea Books, 2012), p 50.

⁷² Joseph M Brincat, "Maltese-an unusual formula," *MED Magazine* 27(2005).

⁷³ Joseph M Brincat, "Maltese-an unusual formula".

⁷⁴ Ray Fabri, "Maltese," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 88, no. 3 (2010): p 800.

1924 they published the *l-Alfabbett tal-Ghaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* (the Alphabet of the Union of Maltese Writers) that became the accepted standardisation and remains the authority on the Maltese language. In August 1934 Maltese was declared an official language alongside English and Italian. Language had been a contentious issue amongst Maltese nationalist politicians of the late nineteenth century such as Fortunato Mizzi who did not regard Maltese as a major language but saw it as a *patois*. They championed Italian as the language of law, education, religion and of Rome, a 'Mediterranean *lingua franca*' and a 'bridge reducing insularity and isolation' in the world.⁷⁵ Language would become perhaps the greatest political issue in Malta during the inter-war period. It was the symbolic cause that divided the politics in Malta, and an issue that was leveraged by the British administration, in an attempt to further their agenda and maintain their control of this strategically important colony.

Malta became a part of the empire largely due to this strategic importance, and its military utility determined its treatment as a colony for the entire time it remained within the British Empire. Important questions such as economic investment or the granting of political autonomy were always in tension with Malta's place in British strategic calculations. In the inter-war period Britain's responses to the threat from both domestic nationalism and Italian influence occurred within this strategic paradigm. This helps to explain Britain's motivations in enforcing the suppression of both internal and external opposition to its rule in Malta during the 1920s and 1930s. It also influenced Britain's management of the Maltese economy.

In 1912 there was a Royal Commission into economic difficulties in Malta.⁷⁶ Commentators noted that Malta had enjoyed a period of prosperity due to the Crimean War (1853-1856), the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) which had made Malta a vital coaling port, and the continued presence of the British Navy in the Grand Harbour. These positive factors began to disappear however as naval strategy caused many ships to return to Britain and at the same time larger ships with extended range did not have to stop at Malta but could reach Port Said in Egypt.⁷⁷ The Commission also described an inequity in the distribution of wealth in Malta. It found that roughly one third of all immovable property belonged to the state, one third to the Church, and one third to the people. The report suggested the existence of a large economic underclass, as had existed when the 1842 census was taken. The Commission had a number of suggestions;

⁷⁵ Henry Frenco, *Europe and empire*, p 53.

⁷⁶ "The Economic Decline of Malta. A Royal Commission", *The Times*, 24 May 1912, p 31. and see Francis Mowatt, *Malta. Report of the Royal commission on the finances, economic position, and judicial procedure of Malta*, Parliament. Papers by command Cd. 6090, 6280-6281 (London: H.M. Stationery off, 1912).

⁷⁷ "The Economic Decline of Malta. A Royal Commission", *The Times*

they were that emigration be promoted, that the judicial system be reformed including the use of the Maltese language in criminal trials, that there be an increase in tax on luxury items and a reduction of the tax on bread.⁷⁸ Most importantly the report noted that the Maltese economy and employment had become entirely dependent upon British defence spending, leaving the country in a precarious position. These economic difficulties were offset for a short time by the onset of World War One which brought employment around the harbour, but returned with the end of hostilities.⁷⁹

The Maltese economy had become completely dependent upon Britain. Broadly speaking the 1920s can be described as a period of economic stability in Malta with improvement in a series of key indicators found in the 1921 and 1931 Census. From 1921 to 1931 the Maltese population grew from 212,258 to 241,621 an increase of 14%.⁸⁰ In both 1921 and 1931 the census recorded industry as the category which had the most employed persons followed by commercial (business people and transport workers) and agricultural. A breakdown of labour figures in Malta from 1931 shows that of a total labour force of 93,304 persons, the 25,678 agricultural workers were heavily outnumbered by the 65,280 employed in the service and manufacturing sectors, two groupings which were comprised heavily of those servicing the British Navy.⁸¹ The dominant position of the British military spending in the Maltese economy was highlighted by Apostolides who noted that Malta could not feed its population without military expenditure in Malta by Britain. He pointed out that agricultural output was only 7.4% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1921, whereas 22% of imports were wheat and flour. This meant that 'the total exports of Malta could only cover 29% of the total value of wheat and grain needed in order for the Maltese population to be sustained'.⁸²

The census specifically noted that the effects of the 'general economic depression had not been felt in Malta' in April 1931 and indeed it is argued below that it would not feel the effects at all.⁸³ In the year 1921 the value of imports was £3,723,814 while exports were £239,617. In 1931

⁷⁸ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Pr., 1967), p 70.

⁷⁹ Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances 7 & 8 June', 20 September 1919, CO 55627, CO 158/411 paragraph 65.

⁸⁰ Malta, *Census of the Maltese Islands, taken on ... 26th April, 1931* (Valletta: Govt. Printer, 1932), p ii.

⁸¹ Alexander Apostolides, "The growth of two small economies in the Great Depression: GDP estimation for Cyprus and Malta during the interwar period (1921-1938)," *Munich Personal RePEc Archive* MPRA Paper No. 30276(2011): p 22. - This dependency also affected the distribution of the population of Malta. A highly urbanised society, in 1931 some 110,274 or 45% of the total population lived in an area described as the 'conurbation of the harbours', an area in and around the capital Valetta.

⁸² Alexander Apostolides, "Why did small European Colonies not perform better? GDP estimation for Cyprus and Malta during the interwar period (Unpublished Work)" (European University Cyprus, 2012), p 18.

⁸³ Malta, *Census of the Maltese Islands, taken on ... 26th April, 1931*, p xxxiv.

these figures were lower at £2,714,530 and £191,873.⁸⁴ This is a significant drop, but not catastrophic, and in the following year, 1932, the imports rose back to £3,319,207 and exports held at £182,250. The 1931 census only returned 30,485 as unemployed, some 1885 fewer than 1921.

During the depression Malta had 'positive GDP [Gross Domestic Product] due to its 'high dependence on British Military expenditure'.⁸⁵ Malta experienced a greater decline in GDP as a result of the Abyssinian Crisis of 1936, when the Royal Navy moved its base away from Malta, than it did at the onset of the depression. The downside of this reliance on military spending was that the Maltese interwar economy did not take part in the rapid post-depression recovery experienced by some other countries within the sterling bloc, such as Cyprus.⁸⁶ The Maltese economy was entirely dominated by its role as a British military base. This affected internal politics in Malta, the British control of the colony and its reaction to pressure from Italy.

Colonial Governance in Malta

Colonial governance in Malta was beset by a series of constitutional crisis and revisions. In 1931 a Royal Commission on Malta was convened to look back at the latest crisis and make recommendations about the future. It said that:

It would be almost possible to plot a graph of the constitutional history of Malta during the last hundred years showing the rise and fall of Constitutions modelled alternately on the principle of benevolent autocracy and that of representative Government.⁸⁷

It was true that Malta had a convoluted constitutional history during which varied political systems purported to give more or less power to the Maltese, but the Commission was wrong in one key respect. The Maltese people never enjoyed anything like true representative government before and during the inter-war period. It was autocracy and veiled autocracy.

In 1813, after more than a decade of effective British control over Malta, Lord Henry Bathurst, the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies moved to formalise the situation and wrote to Sir Thomas Maitland the first Governor of Malta, about government in the colony:

⁸⁴ Malta, Colonial Blue books, 1921-1938 quoted in Alexander Apostolides, "Why did small European Colonies not perform better? GDP estimation for Cyprus and Malta during the interwar period (Unpublished Work)," p 18.

⁸⁵ Alexander Apostolides, "The growth of two small economies in the Great Depression", p 19.

⁸⁶ Alexander Apostolides, "The growth of two small economies in the Great Depression", p 20.

⁸⁷ *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission, 1931: Presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, January, 1932*, (Stationery office, 1932), p 9.

The circumstances of the present year have occasioned a material change in the actual value of Malta, as well as in regard to the importance of our holding a permanent station in the Mediterranean. As a military post, as a naval arsenal, as a secure place of depot for the British Merchants, there is no spot in the south of Europe which appears so well calculated to fix the influence and extend the interests of Great Britain as the Island of Malta.⁸⁸

Whereas there had previously been differences of opinion, the importance of Malta to Britain was now widely acknowledged. Following Bathurst's instructions Maitland announced the unilateral annexation of Malta on 5 October 1813.⁸⁹ The first constitution of the island was known as the 'Bathurst Constitution' and it vested all authority in the Governor.⁹⁰

This was the first in a series of constitutional arrangements as the Maltese were given limited forms of self-government and party political lines emerged. An appreciation of these changes is crucial to any understanding of Maltese inter-war domestic politics. Prior to 1919 a series of Councils of Government were established under four different constitutions and each differed in the number of elected officials (if any). The greater the number of elected Maltese representatives, the greater the potential for conflict with the Governor and the British administration, and for the blocking of legislation. The reality was that the Governor always retained overriding power, either through a right of veto or the power of Order in Council.⁹¹ It is also true that Malta has a long history of dissent and political agitation prior to the inter-war period. The constitutional breakdowns of the inter-war period featured in Chapters 5 and 6 below were not a break with tradition but of continuation of a sustained pattern of Maltese resistance.

In 1830, Count Camilo Sciberras and George Mitrovich set up the *Comitato Generale Maltese* and successfully petitioned for a Council of Government which was introduced in 1835. The role of the Council was to advise and assist the Governor. It was made up of seven members, no

⁸⁸ Bathurst to Maitland, 'Letter regarding establishment of colony', 28 July 1813, CO 159/4

⁸⁹ Desmond Gregory, *Malta, Britain, and the European powers, 1793-1815*, p 189.

⁹⁰ U.J. Rudolf and W.G. Berg, *Historical Dictionary of Malta* (Scarecrow Press, 2010), p 46. - At the Congress of Vienna (1815) British possession of Malta was internationally accepted and it would remain a formal colonial possession until after World War Two. Malta was added to Britain's existing possession of the Ionian Islands that had been granted under the Treaty of Paris (1815). Sir Thomas Maitland was both Governor of Malta and the Lord High Commissioner in the Ionian Islands. The British granted a constitution to the Ionian Islands in 1817 but the colony was not successful. The creation of independent Greece was pivotal to Ionian politics and created an obvious pressure for these islands to become part of this new country. On 2 June 1864 the British left the Ionian Islands (retaining the use of the harbour at Corfu) and they became part of the Kingdom of Greece. See R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 33.

⁹¹ An order-in-council can be made by a British Governor. Orders in council are a form of delegated legislation, made by a person or body other than parliament, under authority granted to that person or body by an Act of Parliament. - "Australian Encyclopaedic Legal Dictionary", (Sydney, N.S.W: LexisNexis Butterworths, 1990).

form of popular election and a Lieutenant-Governor who could act without the consent of the Council.⁹² Consistent with the governance of the Ionian Islands and later Cyprus, the British government retained ultimate control over Malta and had military support available.⁹³

Continued agitation by Maltese nationalist elites represented by the *Comitato Generale* and led by Sciberras resulted in a new Council of Government in 1849. The new Council was a legislative body which could make laws not in contravention of British laws, or Colonial Orders. It had eighteen members in total consisting of eight elected members and ten 'official' unelected members of which five had to be Maltese. This meant a majority (thirteen) of the members were Maltese, but the Governor still retained a right of veto.⁹⁴ Such mechanisms were a feature of all of these colonial constitutions. They are the mechanism for instituting and maintaining a state of exception in the colonies. Suffrage was limited; the right to vote given to all men over twenty one years of age, with a property holding, or a partnership in a mercantile firm, or membership of a profession. These qualifications reduced the voting numbers to only 3,486 in Malta and 281 in Gozo.⁹⁵ Taking the census figures from 1842 above as a rough indication of overall population, this number of voters would represent a fraction, only 3.29% of the population; Malta's social stratification was replicated in the electoral system.

In 1881 an Executive Council was formed to assist the Governor in the business of government. Then, in 1887, Lord Gerald Strickland of Anglo-Maltese heritage and still an undergraduate at Cambridge entered into negotiations with Fortunato Mizzi (founder of the Maltese Nationalist Party)⁹⁶ and the two men proposed a new constitution.⁹⁷

The British government adopted many of the ideas of these two men and this resulted in a more liberal constitution in 1887 which changed the numbers in the Council of Government so that elected members outnumbered non-elected members. Out of twenty members, fourteen (the majority) were now elected albeit four of these represented interest groups (the clergy, nobility, University graduates, and merchants). The Governor retained the right of Order in

⁹² Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 14.

⁹³ In the year 1833 there were a total of 2392 troops stationed there including a regiment of 'Maltese fencibles' (local troops) and a Royal Artillery regiment. - R.M. Martin, *History of the British possessions in the Mediterranean: comprising Gibraltar, Malta, Gozo, and the Ionian islands* (Whittaker & co., 1837).

⁹⁴ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 18.

⁹⁵ Hilda I. Lee, "The Development of the Malta Constitution 1813-1849," *Melita Historica : Journal of the Malta Historical Society* (1952): p 17.

⁹⁶ Kent writes that Fortunato Mizzi linked Italian, Maltese culture (and social order) and Catholicism all together. This was a powerful combination, a 'potent social ideology' which was to 'unite the professional classes and the lower clergy in the political arena in the following years.' See P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1981), p 75.

⁹⁷ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 36.

Council.⁹⁸ The 1887 constitution was similar to the 1882 constitution in Cyprus which provided for a Legislative Council consisting of eighteen elected members, of which twelve (the majority) were elected local members (split into nine Orthodox and three Muslim) and six were appointed. The High Commissioner retained the deciding vote in the event of a deadlock.⁹⁹

The new system in Malta still had very limited suffrage. In 1902 one British MP pointed out that of a total population in Malta of 180,000 only approximately 10,000 (5.6%) were classed as 'electors' and able to vote.¹⁰⁰ In 1888, Strickland was appointed Chief Secretary. He treated Maltese politicians with contempt, an attitude which led to him becoming fiercely disliked.¹⁰¹ Comments in Colonial Office files noted his 'tactless manner' and officials became convinced over the succeeding years that despite his qualifications for office his attitude was a causing public unrest and political stalemate.¹⁰² Strickland was deliberately promoted out of Malta when he became Governor of the Leeward Islands in May 1902.¹⁰³ He later returned and played a major role in the politics of the inter-war period as the leader of the Constitutionalist Party.¹⁰⁴ As suggested above one of the key issues for both sides of politics in Malta was language.

The language question was entangled with Maltese nationalist identity. The British administration wished to promote English over Italian in a bid to engender loyalty to Empire. In 1899 a proclamation that English would replace Italian in the law courts produced a high level of opposition from the Council of Government. This resulted in a determined effort to block supply (finance bills) in the Council, a tactic also employed by members of the Legislative Council in Cyprus over many years and a source of continued frustration to the authorities there.¹⁰⁵ At the same time the Italian press conducted a campaign against the change with 'great

⁹⁸ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 36. An Order in Council is an executive legal instrument which has the force of law.

⁹⁹ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 166.

¹⁰⁰ HC Debate, 28 January 1902, vol 101, cc1168-208

¹⁰¹ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 46.

¹⁰² Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 59. For more information on Strickland see Henry Frenedo, "Britain's European Mediterranean: Language, religion and politics in Lord Strickland's Malta (1927-1930)," *History of European Ideas* 21, no. 1 (1995): p 53.

¹⁰³ Henry Frenedo, "Britain's European Mediterranean", p 53.

¹⁰⁴ Sir Gerald Strickland (1861-1940) was born to an aristocratic English father who retired to Malta and a mother who was heiress to a Maltese Count. He studied in Cambridge and married his first wife Lady Edeline Sackville, establishing himself in the British aristocracy. Strickland had two phases in Malta, first as a member of the Colonial Service he had a career which began in Malta and took him as far as the Governorship of New South Wales. He returned to Malta in 1917, founded the Constitutionalist Party and became head of Government. For more on Strickland see D. Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (Yale University Press, 1994), p 116-21.

¹⁰⁵ For instance in 1912 Greek Cypriot Members resigned en masse after their demands for greater self-representation were not met. See George Francis Hill, *A history of Cyprus*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010 (This edition first published 1940)), p 424.

acrimony'. One newspaper, the *Tribuna*, threatened England with 'the loss of Italian friendship and the extension of irredentist aspirations to Malta'.¹⁰⁶ Supporters of Italian culture in Malta were supported by liberal Italy and this tradition would be continued by the fascists in the inter-war period.

Although the language issue was an expression of Maltese Italian nationalism it was, Claudia Baldoli argues, a pre-occupation of a 'bourgeois culture, not shared by the majority of the population, which spoke Maltese and not Italian' and was linked to the liberal nationalism of the Italian *Risorgimento*.¹⁰⁷ There was a split within the political and economic elite of the island as the Maltese both resisted and collaborated. One group was mainly concerned with business and commerce, spoke English and mixed socially with British aristocracy. The other was intellectual and religious, spoke Italian and supported the Maltese nationalists.¹⁰⁸ British administrators were able to exploit this fissure in Maltese politics. It meant that many of the political attacks from Maltese nationalists were not directed at them but at a proxy of pro-British Maltese who were a reliable ally in domestic politics for the British administrators. This situation can be contrasted to Cyprus where there were individuals or even groups who co-operated or collaborated with the British but there was no major political party committed to furthering British interests.¹⁰⁹ The Turkish Cypriots for instance were often in opposition to the Greek Cypriots and voted with the British but they were by no means blindly loyal to British interests. In both places British administrators tried to manage and exploit these divisions and became embroiled in local disputes.

In 1902, the Conservative Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain compromised and withdrew the 1899 language proclamation with relation to Malta but, speaking in the House of Commons, he warned the nationalist members against further protest:

They cannot expect the Government responsible for this great Imperial fortress to allow this childish game to proceed, and it would be clearly the duty of any Government under these circumstances to preserve the great Imperial interest in their keeping either by going back to the

¹⁰⁶ "Italy And Malta", *The Times*, 8 November, 1900, 4

¹⁰⁷ C. Baldoli, "The 'Northern Dominator' and the Mare Nostrum: Fascist Italy's 'Cultural War' in Malta," *Modern Italy* 13, no. 1 (2008): p 6.

¹⁰⁸ C. Baldoli, "The 'Northern Dominator' and the Mare Nostrum", p 7.

¹⁰⁹ Members of the Advisory Council set up under Strickland were seen as collaborators. Collaboration was viewed very negatively by some in British colonies. In Cyprus the assassination of Antonios Triantafyllides, a lawyer, politician and member of the advisory council is attributed to this cooperation. For further information see FCO 141/2497: Cyprus: assassination of Antonios Triantafyllides.

Constitution before 1887 or by such a modification of that Constitution as may be necessary to give the Government a controlling voice in the administration.¹¹⁰

He then made statements of a more general nature:

We hold Malta solely and entirely as a fortress essential to our position in the Mediterranean. We do not hold it for any pecuniary advantage; quite the contrary... Now, it being understood that we hold Malta not as we hold an ordinary colony, but as a fortress, the first condition which we have to bear in mind is the security of the Imperial interests which are connected with its possession. ...in a fortress anything like open agitation against the Government is a thing that cannot be tolerated on the face of it. If you are prepared to tolerate it, you must be prepared to give up your fortress.¹¹¹

This was a plain statement of the British government's position on Malta, a small, strategic holding on a vital sea route. Chamberlain's statement shows how the value, the position of Malta, affected its governance and the response to threats, in this case internal. It also displays the uncompromising language and position that the government took in the heyday of empire. They would not grant greater self-control to a colony retained chiefly for its strategic importance. If Chamberlain viewed Malta primarily as a military base, then the denial of democracy to the inhabitants of that base would seem as natural as lack of democracy in the command structure of the military. This position was noted in discussions of Cyprus. Officials there were dealing with agitation and one official expressed the belief that 'Cyprus could have some latitude since it was no fortress like Malta'.¹¹²

Chamberlain's concession on the language issue earned a complete change of tone from the *Tribuna* which now said that 'a very beautiful page on Anglo-Italian friendship has been written in the history of the English Parliament'.¹¹³ His warnings did not however dampen nationalist opposition and the next in what was a series of constitutions came into effect on 26 June 1903.¹¹⁴ This one was, in effect, a return to the less liberal system instituted in 1849 in which unelected members outnumbered elected (twenty members, eight elected) and the Governor retained a right of veto. Malta proceeded under this system up until shortly after World War One. The elected members continued to advocate retention of the Italian language and were generally in

¹¹⁰ HC Debate, 28 January 1902, vol 101, cc1168-208

¹¹¹ HC Debate, 28 January 1902, vol 101, cc1168-208

¹¹² CO67/128/45019, minute, Ommanney, 1 February 1902 as referred to in Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 181.

¹¹³ "Malta and The British Government", *The Times*, 30 January 1902, 3

¹¹⁴ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 60.

opposition to the Governor, often engaging the tactic of being elected to the Council, then resigning in protest.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the Maltese people gained limited representation, and enduring political patterns began to emerge. Elite Maltese nationalism was concerned with the preservation of Italian culture. A movement known as *italianita* formed and its perennial and symbolic cause was the ‘language question’, the place of the Italian language within Maltese culture. Aligning against the *italianita* movement were the pro-British commercial interests which were later joined by the Labour movement. Led for many years by Strickland who formed the Constitutionalist Party, this political movement was equally passionate in its loyalty to Britain and its pointed and determined efforts to erase Italian influence. Strickland played the role of a British proxy in Maltese politics and it is notable that his polemical approach was in fact a counter-productive force for the British. His antagonistic style, and his determination to erase Italian influence, typified by his renaming of streets with Italian names, created strong opposition within the *italianita* movement, Italy, and the Catholic Church. The political heat and fury stoked by Strickland helped destabilise colonial politics and formed part of the ‘trouble’ in Malta.

This is the background to the political dynamic which was present during the inter-war period. After 1918 Britain continued to utilise illusory constitutions to limit the agency of the Maltese elites, retain control of its fortress colony and inhibit real political development. Malta had been part of the British Empire for approximately 78 years when in 1878 global strategic changes presented Britain’s Conservative government with an opportunity to take territory from the Ottoman Empire and add another Mediterranean island to its empire.

Why was Cyprus part of the Empire and what role did it play?

Cyprus, the third largest island in the far eastern Mediterranean is located 75 kilometres south of Anatolia and 105 kilometres west of Syria.¹¹⁵ It was subject to a series of occupations before becoming a part of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire from 1571 to 1878. The Ottoman Empire had very large ethnic minorities including Greek Orthodox and Cyprus had a majority Greek Cypriot (Orthodox) population. In the nineteenth century the European powers were immersed in the ‘Eastern Question’, attempting to shore up their interests in the

¹¹⁵ At 9311 km² or 3595 square miles, Cyprus is significantly larger than Malta.

midst of a changing Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁶ In March 1878 the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) came to an end when a dominant Russia accepted a truce with the Ottoman Empire and various Balkan states achieved independence. This conflict was followed by the Congress of Berlin (13 June – 13 July 1878) a meeting at which the European powers negotiated new borders in the Balkan Peninsula and from which Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli famously returned claiming ‘peace with honour’. It was during these events that the Ottoman Empire transferred the right to occupy and administer Cyprus to Britain.¹¹⁷

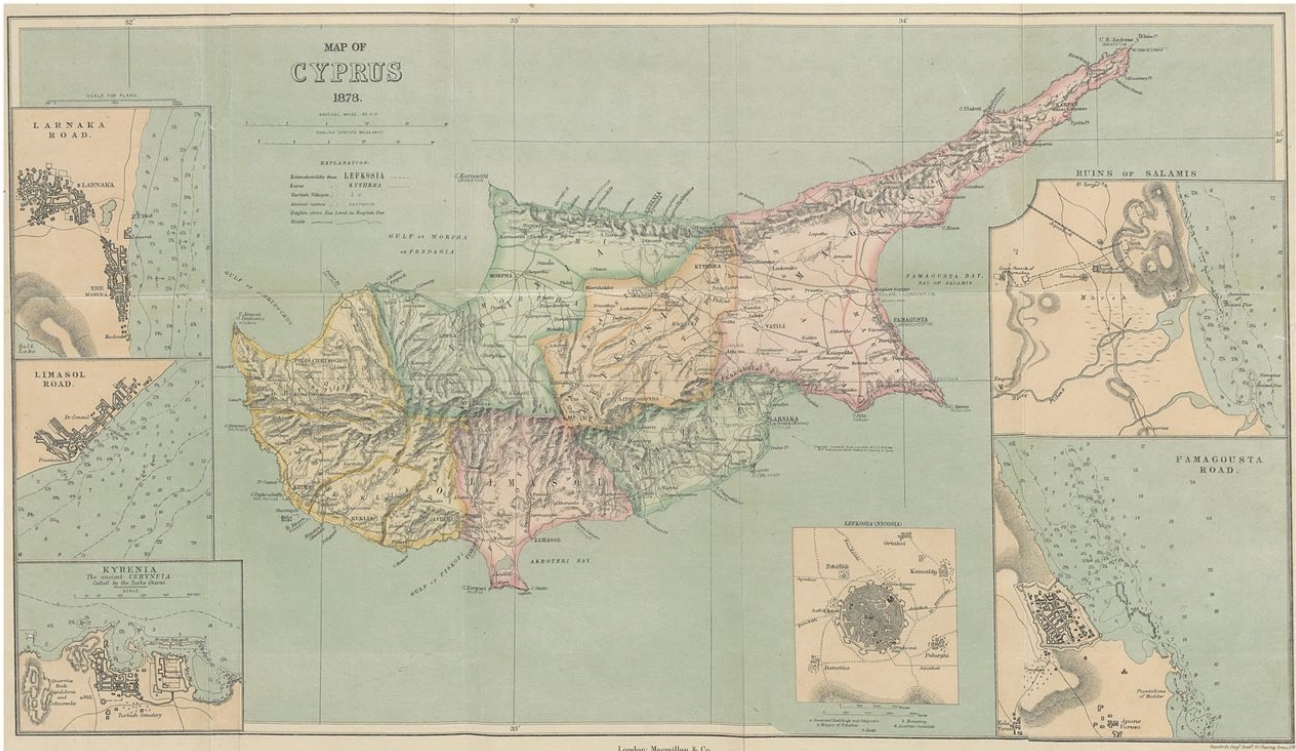


Figure 2 – Map of Cyprus (1878)¹¹⁸

In May 1878, prior to the Congress of Berlin, Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury¹¹⁹ directed Sir Austen Henry Layard, the British Ambassador to the Porte, to offer the Sultan future protection from Russia in return for the occupation and administration of the Island of Cyprus by Britain and for protection of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire. The wording of the offer contained the threat that if the Sultan did not agree then withdrawal of British support would

¹¹⁶ For more on the eastern question see Alexander Lyon Macfie, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: Revised Edition* (Routledge, 2014)., Marian Kent, *The Great Powers and the end of the Ottoman Empire* (Routledge, 2005)., M. Sükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹¹⁷ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 93.

¹¹⁸ R.H. Lang, *Cyprus: Its History, Its Present Resources, and Future Prospects* (Macmillan, 1878), p 22.

¹¹⁹ The Earl of Derby was Foreign Secretary until 2 April 1878 when he was replaced by the Marquis of Salisbury.

follow and the partition of the Empire would be the inevitable result.¹²⁰ Layard communicated the offer to Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Ottoman Prime Minister on 25 May 1878 and the provisional agreement was signed the following day, the wording being exactly that suggested by the Foreign Secretary.¹²¹ The formal document referred to as the *Convention of defensive alliance between England and Turkey to secure the Sultan's territories in Asia, for the future against Russia* was signed on 4 June 1878, only nine days before the Congress of Berlin.¹²²

Vice Admiral Lord John Hay arrived at the port town of Larnaca on the southern coast of Cyprus on 4 July 1878 and wrote to the Admiralty eight days later, the second last day of the Congress, to say that he had 'assumed government of the Island today at Nicosia the capital'.¹²³ On 28 July the first Lord High Commissioner of Cyprus, Sir Garnet Joseph Wolseley, wrote to Salisbury to describe the formal assumption of his position:

I have the honour to inform your Lordship that on Monday the 22nd Inst: I proceeded at six o'clock in the Evening to the 'Konak' in Larnaca then occupied by Royal Marines, and, in the presence of a number of the principal residents of the place, having caused my Commission to be read by the Chief of the staff, I took the oaths of allegiance and office and assumed the Government of Cyprus. I then caused my proclamation to be read in English in Greek and in Turkish.¹²⁴

When the British acquired Cyprus they gained control of a territory with a complex social and ethnic structure. The two basic ethnic groups were the Greek Cypriot Orthodox Christians (73.9%) and the Turkish Cypriot Muslims (24.4%).¹²⁵ This social division became more apparent and important as a result of British rule. When they arrived in Cyprus the British encountered a socially and culturally integrated society that had a mixed ruling class of Muslim, Orthodox Christian and secular elites.¹²⁶ While Cyprus had been a part of the Ottoman Empire the independent Orthodox Church had exerted great power as the representatives of an Orthodox

¹²⁰ Salisbury to Layard, 'Draft of Telegram from the Marquis of Salisbury to Mr. Layard', 23 May 1878, Despatch 675, FO 78/2768

¹²¹ Layard to Salisbury, 'Letter regarding offer to Ottoman Empire for protection in return for Cyprus', 27 May 1878 Despatch 692, FO78/2789 - The Congress of Berlin was meant to be the place where decisions were made about Ottoman territory in Europe, but with regard to Cyprus it was a rubber stamping exercise.

¹²² Layard to Salisbury, 'Letter regarding signing of Convention', 5 June 1878, Despatch 719, FO 78/2790

¹²³ Vice Admiral Lord John Hay to Admiralty, 'Telegram regarding governance of Cyprus', 12 July 1878, Despatch 40, CO 67/2

¹²⁴ Wolseley to Salisbury, 'Letter regarding assumption of role of Lord High Commissioner ', 28 July 1878, Despatch No 2, CO 67/1 - a copy of the proclamation is attached to document.

¹²⁵ Grande-Bretagne. Colonial office and F.W. Barry, *Report on the Census of Cyprus, 1881* (1884).

¹²⁶ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 153.

millet, within the Ottoman system.¹²⁷ With the arrival of the British the Orthodox Church faced the loss of its power and position.

Britain had levered the politics of the Concert of Europe and claimed a piece of the Ottoman Empire that it thought was strategically significant. The British government aimed to use Cyprus as a base from which to check Russian aggression and bolster Ottoman sovereignty. They also saw it as a point from which they could protect their interests in the Near East and India.¹²⁸ The acquisition of Cyprus was part of the end of a period of stability in the European balance of power. Tunis was seized by France in 1881, the British moved on Egypt in 1882, and Germany began to take colonial possessions in Africa and Oceania from 1884. This in turn preceded the ‘scramble for Africa’ a complex event in which Britain took part.¹²⁹

Like it had with the acquisition of Malta, Britain had taken advantage of the dislocation of war where national and imperial boundaries change, but there were different motivations in the case of Cyprus. Geography played an important part; the island had proximity to both Asia Minor and Syria and could support military operations in either place. It was seen as being large enough to house and feed troops, and potentially as a base for British trade.¹³⁰ It was also large enough to support a debt repayment of £40,000 annually owed to Britain and France by the Porte after the Ottoman Empire defaulted on a loan for which they were guarantor.¹³¹

Despite the perceived advantages of Cyprus, problems became apparent immediately after occupation. The very hot climate was challenging and many troops died from fever. Famagusta

¹²⁷ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 153. A millet was a separate legal system for various religious minorities (i.e. Christian or Jewish) residing within the Ottoman Empire. In the later period of the empire it began to mean those religious groups themselves.

¹²⁸ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 87.

¹²⁹ The Berlin Africa Conference was a major event in European affairs despite it being concerned with Africa. Bismarck did not think Britain should be able to claim large areas of Africa without occupation and he invoked the principle of ‘effective occupation’. Ronald Robinson notes the ambivalence or tension in the conference (and the bilateral agreements afterwards) between the territorial and proto-colonial meaning and the commercial and anticolonial interpretation of this principle. This dualism is reflected in the historiographical argument. Robinson concludes that although Bismarck had aspirations to make the conference about free trade, it came to be about the ability of countries to exert power on the spot and their ability to secure a paramount position. See S. Förster et al., *Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition* (Oxford University Press [for] German Historical Institute, 1988), pp v, vi, 1-32. - Jonas Gjersø argues in relation to the scramble for East Africa that the ‘Nile’ related motives were wholly absent and both humanitarian and commercial interests motivated the British annexation. See Jonas Fossli Gjersø, "The Scramble for East Africa: British Motives Reconsidered, 1884–95," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 5 (2015): p 851.

¹³⁰ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 85. – A document known as the ‘Home Memorandum’ listed the advantages of Cyprus and has been identified by some as contributing to the choice of Cyprus, but Varnava notes it was written on 8 June 1878, by which time the decision had been made.

¹³¹ The Porte had defaulted on a loan of 1855 and the British and French were liable to the bondholders for approximately £40,000 annually. So the territory chosen by the British had to have an economy large enough to support such debt repayment. Small strategic ports such as Stampalia were not capable of meeting this economic requirement. Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 80.

harbour had been nominated as the place for the development of a naval station in Cyprus but the harbour was too shallow and the extensive dredging required was too expensive. This along with other improvements to the harbour and an improvement in sanitation in the city itself would have been very expensive. The British government backed away from the project in 1879.¹³²

Then, in September 1882, Britain secured practical control of the Suez Canal after occupying Egypt. A mere four years after its acquisition a fundamental strategic reason for taking possession of Cyprus was effectively neutralised leading Varnava to characterise Cyprus as the 'inconsequential possession'.¹³³ The acquisition of both Malta and Cyprus was linked strongly to strategic considerations. Malta's value exceeded initial predictions while Cyprus played a role in preventing the Russians from expanding in Eastern Anatolia but was not able to be developed into a military base. This difference had implications for the value placed on each island and the methods of governance used. Despite the problems developing the military potential of Cyprus, the island was able to make a valuable contribution to the allied war effort in World War One.

There were two phases for Cyprus during the War. At first it was offered up to Greece in 1915 as an inducement to join the allied side in the war. Then, after 1916, it gained importance as it became a recruiting ground for the men who joined the Cypriot Mule Corps,¹³⁴ a place to house Ottoman prisoners of war, a base for the Armenian Legion¹³⁵ and a place for British Military to operate and undertake 'significant human and electronic intelligence activity'.¹³⁶ Although Cyprus did not play a large strategic role in World War One it did produce and sell large quantities of agricultural supplies to allied forces in the Eastern Mediterranean in addition to the mules, and the men to work them; 12,288 Cypriots enlisted as muleteers which represented between twenty to twenty five per cent of Cypriot males aged 18-39.¹³⁷ Famagusta was primarily used as a supply depot, but it was also used by the French Navy and a prisoner of

¹³² Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 101-11.

¹³³ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 120.

¹³⁴ Andrekos Varnava, "Recruitment and Volunteerism for the Cypriot Mule Corps, 1916-1919. Pushed or Pulled?," *Itinerario* 38, no. 03 (2014).

¹³⁵ The Armenian Legion was organised by the French and moved to Cyprus after Britain and France made the Sykes-Picot agreement in May 1916. See Andrekos Varnava, "French and British Post-War Imperial Agendas and Forging an Armenian Homeland after the Genocide: The Formation of The Légion D'orient in October 1916," *The Historical Journal* 57, no. 04 (2014).

¹³⁶ Andrekos Varnava, "British Military Intelligence in Cyprus during the Great War," *War in History* 19, no. 3 (2012).

¹³⁷ Andrekos Varnava, "Recruitment and Volunteerism for the Cypriot Mule Corps, 1916-1919. Pushed or Pulled?," p 82.

war camp for Turks was set up near the town. Cyprus could not contribute to the war effort in the same way as Malta, but it still made a sizeable contribution.¹³⁸

During the conflict the Cypriot administration was concerned that Turkish Cypriots would communicate with the Ottoman Empire and interned members of that community. This was in stark contrast to Malta where any loyalties with Italy were acceptable as it was an ally of Britain. The Cypriot police investigated, arrested and interned a limited number of Turkish Cypriots they believed were supporting the Ottomans and the island was under a regime of martial law.¹³⁹

For Cyprus the end of the Great War was not sharp or definite. Given its geographical position and ethnic make-up it could not avoid the politics and strategic aftershocks, as Turkey and Greece fought for territory up until 1923.¹⁴⁰ What is also clear is not only the way in which Cyprus re-orientated toward the Mediterranean in British thinking, but also the influence of Greek and Turkish politics upon the local elite population. This regional instability caused the Chiefs of the Air Staff to look again at the strategic usefulness of Cyprus. With the 'offer' still in recent memory the fear was that Cyprus would be given to Greece or otherwise lost to the empire. In October 1919 the Chiefs argued that Britain could not 'afford to run the risk of Cyprus being used by another Power established in Asia Minor or Palestine, as an advance base for air attacks on Egypt and the Suez Canal'.¹⁴¹ Although this was a policy of denial, it acknowledged the strategic worth of Cyprus. The Navy also strenuously resisted the ceding of Cyprus to Greece, pointing to the potential for Famagusta to harbour destroyers, submarines and heavy ships.¹⁴² This was a tenuous argument given it had been established years earlier that major and very expensive works would have to be undertaken at Famagusta for it to be useful. At the Paris Peace Conference neither Lloyd George nor Eleftherios Venizelos, Prime Minister of Greece, raised the issue of Cyprus and neither had 'sufficient domestic political support to be

¹³⁸ Andrekos Varnava, "British Military Intelligence in Cyprus during the Great War". Cyprus also figured in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Negotiated in May 1916, this divided up a future post-war Middle East and provided a new focus for Britain. The agreement contained the pledge that Britain would 'at no time enter into negotiations for the cession of Cyprus to any third power without the previous consent of the French Government'. See James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus, 1919-1939: the political and diplomatic interaction between Great Britain, Turkey, and the Turkish Cypriot community*, Modern European history (New York: Garland Pub., 1987), p 34.

¹³⁹ See FCO 141/2369 and for a detailed description of this counter-intelligence see Andrekos Varnava, "British Military Intelligence in Cyprus during the Great War". and Altay Nevzat, "Nationalism amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave" (University of Oulu, 2005).

¹⁴⁰ The modern Greek state gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1829. In the Treaty of Sevres (1920) it gained large territories in East Thrace (in the 'European' part of Turkey) and Ionia (in western Anatolia). These gains were reversed after fighting with the emerging modern state of Turkey and were formally relinquished in the Treaty of Lausanne (1923).

¹⁴¹ Cabinet Paper Memorandum: *The Retention of Cyprus*, 29 October 1919, CAB 24/92/18 CP 17 p 99.

¹⁴² G.S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918 - 1926: With a Survey of the Foundations of British Rule* (Nicosia: Zavallis Press, 1979), p 109.

able to broker a deal in the case of opposition'.¹⁴³ In 1920, the British government again made it clear that it would retain Cyprus.¹⁴⁴ A Greek Cypriot deputation, one of many to visit London in this period, lobbied the government for *enosis* but only succeeded in evincing a short answer in parliament from Colonial Under-Secretary Leo Amery that 'no change in the status of Cyprus was in contemplation'.¹⁴⁵ Amery, a Conservative and a staunch imperialist, was an influential figure in the 1920s holding the post of Colonial Secretary from 1924 to 1929.¹⁴⁶ His view reflected the post-war consensus that Britain should not cede Cyprus to Greece.

McHenry did not attribute enough importance to the changed role of Cyprus when he expressed the view that, during the inter-war period, Cyprus took on 'the status of a low-value poker chip which could neither be cashed in nor played to any significant value'.¹⁴⁷ Cyprus represented a bridgehead between the traditional and the new post-World War One colonies. As Rappas argues 'Cyprus acquired a renewed importance in Britain's Middle Eastern imperial and strategic interests'.¹⁴⁸ This 'new' importance was a result of changes in the Levant and Middle East. Trying to contend with these changes and the changing international environment after World War One was a series of governments in London that were a product of the British political system, as discussed in the earlier parts of this chapter.

Colonial Governance in Cyprus

Cyprus had a larger area and a larger population than Malta and it was administered differently. Whereas Malta was governed as one large military base soon after it was occupied it was expressly not British policy to 'make Cyprus a fortress, like Malta and Gibraltar'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island: A history of the British in Cyprus* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), p 97.

¹⁴⁴ For the Greek perspective see Antonis Klapsis, "The Strategic Importance of Cyprus and the Prospect of Union with Greece, 1919–1931: The Greek Perspective," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 5 (2013).

¹⁴⁵ "Cyprus Remains British. King Richard's Conquest Retained", *The Times*, 2 November 1920, p 12 See also FCO141/2385. This was the second delegation, one having visited London in 1919.

¹⁴⁶ Leopold Amery (1873–1955) was born in India but returned to Britain when young and was a schoolmate of Winston Churchill. He was a journalist in his early career and he developed a commitment to Empire that 'assumed the dimensions of a faith, staunchly defended for more than sixty years'. He entered Parliament in 1911 as a Conservative and held his seat until 1945 during which time he represented the imperial wing of the party. In 1919 he was appointed as Milner's parliamentary under-secretary at the Colonial Office. He was then made first lord of the Admiralty in October 1922 and the Colonial Secretary from 1924 to 1929. See British Academy and National Portrait Gallery (Great Britain), "Oxford dictionary of national biography" (Oxford: Oxford University Press.).

¹⁴⁷ James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 224.

¹⁴⁸ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 59.

¹⁴⁹ *The Times*, Thursday August 8 1878, 7.c. as quoted in Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 100.

There was a view amongst the British that the Ottoman Empire had badly administered Cyprus and that it was in a state of neglect. Despite this the British did not immediately dissolve the Ottoman structures of government, but gradually took over.¹⁵⁰ Cyprus therefore exhibited what Lisa Ford has called 'legal plurality' between the British and local system but by the inter-war period sovereignty were clearly established in Cyprus.¹⁵¹ In the first two years under British control Cyprus was managed by a military bureaucracy but change came when Lord Kimberly, the Liberal Colonial Secretary took responsibility for Cyprus and brought reform.¹⁵²

On 30 November 1882 a new constitution was introduced allowing for a Legislative Council made up of eighteen members, of whom six were appointed British Officials and twelve (a majority) were elected, nine by Christians and three by Muslims.¹⁵³ The ethnic division in the Council roughly translated to that on the island, which was 73.9% Greek Cypriot, and 24.4% Turkish Cypriot.¹⁵⁴ Although this did not happen immediately the implication of the numbers was that the Greek Cypriot representatives could be stymied by the Turkish Cypriot representatives voting with the British. George Hill in his seminal four volume *History of Cyprus*, using paternalistic language, remarked that Cyprus had acquired a 'toy parliament' and that this toy 'as so often happens, was to be a great nuisance to the giver'.¹⁵⁵ The regime introduced in 1882 was longstanding; the judicial systems put in place lasted until 1927, while the Legislative Council persisted until the events of 1931.¹⁵⁶ The key political issue that plagued the Council and Cypriot society through the entire inter-war period and beyond was the idea of *enosis*.

Support for *enosis* emerged slowly at the elite level after Britain gained control of Cyprus in 1878. It was assisted in part by the British imposition of 'modernist principles – civil and secular institutions and ethnic and racial identification' which 'created space for Hellenic nationalists to spread the topological dream of Hellenism'.¹⁵⁷ This dream was linked to the *Megali Idea* (Great Idea), an irredentist and imperialist concept of Greek nationalism that 'envisaged the extension of the border of the young Greek state to include all the Greek subjects of the Ottoman

¹⁵⁰ Upon arriving in Cyprus the British set up a number of administrative departments overseen by a Secretariat, headed by a Chief Secretary. The Island was divided up into six districts, each headed by a British District Commissioner, assisted by local staff. - G.S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918 - 1926*, p 37.

¹⁵¹ L. Ford, *Settler Sovereignty*, p 3.

¹⁵² G.S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918 - 1926*, p 40.

¹⁵³ R. F. Holland and Diana Weston Markides, *The British and the Hellenes: struggles for mastery in the eastern Mediterranean 1850-1960* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p 168.

¹⁵⁴ Grande-Bretagne. Colonial office and F.W. Barry, *Report on the Census of Cyprus, 1881*.

¹⁵⁵ George Francis Hill, *A history of Cyprus*, p 419. Hill quotes this phrase from the *Edinburgh Review*

¹⁵⁶ G.S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918 - 1926*, p 40.

¹⁵⁷ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 190.

Empire'.¹⁵⁸ *Enosis* was promoted by urban economic elites who had the ability to influence the Greek Cypriot peasantry.¹⁵⁹ It was not a mass movement, but one imposed from above. It can be categorised as a skewed form of nationalism, a Hellenic nationalism rather than an indigenous Cypriot one.¹⁶⁰ The strength of this movement within Greek Cypriot elite circles generated distrust amongst British administrators who responded by carefully balancing the limited power they gave to Cypriots. McHenry suggests that the inner circle of the movement came from the Church reacting to the loss of its power, the literate urban elite asserting their identity, and school teachers who acted as cultural gatekeepers.¹⁶¹ Rappas agrees, suggesting that the Orthodox Church, which had long occupied a position of power in Cypriot politics, adopted *enosis* in a bid to maintain its position after being marginalised by the British.¹⁶² The closest the movement came to achieving its goals was in 1915.

As discussed, in October 1915, Britain offered Cyprus to Greece in return for that country intervening to defend Serbia, which was under threat from Bulgaria, a member of the Central Powers.¹⁶³ This offer was rejected by the Government of Alexandros Zaimis. Varnava argues that the offer was 'not an isolated event, but the outcome of years of [the British] seeing Cyprus as strategically useless and a pawn'.¹⁶⁴ The offer was designed to inveigle Greece into a difficult war and if the offer had been accepted Cyprus would have gone to a pro-British power thereby preserving some of the strategic usefulness of Cyprus for the British. The 'offer' gave hope to those in Cyprus seeking union with Greece for many years afterward; they viewed it as a missed opportunity, and a source of encouragement. After the offer was declined Britain consolidated its control and the offer was not repeated. The offer of Cyprus to Greece in 1915 can be contrasted with the move, many years later in 1956 to integrate Malta with Britain. The contrasting value of the two colonies is evident, but there is also an interesting parallel in that each place had an irredentist movement, one in Cyprus which sought to remove it from British influence and one in Malta, which attempted to make it part of Britain itself.

¹⁵⁸ Anastasia Stouraiti and Alexander Kazamias, "The Imaginary Topographies of the Megali Idea: National Territory as Utopia," in *Spatial Concepts of the Nation: Modernizing Geographies in Greece and Turkey*, ed. Thalia Dragonas Nikiforos Diamandouros, Caglar Keyder (I.B.Tauris, 2010).

¹⁵⁹ *Enosis* was offered as the solution to poverty and other problems which the British administration had not been able to alleviate. - Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 181.

¹⁶⁰ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 190.

¹⁶¹ James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 82.

¹⁶² A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 7.

¹⁶³ R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 158.

¹⁶⁴ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 265.

On 1 May 1925, Cyprus was proclaimed a colony, having been formally annexed in 1914. Cyprus would now have a Governor instead of a High Commissioner. The change to a formal colony made the relationship between Greek Cypriot political leaders and colonial authorities more confrontational as it confirmed that the possibility of *enosis* was now more remote.¹⁶⁵ By this time the post-war uncertainty in the eastern Mediterranean had settled. In 1926 the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID)¹⁶⁶ suggested that there was ‘no reason to anticipate any internal trouble in Gibraltar, Malta or Cyprus’ albeit there were three officers and one hundred from other ranks detached from Egypt in Cyprus, and the Colonial Office (along with the Cypriot Governor) thought it wise that this force should remain.¹⁶⁷ Worth noting is the confidence exuded by this report, which supports MacKenzie’s argument that British officials maintained a positive attitude towards empire in the early inter-war period.

Conclusion

As has been described Malta and Cyprus had limited forms of local representation under the British. Both places were perceived to have strategic roles in the Mediterranean region albeit Malta was more important. These roles influenced the decision to retain both as imperial possessions, to resist any changes to their control and to stave off any attempts at establishing any constitutional arrangements that would jeopardise Britain’s imperial sovereign power. The difference in perceived value led to different levels of control, different forms of government and varying levels of authoritarianism. The colonial level challenge to Britain’s control in both places was exacerbated by a regional threat to Empire in the form of Fascist Italy.

This chapter has sought to briefly outline both the nature of British inter-war politics and the structure of the Government departments whose task it was to advise and carry out policy. This chapter has also introduced the two colonies that are examples of the method by which Britain dealt with challenges and maintained control at the local level.

¹⁶⁵ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 7.

¹⁶⁶ The Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), formed in 1902, was ‘an advisory body without executive powers which kept the defence situation as a whole constantly under review’. Between the wars ‘the committee’s responsibilities expanded to cover wider strategy and defence matters, particularly preparations for warfare’. In the inter-war period the CID consisted mostly of the ‘three service ministers and the chiefs of staff; the secretaries of state for foreign affairs, the colonies, the dominions and India; a Treasury minister; and the permanent heads of the Treasury and Foreign Office’. The CID had various standing-subcommittees of which the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee was particularly important. see A. Thurston, *Sources for Colonial Studies in the Public Record Office*, Vol 2, p 7-8.

¹⁶⁷ Committee of Imperial Defence, ‘Memorandum on the Foreign Policy of His Majesty’s Government with a list of British Commitments in their Relative order of Importance’, 7 June 1926, 700-B, CAB 4/14 Appendix C, p 32.

Despite the nature of imperial dominance exerted by Britain over Malta and Cyprus, both developed their own political systems and forms of political resistance. The political developments prior to the inter-war period set the pattern for future politics. The key political issues of the inter-war period, language and *italianita* in Malta and *enosis* in Cyprus were also contested prior to World War One. These nationalist issues were an elite concern in both places. In both places illusory constitutions offered local representation but denied the Maltese and the Cypriots any real sovereignty as the British retained the right to decide on when to apply exceptional legal measures.

Real power remained the preserve of the British Government and the ‘imperial’ Parliament in Westminster. Assisted by the institutional memory of the Foreign and Colonial Offices, domestic British politics produced the policy for the Mediterranean generally and the laws that ultimately governed Malta and Cyprus. Although the inter-war period saw political changes as Labour supplanted the Liberals, the direction of imperial policy was largely set by the Conservatives who gradually shifted from a staunch imperialist position to one of concession in order to hold on to places such as India. Crucially, however, these concessions did not extend to Malta or Cyprus.

The argument in this study is that there was both greater challenge to and greater control of the Mediterranean Empire than is often acknowledged. Greater control was enforced by a authoritarian mode of colonial governance which, in deference to changing international standards of behaviour was veiled by a series of constitutions which gave control over local matters to the people of the colonies, but which could be suspended at will. The exploration of politics in the metropole above explains the political motivation for policies of strong control and preservation of empire. The political leaders worked in concert with the Colonial and Foreign Offices which themselves contained influential personalities and institutional cultures that directed both the policy and praxis of empire. At the regional level the British government and its departments were strongly challenged by Mussolini’s Italy, a state based on a new ideology with a charismatic leader.

Chapter 2 - The External Threat to the Mediterranean from Italy - From Ally to Rival

Our Father

*Our Pirate which art English accursed be thy name;
Thy Kingdom and thy Empire come crashing down for ever;
thy will and thy bestiality be subject to sanctions in earth
and on the sea. Give up to-day and for ever thine aims at
our place in the sun. Pay us back our debts from 1918 to
1935 as the Negus our debtor will shortly be paying us. Amen.*

*I believe in the Devil, English and delinquent, creator
of ruins and Masons, and in Eden, his filthy son and our
executioner. Conceived by the Masonic spirit, Mason of the
League of Nations, who came into the world only to bring
sanctions and was buried alive in them and died after less
than three days and descended condemned with his companions
Vasconcellos, Litvinoff, Benes, Titulesco and other oxen.*

*I believe in the Holy Fascist Cause, in the Resurrection
of Imperial and Fascist Italy and in the eternal light of Rome.*

Amen.¹

**A parody of the Lord's Prayer and Creed used in
the training of Fascist youth organisations - 1936.**

¹ Rome Chancery, 'Italian Propaganda against United Kingdom', 10 March 1936, R1552, FO 371/20410 . 'Negus' meant king in Ethiopia. Anthony Eden was Foreign Secretary. Augusto de Vasconcelos was a Portuguese diplomat and president of the League from 1935-37. Edvard Benes was president of Czechoslovakia while Maxim Litvinoff and Nicolae Titulescu represented the Soviet Union and Romania at the League respectively.

This Italian parody of the Lord's prayer from 1936 demonstrates the poisonous state of Anglo-Italian relations during the Abyssinian War (3 October 1935 – May 1936).² Italy had been an ally of Britain in World War One but over the course of the inter-war period the relationship between the two countries drifted to a point of outright animosity, a position animated largely by radical political change in Italy. This and the following chapter focus on the rise of Fascist Italy, allowing this thesis to consider the international dimension of the challenge to Britain's control of its Mediterranean Empire. After World War One the global political environment was less amenable to the maintenance of the empire and the war itself had seen the end of the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, German and Ottoman empires. For Britain's Mediterranean Empire one of the key changes to the global environment was the assertiveness of Italy. Italy was a key factor for three reasons; its geography, the British tendency towards global over-extension and their reliance upon image and prestige. Strategically and physically Italy was right in the middle of the Mediterranean Empire and, of three potentially hostile powers, it was the one the British Government believed could be induced to become an ally. This was despite the active way in which Italy worked against British influence, damaging its prestige as the great colonial power.

This chapter will chart the evolution of Italy from ally to rival over the period 1919-1935. It will argue that not only did Italy pose a serious challenge to Britain's Mediterranean Empire, but this threat was clearly recognised by Britain. As the following makes clear, the high level of anxiety and concern within Britain fundamentally altered the administration of that empire. Fascist Italy contributed to the 'authoritarian' turn in colonial administration as Britain responded to the threat with appeasement at the international level, but tight control at the colonial level.³ While Britain contended with France, Greece, Turkey and others in the Mediterranean, it was Italy that posed the greatest threat to continued regional stability under the Pax Britannia. Accordingly, Italy became the pivotal power in the Mediterranean for Britain, shaping British imperial policy as a revisionist, expansionist provocateur. Britain responded to the threat with compromised policy and with change and compromise in its diplomatic and political decision-making. It was constrained by the exogenous threat posed by Italy.

The chapter will consider liberal Italy's empire before looking at the British failure to make good on promises of territory made to induce Italy to join the allies in World War One. It will then look at the cautious Foreign Office response to Mussolini and the fascist government after

² Abyssinia was the previous name for Ethiopia.

³ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe: British Cyprus and the Italian Dodecanese in the Interwar Period," *European History Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2015).

their ascension to power in 1922. The Corfu incident in 1923, when Mussolini ordered the occupation of the Island of Corfu in retaliation for the murder of an Italian official in Albania, provided an example of the timidity with which the British government responded to Italian aggression.⁴ This response is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The Italian occupation was something of a 1920s aberration, as Italy settled into a more stable mode of foreign relations and Anglo-Italian cooperation which lasted until 1935 and included the Stresa Front and anti-German alignment between Britain, France and Italy. This stability and cooperation ended with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Britain faced global over-extension after World War One. It could not protect the European continent from Germany, the Mediterranean from Italy and the Far-East from Japan simultaneously. British governments tried in vain to avoid this scenario, a strategic weakness that dictated policy and promoted appeasement of the Italians. In 1935 the split in Foreign Office and government opinion over appeasement became clear; support Italy and contain Germany, or support the League as it represented collective security against all aggressive nations. The policy of the British government was that of compromise, in the pejorative sense of the word. It both provoked Italy and betrayed the League. This position led to mistakes such as the Hoare-Laval Pact, and a failure to even publicly acknowledge, let alone oppose, Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War.

The focus of this and the next chapter is the perception of Italy within the British government and the ways in which that evolving perception altered the governance of the British Empire in the Mediterranean; whether they had to compromise or alter policy, impose more control, or reduce it so as to make their rule more attractive. Despite being a relatively new imperial power, Italy reached a point in the inter-war period where it represented a real threat to Britain, succeeding in impinging on Britain's freedom of movement in the Mediterranean, a vital step for Italy towards obtaining great power status. Italy was the biggest external threat to the Mediterranean Empire. It affected the British position generally and this combined with or exacerbated problems at the colonial level, in Malta and Cyprus, a topic covered in later chapters.

⁴ For further detail see Peter J. Yearwood, "'Consistently with Honour': Great Britain, the League of Nations and the Corfu Crisis of 1923," *Journal of Contemporary History* 21, no. 4 (1986).

Italy's Existing Empire

Italy had both an empire and ambitions to expand it well before fascism. The country only completely unified in 1871 and then acquired its first imperial possessions, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland in 1889. It failed in its attempt to colonise Ethiopia during the *Prima Guerra d'Africa* (First African War) losing a crucial battle at Adowa to Emperor Menelik II in 1896 and suffering a blow to its national confidence.⁵ Italy expanded its fledgling empire in 1912 at the expense of the Ottoman Empire during the Italo-Turkish War (September 1911 - October 1912) when it took provinces in North Africa, which became Libya, and the Dodecanese Islands (the 'twelve islands') in the Aegean Sea.

The British were on hand to witness this expansion of the Italian empire. On 6 May 1912, Alfred Biliotti, the British Vice Consul in Rhodes (the largest of the Dodecanese Islands) reported that an Italian flotilla of eleven battleships and cruisers, twenty destroyers and torpedo boats, and nine transport ships had arrived in the two preceding days carrying somewhere between eight and ten thousand infantry along with cavalry and artillery.⁶ Italian officers explained to Biliotti that 'this great display of armament' was the result of the 'anxiety of the King to avoid useless loss of life by impressing the Turks with the impossibility to resist such superior military forces'.⁷ With this overwhelming force they easily took control of Rhodes and the other Dodecanese Islands, which were strategically placed in the Aegean Sea en route to the Dardanelles. In so doing Italy became the first power other than Britain to have a Mediterranean colonial presence east of Malta since Napoleon's Egypt and Syria campaign.⁸

During this war Britain maintained a position of strict neutrality. Italy had already invaded and taken control of the former Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan which would become Libya and the invasion of the Dodecanese was intended to apply pressure on the Ottoman Empire to concede the Italian occupation of Libya. While the British government was not too concerned with the Italians in Libya, the Admiralty was greatly concerned with their

⁵ G.M. Finaldi and G. Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa: Italy's African Wars in the Era of Nation-building, 1870-1900* (Peter Lang, 2009), p 13., R. Ben-Ghiat and M. Fuller, *Italian Colonialism* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), p 2.

⁶ Alfred Biliotti, 'Letter to Henry Dudley Barnham', 6 May 1912, No. 2345, FO 195/2396

⁷ Alfred Biliotti, 'Letter to Henry Dudley Barnham', 6 May 1912, No. 2345, FO 195/2396

⁸ Philip John Carabott, "The temporary Italian occupation of the dodecanese: A prelude to permanency," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 4, no. 2 (1993): p 294.

taking of the Dodecanese, as it threatened the ability of Britain to protect its Mediterranean interests.⁹

The Italian invasion and occupation of Ottoman territory has some parallels with the British takeover of Cyprus. Like Britain before it, Italy was building its empire at the expense of the Ottomans. Fitzpatrick has suggested in relation to an earlier period that ‘many Southern European imperial projects’ were ‘underpinned’ by the inability of the Ottoman Empire to keep its European possessions.¹⁰ Italy was operating under a similar model some years later. It was meant to return the Dodecanese Islands to the Ottomans under the treaty signed at Ouchy on 18 October 1912 and called ‘first Locarno’, but in fact it kept administration of them and this situation became permanent when the Ottomans joined the Central Powers in World War One.¹¹ Well before the advent of fascism, Italy had a nascent empire in the Mediterranean, providing the basis for Richard Bosworth’s argument that Fascist expansionism was in some ways a continuation of liberal policy.¹² Giuseppe Finaldi suggests that despite Italy’s difficulties in establishing an empire on the scale of other European powers it still had a culture of colonialism, stemming from its earliest encounters with Africa, which was a ‘necessary aspect of the process of nation-building’ of which the whole of western Europe was engaged.¹³ The concern for Britain was the location of that nation-building. Italy was building its empire in and around the Mediterranean, an area in which Britain had exerted great power since 1800.

Although the First World War was triggered by events in Sarajevo, just across the Adriatic, Italy did not rush into the conflict. It was a member of the Triple Alliance (1882) with Germany and Austria-Hungary but the pact was defensive in nature, and more importantly Italy had signed secret agreements with Paris that cancelled out most of the obligations under the treaty.¹⁴ It made these secret agreements because the alliance with Austria-Hungary, a regional rival, was uneasy. Italy only joined the Allies after being promised large swathes of territory in Dalmatia,

⁹ Philip John Carabott, "The temporary Italian occupation of the dodecanese: A prelude to permanency", p 295.

¹⁰ M.P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p 8.

¹¹ Pre-Fascist Italy offered the Dodecanese back to Greece, exclusive of Rhodes in 1919 and inclusive of Rhodes in 1920 (should Britain give back Cyprus to Greece). See Richard Clogg, "British Perspectives on Greek-Turkish Relations in the Aftermath of World War II," in *The Aegean Sea after the Cold War: Security and Law of the Sea Issues*, ed. Aldo Chircop, André Gerolymatos, and John O. Iatrides (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000).

¹² For an examination of concepts of continuity in Italian foreign policy from the liberal to fascist governments, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also Giuseppe Finaldi, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism* (Routledge, 2014).

¹³ G.M. Finaldi and G. Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa: Italy's African Wars in the Era of Nation-building, 1870-1900*, p 302.

¹⁴ C. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (Penguin Books Limited, 2012), p 93.

Iberia, Albania and along the Brenner frontier.¹⁵ The Italian government denounced the Triple Alliance on 4 May 1915 and entered the war on 24 May.¹⁶ Among those who supported Italian involvement was journalist Benito Mussolini, editor of the Socialist daily *Avanti*. This position was at odds with Socialist policy and he quit *Avanti* in November 1914 to produce a rival newspaper *Popolo d'Italia* ("The People of Italy"), which was strongly in favour of the war.¹⁷ After suffering heavy defeat against Austria at Caporetto in October 1917, Italy enjoyed success late in World War One, breaking through the Austrian lines and winning the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. Italian losses were heavy, around 600,000 military deaths.¹⁸

Two particular issues of relevance to this study can be derived from the period up until the end of World War One. They are firstly that Italy had already begun to acquire an empire in the Eastern Mediterranean, the first power other than Britain to do so since the beginning of the 19th Century. Secondly it had been promised territory as a reward for entering the war on the winning (British) side. Despite ostensibly being in partnership with the British throughout the war years, Italy was already positioned as a potential rival if not yet a threat to British interests in the Mediterranean, before the advent of fascism and Mussolini.

The Inter-War Anglo-Italian Relationship

The historiography of the Anglo-Italian relationship is related to that of Italian foreign policy more generally. Renzo De Felice says it was an opportunistic foreign policy that used local forces to exert pressure on Britain and France.¹⁹ Other Italian Historians have followed this approach such as Luigi Goglia and Rosaria Quartararo who suggests that although Mussolini was expansionist he was open to reaching an understanding with London, and were it not for British

¹⁵ H.J. Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1940* (Praeger, 1997), p 2. - The Treaty of London (26 April 1915) recognised the Italian annexation of Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands and also made provisions for the granting of territory around in Anatolia (around the province of Adalia) in the event that the Ottoman Empire was partitioned. See James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 34. The Italian decision was affected by the Austrian declaration of war on Serbia. If the central powers prevailed Austria would have the best claim to Albania. If the Allies won, Italy would have to be on the allied side before they could have any claim to it and so Italy cast around for the best deal. Austria begrudgingly made a late offer but did not offer as much as the Entente. See M. Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present* (Pearson Longman, 2008), p 181.

¹⁶ J. Grenville and B. Wasserstein, *The Major International Treaties of the Twentieth Century: A History and Guide with Texts* (Taylor & Francis, 2013), p 36.

¹⁷ M. Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present*, p 183.

¹⁸ M. Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present*, p 186.

¹⁹ Nir Arielli, "Beyond Mare Nostrum: Ambitions and Limitations in Fascist Italy's Middle Eastern Policy," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37, no. 3 (2011): p 386.

obstinacy in this regard, Mussolini would not have joined Hitler.²⁰ American and British Historians such as MacGregor Knox, Robert Mallett and Bruce Strang developed the view that Mussolini had an expansionist policy backed by underlying ideology.²¹ Nir Arielli puts it this way 'in summary then, where the Italian or De Felicean school sees Fascist policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East as being an opportunistic instrument in Mussolini's power-politics vis-a-vis Britain and France, the Anglo-North American school focus on the Duce's preconceived ideological drive for imperial expansion'.²² Arielli himself is of the view that 'Mussolini's revisionist policy generally tended to take on one European power at a time' focussing on Britain from mid-1935 until April 1938.²³

Reynolds Salerno writes that Britain 'tacitly acquiesced' to moves by Italy to establish some sort of imperial presence in the Middle East and North Africa. He cites inaction over Corfu and highlights British concern for the Far East and their lack of contingency planning for a conflict in the Mediterranean itself. Salerno emphasises the complexity of the multilateral interaction of Britain, France, Italy and Germany, where the relationship between any pair could affect the relationship between the other pair.²⁴

Massimiliano Fiore has focussed on the subject of Anglo-Italian relations in the Middle East. He argued that there was a systematic attempt to challenge British supremacy in the region (Middle East). But there were limits and activity levels were subject to European politics.²⁵ Fiore suggests that the British desire for peace was 'at odds with Fascist Italy's aspiration to alter the balance of power in the Med and the Red Sea'.²⁶ Italy was resentful after the Paris peace treaties and a 'second roman empire' was the goal. His central thesis was that 'behind the appearance of European collaboration' the Anglo-Italian relationship was already tense from the middle of the 1920's. Italian and British long term imperial interests he argued were destined to clash because the two countries were at 'cross-purposes'. Britain wanted the status quo while the Fascist

²⁰ For examples of the 'Italian School' see R. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce: Lo Stato totalitario 1936-1940* (Einaudi, 1996), R. De Felice and L. Goglia, *Mussolini, il mito* (Laterza, 1983), R. Quartararo, *Politica fascista nelle Baleari: 1936-1939* (FIAP, 1977).

²¹ For examples of the 'Anglo-North American School' see M.G. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), R. Mallett, *Mussolini and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1940* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), G.B. Strang, *On the Fiery March: Mussolini Prepares for War* (Praeger Publishers, 2003).

²² Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-40* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p 3.

²³ Nir Arielli, "Beyond Mare Nostrum: Ambitions and Limitations in Fascist Italy's Middle Eastern Policy", p 406.

²⁴ Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 6-8.

²⁵ Martin Thomas, "Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East/Britain, Palestine and Empire: The Mandate Year," *Intelligence and National Security* 28, no. 6 (2013).

²⁶ Massimiliano Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East, 1922-1940*, p 3.

government wanted to 'raise Italy to the rank of a great imperial power'. The clash between them in this area although peripheral is, he argued, 'crucial to understanding the reason for the outbreak of war between Britain and Italy. Fiore explicitly rejects the consensus among historians such as Ennio De Nolfo and Richard Overy that the Anglo-Italian relationship was satisfactory prior to 1935.²⁷

Manuela Williams writes about Italian propaganda in the late inter-war period and argues that Italy tried to 'export the Fascist Revolution' to British areas of control, particularly Egypt and Palestine.²⁸ She suggests that this propaganda targeted nationalist movements in particular. Further to this she argues that British authorities overlooked the circumstances that made this propaganda alluring to the Arab world and that the British government response was disjointed as a result of disagreements between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office.²⁹

This thesis agrees that Italy pursued an expansionist foreign policy and rejects the idea that it was opportunistic. It tries to avoid the teleological impulse behind an argument that the two powers, Britain and Italy, were destined to clash in the inter-war period, but acknowledges the competing interests, and the potential for conflict. This study does highlight the underlying tensions that existed prior to 1935, and accelerated after the Abyssinian Crisis. It also supports the argument of Williams that the British overlooked, or failed to understand, colonial conditions which made the Italian challenge more potent. This and the following chapter also highlight the disjointed nature policy response to that Italian aggression.

Post-War Italy and the transition to Fascist government

The period from 1919 to 1922 is characterised by three elements, the continuity of foreign policy from liberal to Fascist Italy identified by Bosworth,³⁰ the Italian frustration from limited territorial gains and the emergence of some initial concerns within the British Foreign Office

²⁷ Massimiliano Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East, 1922-1940*, p 3-6. See also E. di Nolfo, *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana: (1919-1935)* (Cedam, 1960)., R. J. Overy and Andrew Wheatcroft, *The road to war* (London: Macmillan London, 1989).

²⁸ Manuela Williams, "Mussolini's war of words: Italian propaganda and subversion in Egypt and Palestine, 1934-1939," *Eunomia* 1, no. 2 (2012): p 49.

²⁹ Manuela Williams, "Mussolini's war of words: Italian propaganda and subversion in Egypt and Palestine, 1934-1939", p 76-7.

³⁰ Bosworth's revisionist position challenged the traditional narrative that sought to characterise Mussolini and the fascist movement as a deviation. His continuity thesis met opposition from Italian historians who maintained the singularity of Fascism. See A. Kallis, *Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945* (Taylor & Francis, 2002), p 8., See also Stephen Corrado Azzi, "The Historiography of fascist foreign policy," *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 01 (1993): p 196.

regarding Mussolini and the fascists in general. These elements set the tone for the Anglo-Italian interactions of the inter-war period. Italy would continue to be expansionist, and rely upon its moral grievance to justify this. Italian fascists would also create distrust amongst those working for the British government.

The Italian government emerged from the Great War frustrated by the rejection of its territorial claims at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, a process that the Italians badly mishandled.³¹ Italy was granted many of its territorial claims, but it was not given Dalmatia or Fiume. Italy's territorial frustrations were focussed on the Mediterranean and the British were acutely aware of this. In November Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon told a conference in the House of Commons, attended by the Viscount Milner (Colonial Secretary), that Italy were 'opening their mouths much wider' to claim the whole of Yugoslav Istria along with territory on the Egyptian frontier, in East Africa and Abyssinia. Milner reminded those at the meeting that:

a special clause of the Treaty of London of 1915 laid down that in the event of France and England obtaining substantial conquest in Africa, Italy would be entitled to equitable consideration; and in Paris certain provisional agreements had been reached as to what was equivalent.³²

He went on to say however that none of these arrangements had 'any international validity until they were formally embodied in some legal instrument', implying that they were not binding on Britain.³³ Those gathered agreed that the cessions to Italy arising from the Treaty of London should become part of a general agreement covering all of Italy's claims. Italy was granted unencumbered possession of the Dodecanese and was to have been granted a large sphere of influence in south-west Turkey, until thwarted by the success of Kemal Ataturk.³⁴ In fact, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Italy's main regional rival) had left Italy in a good position.³⁵ Italy's fascists, however, did not accept this notion and instead supported the idea of a

³¹ See C.J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870-1940* (Routledge, 2001).Chapter 8, and H.J. Burgwyn, *The Legend of the Mutilated Victory: Italy, the Great War, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1915-1919* (Greenwood Press, 1993)., Michael Dockrill and John Fisher, *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919: Peace Without Victory?* (Springer, 2001)., S.P. Tillman, *Anglo-American Relations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

³² Major Thornton, 'Mandates', 1 December 1919, CO68647, CO 537/1027 p 7.

³³ Major Thornton, 'Mandates', 1 December 1919, CO68647, CO 537/1027 p 7.

³⁴ Yılmaz Altug, "Turkish Italian Diplomatic Relations (1919-1938)," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi (Istanbul University Faculty of Political Science Magazine)* (2012).

³⁵ John Whittam, *Fascist Italy*, New frontiers in history (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), p 104.

‘mutilated victory’ (*vittoria mutilata*).³⁶ This ‘mutilated victory’ myth became a powerful political tool for the Fascist government.

The British decision regarding territory occurred in the context of the new mood of Wilsonian self-determination and the establishment of the League of Nations, which meant that territories previously promised as reward for victory were to be given self-control, local government or mandate status. Nonetheless, from an Italian nationalist perspective, Britain’s first major interaction with Italy after the Great War was to deny to its war-time ally the territorial gains it had been promised. It was at this point, and for a range of reasons including a reaction to the rise of the left, the *Bienno Rosa* (the Red Two Years) and the collapse of the Italian parliamentary system, that Italy lurched to the right with the ascension of Benito Mussolini and his National Fascist Party (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*).³⁷

In 1919 Mussolini gained control of the Italian Fascist movement, which had emerged from the split of the Socialist Party during World War One. In the early platform of the *Fasci di Combattimento* (1919) the Fascists demanded a ‘foreign policy aimed at expanding Italy’s will and power in opposition to all foreign imperialisms’.³⁸ This inclusion of imperial expansion, Philip Morgan argues, displayed ‘the interaction of domestic and foreign policies, the internal preparation for imperialist wars of conquest and expansion’.³⁹ This was neither a new nor a specifically fascist idea; Friedrich List had advocated the formation of a German commercial entity, in effect a liberal empire, to compete with the British Empire.⁴⁰ In the nineteenth century British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli had similarly linked domestic politics with imperial expansion.⁴¹ He was of the view that imperial aggression would ‘symbolize a renewal of past imperial splendour’ and would ‘provide a foundation for national unity more compelling than any other that could be devised at the time’.⁴² Liberal imperialism was common in Europe; and

³⁶ Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 4. But see H.J. Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1940*, p 3. who suggests that ‘mutilated victory’ was a half-truth. The phrase itself was used by Gabriele D’Annunzio (the man who led the 1919 occupation of Fiume) in an editorial in the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* 24 October 1918.

³⁷ P. Neville, *Mussolini* (Routledge, 2004), p 50.

³⁸ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Olivia E. Sears, and Maria G. Stampino, *A primer of Italian fascism*, European horizons (Lincoln ; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p 3. The original text is available online: "Fascist Manifesto, 1919," http://www.conservapedia.com/Fascist_Manifesto,_1919.

³⁹ Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*, Routledge companions (London: Routledge, 2003), p 144.

⁴⁰ F. List, *National System of Political Economy: The History (Three Volumes in One)* (Cosimo Classics, 2011).

⁴¹ In 1863, he expressed his dismay at the loss of the Ionian Islands, saying that ‘a country, and especially a maritime country, must get possession of the strong places of the world if it wishes to contribute to its power’. See Hansard (Commons), III, 169, 95-6 as quoted in Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 69.

⁴² Freda Harcourt, "Disraeli's Imperialism, 1866-1868: A Question of Timing," *The Historical Journal* 23, no. 1 (1980): p 88, 99. Ironically the place in which he chose to show this aggression was Abyssinia where, in 1868, he sent a military expedition to rescue some British captives of the Ethiopian emperor Theodore.

some political scientists have suggested that it possessed an internal and ‘underlying material and cultural drive to expand and “civilize”’.⁴³ Italian liberal imperialism did not however flow unbroken into fascist imperialism. Liberal imperialism is often linked to liberal bourgeois notions of the progression of their own interests through ‘creating and maintaining empires as a means of expanding and modernizing their economy, polity, and population’ as well as defending themselves against the expansion of other states.⁴⁴ Fascist Italy adopted this position but in addition to this it brought a natural inclination to violence and militarism which aligned with an aggressive imperialist programme. Mussolini’s policy was both traditional and novel. His ambition was more determined than that of liberal imperialists. This was ‘an exaggeration of liberal Italy’s colonial dreams taken to the ultimate’ based on the supposed superiority of Italian society under Fascism.⁴⁵ War and empire building were methods by which Mussolini increased his prestige at home and undermined the power of other groups such as the monarchy, and the church.⁴⁶ Mussolini’s focus was on territory surrounding the central and eastern Mediterranean.

The Fascists’ expansionist mindset extended over the entire Mediterranean, including to Egypt, an informal British possession. At Fiume in early May 1919, Mussolini declared that:

The first thing to be done is to banish foreigners from the Mediterranean, beginning with the English. We must give every possible aid to the revolutionary movement in Egypt – that ancient Roman colony, the natural granary of Italy.⁴⁷

In 1919, Mussolini was in no position to act on such statements, but they provide clear insight into the early politics of the fascist movement. Fascism’s lack of dogmatic manifesto made it adaptable but also left it open to criticism as it shifted.⁴⁸ As a nationalist, militaristic, anti-left, youth and mass orientated party, its underlying inclination was toward imperial expansion. Although this expansionist tendency was suppressed at times as European politics became more complex over the inter-war period, it nonetheless continually reasserted itself.

⁴³Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, "Introduction: Particular or Universal? Historicizing Liberal Approaches to Empire in Europe," in *Liberal Imperialism in Europe*, ed. Matthew P. Fitzpatrick (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p 3., Jennifer Pitts, *A turn to empire : the rise of imperial liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), U.S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), D. Losurdo and G. Elliott, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (Verso Books, 2014).

⁴⁴ Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, "Introduction: Particular or Universal? Historicizing Liberal Approaches to Empire in Europe," p 16.

⁴⁵ Alan Cassels, "Was There a Fascist Foreign Policy? Tradition and Novelty," (1983): p 261.

⁴⁶ M.G. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War*, p 102.

⁴⁷ Steven Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt, 1935-1940 Conflict and Crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Military History and Policy Ser (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), p 24.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Olivia E. Sears, and Maria G. Stampino, *A primer of Italian fascism*, p xi. - Examples of these shifts include a change from a fierce anticlerical stance (displaying its leftist origins) to an adoption of Roman Catholicism and an about face from a criticism of anti-Semitism to an adoption of a Nazi racial ideology.

The opportunity to implement such policies arose when Mussolini and the Fascists took control from Vittoria Orlando's liberal government after the 'March on Rome' (22-29 October 1922). From the very beginning, the Foreign Office had its reservations about Mussolini who had described Britain as 'the fattest and most bourgeois nation in the world'.⁴⁹ The British Ambassador to Rome, Sir Ronald Graham suggested that Britain should consider 'demanding a formal apology for his hostile anti-British declarations' but went on to say that it would probably be more effective to 'treat M. Mussolini's exuberances with contempt'.⁵⁰ Having consolidated power Mussolini maintained elements of his Fascist movement's 1919 platform but did not aggressively try to expand his territory.⁵¹ He publicly stated that 'he would pursue a [foreign] policy of dignity, expansion and equilibrium ...'.⁵² Prime Minister Bonar Law and Foreign Secretary Curzon telegraphed Mussolini 'thanking him for his friendly message and reciprocating his wishes for continued cooperation between the two countries'.⁵³ Graham met Mussolini in November 1922 and reported that he was 'agreeably surprised and favourably impressed' after his conversation. Mussolini had 'expressed strong desire to improve relations with His Majesty's Government' and said of his previous utterances that 'there are things one says when one has no responsibility, but forgets as soon as possible when one has'.⁵⁴ Mussolini had exerted himself to present an agreeable façade to the British but his underlying political inclination toward imperial expansion in the Mediterranean region remained.

Following this direction, Mussolini repudiated the agreement to return the Dodecanese and instead consolidated the Italian position there.⁵⁵ His government worked to Italianise the Dodecanesians by attacking the two cultural foundations of language and religion.⁵⁶ The Italian authorities made Italian language lessons compulsory and tried to separate the Orthodox Church

⁴⁹ R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p 132.

⁵⁰ Sir R Graham, 'Crisis in Italy', 29 October 1922, C14817, FO 371/7659, Graham, Sir Ronald William (1870–1949), diplomat, became ambassador to Rome in November 1921 where he remained until 1933, an unusually long tenure. Graham's mandate to maintain and safeguard friendship with Italy became increasingly difficult as Mussolini progressed to more dictatorial methods. See I. S. Munro, "Graham, Sir Ronald William (1870–1949)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵¹ For a discussion of the historiography of fascist foreign policy with particular reference to coherence and continuity see Stephen Corrado Azzi, "The Historiography of fascist foreign policy".

⁵² Correspondent, "Victory For Fascisti. Ministry Formed, Signor Mussolini's Policy", *The Times*, 31 October 1922, p 12

⁵³ "Parliamentary Support For Mussolini", *The Times*, 3 November 1922, 1922, p 13

⁵⁴ Sir R Graham, 'Programme of new Italian premier', 1 November 1922, C15068, FO 371/7659

⁵⁵ James Barros, *Britain, Greece and the Politics of Sanctions: Ethiopia, 1935-1936*, Royal Historical Society studies in history series (London: Royal Historical Society, 1982), p 3.

⁵⁶ Stephen L Speronis, "The Dodecanese Islands: A study of European diplomacy, Italian Imperialism and Greek Nationalism, 1911-1947" (Univeristy of Michigan, 1955), p 166. and Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 480. See also Nicholas Doumanis, *Myth and Memory in the Mediterranean: Remembering Fascism's Empire*.

in the Dodecanese from its hierarchies in Greece and Constantinople. The Italian government wanted Dodecanesians to become bona-fide fascists,⁵⁷ and to this end the Italian government developed Rhodes by investing in buildings and infrastructure. They encouraged international tourism and used the island as a show case for their supposed economic prosperity and the ideological superiority of fascism.⁵⁸ Both the Italian and British Governments ruled colonies with majority ethnic Greek populations. This allowed the colonial administrators to observe each other's methods, but it also had political ramifications. The Italians for example could not criticise British methods in Cyprus without facing charges of hypocrisy and vice versa. This interesting dynamic is considered further below.

Despite Mussolini's expressed desire in the 1920s to improve relations with Britain, the Foreign Office believed that Italy was going to take a more aggressive position. Graham wrote to Curzon in December suggesting that Mussolini would broadly follow the policy of the predecessor government and would pursue an 'expansionist' foreign policy'.⁵⁹ The Foreign Office also took note of negative reports from Italy such as one that described in detail how sixteen socialists and communists had been murdered and another twenty were 'being hunted down for execution' in retaliation for the murder of two Fascists. These retaliatory killings were, Graham noted, 'carried out methodically without the slightest interference from the *Guardie Regie* [Interior Ministry Police Corps]'. Written on the cover of the file was a notation 'violent methods in full swing'.⁶⁰

Although Italian foreign policy continued on a generally conventional path marked by continuity rather than rupture in the 1920s, underlying structural issues provided the basis for a rapid shift in policy.⁶¹ The Fascist government knew that Italy was deficient in both natural resources and agricultural capacity and they promoted the concept of *Italia Irredenta* (Italian Irredentism) under which they claimed, among other places, Dalmatia and Malta. This is not to suggest a pre-destined, teleological path, but the elements were in place which made the radical change in Italian position vis a vis Britain possible. It was in Corfu that the first aggressive action took place. It was perhaps the most straightforward threat that Italy posed to British imperial hegemony in the Mediterranean, the direct taking of territory through force.⁶²

⁵⁷ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 488.

⁵⁸ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 479.

⁵⁹ Sir R Graham, 'Letter to Curzon', 22 December 1922, C17637/105/22 - Doc 123 FO 421/303

⁶⁰ Sir R Graham, 'Fascista-Communists disturbance at Turin', 26 December 1922, C17809, FO 371/7660

⁶¹ John Whittam, *Fascist Italy*, p 101.

⁶² John Whittam, *Fascist Italy*, p 102.

The Corfu Incident

On 27 August 1923, 'unknown persons' killed an Italian border commissioner, General Enrico Tellini, in Albania.⁶³ Mussolini's response was 'immediately violent' and 'intransigent'. He was firmly of the opinion that the murder was political and perpetrated by Greece.⁶⁴ The Italians made an extensive list of demands but Mussolini had decided as early as 29 August that he would invade Corfu.⁶⁵ It was generally agreed by other European powers that although Greece had a responsibility to ensure the safety of this representative, the Italian demands coupled with a twenty-four hour time limit were unacceptable.⁶⁶ The Italians occupied Corfu on 31 August 1923 in what Mussolini told his diplomats was a 'peaceful and provisional invasion'.⁶⁷ The invasion against the totally defenceless island was botched however when the Italian Navy, contrary to instructions to avoid casualties, arrived late, gave a very short (half-hour) deadline for surrender and then heavily shelled the town when a white flag was not waved in time.⁶⁸ After the bombardment of Corfu, Italian Naval officers frankly warned Mussolini to limit military action as they could not compete with the English. Thaon di Revel, an Italian Admiral, told him they would last only forty-eight hours in a conflict with Great Britain.⁶⁹ Mussolini realising that he could not yet challenge the British, adopted a conciliatory tone and worked on building up the Italian military.⁷⁰

As they had been in relation to the Dodecanese Islands, the British were concerned about the strategic implications of Italy holding onto Corfu which was located close to the entrance to the Adriatic. A Foreign Office official noted in alarmist tones that:

⁶³ Although earlier articles such as R.J.B. Bosworth, "The British Press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini, 1920-34," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 2 (1970): p 169. suggest that Greek insurgents were to blame, more recent sources such as JS Papafloratos, "The Fiume and the Corfu incidents," *Balkan Studies* 45, no. 2 (2015). argue that the identity of the attackers was unknown.

⁶⁴ JS Papafloratos, "The Fiume and the Corfu incidents", p 263-65., J. Barros, *The Corfu incident of 1923: Mussolini and the League of Nations* (Princeton University Press, 1965), p 33-39.

⁶⁵ R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p 186., J. Barros, *The Corfu incident of 1923: Mussolini and the League of Nations*, p 40.

⁶⁶ Peter J. Yearwood, "'Consistently with Honour': Great Britain, the League of Nations and the Corfu Crisis of 1923", p 559.

⁶⁷ R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p 187.

⁶⁸ J. Barros, *The Corfu incident of 1923: Mussolini and the League of Nations*, p 78, 81. The Italian Minister in Athens, Giulio Cesare Mantagna, told the Greek Foreign Minister, Apostolos Alexandris, that 'the arrival of the Italian Fleet in Corfu in no way meant annexation, but rather the occupation of the island until Greece made suitable amends to Italy'. For details of the invasion and bombardment generally see FO371/8533

⁶⁹ J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p 45.

⁷⁰ Steven Morewood, "Anglo-Italian Rivalry in the Mediterranean and Middle East, 1935-1940," p 169.

Italy will always be troublesome: she has not hitherto been dangerous. The explanation for this is that in the last resort her western and eastern coasts are exposed to naval pressure. If she retains Corfu, the Adriatic will become an Italian lake; she will become half as vulnerable and twice as dangerous. And Jugo-slavia, Albania, Greece, and indirectly Hungary and Austria will be at her mercy.⁷¹

Lord Robert Cecil, then minister responsible for League matters, suggested that the British concentrate its naval fleet in Malta as a message to the Italians.⁷² Howard Kennard, a Counsellor in the Rome embassy, described Mussolini as a ‘mad dog’ who had

no experience in statesmanship and is swayed by a mixture of megalomania and extreme patriotism which makes him far more dangerous to deal with than either statesman of great ability or a dictator of a South American republic.⁷³

While members of the Italian Foreign Service were deeply troubled by the Corfu action, some fascists within Italy were urging Mussolini to go further. Bosworth correctly suggests the Corfu ‘incident’ was not the mad act of an individual but was supported by elite opinion in Italy because it aligned with nationalist policy.⁷⁴ Mussolini’s representative, Antonio Salandra informed the League that the intent of the Corfu action was to protect Italian prestige and national institutions, that they were not of a warlike character and that the incident was not within its competence.⁷⁵ Despite the unreasonable position taken by Italy, the incident was resolved when the League was sidelined and instead the Conference of Ambassadors thrashed out a settlement which provided for the payment by Greece to Italy of the large sum of fifty million lire.⁷⁶

The incident at Corfu was also an early indication of the British tendency toward appeasement of the fascist Italian aggression. This was a policy failure on the part of the British, and this failure would be replicated on a much broader scale as the inter-war period progressed.

⁷¹ Mr Bentwick, 'Italo-Greek crisis', 1 September 1923, C15017, FO 371/8533

⁷² Lord Robert Cecil, 'Suggested concentration of British fleet in Mediterranean', 6 September 1923, C15422, FO 371/8616

⁷³ Mr Kennard, 'Graeco-Italian Crisis', 6 September 1923, C15429, FO 371/8616 - The position of Counsellor is the 4th highest rank within a mission.

⁷⁴ R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p 188.

⁷⁵ J. Barros, *The Corfu incident of 1923: Mussolini and the League of Nations*.

⁷⁶ The Conference of Ambassadors was not a one-off event but an institution set up at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. It existed for eleven years, was based at Quai d'Orsay (The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and its primary task was the execution of the 1919 and 1920 Peace Treaties. See J. Barros, *The Corfu incident of 1923: Mussolini and the League of Nations*, p 3-19. The Italian Navy evacuated from Corfu on 27 September 1923

Corfu was the incident that seemed to confirm Britain's worst fears about Fascist Italy and the threat it posed in the Mediterranean. It was however, a 1920s aberration as Mussolini came to appreciate Italy's military limitations. The resolution of the brief affair was telling as it demonstrated the potential for Italian disruption of the status quo and the tenor of Britain's response to Italian challenge. The resolution of the Corfu incident damaged Mussolini's reputation within the Foreign Office and was certainly a portent of the ineffectual role the League of Nations would play in the more serious Abyssinian Crisis of 1935.⁷⁷ Yet in other ways, it was uncharacteristic of the early years of Italian fascism, given the closeness of the relationship that developed with Britain afterwards and the dividends that Britain derived from that. The British initially took a cautious approach to Fascist Italy and Reynolds Salerno rightly argues that 'Britain tacitly acquiesced in Fascist Italy's imperial program throughout the 1920s' because British worldwide responsibilities had reached new heights and the protection of the Mediterranean and of the Suez was paramount.⁷⁸ The friendship with Italy helped to counter-balance French influence in the Mediterranean, allowing favourable frontier rectifications between British and Italian territory in Africa, leading to the Locarno treaties of 1925.⁷⁹

Furthermore, Mussolini was gaining admiration from certain sections of British society that responded to the ideology of fascism, in particular the idea that a strong person in a position of power and unencumbered by institutions could make positive change.⁸⁰ Mussolini developed personal relationships with British figures such as Austen Chamberlain (Foreign Secretary 1924-29) who said:

I am confident that he [Mussolini] is a patriot and a sincere man; I trust his word when given and I think that we might easily go far before finding an Italian with whom it would be as easy for the British Government to work.⁸¹

In 1923 the *Morning Post*, a pro-imperial paper which represented High Tory opinion, praised Mussolini's 'virile' foreign policy.⁸² Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail* regarded Mussolini as a

⁷⁷ The British ambassador in Paris, Lord Crewe was widely seen as having mishandled the process by giving too much ground to Italy and not properly communicating with London. - Peter J. Yearwood, "'Consistently with Honour': Great Britain, the League of Nations and the Corfu Crisis of 1923", p 570.

⁷⁸ Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 6.

⁷⁹ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 471.

⁸⁰ For an excellent discussion of the appeal of fascism in Britain, as well as the BUF see M. Pugh, *Hurrah For The Blackshirts!: Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars* (Random House, 2013).

⁸¹ R.J.B. Bosworth, "The British Press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini, 1920-34", p 170. Communicating in French, the two had a series of private meetings see Peter Edwards, "II. The Austen Chamberlain-Mussolini Meetings," *The Historical Journal* 14, no. 01 (1971).

⁸² R.J.B. Bosworth, "The British Press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini, 1920-34", p 169.

modern day Napoleon and even Winston Churchill referred to Mussolini's 'gentle and simple bearing' and his 'calm and detached pose in spite of so many burdens and dangers'.⁸³ This positive view amongst British elites was common and such opinions reinforced policies of acquiescence toward fascism, an ideology which received a boost from the Great Depression.⁸⁴ These positive opinions facilitated cooperation between Britain and Italy that continued up until the formation of the Stresa Front.

The Stresa Front

The Stresa Front, an alignment of Britain, France and Italy made on 14 April 1935 in response to German rearmament, was a high water mark in Anglo-Italian relations, but this period of cooperation ended shortly afterwards. Again, it was Italian imperial ambition that damaged the relationship. In the early 1930s, Britain's European focus shifted to the threat from Germany and relations with Italy were cordial.⁸⁵ In 1932, Britain reduced its naval strength in the Mediterranean and actually reduced naval spending in the 1933-4 budget.⁸⁶ For its part, Italy had expressed dismay at Germany leaving the League and the British government saw collaboration with Italy as a solution to its problems in Europe.⁸⁷ In February 1934, Anthony Eden (Lord Privy Seal) met Mussolini for the first time and found him 'lively, friendly, vigorous and entertaining'.⁸⁸ They discussed Hitler (whom Eden had met and Mussolini had not), Germany's attitude toward the league, rearmament and German air proposals. In July, Mussolini's relationship with Hitler was tested when Austrian Nazis killed the Austrian leader Engelbert Dollfuss in the failed Vienna Putsch.⁸⁹ On 7 January 1935 Mussolini and France signed an

⁸³ R.J.B. Bosworth, "The British Press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini, 1920-34", p 173.

⁸⁴ Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*, p 8. The link between democracies and capitalism is not exclusive. Fascism has been seen as capitalism's response to the threat of communism in a time of capitalist crisis. See for instance Peter R Sinclair, "Fascism and crisis in capitalist society," *New German Critique* (1976). A factor in the failure of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) was the relative weathering of the economic storm by the British economy - Robert D. Pearce, *Britain: domestic politics, 1918-39*, p 409.

⁸⁵ Hitler ascended to the Chancellorship in January 1933. Germany then withdrew from the League of Nations and the Geneva Disarmament Conference on 14 October, following Japan which had left the League earlier that year. See R.J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2006), p 618. Japan formally left the League of Nations on 27 March 1933 following the invasion of Manchuria. See W.N. Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy Since Versailles, 1919-1963* (Methuen, 1968), p 120.

⁸⁶ In 1932 the Admiralty built up the Home Fleet and cut back the Mediterranean Fleet to four battleships, removed an aircraft carrier and a flotilla of destroyers, see J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 201.

⁸⁷ J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 201.

⁸⁸ A. Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p 76.

⁸⁹ Mussolini was close to Dollfuss, an 'Austrofascist' who modelled his ideology on Italian Fascism. Led by Dollfuss, Austria represented a buffer between Italy and Germany. Mussolini had to personally deliver the news of the assassination to Dollfuss' widow who was staying in one of his villas. The assassination represented a low point in

agreement which proclaimed that Austria should remain independent.⁹⁰ A short time later on 15 January the results of the Saar plebiscite showed that 90 per cent of voters favoured reunion with Germany.⁹¹ This concerning development led Orme Sargent (Assistant Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office) to suggest that it would be desirable for the British government to 'make some public declaration designed to show their community of interests with France and Italy',⁹² a position supported by Sir Robert Vansittart (Permanent Under Secretary in the Foreign Office).⁹³

Hitler continued to apply pressure to other European states when he announced full German rearmament in March 1935. Hitler told Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon⁹⁴ that Germany had reached parity of air strength with Great Britain.⁹⁵ A concerned Ralph Wigram, head of the Central Department,⁹⁶ stated that 'not for nearly 300 years has any British government allowed this country to be exposed to such a threat from a continental power'.⁹⁷ These concerns motivated the British government to seek a multilateral European agreement that included Italy, a vital party because of its potential to prevent a German takeover of Austria.⁹⁸ The Stresa Front,

relations between Fascism and National Socialism. G. Martel, *Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered* (Taylor & Francis, 2002), p 179.

⁹⁰ Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 10.

⁹¹ Michael Lawrence Roi, "From the Stresa Front to the Triple Entente: Sir Robert Vansittart, the Abyssinian crisis and the containment of Germany," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 6, no. 1 (1995): p 64.

⁹² Sargent Memorandum, 17 January 1935, FO 371/18825/1009/55 as referred to in Michael Lawrence Roi, "From the Stresa front to the triple entente", p 64.

⁹³ Vansittart, Robert Gilbert, Baron Vansittart (1881–1957), diplomatist was appointed permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office, in January 1930 a position he retained until January 1938. He was a very influential and powerful public servant who advocated a strong anti-appeasement position with regard to Germany. See Norman Rose, "Vansittart, Robert Gilbert, Baron Vansittart (1881–1957)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004). Although Vansittart is closely associated with a move to placate Italy to allow a concentration on the threat from Germany it is also true that after Abyssinia Vansittart recognised the failure of Stresa and favoured a policy of containment which involved France, Russia and Britain. See Michael Lawrence Roi, "From the Stresa front to the triple entente", p 63.

⁹⁴ Simon, John Allsebrook, first Viscount Simon (1873–1954), politician and lawyer was a politician who was Solicitor-General, Attorney General and Home Secretary in Asquith's Liberal Government. He then became leader of the Liberal Nationals who formed part of McDonald's National Government and was Foreign Secretary from November 1931 to May 1935. Holding office in a very difficult time he has nonetheless been criticised for the way he handled these events. See D. J. Dutton, "Simon, John Allsebrook, first Viscount Simon (1873–1954)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

⁹⁵ A report on air strength used in Stresa negotiations estimated that Germany had 800 'first line machines' and would have 2,000 by 1939. The report shows that until 1938 the British Air Force 'was built upon the theory that our enemy was to be France: the machines are therefore largely short range machines, incapable of attaining objectives in Germany from bases in the United Kingdom'. It emphasised the need for an accelerated building program without delay. - Wigram and Medhurst, 'Air Strength of Germany, France and the United Kingdom', 14 April 1915, C3248, FO 371/18836

⁹⁶ The Central European Department was a part of the Foreign Office which dealt with Germany, Austria, Italy and the Balkan States. See K. Neilson and T.G. Otte, *The Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1854–1946* (Taylor & Francis, 2008), p 234.

⁹⁷ Michael Lawrence Roi, "From the Stresa front to the triple entente", p 65.

⁹⁸ Michael Lawrence Roi, "From the Stresa front to the triple entente", p 66.

an alignment between Britain, France and Italy, was formed on 14 April 1935.⁹⁹ Its final declaration was in these terms

The three powers, the object of whose policy is the collective maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations, find themselves in complete agreement in opposing, by all practicable means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace of Europe, and will act in close and cordial collaboration for this purpose.¹⁰⁰

The formation of the Stresa Front proved to be a high point in the Anglo-Italian relationship. Shortly after it was concluded, however, Britain and Italy turned away from co-operation and towards antagonism. While the Stresa Front reaffirmed Locarno and supported both Austrian independence and the sanctity of the Treaty of Versailles it was quickly damaged by the Franco-Russian security pact of May 1935 and the Anglo-German Naval agreement of June.¹⁰¹ These agreements came so fast on the heels of Stresa, that it never really had a chance to settle. In addition to this was the issue of Italian imperial ambitions in Abyssinia, a problem before the Stresa negotiations even began. The British did not make their position on Abyssinia clear to Mussolini, because the focus of the whole discussion was on Germany and Abyssinia was a minor matter by comparison.¹⁰² Key people such as Vansittart, Duff Cooper (First Lord of the Admiralty) and Neville Chamberlain, believed that Mussolini's co-operation could be secured if the German threat was successfully contained.¹⁰³

The formation of the Stresa Front demonstrated the pro-Italian impulse at work in British foreign policy. It also shows the shifting nature of European relationships. Stresa promised solidarity but marked the end of the reasonable phase of the Anglo-Italian relationship. Italy's imperial ambitions were not consonant with the level of cooperation that Britain wanted and the contrary interests of the two countries in the Mediterranean came to bear. The period after the breakdown of Anglo-Italian cooperation was characterised by Italian determination to expand and British inability or unwillingness to risk conflict in support of the League and the post-war system of collective security. This was the dynamic at work during the Abyssinian Crisis.

⁹⁹ The document which outlined the terms of the Stresa Front was formally known as the Final Declaration of the Stresa Conference

¹⁰⁰ Foreign Office, 'Stresa Conference on security problem', 14 April 1935, C3250, FO 371/18836

¹⁰¹ G. Johnson, *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge/Curzon, 2005), p 101. - The Anglo-German Naval agreement of 18 June 1935 allowed for a 35:100 tonnage ratio between Germany and Britain. It was controversial because this tonnage was beyond what Germany was allowed under the Versailles agreement and because Britain negotiated the agreement without involvement from either France or Italy.

¹⁰² Michael Lawrence Roi, "From the stresa front to the triple entente", p 69.

¹⁰³ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 01 (2000): p 158.

Abyssinian Crisis – 1935

The Abyssinian Crisis included a period of international tensions prior to the invasion itself. It was a major crisis among European powers because it was a threat to the post-war status quo and it damaged the League of Nations. It had specific implications for the Mediterranean. Italy was Britain's international rival in the region, able to exert pressure, present a strategic challenge and damage British prestige. Italy's military power was not a direct threat to British interests - Mussolini's own military advisors made that plain to him - but Italy exposed the global-overreach dilemma facing Britain in the 1930s. It demonstrated to those in British colonies the limitations of British power. Despite their opposition to Italian expansion Britain were unable to prevent the annexation of Abyssinia. The British government believed that they were losing face in the region and after Abyssinia they made efforts to secure their reputation. It is this aspect of the crisis that is particularly relevant to this study.

Abyssinia had been the target of Italian colonialism during the 'scramble for Africa' but Italy alone among the European powers suffered ignominious defeat when it was defeated by the Abyssinians at Adowa on 1 March 1896.¹⁰⁴ The desire to redeem Italy's reputation was a factor in Fascist policy towards Abyssinia as were prestige, perceived economic gain, and ideology. Fascists suggested that Abyssinia possessed raw materials that could be exploited by Italy and Mussolini believed that he could recreate a modern, albeit smaller, version of the Roman Empire and 'provide full expression for the vigorous leadership and the harsh, heroic values of the [fascist] movement'.¹⁰⁵ He believed the 'new Italian, a far cry from the stereotypes of the past, would be born on the African frontier, the gymnasium of boldness, sacrifice and discipline'.¹⁰⁶

The acute phase of the Abyssinian crisis began on 5 December 1934 with a military encounter at the wells of Wal-Wal, situated in the border zone between Italian Somaliland and independent Abyssinia. Fighting broke out between Italian and Ethiopian troops and there were heavy casualties on both sides. The Italians, intent on invasion but wary of appearing as the aggressor, exploited this incident by demanding an apology and reparations. Abyssinia appealed to the

¹⁰⁴ T. Pakenham, *Scramble for Africa* (HarperCollins, 1992), p 470-86.

¹⁰⁵ R. J. Overy, *The origins of the Second World War* (London ; New York: Longman, 1987), p 38.

¹⁰⁶ Giuseppe Finaldi, *Mussolini and Italian fascism*, p 80.

League for help and Britain and France got involved.¹⁰⁷ Their intervention was however far from decisive and Mussolini largely ignored their warnings, as the satirical magazine *Punch* noted:



Figure 3 – ‘The Awful Warning’, *Punch*, 14 August 1935

In London the Italian *charge d'affaires* Leonardo Vitelli, told Vansittart that Italy would not invade but wished to ‘live in good neighbourly relations’.¹⁰⁸ Italy had in fact been considering invasion since 1932 when General Emilio De Bono put together the first Abyssinian war plan.¹⁰⁹ They delayed because of financial constraints, the unpreparedness of the Army and because of concern that, in the atmosphere of 1933, the plan could lead to a general European war. By December 1934 plans had matured to the point where Mussolini ordered the ‘total conquest of Ethiopia’.¹¹⁰ Unaware of this the British Foreign Office thought in January 1935 that the whole situation would be resolved; a file minute noted that ‘a serious rupture appears to have been avoided by a hair’s breadth’.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Sir John Simon, 'Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs - The Italo-Ethiopian Situation', 15 May 1935, J1850, FO 371/19109

¹⁰⁸ J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 251.

¹⁰⁹ J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 241.

¹¹⁰ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 161.

¹¹¹ Minute by G.A. Wallinger in Consul Patteson, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute', 19 January 1935, J227, FO 371/19101

In preparation for its attack Italy disingenuously claimed that they were moving troops to the border of Abyssinia as a defensive measure against incidental attack on Italian military posts. The Ambassador in Rome, Sir Eric Drummond,¹¹² suggested naively that 'it seems probable that while Italy have at present no aggressive intentions, they are genuinely afraid of overwhelming Abyssinian attack'.¹¹³ In January Mussolini met with French Prime Minister Pierre Laval who, motivated by his fear of Germany, agreed not to intervene. Later that month Italy made diplomatic overtures to Britain and requested they follow the French lead. The Foreign Office, led by Simon and Vansittart, did not agree.¹¹⁴

In May, Simon wrote a memorandum for cabinet noting that Britain was facing an 'exceedingly difficult decision' about how to handle the matter at the League. Opposing Italy would compromise Anglo-Italian relations and affect the 'European situation', but if they acquiesced to Italian demands they would 'lay themselves open to grave public criticism'.¹¹⁵ The cabinet response was meek; they agreed to consult with other countries, return the Italian Ambassador to London for consultation, and ban arms sales to Ethiopia.¹¹⁶ In the Foreign Office, Geoffrey Thompson¹¹⁷ from the Abyssinian department noted that a report 'more than confirms our impression that most of the sensational statements made by the Italians regarding the warlike preparation of Abyssinia, are entirely without foundation'.¹¹⁸ In *The Times* an editorial said that Mussolini 'had chosen singularly flimsy excuses for threatening the independence of Abyssinia'.¹¹⁹ Clement Atlee, then deputy leader of the Labour Party said in Parliament that 'one has to face up to the position of Italy. We have there a country ruled by a dictator and a Government that is in urgent need of something to take off the tension from its internal situation and to re-establish its prestige'.¹²⁰ He continued saying,

this incident, this tension between Italy and Abyssinia, is a test of the reality of the League and the sanctity of the Covenant of the League. If you have one party accepting arbitration and another party refusing it, if you have a failure to renounce force, and if that is acquiesced in by

¹¹² Drummond was formerly the League of Nations Secretary General and was at the time of the crisis the British Ambassador in Rome. Despite his experience Holt suggests that Drummond had little influence on policy, see Andrew Holt, "No more Hoares to Paris", p 1390.

¹¹³ Sir E Drummond, 'Italo-Ethiopian Dispute', 11 February 1935, J525/1/1, FO 371/19102 p 211.

¹¹⁴ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 162.

¹¹⁵ Sir John Simon, 'Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs - The Italo-Ethiopian Situation', 15 May 1935, J1850, FO 371/19109 p 20.

¹¹⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, 'Italo-Ethiopian Dispute - Cabinet Conclusions', 15 May 1935, J1912, FO 371/19109

¹¹⁷ For further information on Thompson's role see his autobiography: Geoffrey Thompson, *Front-line diplomat* (London: Hutchinson, 1959).

¹¹⁸ Sir S. Barton, 'Italo-Ethiopian Dispute: Ethiopian military preparation', 16 May 1935, J1907/1/1, FO 371/19109

¹¹⁹ "Talks In Rome", *The Times*, 27 June 1935, 1935, 17

¹²⁰ HC Debate, 7 June 1935, 302 cc2193-210

the League, you have practically brought the whole system of the League and the Covenant into disrepute.¹²¹

Atlee advocated the reestablishment of the authority of the League by closing the Suez Canal and said 'the League will be destroyed altogether if, within the circle of the League, powers are enabled to carry out Imperialist, filibustering enterprises'.¹²² Simon and Attlee clearly set out the dilemma facing the British. Italy's position was quite transparent. It was counter to basic principles of the league and it was occurring in the Mediterranean. Italy could only effect the invasion with access to the Canal, a vital transport route for Britain.

In Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps,¹²³ Ambassador to Berlin reported Hitler's view that 'the Abyssinians are a non-Aryan race who do not interest him and that Italy is welcome to swallow them up if she likes'. Phipps then warned his colleagues in London; 'if we oppose [Mussolini] too strongly we may find Herr Hitler posing as Signor Mussolini's best friend with the possible risk of an Italo-German understanding concluded behind our backs'.¹²⁴ A comment on the jacket of the file noted that 'it would be a bad day when Herr Hitler and the *Duce* got together'.¹²⁵ These were prescient observations as the Abyssinian conflict was a key factor in the convergence of the two men.

The Foreign Office, looking for ways to avoid an open conflict, adopted a policy of encouraging a settlement between Mussolini and Haile Selassie, the Abyssinian emperor.¹²⁶ In Rome, Drummond had a chance to re-appraise the situation when he spoke directly with Mussolini, a discussion he observed 'could scarcely have been of a more disquieting nature'.¹²⁷ Drummond emphasised to Mussolini that 'it was not a question of sympathy with Abyssinia or of British interests in that country' but the prestige and effectiveness of the League which

¹²¹ HC Debate, 7 June 1935, 302 cc2193-210

¹²² HC Debate, 7 June 1935, 302 cc2193-210

¹²³ Phipps, Sir Eric Clare Edmund (1875–1945), diplomatist was appointed ambassador in Berlin in August 1933 where he remained for four years. He was suspicious of National Socialism and the strength of warnings to his superiors in London increased over time. By 1937 he was firmly in favour of rearmament and alliance with France and the United States. He left Berlin in April 1937 to become ambassador in Paris where, conscious of German power and French weakness, he supported Chamberlain's policy toward Germany. See G. T. Waddington, "Phipps, Sir Eric Clare Edmund (1875–1945)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, 2004).

¹²⁴ Sir E Phipps, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute - Confidential Cypher from Berlin', 20 May 1935, J1956, FO 371/19109 p 188.

¹²⁵ Initialled L.O., this comment was probably written by Lancelot Oliphant who, in 1935, was substantive Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office.

¹²⁶ G. Johnson, *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, p 101.

¹²⁷ Sir E Drummond, 'Italo-Ethiopian Dispute - Summary of Conversation with Mussolini', 22 May 1935, J1985, FO 371/19109 p 211.

concerned his government.¹²⁸ In response Mussolini spoke of war and said that he realised that the policy might seriously weaken the League and damage Anglo-Italian relations, but he could not change that policy. Undeterred Vansittart came up with the 'Zeila' plan under which the Foreign Office suggested ceding the port of Zeila, to Abyssinia who in return would grant land concessions to Italy. Neither Ethiopia nor France were consulted.¹²⁹ Anthony Eden (Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) was selected to present this offer to Mussolini, despite his being unenthusiastic about such a plan.¹³⁰ The Zeila plan is an early example of the tendency toward a policy of concession to Italy. Faced with an aggressive power within its sphere of influence it chose diplomacy and bribery over a show of strength.

Eden's visit to Rome on 24-25 June failed to achieve its objective. Mussolini had obtained a copy of the confidential report, written in June 1935 by John Maffey, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies.¹³¹ The 'Maffey report' concluded that 'Italy will undoubtedly endeavour during the next few years to secure control over Ethiopia' but that no 'vital British interest is concerned in and around Ethiopia as would make it essential for his Majesty's Government to resist an Italian conquest of Ethiopia'.¹³² Mussolini, reassured that Britain would not intervene, had a position of strength in the negotiations and warned Eden that Britain should 'leave Italy to resolve the matter itself or Italy would leave the League'.¹³³ In his memoirs written many years later Eden suggests that 'Mussolini seemed fixed in purpose and impervious to the evident dangers'.¹³⁴ Eden wrote that the choice confronting Britain and the Foreign Office was 'between upholding the League and losing an ally, or undermining the foundation of peace in Europe'.¹³⁵ He deeply distrusted Mussolini after these failed negotiations.¹³⁶

The Abyssinian crisis was the point at which Fascist Italy became openly hostile to British interests. Italy threatened to use military force to take territory in defiance of the post-war system

¹²⁸ Sir E Drummond, 'Italo-Ethiopian Dispute - Summary of Conversation with Mussolini', 22 May 1935, J1985, FO 371/19109 p 212.

¹²⁹ H.J. Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1940*, p 116.

¹³⁰ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 164.

¹³¹ John Maffey was Governor-General of the Sudan (1926-33) and then permanent under-secretary of state for the colonies (1933-1937). See Gilbert Laithwaite, "Maffey, John Loader, first Baron Rugby (1877-1969)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. rev. Philip Woods (Oxford University Press, 2004). The report was leaked from the British Embassy in Rome which had woefully inadequate security and Italian staff who were able to access restricted areas – see Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's propaganda abroad: subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940*, Studies in intelligence series (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006)., Chapter 12

¹³² John Maffey: *Italo-Ethiopian Dispute*, 16 August 1935, CAB 24/256, p 26.

¹³³ J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 268. and Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 165.

¹³⁴ A. Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p 228.

¹³⁵ A. Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p 228.

¹³⁶ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 158.

of collective security. It tested Britain's resolve and damaged its prestige. Italy backed anti-British movements and deployed propaganda and in the Mediterranean it most clearly demonstrated the changing and less favourable international context in which the British Empire was now operating. A pro-League position was in effect a pro-British, status quo position. It was a position against revision and as such it sought to maintain Britain's position in the Mediterranean and its place in Malta, Cyprus and Egypt and Palestine. Failure to maintain the League position suggested that the post-World War One order could be revised.

The Italian challenge to British control of the Mediterranean had crystallised and Italy constrained British policy making in the Mediterranean. It created an environment that encouraged anti-colonial movements in the British Mediterranean colonies that observed the inability or unwillingness of the British to curtail Italian ambition.

The British cabinet, now led by Prime Minister Baldwin, met to discuss Abyssinia on 3 July 1935. They noted that an invasion would raise obligations under Article XVI of the Covenant of the League of Nations and that if these obligations were ignored 'a heavy blow would be struck at the whole of the Pacts and Agreements on which the post-war system of Europe had been built up'.¹³⁷ The cabinet agreed that a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence should report on the application of Article XVI of the Covenant of the League to Italy, including the possible closure of the Suez Canal. The British Navy led by First Sea Lord Sir Ernle Chatfield consistently opposed action against Italy and Mussolini.¹³⁸ The British government was in a very difficult position. As Vansittart said, Britain faced 'a choice between the League busting Mussolini or Mussolini busting the League'.¹³⁹

In August 1935 Foreign Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare¹⁴⁰ and Eden sought advice from Winston Churchill who expressed the view that the Mediterranean fleet should be reinforced and that Britain should make it clear to the world that it was 'prepared to carry out our League obligations even to the point of war with all our military resources, provided that the other members of the

¹³⁷ Cabinet Conclusions, 'Italo Ethiopian Dispute', 3 July 1935, J2670, FO 371/19115

¹³⁸ Andrew Holt, "No more Hoares to Paris", p 1391. The British Navy retained its historical position as the most powerful and influential arm of the services. It was generally conservative, sympathetic toward Mussolini and hostile to the League. The British also had to take into account the attitude of France, a country that was a probable ally in any action against Italy, but whose government was completely pre-occupied by possible German aggression. - J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 265.

¹³⁹ Loraine Diary, 24 July 1935, FO 1011/245 as referred to in Michael Lawrence Roi, "From the stresa front to the triple entente", p 72.

¹⁴⁰ Hoare, Samuel John Gurney, Viscount Templewood (1880–1959), conservative politician became foreign secretary on 7 June 1935. He resigned in response to the scandal of the Hoare-Laval pact but continued in politics for another five years. See R. J. Q. Adams, "Hoare, Samuel John Gurney, Viscount Templewood (1880–1959)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

League are prepared to take the same action'. He made it clear that 'his main interest in the League was as a defence against Germany' and he feared that if the League collapsed in response to the Abyssinian crisis this would be jeopardised.¹⁴¹ He also cautioned Hoare saying 'I do hope the Admiralty will not despise the Italians and believe they will never dare to put to and face us. Mussolini's Italy may be quite different to that of the Great War'.¹⁴²

Churchill quite accurately assessed the international situation. He could see that Britain was pursuing a flawed policy in relation to Italy. The appeasement of Italy was a policy failure made in a challenging international and regional environment. This appeasement did indeed damage the League and the ability of the international community to combat the aggression of both Italy and Germany.

In this tense period the Italian Naval attaché in London Count Ferrante Capponi was keeping a close watch on domestic politics and detected an increase in hostility towards Italy amongst the public, but also noted that 'the Admiralty appeared to be playing a key part in the British cabinet's decisions, counselling moderation because of the risk factor represented by the Italian navy and air force and the irreparable blow to prestige resulting from losses whatever the outcome of a war'.¹⁴³ On 13 August 1935, representatives from the three Italian armed services met to discuss options if Italy went to war against Britain. Leaders of the Italian navy pointed out that it had no battleships or aircraft carriers while Britain had fifteen and six respectively. Italy was also deficient in cruisers, destroyers and was only equal in submarines.¹⁴⁴ Italy, they noted, was faced with the same powerful British Navy as when it occupied Corfu many years earlier, but the geopolitical situation had changed. Admiral Domenico Cavagnari believed Britain might hesitate to take military action because of the global and imperial complications, and he was correct.¹⁴⁵ In response to the changing situation and as a result of Malta's proximity to Italy, Britain moved the Mediterranean Fleet to Alexandria in August 1935 and reinforced it with ships from the Home Fleet in September. Mussolini and the fascist government proceeded with their plans. The crisis was a key moment in the Anglo-Italian relationship. The British government

¹⁴¹ Sir Samuel Hoare, 'Italo-Abyssinian Dispute', 21 August 1935, J3962, FO 371/19127

¹⁴² Sir Winston Churchill, 'Letter to Sir Samuel Hoare', 29 August 1935, CHAR 2/244

¹⁴³ J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 267.

¹⁴⁴ J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 288.

¹⁴⁵ Admiral Domenico Cavagnari was avowedly pro-fascist and by 1935 was the chief of staff of the Italian Royal Navy (*Regia Marina*) and Under-Secretary of State for the Navy. He was a strong advocate for the building of Battleships. See J. Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals*, p 221-2. Italy also had a good strategic position as a result of previous colonial occupations. The Dodecanese Islands were well positioned to support Italy in its colonial adventures. In the period 1922-36 Italy had established bases at Cagliari, Tripoli, Tobruk, Augusta, Leros and Rhodes. See Stephen L Speronis, "The Dodecanese Islands: A study of European diplomacy, Italian Imperialism and Greek Nationalism, 1911-1947", p 183.

had a difficult choice between the preservation of the League or the alienation of Italy. They did not fully commit to either but implemented a weakened League response which did not include the use military force. This was not enough to prevent Italy from invading Abyssinia, but enough to embitter the Anglo-Italian relationship. Such a downturn in the relationship markedly increased the threat from Italy to Britain's Mediterranean Empire. Italy's ambitions were in the open, and it actively worked to damage Britain's reputation and prestige. Britain needed Italy and so it absorbed the bad behaviour of Italy and kept asking for friendship.

From 'crisis' to war – the Abyssinian War begins

On 3 October 1935, Italy invaded Abyssinia for the second time sending 400,000 men by December 1935 and another 250,000 in early 1936.¹⁴⁶ The only political support for Italy came from Nazi Germany, but Britain did not close the Suez Canal, a vital transport link between Italy and Abyssinia.

The Canal had long been important to Britain. It allowed quicker trade with India, the Malay States, Burma and Australasia. The canal route halved the shipping time from London to Bombay and made the trip to the Far East quicker.¹⁴⁷ Due to its importance, Britain updated its defensive plans on 4 October 1935. The plan provided for the closure of the Canal through the use of boom ships, which would physically close the entrances to the Canal, and naval examination patrols, supported by shore gun batteries.¹⁴⁸ The Admiralty were worried about the protection of the Far East and the so the Abyssinian War caused them great concern. The 'Main Fleet' doctrine envisaged the protection of the Far East by a large fleet, which would steam through the Suez Canal, as time would be of the essence. A hostile Italy threatened the viability of this plan. The Admiralty was therefore lukewarm on the idea of sanctions against Italy.¹⁴⁹

Britain deliberately refrained from taking that crucial action which had the potential to stop Italy. They did this because they would not countenance open conflict with Italy over Abyssinia. As the Maffey report made clear, Britain had no real interest to protect in Abyssinia. They were not prepared to go to war over the principle of other state's national sovereignty and the real

¹⁴⁶ M. Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present*, p 282.

¹⁴⁷ Steven Morewood, "Protecting the Jugular Vein of Empire: The Suez Canal in British Defence Strategy, 1919-1941," *War & Society* 10, no. 1 (1992): p 81.

¹⁴⁸ Steven Morewood, "Protecting the Jugular Vein of Empire", p 86.

¹⁴⁹ Steven Morewood, "Protecting the Jugular Vein of Empire", p 82-86. - The Admiralty and the Foreign Office were also loath to signal to Italy that they would close the Canal, so they put in place a number of precautions to prevent the revelation of their secret defensive plans.

concern of the government and the Foreign Office was the broader European situation, in which Italy was a key player, a 'swing vote' that could help to control Germany, or make the situation much worse. Britain had to take a submissive posture toward Italy and allow it to upset the status quo by taking territory and damaging Britain's position in its Mediterranean colonies as they observed their powerful colonial ruler resist from conflict and placate the aggressor. This also explains Britain's desire to work from within the anti-revisionist League of Nations and avoid direct confrontation with Italy.

In response to the invasion of Abyssinia Liberal MP and critic of appeasement, Geoffrey Mander, called for Britain to 'sever communications' (through the canal) in order to prevent the 'slaughter of thousands of Abyssinians every day'.¹⁵⁰ Hoare said that Britain would not contemplate an isolated war, but would stick with the League, the 'great instrument of peace'.¹⁵¹ In June 1935, Ramsay MacDonald resigned due to ill health and was replaced by Baldwin who had to contend with the Abyssinian Crisis. In a speech given during the campaign for the re-election of the National Government, Baldwin defended non-intervention and argued that because 'every government since the war has cut down in every possible way expenditure on all our defence services' many British ships were 'completely out of date for most modern methods of warfare' and were especially vulnerable to air attack. He said that a victory was possible but that it would involve a 'cost of life unnecessary and wanton'.¹⁵² Labour's response to the crisis was not united and Baldwin looked to exploit this by having the election in November and running strongly on League issues. Internal political division weakened Britain's position on the Mediterranean but Baldwin's National Government won the election and Baldwin served until May 1937. His position reflected the cautious approach of the British Navy that persisted despite the fact that, as the Italian Navy had pointed out to Mussolini, the British Navy was actually far stronger in capital ships. The spectre of air attack troubled many planners in the British military and government. The idea that 'the bomber would always get through' was popular, and Italy's reputation as being a leader in aviation added to the concern. This aspect of military strategy was particularly relevant to Malta, which faced the prospect of aerial bombardment that would make it less suitable as a naval base.

During the summer of 1935 the Italian Navy had drawn up plans for an attack on Malta and they believed that in the event of a Mediterranean War that Malta would be one of the strategic

¹⁵⁰ Geoffrey Mander, HC Debate, 22 October 1935, 305 cc17-142

¹⁵¹ Samuel Hoare, HC Debate, 22 October 1935, 305 cc17-142

¹⁵² "Mr. Baldwin On Defence", *The Times*, 26 October 1935, p 17.

theatres.¹⁵³ Baldoli rightly points out that in reality the Italian Navy lacked the ability to blockade Malta.¹⁵⁴ The naval threat posed by Italy was not real but the perception or bluff could still affect the British response.

When hostilities in Abyssinia began Italy only had enough oil to keep the navy going for two and a half months, so this commodity more than others, had the potential to make a real impact.¹⁵⁵ Economic sanctions were imposed by the League, without American involvement, without restricting oil, and consequently without effect.¹⁵⁶ The League response was a half-way position for Britain. It had condemned Italy and supported half-measures which made the League look weak. For its part, Italy's diplomatic stance during the Abyssinian conflict was pure fantasy. An Italian representative told the League in October 1935 that 'Italy had been the victim of Ethiopian aggression for several years past'. He suggested that Italy had 'taken measures of legitimate defence called for by the increasingly threatening attitude of Ethiopia' and even argued that the 'withdrawal of Ethiopian troops by 30 kilometres was a masked move intended to conceal the mobilisation of troops and preparations for aggression'.¹⁵⁷ Phipps in Berlin still regarded Abyssinia as a sideshow. He saw everywhere in Germany the signs of re-armament and militarism. In a letter to Hoare he noted that 'the salient feature of German social, economic and political life was the reconstruction of the armed forces'.¹⁵⁸ Phipps argued that the Ethiopian imbroglio would be seen as 'child's play' when compared to what Britain would face in the future.¹⁵⁹ Phipps was in a sense reminding Hoare and others why they were not trying to prevent Italy from shipping troops and supplies through the British controlled Suez. Sanctions against Italy had failed and Germany was threatening. These were the drivers behind the politically disastrous Hoare-Laval Pact that Gaynor Johnson suggested was a response to the failure of sanctions.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ C. Baldoli, "The 'Northern Dominator' and the Mare Nostrum", p 8.

¹⁵⁴ C. Baldoli, "The 'Northern Dominator' and the Mare Nostrum", p 8.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 176.

¹⁵⁶ Martin Blinkhorn, *Mussolini and Fascist Italy*, 2nd ed., Lancaster pamphlets (London ; New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1994), p 45.

¹⁵⁷ Italian representative Baron Aloisi in: Geneva Consulate, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Private session of League Council on 5th October', 5 October 1935, J5683, FO 371/19141 Italy also made periodic complaints about the use of dum-dum bullets by the Abyssinians. This position was particularly hypocritical given Italy's extensive use of poison gas later in the conflict. See League of Nations, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Alleged use of dum-dum bullets by Ethiopia', 25 December 1935, J9970, FO 371/19174

¹⁵⁸ Samuel Hoare: *Cabinet - German Rearmament - Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs*, 25 November 1935, CP 217 (35), p 237.

¹⁵⁹ Samuel Hoare: *Cabinet - German Rearmament - Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs*, 25 November 1935, CP 217 (35), p 238.

¹⁶⁰ G. Johnson, *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, p 101.

'No more coals to Newcastle, no more Hoares to Paris' – The Hoare-Laval Pact

The Hoare-Laval Pact was an example of the compromises that Britain was willing to make to placate Italy and protect its self-interest.¹⁶¹ Back in May 1935, Drummond had emphasised that it was not Abyssinia but the League that mattered to the British. This sentiment underwrote the negotiation of the Hoare-Laval Pact which took place without any Ethiopian involvement. Hoare, along with Vansittart and Maurice Peterson, head of the Egyptian department,¹⁶² went to France on 7 December and had a meeting with Pierre Laval, the French Prime Minister.¹⁶³ Details of the pact, which promised Italy roughly half of Abyssinia in return for an end of hostilities, were leaked causing a political scandal as it was widely seen as a sell-out of Abyssinia. Both Hoare and Laval were forced to resign their positions. Those within the Foreign Office were particularly disparaging of Laval. One wrote that 'we have in fact been double crossed by Mr Laval from the beginning'. Another noted that 'Mr Laval has ... shown himself not merely a crook but a clever crook'.¹⁶⁴ The impression was that Laval, who had been working against oil sanctions had persuaded Hoare to commit to this disastrous plan. Laval had in fact been telephoning Mussolini during the negotiations.¹⁶⁵ In Geneva, Eden (Minister for League of Nations Affairs) noted the devastating impression made by the 'Paris proposal'. Countries that took part in sanctions, such as Portugal, were asking why they did so if the 'only result is that Italy should be offered by France and Great Britain more, probably, than she would ever have achieved by herself alone, even if sanctions had not been put on?'¹⁶⁶ What precedent was being set, they asked, and would Germany now be encouraged to follow the Italian example?¹⁶⁷ Eden, who had had been surprised and dismayed by the agreement from the beginning backed away from it in his speech to the Committee of Eighteen at the League, suggesting the proposals were

¹⁶¹ The 'no more coals to Newcastle, no more Hoares to Paris' joke was created in reaction to the Hoare-Laval pact. It was retold by King George V directly to Hoare himself, who apparently did not appreciate the humour. See A. Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p 317.

¹⁶² Peterson was 'intimately involved in the negotiations surrounding the Abyssinian crisis in 1936, and although he was closely associated with what came to be known as the Hoare-Laval plan to stop the war in Abyssinia, he favoured a hard line against Mussolini during the later stages of the war, including barring the Suez Canal to Italian shipping'. See Victor Rothwell, "Peterson, Sir Maurice Drummond (1889–1952)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

¹⁶³ Pierre Laval would go on to lead the Vichy regime in France, and was executed after the war. See R.O. Paxton, *Vichy France* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015).

¹⁶⁴ These comments were made by Thompson and Wigram respectively. - Sir G Clerk, 'Italo-Ethiopian Dispute. Attitude of General Gamelin', 10 December 1935, J9145, FO 371/9168

¹⁶⁵ A. Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p 304.

¹⁶⁶ Anthony Eden, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Proceedings at Geneva', 12 December 1935, J9256, FO 371/19169

¹⁶⁷ Anthony Eden, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Proceedings at Geneva', 12 December 1935, J9256, FO 371/19169

not 'sacrosanct' and that Britain would make 'no complaint' if the League did not agree with them.¹⁶⁸

The reaction in the 'City', meaning the financial district in London, matched that in Geneva. A friend of Orme Sargent (Foreign Office Assistant Under-Secretary)¹⁶⁹ told him that 'opinion has suddenly crystallized with vehemence and a unanimity which I have never seen equalled'. All classes, he said, had combined 'without a single dissentient voice in describing the terms as the most miserable document that has ever disgraced the signature of a British statesman'. Why, he asked, 'was not France left to propose the terms alone' while Britain indicated it would abide the League's decision. Such a position, he said, 'could not have brought down the bombs on Malta'.¹⁷⁰ Again there was an anxiety about the potential bombing of Malta. Any Anglo-Italian conflict would have resulted in a war in the Mediterranean, with Britain projecting power from Malta, Egypt, Cyprus and Palestine. It would also have been a war in the middle of the route to India, Singapore and the Far East. Concern about this eventuality led to a league response instead of strong ultimatums backed by British force.

Sargent's friend argued that it would have been better to go to war with Italy than suffer 'the loss of our leadership in Europe and of the Government's reputation at home'.¹⁷¹ In Abyssinia the British Ambassador Sir Sydney Barton reported that the Emperor was 'bewildered by the association of His Majesty's Government with these proposals'.¹⁷² The political and diplomatic position of Britain in the Mediterranean was being damaged by its response to Italian aggression.

The Ambassador to France, Sir George Clerk,¹⁷³ put up a defence for Hoare, suggesting that the discussions leading to the agreement 'were held under the shadow of a possible Mediterranean war with Italy' and 'were conditioned throughout by our own naval military and

¹⁶⁸ A. Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p 307.

¹⁶⁹ Sargent, Sir (Harold) Orme Garton (1884–1962), diplomatist and civil servant was promoted counsellor and put in charge of the Foreign Office's central department (which covered Italy, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and the Balkans) in October 1926. In August 1933 he was promoted to the position of Assistant Under-Secretary. See Ritchie Owendale, "Sargent, Sir (Harold) Orme Garton (1884–1962)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

¹⁷⁰ Mr Nigel Law, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute: peace plan', 12 December 1935, J9309, FO 371/19169

¹⁷¹ Mr Nigel Law, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute: peace plan', 12 December 1935, J9309, FO 371/19169

¹⁷² Sir S Barton, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Emperor of Ethiopia and peace proposals ', 16 December 1935, J9444, FO 371/19170

¹⁷³ Clerk, Sir George Russell (1874–1951) was the surprise choice to become ambassador to Paris in succession to Lord Tyrrell. Clerk's tenure at the Paris embassy witnessed the prelude to the Second World War. Clerk was one of the group of ambassadors, including Horace Rumbold and Eric Phipps, who were alive to, and warned of, the threat from Germany. see Erik Goldstein, "Clerk, Sir George Russell (1874–1951)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

air position and by the situation in France'.¹⁷⁴ Italy had repeatedly said that an oil embargo 'definitely meant war'.¹⁷⁵ Laval was reluctant to support Britain and the League and he made it clear that France would not fight Italy unless it was threatened. Clerk asserts that a failure to go along with Laval:

would have meant if not an open break, certainly a drifting apart from the French and ourselves, with ultimate consequences of the utmost gravity for Europe and civilisation and with the immediate result of splitting the League of Nations and encouraging Signor Mussolini.¹⁷⁶

The pact was as much about maintaining the French relationship, as it was capitulating to Italy. The whole Abyssinian crisis may have focused on the relative strength of the powers in the Mediterranean, but it was played out in the shadow of Germany, the pivot around which the entire crisis, and the actions of France and Britain moved.¹⁷⁷

Whatever the justifications, in the face of such enormous public pressure the pact was politically impossible and in this case public opinion altered foreign policy.¹⁷⁸ Hoare, politically damaged by the whole affair, resigned saying to the House of Commons:

my conscience is clear...I sincerely believe that the course that I took was the only course that was possible in the circumstances...In any case, there is the hard ineluctable fact that for the time being I feel that I have not got the confidence of the great body of opinion in the country, and I feel that it is essential for the Foreign Secretary, more than any other Minister in the Government, to have behind him the general approval of his fellow-country-men.¹⁷⁹

In reply the leader of the Labour Party, Clement Attlee moved a motion declaring that the pact rewarded 'the declared aggressor at the expense of the victim' and would 'destroy collective security, and conflict with the expressed will of the country and with the Covenant of the League of Nations, to the support of which the honour of Great Britain is pledged...'¹⁸⁰ The pact was a compromise position, taken by Britain as a result of the global situation. It damaged Britain's position, and highlighted the impact of Italy upon British policy.

¹⁷⁴ Sir G Clerk, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Situation in which peace negotiations took place', 15 December 1935, J9439, FO 371/19170

¹⁷⁵ Sir G. Clerk, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Conversation between Sir R Vansittart and Italian Ambassador in Paris', 10 December 1935, J2129, FO 371/9168 [Italian ambassador possibly Vittorio Cerutti]

¹⁷⁶ Sir G Clerk, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Situation in which peace negotiations took place', 15 December 1935, J9439, FO 371/19170

¹⁷⁷ Giuseppe Finaldi, *Mussolini and Italian fascism*, p 84.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Holt, "No more Hoares to Paris", p 1396.

¹⁷⁹ HC Debate, 19 December 1935, 307, cc2007-17

¹⁸⁰ HC Debate, 19 December 1935 307, cc2017-127

The Conservatives had made the decision that the Italian invasion of Abyssinia would not compromise Britain's position in the region. They supported a quasi-League approach as it was the status-quo option, but were not prepared to risk open conflict, and risk Britain's position in places such as Malta. The Labour Party, like Eden, wanted a League first approach, which stuck more closely to the maintenance of collective security and the notion of self-determination.

Eden took over as Foreign Secretary on 22 December 1935 and brought a new approach. In his memoir Vansittart wrote that after taking the role Eden received a 'lovely Christmas box, bright red and marked F.O.' which was 'full of troubles'.¹⁸¹ Eden harboured a deep hatred for Mussolini and the feeling was mutual, a situation which prevented repair of the Anglo-Italian relationship.¹⁸² It was not just personal. Mussolini was aware that Eden advocated a stronger line against Italy.¹⁸³ On 17 January 1936, in his first public speech as Foreign Secretary, Eden reviewed the year that had been. He observed that:

If the collective peace system is to be effective, it must possess strength and elasticity – strength in order that the aggressor may be effectively discouraged and elasticity in order that some of the causes of war may be removed through the promotion by consent of the necessary changes when the time is ripe for them to take place.¹⁸⁴

The failure of sanctions caused a split of opinion in the British government. Eden wanted to show strength and impose an oil embargo, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain,¹⁸⁵ wanted an end to sanctions and a rebuilding of the Stresa Front.¹⁸⁶ First Sea Lord Chatfield, acting in line with the navy's pro-Italian appeasement position, supported Chamberlain as did Simon (Home Secretary) and Vansittart; Simon because he feared communism if Mussolini fell and Vansittart because he was more concerned with Germany. Junior officials in the Foreign Office shared Eden's view that they should support the League.

The cabinet feared attack on Egypt and Malta by Italy and the navy was worried about air defences, due to the perception that Italy had both a strong air force and many submarines. Hoare attributed failures in foreign policy to Britain's military weakness echoing Baldwin's

¹⁸¹ R.G.V. Vansittart, *The mist procession: the autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (Hutchinson, 1958), p 543.

¹⁸² G. Johnson, *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, p 101., R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p 328.

¹⁸³ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 172.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 172.

¹⁸⁵ Salerno notes that 'as early as 1936 Mussolini identified Britain - and especially the politically influential Neville Chamberlain - as susceptible to deceitful Italian diplomacy'. Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 214.

¹⁸⁶ Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 13-14.

election speech about the unpreparedness of the British Navy.¹⁸⁷ The fear on the part of cabinet and the government meant that the position of France was crucial. Britain would take action with French support, but would be very cautious without it. Unconcerned by Britain's Mediterranean dilemmas, the French wanted to maintain the Stresa Front in a bid to combat German rearmament and did not encourage action by Britain.

British policy in the Mediterranean arose from a trade-off between the public pressure for action against Italy and the view of cabinet that Britain should preserve both Anglo-Italian and Anglo-French relations.¹⁸⁸ The Hoare-Laval pact and the split in opinion after Eden took office show the way in which Italy complicated the international context for the Mediterranean Empire. It, along with Germany was always in mind when policy was formed, but the policy was not sound. It reflected the disjointed views amongst the political ranks, and within the Foreign Office and in attempting to satisfy two competing objectives it achieved neither. The actions of Italy were met with a pusillanimous response which foregrounded the protection of self-interest, allowed the sacrifice of Abyssinia and advocated the abandonment of League ideals. The whole episode was a public relations disaster which suggested to the colonies that Britain's power had diminished and that Italy's had expanded. British policy was completely ineffective in impeding Italy's success in the war against Abyssinia. The threat from Italy to Britain's position in the Mediterranean had crystallised.

Italy wins the Abyssinian War

Despite the use of poison gas it took some time before Italy ended the war by marching into Addis Ababa on 5 May 1936.¹⁸⁹ Mussolini declared 'Italy has her empire at last: a Fascist empire', but the victory came at great economic cost and led to Italian military complacency.¹⁹⁰

Italian victory had an immediate effect upon the position of Britain in the Mediterranean. The Foreign Office reported a general opinion in Greece that 'Great Britain has suffered a serious rebuff and that the Italian star is on the rise in the Mediterranean and ours [Britain's] is on the

¹⁸⁷ Andrew Holt, "No more Hoares to Paris", p 1399.

¹⁸⁸ Andrew Holt, "No more Hoares to Paris", p 1400.

¹⁸⁹ For more on the use of poison gas see Giorgio Rochat, Chapter 4, 'Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-36)', R. Ben-Ghiat and M. Fuller, *Italian Colonialism*. While the Italian people were rejoicing at the end of the war in Rome, Haile Selassie was crossing the Red Sea in the British cruiser HMS *Enterprise*. On 4 May, he had sailed from Djibouti on his way to England via Palestine and Gibraltar. See Richard Pankhurst, "Emperor Haile Selassie's Autobiography, and an Unpublished Draft," *Northeast African Studies* 3, no. 3 (1996).

¹⁹⁰ R. J. Overy, *The origins of the Second World War*, p 98.

wane'.¹⁹¹ This view, held widely in the Near and Middle East was sufficient for Eden to suggest to cabinet action to restore the British position. He noted that

the safety of British communication passing through Suez Canal, the relative stability of international relations in the Mediterranean and Red Sea basins, the internal security of British possessions and protectorates in those areas, the paramountcy of Britain in Egypt, and the influence which His Majesty's Government have been able to exercise over foreign States in the Near and Middle East have hitherto been largely assured by the unchallenged and as it was thought, unchallengeable efficacy and prestige of British sea power in the Med.¹⁹²

He went on to say

Recent events have, rightly or wrongly placed in doubt the capacity of Great Britain to maintain her predominant position in the Mediterranean, and, even supposing the capacity to exist, her determination to do so. Ground has, in short, been given in many quarters for the belief that, for one reason or another, we are unable to meet the Italian challenge, and, as a consequence, profound misgivings and hesitations have been manifested in Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Egypt Arabia and Palestine.¹⁹³

Eden effectively highlighted the importance attached to regional prestige by the British government in the Mediterranean and the key role played by Italy in damaging it. He suggested a form of insurance against Italy in the form of an agreement with neighbouring countries in the same way they had done with France and Belgium on 19 March 1936. In June 1936 Eden reaffirmed an assurance given by Britain to Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia in December of the previous year to stand together in the event of Italian attack resulting from their role in enforcing League sanctions.¹⁹⁴ The assurances were not intended to escalate the situation in the Mediterranean. In a comment on the file Sargent made it clear the 'ultimate objective [was] to return to friendly relations with Italy' after a difficult period caused in part by British public opinion which would 'not allow an immediate resumption of friendly relations'.¹⁹⁵ The pro-Italian position taken by Simon, Vansittart and the navy had won out over the pro-League position of Eden and Churchill. Harold Nicolson, a former diplomat and National Labour

¹⁹¹ Sir S Waterlow, 'Mediterranean questions', 23 April 1936, R2403, FO 371/20381

¹⁹² Anthony Eden, 'Mediterranean Policy of British Government', 11 June 1936, R3440, FO 371/20381

¹⁹³ Anthony Eden, 'Mediterranean Policy of British Government', 11 June 1936, R3440, FO 371/20381

¹⁹⁴ HC Debate, 18 June 1936, vol 313 cc1197-247, Lawrence Pratt, *East of Malta, west of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean crisis, 1936-1939* (Cambridge Eng. ; New York: Cambridge University Press in co-operation with London School of Economics and Political Science, 1975), p 35.

¹⁹⁵ Sargent minute in Ernle Chatfield, 'Situation in the Mediterranean', 19 June 1936, R3678, FO 371/20381

Member of the House of Commons suggested somewhat cynically in a January 1937 article that the 'the mass of the British people cared little for Egypt and less for the Yemen' and that:

although British opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of the League of Nations, it supported the Covenant rather in the hope of avoiding war than with the determination to enforce peace. Secondly, that the willingness of left-wing opinion to fight Mussolini over Abyssinia was partly anti-Fascist in origin and might have been modified (or even reversed) once it was found that the defeat of Mussolini would require something more than a naval demonstration off the Gulf of Spezzia.¹⁹⁶

Public opinion in London was against military conflict, a situation that limited the scope for political action and placed constraints upon British action in response to Italian aggression. The difference in opinion within the Foreign Office continued as Eden maintained the view that Italy was drifting toward Germany while Vansittart believed friendly relations with Italy should be restored as Britain could not fight Japan, Germany and Italy simultaneously. Italy responded to overtures from the Foreign Office and Dino Grandi (Italian Ambassador to the United Kingdom 1932-39) met with Eden in May 1936. Grandi downplayed his country's relationship with Germany and its imperial ambitions while Eden sought better relations with Italy. As Robert Mallett suggests, given Mussolini's clear path towards a closer association with Germany, the Italians may have only attended the meeting in order to deflect attention from this strengthening relationship.¹⁹⁷

Prominent fascist Luigi Federzoni believed the Mediterranean was the base for Britain's empire and that Britain saw Fascism as a threat to this dominance. He publicly castigated Britain for opposing the invasion of Abyssinia and for 'granting preference not to a great European nation, the mother of civilization, but to barbaric hordes of blacks'. He suggested that this may have repercussions for Britain, a nation that 'rules so many coloured peoples'. He pointed out that Italy's empire was marginal compared to Britain's and that Italy could not attain independence without control of maritime routes leading to Italy itself.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Harold Nicolson, "British public opinion and foreign policy," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1937): p 60-61. La Spezia is a large commercial and military harbour located in north-west Italy. It was a major Italian Naval base prior to and during the Second World War.

¹⁹⁷ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 179-80. In Italy Mussolini appointed his son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano to Foreign Minister in a move that was seen as a re-orientation toward Germany.

¹⁹⁸ Luigi Federzoni, "Hegemony in the Mediterranean," *Foreign Affairs* 14, no. 3 (1936): p 396., On 1 June Italy officially merged Ethiopia with Eritrea and Italian Somaliland creating a new state known as *Africa Orientale Italiana*. On the last day of that month Haile Selassie spoke at the League of Nations. In this famous speech he asserted that

Mussolini kept up the pressure on Britain to lift sanctions, repeating his threat to withdraw Italy from the League. The Foreign Office was in favour of lifting sanctions and Eden announced their revocation to parliament in June. Acknowledging failure he said that the League could only impose particular sanctions due to incomplete membership to which those opposite shouted 'oil'. Eden said that the Italians were in occupation of Abyssinia, a situation which could only be reversed by military action which no country was willing to contemplate. He said that His Majesty's Government had come to the conclusion that there was 'no longer any utility in continuing' the sanctions 'as a means of pressure on Italy' to which the opposition yelled 'Shame, Resign, Sabotage'.¹⁹⁹ In Italy large crowds gathered in the Piazza Venezia where Mussolini made a speech declaring that 'the white flag had been raised on the fortress of sanctionism'.²⁰⁰ The Italian press described the revoking of sanctions as 'a total political capitulation on the part of the League' which 'implied the political death of an institution which had no real aim beyond the maintenance of the international status quo'.²⁰¹ The main argument was valid; it was a crippling blow for the League, demonstrating its impotence. The crucial outcome of this diplomatic interaction was the opposite of what Britain had hoped for. Mussolini no longer felt the need to placate Britain. Having achieved the concession he badly wanted, he moved to consolidate relations with the ideological kindred spirit of Germany and he moved to a more openly hostile position toward Britain, as is discussed in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This and the following chapter seek to analyse the external threat posed by Italy to Britain's Mediterranean imperial hegemony. After 1935 in particular Italy was the embodiment of the regional, external and international threat to the preservation of Britain's advantageous position in the Mediterranean. This was not always the case, and this chapter has charted the drift in position from wartime ally to hostile power from 1918 until 1936.

Over that period some central themes emerge about Italy and the path it took and the reaction of the British to this. In Italy there was a continuity in foreign policy, where expansionist ambitions, and the disappointment at the post-war settlement were carried over and amplified

Ethiopia was the victim of Italian aggression, appealed for meaningful international intervention and warned the assembly that the 'very existence of the League of Nations' was at stake. - Haile Selassie, "Speech to the League of Nations," *League of Nations, Geneva, June 20(1936)*.

¹⁹⁹ HC Debate, 18 June 1936, Vol 313, cc 1197-247

²⁰⁰ Sir E Drummond, 'Raising of sanctions', 18 July 1936, R4378, FO 371/20423

²⁰¹ R. J. Overy, *The origins of the Second World War*, p 98.

from liberal Italy to Fascist Italy. This leads to the idea that, despite the ability of Britain to accommodate other imperial powers, there was an underlying opposition between Britain and Italy whose interests were focussed on the same geographic area. The British wished to maintain status quo, and Italy wanted to revise borders, and acquire territory. This willingness on the part of Italy to promote change, had an influence nationalist movement in both Malta and Cyprus, who saw Italy as an agent of change in the region.

Another theme is the seriousness of the strategic challenge posed by Italy. Geographically Italy was central to the Mediterranean, close to Malta and Cyprus. It represented an outright and obvious strategic threat albeit members of the Foreign Office knew, as did the Italians, that Britain was militarily stronger than the Italians.

They also understood that Italy was positioned astride the 'all red route' and therefore potentially able to restrict communication to India, Singapore and the Far East. Italy alone was no serious threat to British hegemony, but in combination with Germany and Japan it would be fatal. If Italy became hostile it would make the global strategic situation very difficult for Britain. Italy exposed the nature of that over-extension and at the same time was the possible solution, as many believed it could become a friendly power. The other aspect of the Italian threat to Britain's Mediterranean interests was the way in which it was able to damage Britain's image and its prestige. Nationalist and anti-colonial interests within British colonies, along with governments of other Mediterranean countries were witness to a bullish and aggressive Italian foreign policy largely unchecked by British opposition.

The serious challenge posed by Italy produced a level of anxiety and concern within the British government that in turn affected policy. Throughout this chapter there have been examples of the consternation amongst British officials as they tried to grapple with Mussolini and his government. This chapter has covered three areas in particular. They are the early incident in Corfu, the drawing together of Britain and Italy which reached its zenith with Stresa, and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, met with British appeasement.

Early actions of the fascists as they consolidated power worried officials, and Corfu in particular led some to strongly condemn Mussolini. The practicality of foreign policy, the desire to protect the League of Nations and the protection of British self-interest meant that initial objections were not allowed to interfere with foreign policy but clearly there were strong differences of opinion between powerful figures such as Eden and Vansittart. Italian expansionism presented a foreign policy problem that split the British government and the

Foreign Office. While some in the Foreign Office were overly optimistic, others changed in response to the series of *faits accomplis* presented to Britain by Italy. Eden had a good understanding of Italian motivations but he seems to have been motivated in part by a level of enmity developed in his first dealing with Mussolini. Vansittart also has a considered view of Italy but he thought it was a minor player.

The varied understandings of the nature of the Italian government produced a variety of policy responses, most obviously in the vexed area of appeasement. Vansittart and Phipps were correct in respect of Germany's real importance to a future conflict in Europe. Germany was undoubtedly the big fish and Italy the minnow. But Vansittart's position of Italian appeasement was only effective if indeed Italy was brought around to a position of at least neutrality. The corollary of Vansittart's pro-Italian policy was an anti-German one. Britain had to stand firm against German political and physical encroachment for the policy to make any sense and they had to accept that Italy could make territorial gains in North Africa.

As the threat increased the anxiety and the concern within the government produced both increased colonial control and compromised policy decisions, particularly as Italian activity exacerbated or encouraged internal dissent in the colonies. In Malta and Cyprus the threat combined with determined internal dissent to promote authoritarian administrations. As the British government adopted a policy of appeasement toward Italy, it compensated with the introduction of more authoritarian rule in its colonies, and particularly so in Cyprus. In Malta a more assertive brand of Italian expansionism would have made administrators concentrate on signs of Italian sympathy. On the broader scale compromised policy decisions were evident in the reaction to the Abyssinian Crisis, and the Hoare-Laval Pact was a particularly good example of this. Britain's response to the Abyssinian invasion was not effective. Mussolini and others easily saw it for what it was; namely a limited commitment to collective security, one that stopped where it clashed with Britain's real and underlying imperial interests. Britain's struggle to cope with the threat from Italy became particularly pronounced in the latter half of the 1930s a period that will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 – The Italian threat to Britain after the Abyssinian Crisis and Italian Appeasement

'If we are ever to divide and rule (as I hope we shall) it is clear that we should not keep all the hungry powers lean at the same time. Such a policy would obviously only unite them all the more. The right thing to do is to take rather bolder steps to encourage trade all round and thus make everybody less hungry and then, if this had only small effect to throw a bone to the least dangerous dog first. For compared with Germany (both in civilized organisation and in crime) Italy is only a poor provincial amateur'.¹

Gladwynn Jebb (Foreign Office) - 1936

After the Abyssinian conflict had come to a close Britain was faced with a new phase in its relationship with Italy. Mussolini's fascist government became much more proactive in attempting to limit and subvert British power and influence in the region. For Britain the same factors that dictated policies of appeasement during the Abyssinian crisis continued to be in play. The Foreign Office advocated a return to normal relations after 1935, resulting in two ultimately meaningless agreements, the Gentleman's Agreement of 2 January 1937 and the Anglo-Italian Agreements also known as the Easter Accords of 16 April 1938.² Chamberlain's appointment as Prime Minister resulted in Eden being sidelined, but the British government's new policy was to appease both Italy and Germany, something that neither Eden or Vansittart had advocated. Foreign Office opinion toward Italy finally hardened in 1939 but this was too late to meaningfully change the direction of the relationship.

This chapter considers the development of British policy in relation to Italy and in particular the policy of appeasement that continued as the hostility of Italy increased. It looks at the propaganda effort of the Fascist state, the review of British defence policy and the effect that Italian activity was having on Egypt and Palestine, areas of informal and formal interest to

¹ Sir E Drummond, 'The economic and financial situation in Italy with especial reference to its bearing on Signor Mussolini's attitude towards peace.', 4 December 1936, R7366, FO371/20403 p 125.

² "Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Italy - Agreement regarding Questions of Mutual Concern consisting of a Protocol and Annexes, signed at Rome, April 16th, 1938, and Exchanges of Notes relating thereto of the same Date, and Declaration bringing into Force these Instruments, signed at Rome, November 16th, 1938", (League of Nations Treaty Series - LNTSer 42; 195 LNTS 77, 1939).

Britain. These areas show the increased activity of Italy and the challenge it posed to British hegemony. It shows the targeted way in which Italy sought to take advantage of difficulties such as those in Palestine. Italy actively sought to counter British interests at the colonial level, and in so doing created distrust and anxiety amongst the British. This significant external pressure interacted with high levels of internal dissent to influence the administration of Britain's Mediterranean Empire and promote authoritarian rule.

Italian Appeasement after the Abyssinian War

The policy of Italian appeasement had an effect at the colonial level as direct or public confrontation with Italy was replaced by private precautions within the Mediterranean colonies. In the years after Italy succeeded in taking Ethiopia the issue of Italian appeasement continued to be a vexed policy area that exposed differences of opinion between senior officials and politicians in the British government. The Foreign Office maintained their policy of trying to resume a friendly relationship with Italy and this affected many aspects of policy in the Mediterranean. Instead of projecting strength the British made concessions. Rappas suggests that the desire on the part of the British to show strength in the face of fascism manifested itself not in direct confrontation, which was counter to appeasement policy, but by tightening its rule in Cyprus, an 'authoritarian turn'.³ In 1936 the Foreign Office officials placed the blame on Italy for the current state of affairs in the Mediterranean:

We must remember that the spirit of rivalry which we should so much like to see disappear was created by the Italians themselves with their scarcely disguised ambitions to achieve a hegemony in the Mediterranean (Mare Nostrum etc.). We have plenty of evidence of their underground activities all over the Near East which are calculated to contribute to this end, while we have never threatened their 'security' even when our preponderance in the Mediterranean was undisputed.⁴

The Foreign Office understood what it was that the Italian government were doing in the Mediterranean, but this knowledge did not lessen their desire to conciliate Italy.

In October 1936, Ciano travelled to Berlin and was warmly received. During the visit Hitler said that the Mediterranean was an Italian Sea and Germany announced that it would recognise the Italian Empire of Ethiopia. After the visit Mussolini declared that an 'axis' had been formed

³ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 484.

⁴ N.J.A. Cheetham jacket comment in Sir E Drummond, "The economic and political situation in Italy with especial reference to its bearing on Anglo-Italian relations", 23 October 1936, R6299, FO 371/20412

between the two countries.⁵ The relationship between Germany and Italy had overcome those issues, such as Austria, which divided them and although no firm commitments were given, plans for a future war alongside Germany were drawn up. Mussolini believed that Britain, humiliated by Italian success in Abyssinia, would now try to encircle Italy.⁶ He suggested to the Fascist minister for education, Giuseppe Bottai, that Italy's next war would be against Malta and the British fleet.⁷ If Italy defeated Britain in such a conflict it could link Libya with Italian East Africa via conquest of Egypt, and solidify the Italian Empire. No such changes occurred as Mussolini was mistaken in his belief that Britain would encircle Italy. The British were damaged by Italy's success, but they did not want further conflict. In fact, the majority wanted to conciliate.

In November the Foreign Office and Vansittart pushed for an improvement in relations with Italy through an Anglo-Italian agreement. They wanted to 'offer Italy an alternative friendship to that of Hitler' and improve Britain's strategic position.⁸ Eden vigorously opposing Vansittart asked 'does anybody in the Foreign Office really believe that Italy's foreign policy will at any time be other than opportunist?' He went on to write:

the Chiefs of Staff speak naively about not having to develop Cyprus as a base if we improve relations with Italy, without appearing to realise that if relations are improved it will be because that suits Italy for the moment and that no amount of promises or understanding or renewed professions of friendship or even humble crawling on our part will affect Mussolini's course.⁹

Eden's position on Italian appeasement had hardened but his was not the majority opinion. The Cabinet came to the conclusion that Eden, despite his reservations, should adopt a policy of improving relations with Italy.¹⁰ Eden spoke in the House of Commons the next day and emphasised that Britain was acting collectively with the League, did not have a quarrel with Italy and that it had 'no desire to threaten, or intention to attack, any Italian interest in the

⁵ S. Balfour, P. Preston, and P.P. Preston, *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century* (Taylor & Francis, 2002), p 159., Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 158.

⁶ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 181.

⁷ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 181.

⁸ Orme Sargent, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 2 November 1936, R6646, FO 371/20412

⁹ Anthony Eden Jacket Comment (9 Nov) in Orme Sargent, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 2 November 1936, R6646, FO 371/20412

¹⁰ Cabinet Conclusion, 'Anglo-Italian relations', 4 November 1936, R6694, FO 371/20412

Mediterranean'.¹¹ Churchill weighed in through an article in the *Evening Standard* and warned against the:

carefully fostered view in Italy that Great Britain is a worn-out, dying power, enfeebled by democracy, rotten by pacifists, a power whose great possessions and foremost place in the Mediterranean are the future inheritance of a Fascist Italy.¹²

He conceded the need for greater air power but pointed out that the British Fleet was 'still incomparably the most powerful in Europe' and that Britain had powerful friends in the Mediterranean. Churchill urged Italy to 'join in this new regional pact of confidence and goodwill and make these historic waters a wide and important area of free movement and tranquillity'.¹³ This mixture of warning and entreaty held out some hope of reconciliation with Italy, but emphasised British strength. Churchill warned Italy not to believe its own propaganda and seriously consider the considerable strength of the British Navy, a message that differed from more straightforward appeasement.

A year after Eden had come to office the rancorous split in opinion on how to approach Italy continued. On 1 November 1936 Mussolini had declared that for Great Britain the Mediterranean was 'a route, one of many routes, or rather a short cut' while for Italy it was *vita* (life).¹⁴ Eden in response told the House of Commons that 'the Mediterranean is not a short cut but a main arterial road' and that 'freedom of communication' was a 'vital interest, in the full sense of the word, for the British Commonwealth of Nations'.¹⁵ In order to defuse this tension, Eden 'having digested the bitter pill of the League's failure' agreed to talks between Drummond and Ciano in Rome.

In December 1936 before any formal outcome from the talks was announced, Eric Drummond in Rome wrote to Eden about Italy's economic troubles and the possibility of this causing Italian aggression as Mussolini sought a foreign 'adventure' to distract from domestic pressure.¹⁶ Gladwyn Jebb, a diplomat formerly posted to Rome¹⁷ expressed the view that 'Italy

¹¹ HC Debate, 5 November 1936, vol 317, cc 275-386

¹² Winston Churchill, "In Mediterranean Waters", *Evening Standard* 13 November 1936 in Sir E Drummond, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 14 November 1936, R6868, FO 371/20412

¹³ Winston Churchill, "In Mediterranean Waters", *Evening Standard* in Sir E Drummond, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 14 November 1936, R6868, FO 371/20412

¹⁴ J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record. British-French supremacy, 1914-1945*. 2 (Yale University Press, 1979), p 508.

¹⁵ J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, p 508.

¹⁶ Sir E Drummond, 'The economic and financial situation in Italy', 4 December 1936, R7366, FO371/20403 p 136.

should be in effect bought off and thus kept on Britain's side, instead of being allowed to slide into the arms of the Germans'.¹⁸ He sparked a debate in the minutes about Italy and Germany by writing that Britain should assist Italy economically and 'throw a bone to the least ferocious looking dog first'.¹⁹ Vansittart strongly agreed with Jebb as did Sargent. Jebb's statements show the reasoning behind the Italian appeasement position. Jebb and the Foreign Office saw Italy as the least worst of potential future enemies, and were prepared to pursue policies that aimed to change Italy's course and separate it from Germany. The split within government was a manifestation of the anxiety and disruption caused by the whole international situation becoming increasingly difficult.

Eden maintained his position, arguing that if Italy could not afford war Britain should not provide it with the means. Vansittart wrote to Eden suggesting that he did not do the Foreign Office justice and that if Italy asked for a loan then this could be 'utilised to detach Italy from any extreme complicity with Germany'. He assured Eden that the Foreign Office was not staffed by 'undiscriminating philanthropists or indeed by "phils" of any description' and that they knew Germany was a far greater threat than Italy.²⁰ Vansittart injected some subtlety into the debate, but was very strident in his defence of his office. Eden acknowledged Vansittart's points but the robust exchange was evidence of the level of anxiety about the situation in Europe and the policy of Italian appeasement.²¹

The Drummond/Ciano talks resulted in the two countries signing the Declaration on the Mediterranean: Britain and Italy (Gentleman's Agreement) dated 2 January 1937.²² The agreement recognised that freedom of entry into, exit from and transit through the Mediterranean was a vital and not inconsistent interest to both parties, and it provided for maintenance of the 'status quo as regards national sovereignty of territories in the Mediterranean area'.²³ Although the agreement acknowledged the right of free passage through the Mediterranean it did not address other more central issues between the two countries. Despite

¹⁷ Gladwyn Jebb was posted to Rome in 1931 and returned to the Foreign Office in London in November 1935 where he took part in the discussion about the correct policy for contending with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. - Alan Campbell, "Jebb, (Hubert Miles) Gladwyn, first Baron Gladwyn (1900–1996)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

¹⁸ Sir E Drummond, 'The economic and financial situation in Italy', 4 December 1936, R7366, FO371/20403 p 125.

¹⁹ Sir E Drummond, 'The economic and financial situation in Italy', 4 December 1936, R7366, FO371/20403 p 131.

²⁰ Sir E Drummond, 'The economic and financial situation in Italy', 4 December 1936, R7366, FO371/20403 p 135.

²¹ Sir E Drummond, 'The economic and financial situation in Italy', 4 December 1936, R7366, FO371/20403 p 135.

²² Lawrence Pratt, *East of Malta, west of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean crisis, 1936-1939*, p 63.

²³ J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, p 508.

continued appeasement by Britain, Mussolini and the Italian Fascists were actually now firmly aligned with Nazi Germany.

In May 1937 Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister marking a decided shift in British foreign policy. Chamberlain utilised bilateral agreements and infamously pursued a policy of appeasement, but he differed from both Eden and Vansittart. He eschewed the collective security of the League, and sought to placate Italy, but did not take a hard line against Germany as both Vansittart and Phipps would have preferred. In placating both he ignored the Mediterranean basis for the policy of Italian appeasement. In August Philip Nichols of the Foreign Office drafted a Cabinet Paper reporting on the effect of the 'Gentleman's Agreement'.²⁴ He noted the hope that the agreement 'would have ushered in a new and better phase in Anglo-Italian relations' but, he said:

This hope has not been fulfilled. Italy's intensive intervention in the Spanish civil war, comments in the British press on the courage of Italian soldiers in Spain, the invitation extended to the ex-Emperor to send a representative to the Coronation, the effects of the massacre at Addi Ababa, the nature of Italian broadcasts from Bari, Italian propaganda generally in the Near East and the attacks on Gt. Britain in the Italian press, and broadcasts have all been factors which have contributed to the maintenance of an atmosphere of suspicion and misunderstanding between Italy and the United Kingdom.²⁵

The Foreign Office could clearly see that the policy of appeasement was not working. Italian appeasement did not have the desired effect. It prevented a response to Italian aggression, encouraged anti-colonial and nationalist interests and promoted an authoritarian turn within the colonies. As Nichols noted in his paper, the Spanish Civil War had a decisive impact on European politics. Paul Preston suggests that Mussolini entered into an open-ended commitment to Franco that was 'in everything short of a formal declaration of hostilities, at war with the Spanish Republic'.²⁶ Mussolini had been encouraged by his success in Abyssinia, and was convinced by Franco to assist the cause of the nationalists. At first, this assistance was meant to be modest, but the demands from Spain grew and in the end, Italy committed a large

²⁴ Nichols drafted the paper on 20 August 1937 on the instructions of Lord Halifax. Wood, Edward Frederick Lindley, first earl of Halifax (1881–1959), former viceroy of India and Lord was a proponent of appeasement, and has been seen as one of the 'guilty men' for pursuing this policy. More recently work has been done which suggest that Halifax worked to modify Chamberlain's policies. See D. J. Dutton, "Wood, Edward Frederick Lindley, first earl of Halifax (1881–1959)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁵ Makins, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 20 August 1937, R6095, FO371/21161

²⁶ S. Balfour, P. Preston, and P.P. Preston, *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, p 151.

proportion of its military power to fight in Spain. So much in fact that it weakened its own military capacity. Mussolini was prepared to make such a commitment, Preston argues, because of the resentment he shared with Franco toward Anglo-French hegemony in the Mediterranean. The relationship between the two men was however limited by their 'mutually incompatible ambitions to take over the French North African Empire'.²⁷ The Italian interference in the Spanish Civil War manoeuvred Italy into a position of greater diplomatic distance from Britain, as it drew closer to fellow fascists and right wing regimes, both in Spain and Germany. During this period, Italian anti-British activity continued at a high level and propaganda was one of its most obvious manifestations.

Propaganda

The Italian dissemination of anti-British propaganda was an obvious and direct manifestation of the deteriorating Anglo-Italian relationship. It was a very practical method of influencing public opinion within both formal colonies and British spheres of influence. It was a nexus of external pressure and internal dissent down at the colonial level and something that the British treated very seriously. The main vehicle for Italian anti-British propaganda was Radio Bari. Named after the town of Bari on the east coast of Italy, this short-wave radio station broadcast in Arabic and was popular amongst Arabs in both Egypt and Palestine. Whitehall was concerned enough to jam the Radio Bari signal in November 1935, but did not continue to do so as this was counter to international rules, and could provoke Italian retaliation.²⁸

In 1937 Radio Bari was being heard across the Near and Middle East. The station was 'broadcasting in Arabic news and views favourable to the Italian cause' and had content which according to the Foreign Office 'ranged from recognisable but strongly biased accounts of recent events and declarations of Italy's sympathy with the Moslem world to violent anti-British fabrications'.²⁹ The success of this form of propaganda was causing concern and annoyance to the British government and the option of setting up a rival broadcasting station in Cyprus was considered. Colonial Secretary William Ormsby-Gore³⁰ informed Cypriot Governor Palmer that:

²⁷ S. Balfour, P. Preston, and P.P. Preston, *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, p 176.

²⁸ Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-40*, p 52.

²⁹ Ormsby-Gore, 'Letter from Ormsby Gore to Governor Palmer', 5 August 1937, red 14, FCO141/2577

³⁰ William Ormsby-Gore became parliamentary under-secretary at the Colonial Office in October 1922 where, apart from an interval during the first labour government, he remained until 1929. He was then Colonial Secretary from

His Majesty's government have decided that immediate steps must be taken to remedy the damage which British interests in the Near and Middle East are suffering through the lack of proper broadcasting facilities. The Arabic broadcasts at Bari have become notorious for their violently anti-British tone...³¹

Radio Bari successfully pushed an anti-British message to many parts of the empire despite the efforts at appeasement that were made repeatedly by the British. Controlling a large, disparate and increasingly restive global empire Britain held its prestige very dear, and it could see, or hear that being eroded by Italy's continuous broadcasts. Radio Bari did not however increase Italian influence in the Middle East, as there was a disconnect between the Italian message and their policy in places such as Libya. It was more successful in embarrassing the British, particularly in Palestine. This prompted British concessions to Italy in relation to *de jure* recognition of their position in Abyssinia, but it also motivated the British to make concessions in Egypt, and begin their own form of radio propaganda through the BBC.³²

In February 1937, Reginald Leeper, head of the News Department in the Foreign Office³³ wrote to Vansittart, desperate for funds to counteract 'lavishly funded' cultural propaganda from totalitarian states.³⁴ Leeper noted that the Italian Government had set up a Ministry of Press and Propaganda with a staff of 800 officials while he was unable to extract any more than £30,000 from the Treasury. Leeper nominated the Mediterranean and the Near-East as the area most seriously threatened by Italian activity.³⁵ In June, Robin Furness, (Press Officer, Government of Palestine, 1934-36) warned of the effect of Radio Bari which adopted a strong anti-British tone at the outbreak of the Abyssinian Crisis. Although Bari was playing a role in public opinion its influence was weakened by the inherent contradiction between Italy's imperial ambitions and its

May 1936 until April 1938, a tumultuous period during which he committed to the partition of Palestine and was a critic of Nazi Germany. see K. E. Robinson, "Gore, William George Arthur Ormsby-, fourth Baron Harlech (1885–1964)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

³¹ Ormsby-Gore, 'Letter from Ormsby Gore to Governor Palmer', 5 August 1937, red 14, FCO141/2577

³² Callum A. MacDonald, "Radio Bari: Italian Wireless Propaganda in the Middle East and British Countermeasures 1934-38," *Middle Eastern Studies* 13, no. 2 (1977).

³³ During his time at the Foreign Office in the 1930s Reginald Leeper was particularly concerned about the threat of fascism and improving British propaganda. He strongly supported anti-appeasement politicians such as Churchill, and he was a strong supporter of Vansittart. In March 1943, Leeper was appointed ambassador to the Greek Government. See Derek Drinkwater, "Leeper, Sir Reginald Wildig Allen (1888–1968)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

³⁴ Reginald Leeper, 'Foreign cultural propaganda and the threat to British interests abroad', 18 February 1937, P823, FO 395/554

³⁵ Reginald Leeper, 'Foreign cultural propaganda and the threat to British interests abroad', 18 February 1937, P823, FO 395/554 - Vansittart brought these concerns to Eden who agreed to bring it to cabinet after the coronation of George VI (12 May 1937)

anti-imperial propaganda.³⁶ It may have been able to avoid this if it could represent itself as a liberator, but such a position was difficult after Mussolini chose to invade independent Abyssinia. Despite the contradiction Hoyer-Miller of the Foreign Office who had spent four years (1930-34) in Egypt³⁷ also believed this propaganda was dangerous. He noted the popularity of Radio Bari and said the broadcasts 'create[d] a considerable impression ... on the native listeners and made them feel that Great Britain's prestige and power in the Near East was on the decline'.³⁸ The level of anxiety and concern among British officials led to efforts to limit Italian activity.

In July 1937, Nichols, of the Foreign Office referred to the assurance in the Gentleman's Agreement that Italy would cease anti-British propaganda and activities and noted that Ciano had not been reassuring on this point in the months after this agreement was signed.³⁹ On 14 June, Eden spoke directly to Grandi about Radio Bari pointing out that 'this propaganda naturally aroused resentment among those who were aware of it and that its cessation would do a great deal to stimulate an improvement in Anglo-Italian relations'.⁴⁰ Shortly after this Vansittart wrote to Drummond suggesting that perhaps there should be a meeting between Drummond and Mussolini himself at which issues, including propaganda, could be aired openly. Vansittart thought Drummond should tell Mussolini that although re-armament was not directed against Italy, they were designed to secure the safety of the British Empire and would be used if that security were threatened. This was similar to the argument put forward by Churchill and referred to above. Drummond demurred; 'are we prepared ultimately to use force to check these activities' he asked, 'if not, would it not savour of bluff on our side and might not he call it?'⁴¹ Drummond wanted to wait for *de jure* recognition of Italian Abyssinia which he believed would be a bargaining chip. Nichols suggested three options in response to Italian propaganda: demand that the Italian government stop it; take action to nullify its effect, namely counter-propaganda; or a third way, a statement in parliament designed to raise public opinion against it. Sargent did not think a demand would work as 'in a discussion of this kind' it was 'essential that there should

³⁶ Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's propaganda abroad*, p 4.

³⁷ Sherfield, "Millar, Frederick Robert Hoyer, first Baron Inchyra (1900–1989)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

³⁸ Mr Hoyer Miller, 'The Italian anti-British broadcasts from Radio Bari', 30 June 1937, R4524, FO 371/21159

³⁹ Mr Nichols, 'Anti-British Propaganda', 2 July 1937, R4557, FO 371/21159 - Nichols was later head of the Southern Department (1939-41)

⁴⁰ Mr Nichols, 'Anti-British Propaganda', 2 July 1937, R4557, FO 371/21159

⁴¹ Mr Nichols, 'Anti-British Propaganda', 2 July 1937, R4557, FO 371/21159 p 196.

be a basis of goodwill on both sides' whereas this was 'entirely lacking on the Italian side'.⁴² He did not support a statement in Parliament because of strained relations with Germany and Italy resulting from the 'Spanish trouble' and he suggested counter-propaganda be put in place immediately.⁴³ Alexander Cadogan⁴⁴ noted that the question of counter-propaganda had already been actively pursued and the plan was to 'put out news in Arabic through the Haifa station' although the idea has to be approved by Cabinet. A more permanent station was planned for Cyprus.⁴⁵

Eden wrote a minute for cabinet on 13 July where he argued that the time had come for 'positive steps' and that it was 'essential for His Majesty's Government to ensure the full and forcible presentation of the British view of events in a region of such vital imperial importance'. He outlined the need for a medium wave station first in Palestine and then in Cyprus that would broadcast material written by the news department of the Foreign Office and asked cabinet for immediate adoption of his proposal. The estimated cost of a station at Cyprus was £50,000 and the estimated building time was nine months.⁴⁶ Cabinet agreed but it turned out that Cyprus was too close to the Middle East for short wave, which cannot be received within a few hundred miles and too far for medium wave, which cannot be received beyond 300 miles.⁴⁷ The decision was therefore made that the BBC, with close oversight from the Foreign Office, would handle the broadcasts, which would emanate from a broadcasting station in Daventry, a town in Northamptonshire.⁴⁸ The BBC Arabic service began broadcasting in 1938.⁴⁹ It was joined later by Spanish and Portuguese services, but Arabic was deemed most urgent, according to the *Manchester Guardian*, as it was 'in the Near and Middle East that Italian propaganda by wireless against British interests' had 'been most persistent'.⁵⁰ The station aimed to provide 'straight'

⁴² Mr Nichols, 'Anti-British Propaganda', 2 July 1937, R4557, FO 371/21159 p 188.

⁴³ Mr Nichols, 'Anti-British Propaganda', 2 July 1937, R4557, FO 371/21159

⁴⁴ Cadogan, Sir Alexander George Montagu (1884–1968), diplomatist, worked in China before Eden invited him back to London. He became the Permanent Under Secretary in January 1938, displacing Vansittart, with whom Eden had many differences of opinion. Cadogan was first and foremost of the realpolitik school of foreign policy, and had no illusions about the power of diplomacy unsupported by force. See Gore-Booth, "Cadogan, Sir Alexander George Montagu (1884–1968)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. G. R. Berridge (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁵ Mr Nichols, 'Anti-British Propaganda', 2 July 1937, R4557, FO 371/21159

⁴⁶ Anthony Eden 'Arabic Broadcasts', Cabinet Memorandum CP185 (37) dated 13 July 1937 in Mr Nichols, 'Anti-British Propaganda', 2 July 1937, R4557, FO 371/21159

⁴⁷ P.M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda, 1919-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p 200.

⁴⁸ Cabinet Memorandum: *Cabinet Conclusion*, 27 October 1937, CAB 23/90A.

⁴⁹ Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's propaganda abroad*, p 156.

⁵⁰ Our Wireless Correspondent, "First Broadcast in Arabic", *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 January 1938, 11

news, but its success was somewhat limited by a ineffective strategy of targeting an audience of intellectuals and elites, instead of the mass appeal and popular music approach of Radio Bari.⁵¹

Radio Bari's overt Italian propaganda caused real concern in the British administration. It was evidently treated seriously as the issue went all the way to Cabinet and received significant funding. But for a quirk of technology Cyprus would have been the place from which the counter-propaganda was broadcast. Although it was not set up the (proposed) radio station is a good metaphor for the changed orientation of Cyprus which was now seen as a site for exerting influence in the Middle East. The virulence of Radio Bari toward Britain was the most obvious and public manifestation of the post-Abyssinian relationship. It waxed and waned as Britain made overtures, and gained concessions, but overt anti-British activity was a feature of the post-Abyssinian relationship. Italian propaganda was a point of connection between the two points of pressure considered by this study. Italy sought to exploit and exacerbate internal dissent, creating trouble in the Mediterranean Empire and the Middle East. The obvious nature of Italian hostility to British interests also made a review of British defence policy necessary.

Review of Defence Policy

The decision to begin broadcasting counter-propaganda was made at a time in which the language in the Foreign Office with regard to Italy generally was becoming more strident and direct. In response to a report on growing Italian influence in Palestine G.L. McDermott, a diplomat in the Foreign office wrote on the file jacket:

We know very well now both that S. Mussolini is preparing expressly for the possibility of war with us, and that the undermining of British influence in the Near East by such methods as these is one of the methods of preparation which he regards as most important.⁵²

In June, Owen O'Malley,⁵³ a counsellor in Whitehall, prepared a memo for the benefit of the Committee of Imperial Defence which was considering a review of defence policy. O'Malley noted the Anglo-Italian Declaration of 2 January about freedom to move through the

⁵¹ Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's propaganda abroad*, p 157.

⁵² Sir E Drummond, 'Anglo-Italian relations: Signor Mussolini's pose as the protector of Islam', 28 May 1937, R3792, FO 371/21159 . The method referred to was the reporting by Italian newspapers of enthusiasm for Italy and Germany within Palestine.

⁵³ O'Malley, Sir Owen St Clair (1887–1974), diplomatist was made counsellor, a position in Whitehall in August 1933. See Alan J. Foster, "O'Malley, Sir Owen St Clair (1887–1974)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

Mediterranean, but said wryly ‘fine words, however, butter no parsnips’ emphasising that ‘Italian aspirations towards expansion of power and influence are virtually irreconcilable with a situation where police control of that road is in our hands and not in hers’. This statement is an expression of the conflicting basic interests identified in the previous chapter. Orme Sargent recommended that the formula on which relations with Italy were based be changed to read:

Italy cannot be considered a reliable friend and must for an indefinite period be regarded as a possible enemy, especially if she can count on the goodwill and potential support of Germany or if Great Britain were at any time to be involved with difficulties elsewhere.⁵⁴

This change was rejected by Cabinet on 14 July 1937.⁵⁵ Instead, with the backing of Chamberlain, the agreed formula was: ‘Italy could not be counted on as a reliable friend but in the present circumstances need not be regarded as a probable enemy’.⁵⁶ Chamberlain and the Cabinet did not want to grasp the nettle and consider the implications of a hostile Italy. At the same time the Chiefs of Staff were pushing very hard for a restoration of friendly relations with Italy, a strategically motivated position.⁵⁷ They argued that ‘from the strategical point of view the first desideratum is a secure Mediterranean. This involves, as a primary consideration the restoration of our former friendly relations with Italy’.⁵⁸ The Chiefs were of the view, that Britain’s communications through the Mediterranean could ‘only be made secure either by maintaining friendship with Italy or establishing ourselves in such military strength in the Mediterranean as would permanently deter Italy from embarking on war against us’.⁵⁹

In late July, Chamberlain exchanged letters with Mussolini and in August a high-level meeting in the Foreign Office, attended by Lord Halifax, Drummond, Vansittart and Oliphant, discussed upcoming talks with the Italian Government. The Foreign Office wanted to recognise Italian Abyssinia so that it could progress negotiations with Italy. They were aware that it was as politically sensitive topic, so they considered the best way to present recognition to the outside world. One of the concerns was that recognition of Abyssinia would be seen as a loss for the League of Nations and damage its reputation. They argued that the primary object of the League was the:

⁵⁴ O'Malley, 'Probability of War with Italy', 1 June 1937, R3831, FO 371/21159

⁵⁵ Makins, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 20 August 1937, R6095, FO371/21161

⁵⁶ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 483.

⁵⁷ Makins, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 20 August 1937, R6095, FO371/21161

⁵⁸ Makins, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 20 August 1937, R6095, FO371/21161 p 173.

⁵⁹ Makins, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 20 August 1937, R6095, FO371/21161 p 173.

maintenance of peace and the furtherance of international co-operation. Its failure to maintain peace in a particular case does not justify it, through reluctance to accept a failure, in neglecting the opportunity of restoring international co-operation. Such co-operation can only be effective on a basis of reality.⁶⁰

A second argument put forward went closer to the heart of the matter. The Foreign Office believed that failure to recognise Italian Abyssinia was creating ill-will between the countries and even the belief in Italy that Britain and other members of the League were 'contemplating an eventual revenge for the future of League action in the Italo-Abyssinian dispute'. This, the memo cautioned, could threaten European peace.⁶¹ Drummond believed that if upcoming conversations with the Italian Government went well then the 'whole propaganda question would naturally fall into line'.⁶²

Eden presented a Memorandum to Cabinet in September 1937 in relation to these talks. He referred to the Chiefs of Staff, who were 'preoccupied with the importance, from the military point of view, of the restoration of our former friendly relationship with Italy'. The objective of His Majesty's Government, he said, was

as always, the general appeasement of the European situation, the chief disturbing factors in which are the two dictatorship countries Germany and Italy. Hitherto all attempts to get to closer quarters with Germany have failed and for the moment nothing more can be done in that quarter.⁶³

Eden suggested that Italy was open to conversations but this was couched in the language of recognition of Italian Abyssinia. Eden noted on the final draft of the memorandum his apprehension that

that these conversations may arouse too great hopes. There is no doubt that many of my colleagues believe that we can reach, and that fairly soon, a state of relations with Italy that will justify our relaxing rearmament efforts. I am convinced that Italy policy is too untrustworthy for this to be possible.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Foreign Office, 'Anglo-Italian Conversations: Italian activities in various Near Eastern countries', 29 September 1937, R6479, FO 371/21161

⁶¹ Foreign Office, 'Anglo-Italian Conversations', 29 September 1937, R6479, FO 371/21161

⁶² Foreign Office, 'Anglo-Italian Conversations', 29 September 1937, R6479, FO 371/21161

⁶³ Cabinet Memorandum C.P. 210 (37) in Foreign Office, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 20 August 1937, R6095, FO 371/21161

⁶⁴ Foreign Office, 'Anglo-Italian Relations - Final Draft of Cabinet Paper', 2 September 1937, R6096, FO 371/21161

Eden doubted that Britain could appease Italy and the general disposition of Italy was underscored when, on 1 September, an Italian submarine that was operating in connection with the Spanish Civil War attacked the *Havoc* (a British destroyer). In the same month the War Office drew up a detailed plan for a unilateral war with Italy, with the possible involvement of Germany covered in the appendix. The report noted Italy's strength in submarines and torpedo boats in particular, while the British only had force in the Mediterranean 'necessary for internal security and local defence'. Annexure "A" noted that in a unilateral war Italy would want to draw in allies and only a 'spectacular success' would give Italy a reasonable chance of persuading other Powers that British 'power was on the wane and that the time was right to split up the British Empire'.⁶⁵

The nature of these discussions, the revision of Italy's belligerency status and the war-planning all indicated the high level of tension between Britain and Italy by 1937. For roughly fifteen years Italy had wavered in European politics, but after Abyssinia the tension in the Anglo-Italian relationship grew very quickly and so did the level of threat to Britain's Mediterranean Empire and the colonies within it.

The late stage of the inter-war Anglo-Italian relationship

During the latter half of the 1930s Italian activity was being felt in the British colonies and informal empire in the Mediterranean. A Foreign Office note reported that:

Fascist Italy under Signor Mussolini aims at extension of Italian influence throughout the Mediterranean and Red Sea areas; and the Italians are convinced that one of the essential factors in this process must be the undermining of British influence in the same area.⁶⁶

The report downplayed Italian activities in Malta and Cyprus and suggested that the tone of Radio Bari had improved since the British Ambassador's protest to Count Ciano on 15 May. The report goes on at length, however, about Egypt, noting the existence of an 'Italian espionage organisation run under cover of a tourist agency, the *Ufficio Turistico Riunione Adriatica*' and the overtures made by Italy to the Egyptian government with the aim of securing their neutrality in the event of a conflict between it and England'.⁶⁷ On 6 November Italy joined the anti-Comintern Pact and the following month Italy withdrew from the League. This hardly gave comfort to the Mediterranean colonies who began to view Italy as a real threat. The Governor of

⁶⁵ War Office General Staff, 'Note for General Weir in situation in Middle East in event of war with Italy', 15 September 1937, LIST/G/12/12, WO106/2015

⁶⁶ McDermott, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 29 September 1937, R6466, FO 371/21161

⁶⁷ McDermott, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 29 September 1937, R6466, FO 371/21161

Malta, Charles Bonham-Carter, drew up a defence plan for Malta,⁶⁸ which anticipated bombing from Italy and made provision for air raid procedures and anti-air weapons.

By January 1938, Eden and Chamberlain had fallen into clear and strong conflict over policy toward Italy. Chamberlain demanded that Eden 'fall into line' but Eden held to the position he had maintained since September of the previous year.⁶⁹ Mallet is right to suggest that Eden, although displaying some aspects of a personal crusade, was actually correct about Italy. Mussolini, Ciano, Grandi and others were strongly in favour of a close relationship with Germany and were of the view that Italy should plan for the inevitable conflict with Britain.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, Eden was politically offside and on 20 February 1938 he resigned as Foreign Secretary,⁷¹ informing Chamberlain that there was a 'difference of outlook between us in respect to the international problems of the day and also as to the methods by which we should seek to resolve them'.⁷² He was replaced by the more compliant Halifax, a change that caused Churchill to decry the change in parliament and suggest that it would be 'universally believed' that it was 'Signor Mussolini's superior power which has procured the overthrow of the British Foreign Secretary'.⁷³ Despite the removal of Eden, Britain continued to devise a backup plan in case the appeasement of Italy failed. On 25 March 1938 the Committee of Imperial Defence agreed to approve a Chiefs of Staff appraisal of the situation in the Mediterranean and Middle East as a 'basis for the preparation of detailed plans to meet the contingency of war against Italy' and in particular they agreed to strengthen their position at Malta.⁷⁴

The Anglo-Italian Agreements also known as the Easter Accords finally came into effect on 16 April 1938.⁷⁵ A re-affirmation of the Gentleman's Agreement of 2 January 1937, by which the countries had agreed to maintain the status quo in the Mediterranean (including a British commitment not to fortify Cyprus), brought some shallow optimism. The narrator on a *British*

⁶⁸ Letter by Bonham-Carter (19 January 1938) in L.C. Hollis, 'Malta Defences', 21 November 1938, CO 323/1592/54

⁶⁹ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 185.

⁷⁰ Robert Mallett, "Fascist Foreign Policy and Official Italian views of Anthony Eden in the 1930s", p 185.

⁷¹ Norman Rose, "The Resignation of Anthony Eden," *The Historical Journal* 25, no. 4 (1982).

⁷² Anthony Eden: *Copy of Letter from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister*, 20 February 1938, CAB/23/92f252.

⁷³ HC Debate, 22 February 1938, 332 cc235-48

⁷⁴ L.C. Hollis, 'Malta Defences', 21 November 1938, CO 323/1592/54

⁷⁵ "Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Italy - Agreement regarding Questions of Mutual Concern consisting of a Protocol and Annexes, signed at Rome, April 16th, 1938, and Exchanges of Notes relating thereto of the same Date, and Declaration bringing into Force these Instruments, signed at Rome, November 16th, 1938."

Pathe newsreel cheerily declared: 'from now on we're all good friends and good neighbours'.⁷⁶ The Abyssinian rupture was supposedly behind the two countries, and Britain had improved its strategic situation as was the desired outcome of the Chiefs of Staff. It was however the last gasp of the Anglo-Italian inter-war relationship.

In the face of British appeasement, Italy continued to move closer to Nazi Germany when Mussolini visited Germany in January 1938. Although Chamberlain famously secured Hitler's signature on the Munich agreement in September, the Colonial Office was concerned with the defence of Malta in the event of war. They said that:

the importance of Malta to the prestige of the British Empire and to the safety of British interest in the eastern Mediterranean is now fully realised, as shewn by the scale of approved armament and garrison, and it is acknowledged that with Italy as enemy, it would be impossible to send reinforcements to Malta after hostilities had begun.⁷⁷

In January 1939 Chamberlain and Halifax visited Italy as part of a high level delegation. They were received cordially by Mussolini and Ciano, but the possibility of further aggression weighed heavily on Chamberlain's mind. He raised it repeatedly with Mussolini and was not satisfied with the latter's suggestion that the military build-up was defensive in nature.⁷⁸ By 1939 Mussolini was giving speeches which amounted to a form of pre-war rhetoric. In February he gave the 'March to the Oceans' speech in which he again referred to the Mediterranean as *Mare Nostrum* (Our Sea) and evoked imagery of the 'prison of the Mediterranean' where the bars and guardians were British and French possessions.⁷⁹ In March, Andrew Noble at the Foreign Office wrote in response to idea that Italian opinion may be softening towards Britain after the Czech crisis:

If Italy is ever to be weaned from her German allegiance, it will not be by fat bribes – whoever escaped by this road from the clutches of the blackmailer? – but by convincing her that we have the strength and the determination to use it, so that it will be to her advantage to stand on our side. The time for one sided concession to totalitarian bluster is surely past and Signor Mussolini's promises are worth no more than Herr Hitler's.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ British Pathe, "Anglo-Italian Pact Signed In Rome 1938" (United Kingdom: British Pathe, 1938). - The condition in the agreement would not come into force until there had been a settlement in Spain and this condition was met in November when ten thousand Italian soldiers were withdrawn.

⁷⁷ L.C. Hollis, 'Malta Defences', 21 November 1938, CO 323/1592/54

⁷⁸ Foreign Office, 'Visit of Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax to Rome', 19 January 1939, R434, FO 371/23784

⁷⁹ Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 106.

⁸⁰ Minute by A.N. Noble in Sir R Campbell, 'Anglo-Italian Relations', 20 March 1939, R1852, FO 371/23784

Appeasement had failed to pacify Italy and a position of strong opposition and war preparation was forming.

Italy annexed Albania in April 1939 and a British parliamentary committee concluded that Italy was in breach of the 1938 agreement in 'several important respects'.⁸¹ The invasion of Albania was a 'modification as regards national sovereignty' in the Mediterranean. The other breaches were a failure to cease hostile propaganda and Italy's claim for an alteration in the control of the Suez. The final analysis was that Italy had broken the three major conditions of the agreement, and the British government would be justified in renouncing it, as it had in any case 'proved to have made little contribution to European Peace'.⁸² Although it had grounds to do otherwise Whitehall tried to preserve this relationship even after September 1939.⁸³ As Fiore argues, by now the British government 'abandoned all hopes of restoring the traditional friendship that had once existed with Rome and sought instead to neutralise the Fascist threat both diplomatically and militarily'.⁸⁴

The British were aware of the signing of the Pact of Friendship and Alliance between Germany and Italy (the 'Pact of Steel') but the full text was kept secret.⁸⁵ From what was publicly available Noble concluded that 'the terms of the alliance do not contain any particular surprises'. He noted that it paid

lip service to the maintenance of peace, as that term is understood by the Axis but otherwise is a nakedly offensive and defensive alliance in the pre-war style and will no doubt be received as such by the world at large.⁸⁶

On 25 May Ambassador Grandi made a speech in London on the occasion of the alliance full of bellicose language and sentiment directed particularly at France. Cadogan regarded the speech as 'a disgraceful performance to which Count Grandi ought not to have lent himself' and referred

⁸¹ Parliamentary Committee for Spain, 'The Anglo-Italian agreement (report)', 12 April 1939, Archives of the Trades Union Congress - 292/946/17b/8(i)

⁸² Parliamentary Committee for Spain, 'The Anglo-Italian agreement (report)', 12 April 1939, Archives of the Trades Union Congress - 292/946/17b/8(i)

⁸³ Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads: Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 150.

⁸⁴ Massimiliano Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East, 1922-1940*, p 54.

⁸⁵ The Pact, signed on 22 May 1939 in Berlin, had a Secret Supplementary Protocol. Italy entered into this agreement with the idea of winning concessions from other European countries and in the belief that Germany would not start a major conflict before 1943. - M. Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present*, p 283.

⁸⁶ Minute by Noble in Sir N Henderson, 'Italo-German Alliance', 22 May 1939, R4279, FO 371/23808

to Grandi as 'a miserable weak creature'.⁸⁷ After pursuing policies of friendliness, acquiescence, compromise and appeasement, the British government was in the situation it was seeking to avoid for two decades - its Mediterranean Empire and Mediterranean imperial interests under military threat from an expansionist Fascist Italy. As the relationship became more difficult from Abyssinia onwards, it had an increasing effect not only on Malta and Cyprus but other areas of British control and influence of which Egypt and Palestine were particularly important.

The Effect of Italy upon the Anglo-Egyptian relationship

British officials in Egypt observed Italy's success in Abyssinia with great concern and this had implications for Britain's management of Egypt. The Mediterranean Fleet re-positioned from the Grand Harbour in Malta to Alexandria (in Egypt) during the Abyssinian Crisis. The Foreign Office thought that Italy would effectively surround Egypt and Sudan as it had territory east and west. Sir Ronald Campbell, head of the Egyptian Department (1935-1938) noted in July 1936 that if Italy was to establish itself in Abyssinia either with British connivance or in the face of British protest

the example might at first make Egyptians and Sudanese glad to think they had us there to protect them from worse domination, our failure to prevent the violation of treaties and the wanton aggression would, I feel sure, soon make them wonder what, if it came to a 'showdown' is the practical value both of our boasted moral contribution in Egypt and of our protection.⁸⁸

This was typical of the concern expressed by Foreign Office officials and colonial administrators throughout the Mediterranean in relation to matters of prestige and appearance.⁸⁹ The maintenance of empire depended upon both resources and the perception of strength which led to political stability and in turn limited the resources required. Eden told the Cabinet in June 1936 that British prestige in Egypt had suffered and that 'Signor Mussolini's recent success has considerably impressed at our expense the timorous and receptive Egyptian public'.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Alexander Cadogan minute in Sir P. Loraine, 'Italo-German Agreement: Count Grandi's speech', 30 May 1939, R4543, FO 371/23808

⁸⁸ Minute by R.J. Campbell in Sir M Lampson, 'Position of Egypt in event of Italy's absorption of Ethiopia', 5 July 1936, J2663, FO 371/19115

⁸⁹ For instance see Foreign Office, 'British Prestige in Eastern Mediterranean and possible Development of Cyprus: Memorandum reviewing position', 9 November 1937, R 7439, FO371/21142

⁹⁰ Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-40*, p 53.

Egypt figured prominently in fascist foreign policy calculations. In 1934 Mussolini said privately, that ‘...we must have Egypt; we shall only be great if we can get Egypt’.⁹¹ The following year Lampson expressed concern about Italian propaganda in the form of Radio Bari.⁹² During the Arab revolt (1936) it was estimated that 60 per cent of Palestinians with radio sets were listening to the station.⁹³

On 30 April 1937 Lampson wrote to the News Department in London with regard to French and Italian cultural propaganda in Egypt. Leeper believed this report would strengthen the News Department’s hand when they appealed for ‘fresh money’ for their cultural work.⁹⁴ Lampson noted the historical influence of the French in Egypt, and the new influence of Fascist Italy propagated via Italian language schools for both the Italian and Maltese diaspora living in Egypt.⁹⁵ He said that although Italian was not the dominant cultural influence in Egypt, since the ‘revival of the Italian national spirit’ under Mussolini ‘Italian policy in Egypt and the Mediterranean had developed amazingly’ assisted by the annual expenditure of £100,000.⁹⁶ Lampson anticipated an ‘intensified cultural drive to catch Egyptians by means of schools and hospitals etc’ and concluded with the remark, ‘it is humiliating that after fifty-five years of British political predominance in Egypt we are not sufficiently firmly entrenched to meet any Italian advance of this kind’.⁹⁷

The pressure applied by Italy to the political stability of British colonies both formal and informal changed the atmosphere in which negotiations between the Egyptian and British governments took place. Italian warships were passing through the Suez to Abyssinia when, in 1936, ‘Britain, alarmed by Italian expansionism in Ethiopia, agreed to renegotiate the 1922 declaration [Unilateral Declaration of Egyptian Independence]’.⁹⁸ The treaty which arose from these negotiations was concluded ‘under the shade of Mussolini’.⁹⁹ In June 1935 Egyptian Prince Mohammed Ali, heir presumptive of Egypt and Sudan, spoke to British diplomat Hoyer Millar, and ‘alluded to the great efforts which the Italian Government has been making during the last

⁹¹ Steven Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt, 1935-1940 Conflict and Crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean*, p 27.

⁹² Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-40*, p 52.

⁹³ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 483.

⁹⁴ Sir M Lampson, 'Italian and French cultural propaganda in Egypt', 30 April 1937, P2130, FO 395/554

⁹⁵ The report noted that there were 60 Italian schools teaching a total of 12,000 students and only 39 British schools teaching 4,500 students.

⁹⁶ Sir M Lampson, 'Italian and French cultural propaganda in Egypt', 30 April 1937, P2130, FO 395/554 p 64.

⁹⁷ Sir M Lampson, 'Italian and French cultural propaganda in Egypt', 30 April 1937, P2130, FO 395/554 p 66.

⁹⁸ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004), p 197.

⁹⁹ John Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian relations : 1800-1956*, 2nd ed. (London: F. Cass, 1965), p 306.

year or so to increase the importance of their position in Egypt' and said further that such activities were impacting 'unfavourably on the position of Great Britain in Egypt'.¹⁰⁰ According to a Foreign Office report the Italian Legation told the Young Egypt Society¹⁰¹ that 'Italy was prepared to help Egyptians effectively as against Great Britain at this opportune moment, even to the extent of assisting a revolution to secure full Egyptian independence' and they wanted to promote propaganda 'in order to inflame Egyptian public opinion as much as possible against Great Britain'.¹⁰² Italy had reached a position of active opposition against British imperialism in Egypt.

The Abyssinian Crisis softened positions on both sides of the negotiation. Britain wanted to secure a new agreement and placate Egyptian unrest,¹⁰³ while Egyptian leaders were in fear of Italian aggression and more amenable to compromise.¹⁰⁴ The *Wafd*, an Egyptian nationalist party, maintained an anti-British and anti-imperialist stance and promoted student demonstrations.¹⁰⁵ On 13 November 1935, rioting began in Cairo and the unrest brought renewed pressure for a new agreement with the British.¹⁰⁶ Ronald Campbell, head of the Egyptian department in the Foreign Office from 1935-38, observed that the permanent or long-term objectives were:

- (a) to place our position with respect to Egypt on a legal basis and thus exorcise the danger of its being challenged from outside, e.g. in the League of Nations, and (b) thus to ensure our ability to be present unchallenged and in sufficient strength to secure our Imperial Communications.¹⁰⁷

The temporary objective was to avert internal disorder in Egypt, which would occupy British forces otherwise detailed to protect Egypt from Italy. Campbell was concerned that the temporary objective was outweighing the permanent one. A week later Campbell wrote that internal disorder would ensue if negotiations failed, due to the expectations which had built up.

¹⁰⁰ Mr Hoyer Millar, 'Prince Mohammed Ali's views on Italian activities in Egypt', 26 June 1935, J2507, FO 371/19073 p 30.

¹⁰¹ The Young Egypt Society formed in 1933 was a radical nationalist party which promoted Egypt's Arab-Islamic heritage as the foundation of a supra-Egyptian nationalism. Influenced by fascism, it was militaristic and was known for the 'green shirts' of its members. See I. Gershoni and J.P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p 15.

¹⁰² Mr Kelly, 'Pro-Italian and anti-British campaign: "Young Egypt Society"', 4 September 1935, J4831, FO 371/19075

¹⁰³ Selma Botman, *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952*, 1st ed., Contemporary issues in the Middle East (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991), p 38.

¹⁰⁴ Martin Kolinsky, *Britain's war in the Middle East : strategy and diplomacy, 1936-42* (Basingstoke ; New York: Macmillan ; St. Martin's Press, 1999), p 2.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Thornhill, "Informal Empire, Independent Egypt and the Accession of King Farouk," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38, no. 2 (2010): p 283.

¹⁰⁶ Martin Kolinsky, *Britain's war in the Middle East : strategy and diplomacy, 1936-42*, p 37.

¹⁰⁷ Mr Ronad Ian Campbell, 'Anglo-Egyptian Relations', 5 February 1936, J1297/2/16, FO371/20099 p 27.

He argued that failure would expose Britain to the 'greatest unpopularity amongst all nations of the Near East and probably all Moslem countries'.¹⁰⁸ In April 1936 Lampson met with *Wafd* leader Nahas Pasha who 'made an urgent appeal that we should finish [the negotiations] soon and face the world and Italy with *fait accompli* of an alliance'.¹⁰⁹ On 26 August 1936 the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was finally signed.¹¹⁰ The agreement led to the establishment of Egyptian Embassies around the world and limited Britain to a troop presence of 10,000, all of whom had to reside in the Suez Canal Zone.¹¹¹ Egypt's nominal independence was confirmed under the treaty but the British retained a right to defend Egypt against attack.¹¹² High Commissioner Lampson had secured Britain's interests by integrating Egypt in a system of imperial defence and securing and maintaining an unequal relationship.¹¹³

More generally, however, the defence of the Mediterranean was actually slipping down the list of British priorities. At the 1937 Imperial Conference the British government made a commitment to the defence of Australia and New Zealand and this meant they gave priority to the defence of the far-east and Singapore over the Mediterranean.¹¹⁴ The British Chiefs of Staff (COS)¹¹⁵ put it another way; 'no anxieties or risk connected with our interests in the Mediterranean can be allowed to interfere with the despatch of a fleet to the Far East'.¹¹⁶ The implication of this was that in the event of war against Japan, British would give less priority to the Mediterranean and Egypt would have to be self-sufficient.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁸ RJ Campbell, 'Anglo-Egyptian Treaty', 12 February 1936, J1425, FO 371/20099 p 190.

¹⁰⁹ Sir M Lampson, 'Anglo-Egyptian Treaty conversations: Egyptian Anxiety regarding Lake Tsana', 6 April 1936, J2860, FO 371/20103 p 337. - He was particularly concerned that the Italians had gained control of Lake Tsana.

¹¹⁰ JS Somers Cocks, 'Summary of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty signed on August 26, 1936', 28 August 1936, J7309/2/16, FO 371/20118 for full text see Mr Somers Cocks, 'Publication of Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and connected documents', 26 August 1936, J7314, FO 371/20118

¹¹¹ The 'Suez Canal Zone' was not actually a defined area. The Treaty refers to the vicinity of the Canal and refers to a number of bases. The map that accompanies the Treaty shows two training areas one for year around and one for particular months. See "The Treaty of Alliance Between His Majesty, in Respect of the United Kingdom, and His Majesty the King of Egypt", (1936).

¹¹² William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p 197.

¹¹³ Michael Thornhill, "Informal Empire, Independent Egypt and the Accession of King Farouk", p 295.

¹¹⁴ For more on Singapore see Ian Cowman, "Main fleet to Singapore? Churchill, the admiralty, and force Z," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 17, no. 2 (1994), Arthur Jacob Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies: Strategic illusions, 1936-1941*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 1981). and Stephen Roskill, "Imperial defence 1910-1950: Conflict in peace agreement in war," *The Round Table* 60, no. 240 (1970).

¹¹⁵ The Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee was established as a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) in 1923. It consisted of the First Sea Lord, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (British Army) and the Chief of the Air Staff each of whom took turns as chairman of the committee.

¹¹⁶ Martin Kolinsky, *Britain's war in the Middle East : strategy and diplomacy, 1936-42*, p 21.

¹¹⁷ Martin Kolinsky, *Britain's war in the Middle East : strategy and diplomacy, 1936-42*, p 21.

A further aspect of the Italian threat which was seen in Egypt was the appeal of the fascist ideology. In late 1936 the Foreign Office reported on the existence of a 'Blueshirt' organisation in Egypt. The Blue Shirts were a para-military youth auxiliary organised by the *Wafd*.¹¹⁸ David Kelly, a diplomat based in Cairo, noted that they describe themselves as 'above all *Wafdists* [but] they could equally well declare themselves anti-Bolshevist and supporters of an authoritarian State, like the Continental organisation on which they are modelled'.¹¹⁹ The Blue shirts were short lived; formed in 1936 they disappeared by early 1938.¹²⁰ Briefly, however, they were one of the challenges for the British in the inter-war period; a product of the attraction of right-wing ideology in the colonies. In 1938, Italian propaganda continued to reach Egypt. 'It is within our knowledge' said a Foreign Office minute:

that Italian propaganda and espionage are carried out on a large scale by a propaganda bureau Large sums of money are spent by the Italians on attempts to influence the Egyptian press. Many Arabic newspapers receive regular subsidies from the Italians.¹²¹

Mussolini undertook a public relations trip to Libya in 1937 where a Berber chief presented him with the 'Sword of Islam' a weapon made in Florence. During the trip the Italian media called Mussolini the 'protector of Islam' but the pro-British Egyptian press was critical of this title and wary of the Italian military threat in Libya.¹²² After the Anglo-Italian Easter agreement of March 1938 the level of Italian anti-British propaganda in the Middle East dropped markedly.¹²³ In May Lampson noted the attitude of the Egyptian Government of Muhammad Mahmud towards Italy had been 'entirely satisfactory'.¹²⁴ In 1939 the popularity of Radio Bari also began to wane. The mantle was taken up in part by Germany, which up until September 1939 was spending £3000 a month on propaganda.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ James P. Jankowski, "The Egyptian blue shirts and the Egyptian Wafd, 1935–1938," *Middle Eastern Studies* 6, no. 1 (1970).

¹¹⁹ Mr Kelly, 'Blueshirt organisation in Egypt', 24 October 1936, J8299, FO 371/20120 p 418.

¹²⁰ James P. Jankowski, "The Egyptian blue shirts and the Egyptian Wafd, 1935–1938", p 77.

¹²¹ Foreign Office Minute, 'Italian Propaganda', 3 January 1938, J38/38/16, FO 371/21980 p 6.

¹²² Nir Arielli, "Beyond Mare Nostrum: Ambitions and Limitations in Fascist Italy's Middle Eastern Policy", p 396-7. For the attitude of the British press see I. Gershoni and J.P. Jankowski, "Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s ". (Stanford University Press, 2010), e-book.2010, p 24, Chapter: 'The external Context'

¹²³ I. Gershoni and J.P. Jankowski, "Confronting Fascism in Egypt." p 24, Chapter: 'The external Context'

¹²⁴ I. Gershoni and J.P. Jankowski, "Confronting Fascism in Egypt." p 25, Chapter: 'The external Context'

¹²⁵ Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's propaganda abroad*, p 102. For further information on Nazi Propaganda in the Middle East see J. Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (Yale University Press, 2009).

As an informal colony in Africa, in close proximity to Abyssinia, Egypt fully felt the effects of the Italian aggression in the central and eastern Mediterranean. There were basic strategic threats to Egypt, but also a high level of propaganda and other disruptive activity that directly affected British prestige, not an intangible, but a valuable commodity which officials there tried to preserve. The negotiation of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty was conducted and resolved with a backdrop of aggressive Italian imperialism nearby. The history of the Anglo-Egyptian relationship bolsters the argument that Italy constrained and limited Britain's scope of activity and policy-making in the Mediterranean. Britain had to fight off Italian influence and conducting negotiations with Egypt in a pressure situation.

Italy and Palestine

Italian expansionism also affected Palestine, the least stable of the British colonies in the region. The effect of Italy on Palestine has to be seen in the context of the other serious problems endemic to this mandate. There were major outbreaks of unrest in both 1929 and 1936, with the most obvious driver being a fundamental clash between the Arab population and the Zionist settler communities, one established and one immigrating in increasingly greater numbers. Overlaying this was the British Mandate system, which was neither a formal colony nor independent government, but a form of trusteeship sanctioned by the League of Nations. Such an environment of antagonism was easily exploited by both Italy and Germany as they sought to damage British regional interests.

The 1929 outbreak of disorder was sparked by a run of religious holidays for both the Jewish and Muslim communities. Reinforcements were sent from Malta and Cyprus to deal with this violence which 'although it arose from conditions established by the mandate, was definitely communal in character – a clash of racial and religious animosities'.¹²⁶ The violence was not enough to negate the considerable push factors which resulted in a wave of refugees from Europe. Jewish immigration continued when Palestine became a Mandate and accelerated sharply from 5000 in 1930 to 62,000 in 1935 as European persecution grew.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ C.W. Gwynn, *Imperial policing* (Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1934), p 367.

¹²⁷ Robert D. King and Robin W. Kilson, *The statecraft of British imperialism : essays in honour of Wm. Roger Louis* (London ; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1999), p 171.

Continued Jewish immigration caused friction between Britain and the Arab population and resulted in the Arab Uprising (1936-39). The uprising had two phases beginning with a general strike and then in 1937 turning into a more general rebellion. The Arab rebellion was actively supported by German and Italian intelligence¹²⁸ and Arab youth were ‘influenced by the example of organized youth found in Italy and Germany’.¹²⁹

George Rendel, head of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office (1930-38), analysed Italian activity during the initial revolt from April to October of 1936. He suggested that Italian propaganda was ‘partly due to jealousy and resentment at having received no Mandate or Colony after Versailles and consequent determination to make the most of the “open door” provisions of the Palestine Mandate’. He noted the ‘ambition of Italy to be regarded as a great Power and to be ready to step in should any opportunity occur of her pegging out political or territorial claims anywhere in the Middle East’.¹³⁰ The British were keeping tabs on Italian activity in 1936 but at this stage were not expressing great alarm. In Rendel’s view the Arabs of Palestine felt ‘that they have their backs to wall owing to the strength of Jewish influence against them’ and were ‘only too ready to turn to any foreign Power’ which they thought they could make use of against Britain.¹³¹ He also expressed the view that the failure to suspend Jewish immigration had ‘done more to help Italian propaganda in Palestine and Arabia generally than the expenditure of many hundred thousand pounds of Italian money’.¹³² The British were in a difficult position of their own making in Palestine and Italy was happy to exploit this. Italy provided approximately £157,578 in funding, disseminated anti-British propaganda through Radio Bari, and planned to supply arms as part of an explicit attempt by Rome to destabilize the British position in the Middle East.¹³³

In 1935 the situation in Palestine was very difficult. A Palestine Police Summary from December 1935 noted a:

¹²⁸ Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital crossroads : Mediterranean origins of the Second World, 1935-1940*, p 17.

¹²⁹ Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict*, 5th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), p 131.

¹³⁰ George W Rendel, 'Question of Italian support for Palestine Arabs', 12 November 1936, E7178, FO 371/20018 p 17.

¹³¹ George W Rendel, 'Question of Italian support for Palestine Arabs', 12 November 1936, E7178, FO 371/20018 p 17.

¹³² George W Rendel, 'Question of Italian support for Palestine Arabs', 12 November 1936, E7178, FO 371/20018 p 17.

¹³³ Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-40*, p 117-30.

genuine feeling of apprehension amongst the Arabs as to their political, social and economic future in Palestine, and it is openly said that if the Zionist policy continues, the Arabs are doomed to expulsion and destruction.¹³⁴

This rather plain statement of the underlying issues in Palestine held true for the entire inter-war period. In late 1936, there was a 'lull' in both the strike and violence against the British long enough to allow the Peel Royal Commission to recommend partition which did not occur.¹³⁵

The Foreign Office opposed partition and Italy also voiced some concerns. Britain wanted assurances that Italy would refrain from creating trouble in Palestine. Italy replied by saying that:

the Italian Government's chief objection to giving such an assurance is their fear that under a scheme of partition H.M.G. may take advantage of the establishment of a friendly Jewish State to strengthen their strategical positions in Palestine e.g. at Haifa.¹³⁶

Sir John Shuckburgh, Deputy Permanent Under Secretary in the Colonial Office wrote on the file containing the Italian statement that the 'Foreign Office are likely to make the most of any point that may help them in their campaign against partition'.¹³⁷ The official mind in relation to Palestine was schizophrenic.

The violence resumed and progressed to the stage where, in 1938, control of sections of Palestine was lost to the British who only restored order through 'drastic counter-terrorist measures'.¹³⁸ These internal problems in Palestine were exacerbated by external pressures and by British policy.¹³⁹ Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Cyril Deverell, specifically refers to the role of Italy in 1936 noting that 'the Foreign Office must decide if the tension with Italy is

¹³⁴ Criminal Investigation Department - Jerusalem, 'Palestine Police Summary', 4 December 1935, E19, FO 371/20018

¹³⁵ James Jankowski, "The Government of Egypt and the Palestine Question, 1936-1939," *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 4 (Oct) (1981): p 430.

¹³⁶ Colonial Office, '1938 - Palestine - Italian Activities - Conversations with Italy', 7 March 1938, 9, CO 733/374 - their second objection was that Mussolini was meant to be the protector of Islam.

¹³⁷ Colonial Office, '1938 - Palestine - Italian Activities - Conversations with Italy', 7 March 1938, 9, CO 733/374

¹³⁸ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's declining empire*, p 57. First General Dill and then General Wavell were in charge of the military in Palestine during this period, and each wrote a report. General Dill wrote about the disturbances in 1936, and General Wavell wrote about events from September 1937 until the end of March 1938. See John G Dill, 'Palestine Disturbances, 1936 - Report of GOC, British Forces in Palestine and Transjordan', 0176/466, WO 32/9401 and Archibald P Wavell, 'Report of the Operations Carried out by the British forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan in aid of the Civil power from 12th September 1937 to 31 March 1938', OR/PAL/7869/G, WO 32/9401

¹³⁹ Elizabeth Monroe, *The Mediterranean in politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p 199. Monroe points out that Hitler caused the British more damage than Italy albeit it was unintended. By persecuting Jews so heavily in Europe, Germany intensified the disputes in Palestine. Monroe emphasises that it is about sheer numbers of immigrants. See p 85-6

sufficiently eased to allow of the despatch of armoured fighting vehicles from Egypt to Palestine, and Battalions from Malta'.¹⁴⁰

On 20 June 1936 Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden circulated a memo describing the situation in the Middle East generally.¹⁴¹ He reported a 'wave of sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs' in Iraq.¹⁴² King Ibn Saud (of Saudi Arabia) was said to have been 'in an extremely difficult position'.¹⁴³ The memo noted that 'the importance to His Majesty's Government of the Arabian coast of the Red Sea has also recently become ever greater than before owing to Italian expansion in Abyssinia'. It said that the establishment of Italian influence on both sides of the Red Sea would seriously endanger British maritime communications with the East'. In relation to Egypt, Eden noted that although the official position has been sympathetic, the 'feelings of the Egyptian people' were 'entirely on the side of the Arabs'.¹⁴⁴ Palestine was regionally influential, a part of events external to the formal British colonies of Malta and Cyprus but exploited by Italy.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the growing Italian threat after the Abyssinian Crisis. This was a period when the British met increasingly open Italian hostility with determined appeasement. This policy had a range of effects, which eroded Britain's position within the Mediterranean Empire. As open confrontation with Italy was undesirable, Italian 'misbehaviour' and propaganda could not be combatted openly. Italian activities caused concern amongst British administrators and so they sought to increase local control.

It also meant that Britain shied away from overtly countering Italian propaganda. This propaganda, led by Radio Bari, was both virulent and targeted. It represented a nexus between the external and internal threats to Britain's Mediterranean imperial assets. It was a mechanism whereby external pressure from Italy was able to interact with and exacerbate the internal threat.

Failure to properly confront Italian aggression also compromised defence planning. Reviews of British defence policy occurred in a political atmosphere which favoured Italian appeasement. The reality of Italian enmity was not confronted, and the preparedness of Britain was only

¹⁴⁰ Sir Cyril Deverell, 'Palestine Disturbances 1936-38, General Policy', 30 June 1936, 0176/457, WO32/4176

¹⁴¹ Anthony Eden, 'Cabinet - Palestine - Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs', 20 June 1936, C.P. (36), CO 733/312/3

¹⁴² Anthony Eden, 'Cabinet - Palestine - Memorandum', 20 June 1936, C.P. (36), CO 733/312/3 p 114.

¹⁴³ Anthony Eden, 'Cabinet - Palestine - Memorandum', 20 June 1936, C.P. (36), CO 733/312/3 p 115.

¹⁴⁴ Anthony Eden, 'Cabinet - Palestine - Memorandum', 20 June 1936, C.P. (36), CO 733/312/3 p 118.

salvaged through the military's propensity for contingency planning. In the latter stages of the Anglo-Italian relationship the position of Italy became increasingly evident and those in the Foreign Office became disillusioned. Despite this trend, it was Eden who was sidelined and Chamberlain who continued and extended appeasement. Chamberlain's position took the Italian policy of Vansittart and applied it to another. Whereas Vansittart wanted to throw a bone to the least vicious dog, Chamberlain sought to throw one to all of them. Although Chamberlain's policy was the worst of the three, it was the one that prevailed.

Finally, this chapter has considered the regional effect of Italy's position after Abyssinia. In Egypt and Palestine Italy was particularly active. Military assistance had to be sent from Malta and Cyprus themselves, to suppress dissent and violence. In these troubled territories Italy was able to exploit division. The determined pursuit of appeasement compromised Britain's freedom of action in the Mediterranean. British policy in this region has to be considered in this paradigm, a significant constraint upon a great colonial power. In the formal colonies of Malta and Cyprus, the focus of the next two chapters, the effect of Italy was subtler, but still important. In Malta the Italian government sponsored schools and other cultural organisations as it attempted to promote the benefits of fascist Italy. It also took part in more direct activity such as intelligence gathering. This activity caused anxiety with the British who actively worked to limit this influence. In Cyprus Italian activity damaged the British aura of invincibility and encouraged proponents of *enosis* that change might be possible in a world where the British Empire was not all that it once was. As the Italian threat became more concrete it also affected strategic planning as naval bases in Cyprus became a distinct possibility.

In the last half of the 1930s the external threat from Italy came to its full fruition. The success in Abyssinia, the damage to Britain's reputation, the continued attacks through propaganda, and the disruptive activities in Egypt and Palestine made up a multi-faceted external threat to preservation of Britain's Mediterranean Empire. Faced with a worsening strategic and global environment, Britain chose to avoid a direct clash. Seeking to avoid conflict and concerned for the future, it looked within, and tightened colonial controls in its Mediterranean colonies as it attempted to protect 'all it had'.

Chapter 4 – Unrest and Violence in Malta and Cyprus from 1912 to 1931

This chapter looks at events in Malta and Cyprus, at the colonial level, from 1912 to 1931. It explores nationalist unrest, highpoints of violence and examines the methods by which Britain maintained control. Neither the Maltese nor the Cypriots were able to cast off the British in this period; this is a look at what Antoinette Burton calls ‘resistance and failure’.¹ The chapter will consider three episodes of violence, one in Malta in 1919 and two in Cyprus in 1912, and 1931. In both places these events caused major constitutional change, but of a very different character. While in Malta there was a consistent inclination towards the grant of (limited) self-representation, in Cyprus the violence of 1931 was met with strong and sustained political repression. The trouble in the Mediterranean colonies was constant, and at times of strain, it broke out in violent incidents. The high level of discontent and agitation was driven in part by economic concerns. The financial problems, felt on the ground in very practical ways, were the base layer, over which political grievances were laid.

Ashton and Stockwell correctly suggest that some countries in the inter-war period found themselves going backwards politically and constitutionally. The Mediterranean, they say is an example of these ‘forward and reverse thrusts’.² They put Malta and Cyprus together but in their brief treatment (as they are focussing on broader themes) they elide the differences between the places, which this chapter will also explore. What was common between the colonies was the high level of challenge and dissent. This was met with firm control as Britain protected its interests.

Malta and the ‘illusory constitutions’³

In early 20th century Malta bread was sold by weight and the standard measure was the *rotolo*, a southern Italian measure (approximately 891 grams). This food staple, measured by an Italian standard, represented the two parts of the motivation for internal unrest in Malta after the war –

¹ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 214.

² S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p xlv

³ CO to Plumer, 'Labour and Economic Situation', 9 July 1919, CO41637, CO 158/410 ascribed by author to Mr Walter Devonshire Ellis, Principal Clerk at the Colonial Office, Assistant Secretary 1920-31

firstly the cost of living and secondly the place of Italian culture within Malta. These material and ideological factors were the fundamental drivers for the outbreak of unrest in 1919 considered below.

Malta provides an opportunity to examine the operation of the British Empire in the Mediterranean at the colonial level and the challenges it faced. Despite its strong control of this 'fortress colony' Britain had to contend with colonial nationalism coupled with the Catholic Church, the nationalist party and the *italianita* movement, economic challenges and the influence of Fascist Italy, only 80 kilometres away. The violent riot of 1919 was successfully met by the machinery of British colonial governance in Malta. Britain, however, was never able to successfully implement a long-term system of government to placate the Maltese. Darwin suggests that imperial governance was a series of compromises and constitutional reforms.⁴ This is what occurred in Malta. In a survey of British Commonwealth Affairs written in 1937, historian W.K. Hancock suggested that in 1919 Malta 'represented in miniature the nationalisms which were challenging and distracting a victorious and tranquillity-craving empire'.⁵ In Hancock's mind the plateau of imperial ascendancy was being ruined by nationalists. In reality this challenge was integral to empire.

This does not mean that the Empire was breaking apart. Britain never lost control of Malta, and indeed it swiftly put down violent unrest and political agitation, but the series of concessions, the constant constitutional re-arrangements and later the inclination to Italian appeasement show that the Mediterranean Empire was subject to continued internal and external challenge.⁶ It is these challenges and the response which this and the subsequent chapter seek to identify. It will also suggest that while the acquisition of Malta, and the suppression of early forms of dissent was through the use of naked military power, the British evolved to the skilful implementation of legal and constitutional systems to enforce its control. These imperial constitutions were designed to quell demands for self-rule, but they never gave away real power. British governments instead maintained dual systems of government, and they alone retained the right to decide on the state of exception, and suspend normal governance. They retained

⁴ J. Darwin, *Unfinished Empire*, p xiii.

⁵ W.K. and Latham Hancock, R.T.E., *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* (Oxford University Press, 1937), p 407.

⁶ There was an apparent disjunction in the policy of the British government which appeased Italian Fascism but strongly repressed local dissent. This contradiction was highlighted by local politicians including Nerik Mizzi in Malta who made a statement in the Council of Government titled *la proverbiale ipocrisia inglese* [the proverbial English hypocrisy]. See Henry Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*, p 161.

sovereignty, but constantly put forward new constitutions to legitimise their control and maintain British hegemony.

Maltese Riots – *Sette Giugno*

By 1918 Malta had been a part of the British Empire for over one hundred years, but in that time, amidst an enthusiastic adoption of colonial identity Malta had also experienced constant internal dissent of different kinds. The post-war climate of self-determination exacerbated this problem for the British Government and the Colonial Office. A high point of civil unrest occurred when riots broke out in Valletta, the Maltese capital, on 7 June 1919.⁷ The British Military fired upon the rioters and four people were killed and eight injured. The event, now known to the Maltese as *Sette Giugno* (Seven June), has become a symbol of efforts for Maltese independence and has been marked by a public holiday in Malta since 1989. As an event it has been claimed by modern nationalists, but the motivations for unrest went beyond bare nationalism and the incident provides an opportunity to consider unrest and control.

The unrest was driven by Maltese nationalist elites who were agitating for greater self-government in 1919.⁸ They considered Italian language and culture as part of Maltese identity, but they were ‘Maltese’ nationalists who believed in a unique Maltese character and the right to self-government.

The other and more powerful motivation for the riots was the economy, jobs, price of living and food prices. There is a tension in the analysis of these events between the role of ideology, and that of the economy, but the two can work together. One of the dynamics in common to Malta and Cyprus was the way in which the cost of living, a basic concern of the working and rural classes, was directed by nationalist elites. In Malta people attacked buildings associated with flour millers and tore down British flags. The ideological and the material worked in tandem. The

⁷ As pointed out by E.P Thompson the terms riot and mob have to be used advisedly by historians as they can simplify the picture of people engaged in insurrection who had complex motives and behaviours which should not be overlooked. See E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present*, no. 50 (1971). Linked to this issue is the nature of the primary sources used for this section. Written from a decidedly British point of view they demand caution lest one unconsciously reproduces a ‘counter-insurgency’ code. See Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): p 1479.

⁸ This association of elites with nationalist causes was a feature across Empire. In India, for example, industrialists and the bourgeoisie aligned themselves with nationalist causes, while in Cyprus it was the elite Greek Cypriots who pursued *Enosis*. see D. Lockwood, *The Indian Bourgeoisie: A Political History of the Indian Capitalist Class in the Early Twentieth Century* (I. B. Tauris, 2012).

unhappy and disenfranchised looked for someone to blame in Malta as they had done in England in the past.

Food riots were a common phenomenon in England and Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For E.P. Thompson food shortages or price spikes represented a failure of the 'moral economy'.⁹ This is the idea that there was a traditional view of social norms which included the way in which different parties behaved economically.¹⁰ Such a view led to a popular consensus as to what were legitimate practices in food production and the notion of 'common weal' which was supported by paternalistic authorities and 're-echoed' by the people.¹¹ Whereas food prices were the fundamental pre-occupation of those rioting in Scotland, for example, in Malta food prices were part of a range of factors. To adapt Thompson, it is reasonable to suggest that in Malta there was something that could be called the 'fortress economy', that is, a community standard or expectation about the economy, jobs, and food prices in a fortress colony under the control of the British. When the British administration failed to properly manage these economic pressures, and allowed the price of food to rise, then the trade-off between political autonomy and economic benefit ceased to be reasonable. While the nationalist elites may have wanted independence regardless of economic conditions, for the working classes a booming military economy went a long way to allaying political concerns.

In Malta in 1919 pressures began to mount. There was unemployment in the docks, an increase in living costs, and industrial action by policeman and postmen.¹² The police had been offered a war bonus which they were not prepared to accept and university students were also unhappy as they wanted the ability to obtain the degree of Doctor without the preliminary degree of Bachelor.¹³ Added to this Malta suffered a very serious economic recession in 1919 due to the sharp reduction in military expenditure.¹⁴ The parallels with the 1931 Cypriot riot occurring soon after the Great Depression are clear.

⁹ E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century".

¹⁰ E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century", p 79.

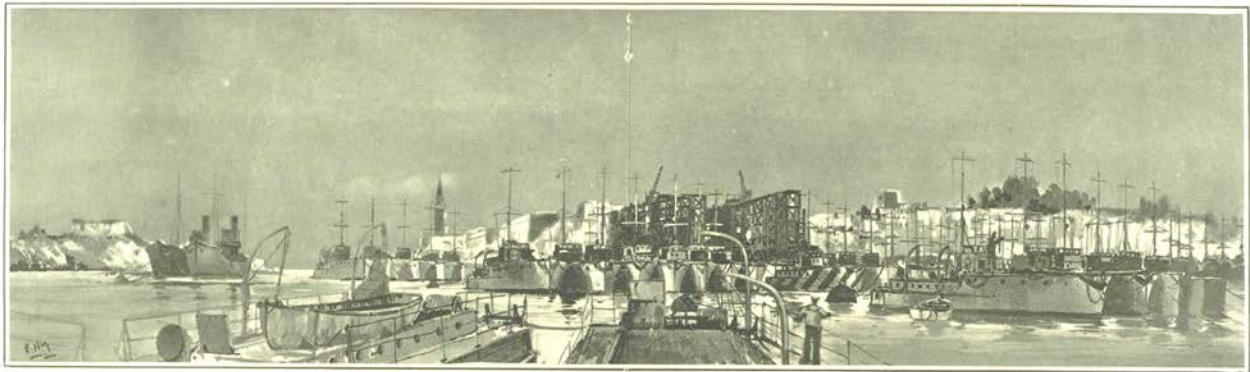
¹¹ Food riots also occurred in Scotland in 1847 and in Germany in the late 1840's. - See Eric Richards, *The last Scottish food riots*, Past & Present Supplement (Oxford: Past and Present Society, 1982). and Manfred Gailus, "Food Riots in Germany in the Late 1840s," *Past & Present*, no. 145 (1994).

¹² Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 74.

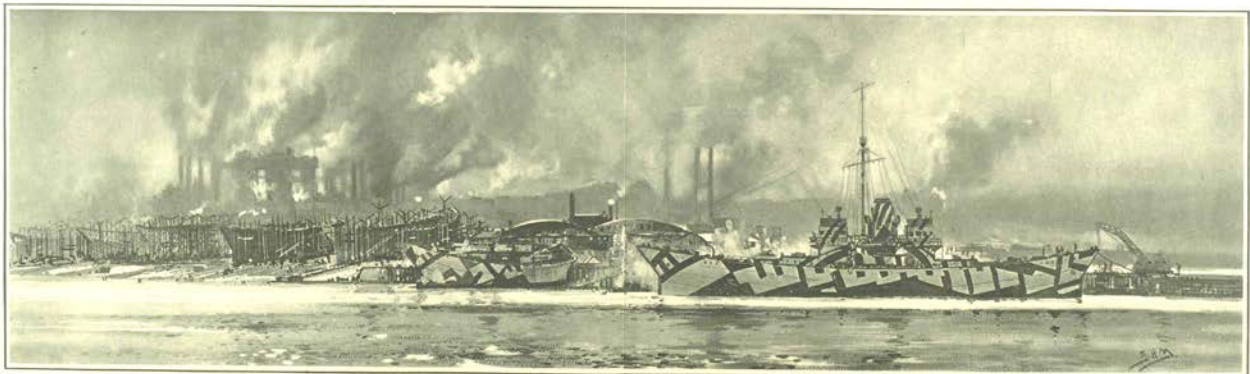
¹³ Hunter-Blair to Milner, 'Rioting in Malta', 10 June 1919, CO 34552, CO 158/409

¹⁴ Alexander Apostolides, "The growth of two small economies in the Great Depression", p 19.

THE REDUCTION OF NAVAL EXPENDITURE: IDLE PATROL BOATS AT MALTA: NEW CONVOYING SHIPS NOT REQUIRED.
DRAWN BY FRANK H. MANN, R.E.A.



THE EFFECT OF ORDERS TO "REDUCE TO CARE AND MAINTENANCE PARTS": STAGNATION AT MALTA AFTER FOUR-AND-A-HALF YEARS OF FEVERISH ACTIVITY.



RENDERED UNNECESSARY BY PEACE: THE NEW "KIL" CLASS OF PATROL GUN-BOATS, WITH BOW AND STEER EXACTLY ALIKE, AND DUMMY COUNTERPARTS OF ALL DECK STRUCTURES.

Figure 4 – Reduction of Naval Expenditure

Source: *Illustrated London News*, 8 November 1919

Political leaders in Malta understood the social factors at work and feared civil unrest. Jos Howard of the Malta Emigration Committee wrote to the Maltese government a month before the riots asking that new Maltese battalions be raised to stave off a crisis. He noted that the 'steady discharges from the Royal Air Force, the Labour Battalions and His Majesty's Dockyard' were 'daily increasing the number of unemployed in the Island, at a time when the cost of living does not show any appreciable signs of decline'.¹⁵ This solution was not adopted.

As the tension increased General Plumer, a career soldier, was appointed Governor of Malta in March 1919, continuing a steady tradition of appointing military men to lead the colony.¹⁶ Although prominent in the aftermath of these events he was not on the Island when they

¹⁵ Jos Howard to Hunter-Blair enclosed in despatch from Hunter-Blair to Milner, 'Emigration', 3 May 1919, CO 33384, CO 158/409 – The King's Own Malta Regiment Militia and the Royal Malta Artillery were already in existence, but Howard was obviously suggesting new and additional battalions.

¹⁶ General Sir Herbert Plumer was appointed to Governor in March and replaced Field Marshall the Right Hon. Lord Methuen. Plumer commanded troops in France in the Italian Expeditionary Force see "General Plumer's New Post", *The Times*, 15 March 1919, 10 In 1925 he would become High Commissioner of the British Mandate for Palestine

occurred, as he did not arrive until 10 June. The military leader on the ground was Major-General Walter Charles Hunter-Blair and he, along with the Maltese Police, was aware of the immediate possibility of trouble on 7 June, and took precautionary measures. As he later wrote in a report '75 men from the Malta Composite Battalion were moved from Floriana to Valletta and kept in reserve at the Castille'.¹⁷

A Commission of Enquiry later found that on 7 June a section of the crowd planned a demonstration against the Maltese and British governments, the *Daily Malta Chronicle* and against flour millers. They found that it was widely known that violence was going to occur on that day and the attack on the newspaper office was planned at the Dockyard. The Commission suggested that the use of iron and rivets as missiles indicated that many of these protesters belonged to the working classes.¹⁸

The events of the day unfolded in the following manner. On Saturday 7 June 1919 an assembly was held to consider Colonial Secretary Lord Milner's reply to a resolution adopted by an assembly convened by Dr Filippo Sciberras in the days prior.¹⁹ The meeting of the assembly on 7 June took place at the premises of *Giovine Malta* 'a Club having for its primary object the diffusion of Italian ideas'.²⁰ Although the club aimed to promote Italian culture and language, which it viewed as part of Maltese identity, it did not advocate for union with Italy.²¹ *Giovine Malta* was situated in the heart of Valletta and was, ironically very close to the local police station. The meeting was advertised; the populace was urged to gather and support the assembly and some two to three thousand people gathered.²² Despite the anticipation and precautions a riot broke out in *Strada Forni* and the Palace Square, both a short distance from the club.²³ The crowd initially demanded that shops close and that Union Jacks be lowered. They then attacked buildings when the occupants did not comply, and the police, unable to maintain order, asked for military assistance. The Commission report gave the impression that the group was moving from building to building inflicting damage and targeting Union Jacks in particular. Buildings such as the public library had their windows smashed as the crowd demanded that the Union

¹⁷ Hunter-Blair to Milner, 'Rioting in Malta', 10 June 1919, CO 34552, CO 158/409 . The Castille was the British Military Headquarters in Valletta

¹⁸ Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances 7 & 8 June', 20 September 1919, CO 55627, CO 158/411 paragraph 58.

¹⁹ Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances', 13 June 1919, 36593, CO 158/409

²⁰ Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances', 13 June 1919, 36593, CO 158/409

²¹ Michael Galea, "The Genesis of the Circolo 'La Giovine Malta'," *Journal of the Malta Historical Society* 14, no. 2 (2005).

²² Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances 7 & 8 June', 20 September 1919, CO 55627, CO 158/411 paragraph 9, 14.

²³ Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances 7 : 8 June', 19 July 1919, CO 42486, CO 158/410 p 253.

Jack be lowered. Two policemen that tried to 'prevent the disturbances' at the library were 'overpowered and severely beaten'.²⁴ Other obviously British buildings such as the Union Club and the Lyceum were also targeted. At the Meteorological Station the flag, having been removed, was burnt in the street. Rioters were reported to have attacked the Palace and the offices of the *Daily Malta Chronicle*. Numerous private houses were also attacked including in particular the residence of Antonio Cassar Torreggiani who was the head of the Flour Control Office.²⁵ This target reaffirms the economic aspect of the unrest as the rioters were clearly acting in response to food prices.²⁶

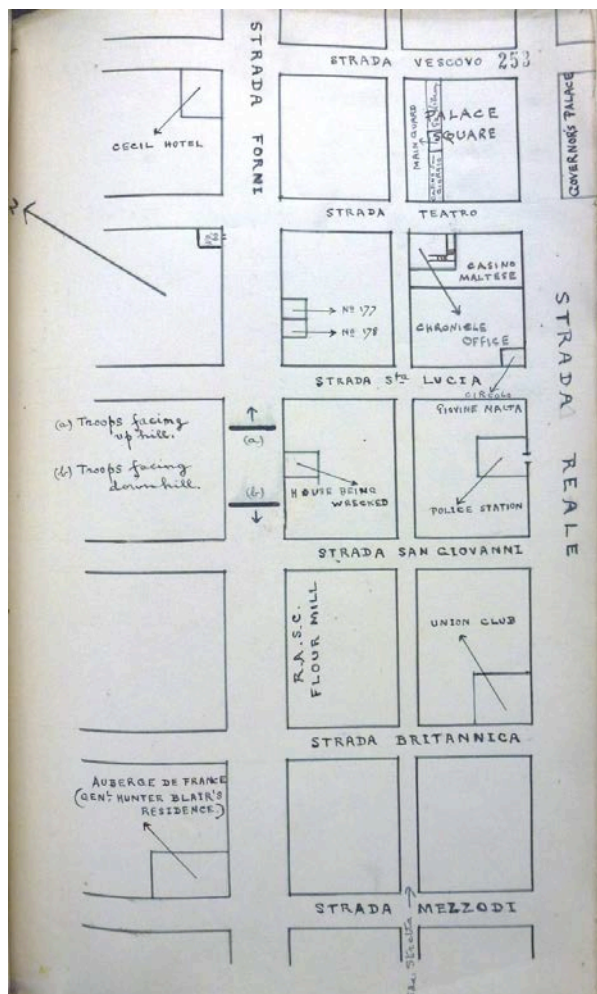


Figure 5 - A rough map showing the location of the unrest.

Source: Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances 7 : 8 June', 19 July 1919, CO 42486, CO 158/410 p 253

²⁴ Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances 7 & 8 June', 20 September 1919, CO 55627, CO 158/411 paragraph 14.

²⁵ Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances', 13 June 1919, 36593, CO 158/409 para 5.

²⁶ Joseph Falzon and David Lanzon, "Price and Quantity Indices of Food Imports in Malta: 1856 – 1938," *Journal of Maltese History* Volume 2, no. 2 (2011): p 13.

At *Strada Forni*, the British troops were formed up in the street and were being attacked by a large group throwing missiles. The Court of Enquiry report claims that shots were fired from the crowd. In any event British troops fired without being ordered to do so, resulting in two killed and eight wounded.²⁷ At Palace Square, a focal point for the city of Valletta a party of eleven troops 'found a crowd of several hundreds engaged in wrecking, burning and looting the contents of the pro-British *Daily Malta Chronicle* office'.²⁸ The troops occupied the building, a tactical error as they were quickly barricaded inside the building by the rioters; they discovered that there was a gas leak in the building, and the rioters set the barricade on fire. An order was given to fire at the barricade to try and disperse the mob. This was effective but one of the rioters was killed.²⁹

Later in the day a deputation of Maltese notables contacted Hunter-Blair and successfully negotiated for the withdrawal of the military in return for dispersing the crowd.³⁰ On the next day, after receiving the deputation again, Hunter-Blair addressed a crowd outside the palace warning them that force would be used to maintain order and preserve property but also promising an inquiry into the events of 7 June.³¹ This mollified the assembled crowd who partially dispersed but later that day a crowd again gathered and badly damaged the residence of Colonel Francia the proprietor of a flour mill despite the presence of 200 men of the Royal Malta Artillery.³² These Maltese troops, who were unwilling to intervene against their own people, were relieved by British Marines who restored order. Indeed the use of naval troops was a prominent feature of the British regaining control. Violence, used as a short term solution, was later followed by political repression, suspension of the constitution and constitutional reform. This was the standard pattern in Malta.

By 10 June there were 800 navy personnel in Malta, some of whom were from the battleship *H.M.S. Benbow*.³³ Hunter-Blair ordered strict press censorship and banned public meetings in the immediate aftermath of the riots.³⁴ In a telegram to Milner he indicated that the disturbance was political 'but the chief factors' were 'dearness of bread, [and] unemployment'. This caused a

²⁷ Plumer to Milner, 'Recent Disturbances - Military Court of Enquiry', 21 July 1919, CO43929, CO 158/410 p 277.

²⁸ Plumer to Milner, 'Recent Disturbances - Military Court of Enquiry', 21 July 1919, CO43929, CO 158/410

²⁹ Plumer to Milner, 'Recent Disturbances - Military Court of Enquiry', 21 July 1919, CO43929, CO 158/410

³⁰ Hunter-Blair to Milner, 'Rioting in Malta', 10 June 1919, CO 34552, CO 158/409

³¹ Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances', 13 June 1919, 36593, CO 158/409 para 6.

³² On 8 June 1919 in Hamrum (two miles from Valletta) the residence belonging to a miller, Mr Farrugia, was 'sacked' and later his flour mill was set on fire. See Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances', 13 June 1919, 36593, CO 158/409 at paragraph 7 of Hunter-Blair's report.

³³ Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances', 13 June 1919, 36593, CO 158/409 para 7-8.

³⁴ Plumer to Milner, 'Recent Disturbances - Military Court of Enquiry', 21 July 1919, CO43929, CO 158/410

‘general and strong anti-British feeling’ to be ‘openly displayed’ by the Maltese.³⁵ By 11 June 1919, the Maltese administration was subsidising the price of bread at 4½ pence per *rotolo* in an attempt to limit public unrest, a measure that General Plumer described as absolutely necessary.³⁶ On 13 June 1919, Plumer published a proclamation which, referring to the actions of the rioters, expressed ‘regret that there has been hitherto no general expression of protest, or disapproval of these outrages’.³⁷ Condemnation of the actions of the soldiers was left to nationalist elites who were angry about the deaths and described those killed as murdered martyrs.³⁸ Dr Pullicino, a nationalist politician, criticised the political system imposed by the British and spoke of:

the might by which England has constantly dominated over Malta oppressing this population and despising rights of the Maltese; a constitution not worth its name which has been imposed upon us and which has been handled by Government according to its pleasure.³⁹

This was the ‘eyes-wide-open realpolitik’ of the colonised identified by Burton. Pullicino blamed the riots on the high cost of foodstuffs, caused by government policy. A second Maltese politician, Dalli Antonio, suggested that the cause of the riot was political and that bad administration led to a bad economy. He also suggested that the damage to buildings not associated with food proved that this was not looting, but was a protest of a political nature. Neither politician made any mention of Italy. Writing to Milner, Plumer was quick to make his characterisation of events clear. The disturbances, he noted:

have shown that the labour and economic situation is such to make the people, naturally credulous as they are, easily led by agitators to ascribe all their privations to the shortcoming and general policy of the British Government. This high price of the necessities of life and an increasing amount of unemployment are here, as elsewhere the causes of the general state of discontent which certainly prevails.⁴⁰

Hunter-Blair wrote in a report that in his opinion:

the incidents of the 7th and 8th though doubtless fomented by the food situation, were due primarily to the speeches and propoganda of the so called Nationalist leaders and to the

³⁵ Hunter-Blair to Milner, 'Rioting in Malta', 10 June 1919, CO 34552, CO 158/409

³⁶ Plumer to Milner, 'Bread Subsidy', 11 June 1919, CO 35063, CO 158/409

³⁷ Plumer to Milner, 'Recent Disturbances at Malta', 27 June 1919, CO 41175, CO 158/409

³⁸ Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances 7 June', 17 July 1919, CO43920, CO 158/410

³⁹ Translation of speech by Dr Pullicino enclosed in Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances 7 June', 17 July 1919, CO43920, CO 158/410 - This speech and others of a similar type were denied publication on the grounds that they were calculated to incite further disorder.

⁴⁰ Letter from Plumer to Milner in CO to Plumer, 'Labour and Economic Situation', 9 July 1919, CO41637, CO 158/410 p 35.

inflammatory articles published in the local and vernacular press under (according to my information) their auspices and direction.⁴¹

The economy and food prices were a key and central motivation for the Maltese engaged in the unrest. Maltese nationalism was a rallying cry, a political touchstone, but the base level of discontent was strongly economic. Although not involved in promoting the riot, Italian interests were quick to comment. An article in the *Corrier della Sera* newspaper from Milan published the day after the riots pointed out that the British government was both promoting and suppressing self-determination where it suited them:

The world, for this sort of virtuous Englishmen is divided into two parts: one where British Imperialism majestic and gigantic can take its stand, guarded by bluejackets with rifle and bayonets against any possible unrest; the other where imperialism is a crime against humanity, against civilization, against democracy, against justice.⁴²

This article was a product of its time. Italian opinion was embittered by the British opposition to post-war Italian imperial expansion. It does however point to a problem of legitimacy within the British Empire. This conflicted position led to the fig leaf of the Mandates, and it is also precisely what the 'self-representative' constitutions were intended to obfuscate or obscure. The violence and unrest in both Malta and Cyprus laid bare the nature of the power relationships between the coloniser and the colonised.

While the British administration in Malta had successfully suppressed the violent demonstrations they were aware that reform was necessary. This is an example of the dynamic of challenge and control. Plumer implemented a number of changes including reorganising the police, lifting wages for the King's Own Regiment, addressing job losses in the dockyard, improving relations with the Church and increasing spending.⁴³ Plumer wrote in a memorandum that if Malta was to be a 'Fortress of the Empire' then money must be spent for the welfare of its people.⁴⁴ This positiveness, the willingness to spend money and relax measures of oppression was the fundamental difference between the administration of Malta and Cyprus. Plumer's

⁴¹ Plumer to Milner, 'Disturbances', 13 June 1919, 36593, CO 158/409 at paragraph 11 of Hunter-Blair's report

⁴² Translation from the "Corrier della Sera" of Milan, story titled 'Shocking', author unknown, of 14 June 1919 enclosed in Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Disturbances Commission', CO 57016, CO 158/412 . This article referenced the Italian post-war disappointment at losing its claim to Fiume in Yugoslavia and tied this into the disappointment in the British actions in Malta. *Corrier Della Sera* is a large mainstream daily still operating and based in Milan. It is said to represent the opinions of the industrial bourgeoisie from the north, see <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/source-profile/22341-corriere-della-sera>

⁴³ R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 197.

⁴⁴ R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 197.

opinion sparked comment in the Colonial Office about the labour and economic situation in Malta.

The first minute on Plumer's memorandum which is only initialled, but most likely written by Walton Ellis, Principal Clerk at the Colonial Office, said the policy for the last 40 or 50 years consisted of 'granting Malta from time to time more or less illusory constitutions, and then withdrawing them as soon as the Maltese attempted to use their power in any way which does not approve itself to us'.⁴⁵ The similarity between the phrase 'illusory constitutions' in respect to Malta and the description of 'sham responsible parliament' in relation to Cyprus is striking.⁴⁶ The same basic model of control was used in both places, but implemented differently.

In reply to Ellis, Leo Amery, then Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for the Colonies,⁴⁷ said that 'the camouflage system [of illusory constitutions] has served its term possibly but I doubt we can continue it'.⁴⁸ They were debating whether Malta should be a fortress with absolute rule and an accompanying financial subsidy to keep the population happy, or a colony with self-government, which is economically self-supporting. These were the same motivations at work in informal empire. Self-government, in a limited form, was the cheaper option and this was the one that was ultimately pursued.

While political reforms were being debated, a Court of Enquiry into the shootings was held on 17 June 1919. This was followed by a Special Judicial Commission. The Report of the Court of Enquiry was forwarded to the Governor by Hunter Blair, the very man who was ultimately in charge of the troops that day. Hunter Blair believed that the troops 'acted with all possible forbearance' and that their actions were 'no more than was necessary to put a stop to or prevent felonious crime...' He further quoted as precedent a Secret Circular Dispatch which dealt with such scenarios and in a stunning piece of exculpatory logic stated that 'a guilty ringleader who under such conditions is shot dead, dies by justifiable homicide. An innocent person killed under such conditions dies by an accidental death'.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ CO to Plumer, 'Labour and Economic Situation', 9 July 1919, CO41637, CO 158/410 ascribed by author to Mr Walter Devonshire Ellis, Principal Clerk at the Colonial Office, Assistant Secretary 1920-31

⁴⁶ S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p 253. - Wedgwood was an MP and author of *The seventh dominion* (London, 1928);

⁴⁷ Leo Amery a Conservative party politician was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1919 to 1921 and Secretary of State for the Colonies from 6 November 1924 until 4 June 1929

⁴⁸ CO to Plumer, 'Labour and Economic Situation', 9 July 1919, CO41637, CO 158/410

⁴⁹ Plumer to Milner, 'Recent Disturbances - Military Court of Enquiry', 21 July 1919, CO43929, CO 158/410

A second process, the Report of the Commission of Enquiry (quoted above) was provided to the Colonial Office on 20 September 1919. Part IV looked at preceding events and highlighted social and economic factors. It noted that in the pre-war period the Maltese docks had employed 4,600 people and that this number had swollen to 12,000 during the war. Post-war unemployment in the docks was fully expected and further it was understood that the Maltese economy could not absorb the large number of newly unemployed.⁵⁰ The Commission also identified one of the principal factors mentioned in the very first dispatches to London, the cost of bread. The commission says that the cost of bread was due solely to the war, but immediately noted it was now being subsidised and said 'it is regretted that this measure was not taken at the very outset'.⁵¹

The Commission noted that after the abolition of censorship on 3 February 1919, articles were published that were both anti-British and pro-Italian in the *Comitato Patriottico* and *La Voce del Popolo*, newspapers it described as 'an instrument of sedition'.⁵² The Commission suggested that authors of anti-British articles should have been prosecuted under the Malta Defence Regulations (introduced in August 1916).⁵³ The Commission also suggested that the administration erred in not employing propaganda to contradict damaging rumours that the government was profiteering. The report naively suggested that this propaganda work could have been carried out by parish priests 'it being the duty of the Parish Priest to promote goodwill between the people and the Government, they would have acquiesced with willingness'.⁵⁴ The report found that the shooting in the *Chronicle* office was done under orders, but was not justified. The Commission stressed its view that a senior police officer could have calmed the situation. The reports having been written, the focus of the British government turned to reform.

After the riot Plumer repeated his view that the British government must either:

⁵⁰ Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances 7 & 8 June', 20 September 1919, CO 55627, CO 158/411 paragraph 65.

⁵¹ Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances 7 & 8 June', 20 September 1919, CO 55627, CO 158/411 paragraph 68.

⁵² Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances 7 & 8 June', 20 September 1919, CO 55627, CO 158/411 paragraph 69.

⁵³ Malta, *The Malta Defence Regulations, 1916 consolidated and revised to December 31st, 1917, including Orders, Regulations, &c., issued in virtue thereof* (Malta: Government printing Office, 1918).

⁵⁴ Plumer to Milner, 'Report of Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances 7 & 8 June', 20 September 1919, CO 55627, CO 158/411 paragraph 94.

abandon all pretence of letting the Maltese manage their own affairs, and control the Island almost as if it were an “occupied” country, or accord to the people a generous measure of self-government involving real responsibility for the conduct of all local administration.⁵⁵

Among the outstanding issues was the vexed question of whether to use Italian or English as the official language.⁵⁶ Leo Amery travelled to Malta in August 1919 and three months later he and Milner put a set of proposals to Cabinet in London.⁵⁷ Cabinet adopted the proposals of a one-off grant-in-aid of £250,000 and an announcement of greater self-governance. The new constitution set up a diarchy model similar to that introduced in India in 1919.⁵⁸ Two concurrent systems of government would operate, one for ‘matters of local concern’ and another for ‘matters of imperial concern’.⁵⁹ In Parliament Amery announced that:

His Majesty’s Government have decided that the time had come to entrust the people of Malta with full responsible control of their purely local affairs, the control of the naval and military Services, and of such other services and functions of government as are connected with the position of Malta as an Imperial fortress and harbour remaining vested in the Imperial authorities.⁶⁰

Lord Plumer reported that the news had been received in Malta ‘with profound satisfaction and demonstrations of joy and loyalty’.⁶¹ The president of the Maltese National Assembly was more poetic, declaring that Malta:

received the happy and auspicious announcement of grant of self-government with feelings of boundless joy which found expression in a spontaneous and most imposing popular demonstration of love and loyalty to the Mother Country and of respect and gratitude to His Majesty’s Government and Lord Plumer amidst the most enthusiastic cheers for their beloved

⁵⁵ Plumer to Milner, 'Revised Constitution involving local self Government', 19 September 1919, CO57197, CO 158/411 p 2. - This was a repetition of his views expressed on 9 July of that year.

⁵⁶ Plumer to Milner, 'Revised Constitution involving local self Government', 19 September 1919, CO57197, CO 158/411

⁵⁷ CO, 'Affairs of Malta: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies covering a report by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State together with a Despatch from the Governor and other papers', October 1919, Confidential Print: Mediterranean No 78, CO 883/7/16

⁵⁸ John Darwin, D. K. Fieldhouse, and A. F. Madden, *Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth: The Foundations of a Colonial System of Government*, Documents in imperial history, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985). Volume 8 Part 1 The End of Empire Dependencies Since 1948 p 149

⁵⁹ "The Parliament of Malta - A Mediterranean Nation - New Page in Empire History", *The Times*, 1 November 1921, 11

⁶⁰ HC Debate, 19 November 1919, vol 121 cc909

⁶¹ Great Britain. Malta Royal Commission and G.R. Askwith, *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission, 1931: Presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, January, 1932* (H.M. Stationery Office, 1932), p 13.

King, and the strains of the National Anthem sung by thousands of loyal hearts, and the flutter of the glorious British Flag side by side with the national colours.⁶²

The new model, a high point in inter-war Maltese self-representation, consisted of a Senate and Legislative Assembly. The Senate consisted of eight special members who were appointed and seven general members who were elected. The special members 'represented the clergy, the nobility, the university graduates, the Chamber of Commerce and the Trade Union Council – the clergy being nominated by the Archbishop and the others chosen by their respective classes'.⁶³ The presence of clergy in the Senate would become crucial to the constitutional crisis in 1930, as the next chapter will discuss. On a more practical level, this system of government anticipated the development of political parties, which did occur prior to the election. The new Maltese Parliament opened on 1 November 1921 by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII), governed a population that had grown to around 212,258 people.⁶⁴ Not all in London were in favour of the new arrangements. In the view of Winston Churchill, who was Colonial Secretary, the political reform was like 'trying to devise a constitution for a battleship'.⁶⁵ Churchill need not have worried. Britain did make an effort to make the population happy and in so doing saved money, but they did not compromise their control of Malta.

The key feature of this whole episode is the way in which the British government were determined to follow discipline with reward and repression with change. Malta as a fortress colony with more inherent value, and more strategic importance elicited a different response than did Cyprus, another Mediterranean colony. Britain could not afford to lose Malta or have its naval capability compromised by a hostile local population. This difference not only affected the political but also the economic treatment of Malta. The British colonial authorities and the government in London used the law to control unrest in both locations, but used it differently.

⁶² Great Britain. Malta Royal Commission and G.R. Askwith, *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission*, p 13.

⁶³ The general members of the senate were elected by 'male British subjects over twenty-one years old and paying £20 in rent or in possession of £20 in real property or other capital'. The Legislative assembly had thirty-members and the franchise rules for electors were relaxed slightly. Voters had the same requirements as above except the monetary hurdle was £5 and they had to be able to read and write. Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 78-9.

⁶⁴ L. H. Dudley Buxton, "Malta: An Anthropogeographical Study," *Geographical Review* 14, no. 1 (1924): p 85.

⁶⁵ Cmd. 1474 of 1921, p37 as quoted in W.K. and Latham Hancock, R.T.E., *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*.

Cyprus – ‘a kick one day and a caress the next’.⁶⁶

Inter-war Cyprus was a site of constant agitation and insufficient spending. The political situation described in Chapter One and the cleavage between the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots continued in the inter-war period as did *enosis*. The difficulty the British had in dealing with the internal dissent in Cyprus is typified by Governor Sir Ronald Storrs, an important figure in this chapter, whose talent and ambition came up against the deep problems in Cyprus resulting in career-limiting failure. A key turning point was the general outbreak of violence sparked by the burning down of Government House in 1931. The broad and sustained repression after this event kept Cyprus firmly under British control, but it had long term consequences and damaged the legitimacy of their rule. The extent of the authoritarian turn in Cyprus distinguishes it from Malta. Both colonies however experienced internal events which resulted in constitutional reform. The maintenance of British imperial hegemony necessitated constant adaptation to maintain control in the face of challenge. Prior to World War One however there was an outbreak of violence which provides a point of comparison to the much more serious events of 1931.

Communal Violence - 1912

In 1912 there was a short and violent outburst of communal violence which demonstrated the level of tension which existed under British rule. British policy with regard to Hellenic nationalism was weak and the authorities compensated with a willingness to deploy violence in order to maintain control. The events provide a point of comparison to what occurred in 1931.

In Cyprus the politics and conflict surrounding Turkey and Greece had local consequences as they impacted upon the ethno-religious divide within the island. By 1912 there were significant problems in governance and a rare outbreak of communal violence. Recently released, so called ‘migrated’ files which were generated in Cyprus but sent to Britain and then not made available to researchers, provide a detailed view of these events. In 1912 Italy and the Ottoman Empire were engaged in the Italo-Turkish War and the Ottoman Empire was suffering a series of defeats. This was a cause for celebration amongst some Greek Cypriots which in turn provoked Turkish Cypriots. Political tension across the island also increased when High

⁶⁶ S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p 253.

Commissioner Hamilton Goold-Adam rejected reform proposals put forward by Greek Cypriot deputies who subsequently resigned from the Legislative Council, in large numbers.⁶⁷

Then, on 24 May 1912, Greek Cypriot schoolchildren from the Nicosia Gymnasium returning from an expedition to a Monastery passed through the Turkish Cypriot village of Mandres around nine pm singing and blowing bugles.⁶⁸ The children and teachers were attacked by the Turkish Cypriots of that village and they dispersed into the fields and surrounding villages. Rumours that some of the children, who took some time to straggle home, had been murdered raised tensions between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.⁶⁹ The next day many Cypriots gathered in Limassol for the festival of *Kataklysmos*.⁷⁰ On the outskirts of Limassol in an area called Djoumada, a group of Greek Cypriots threw stones at some Turkish Cypriots in a horse carriage. One of the Turkish Cypriot men responded by stabbing three of the Greek Cypriot men. News of this violence sparked a large riot in and around the Turkish Cypriot Bazaar in Limassol. The gathering of Greek Cypriots was aided by the ringing of the church bells, an act which contributed to the violence.⁷¹ The riot was vicious and was characterised by a Greek Cypriot majority on the offensive and a Turkish Cypriot minority seeking shelter.⁷²

M Mackay, the collector at the Customs House in Limassol observed a 'large crowd of Greeks with sticks in their hands ... hurling chairs and stones at the stalls and tables of [Turkish Cypriot] sellers'.⁷³ Michael Kareclass, an Greek Cypriot Inspector in the Cyprus Military Police reported that he had been in previous riots, which were 'simply fighting but this riot was war'.⁷⁴ Captain Albert E. Gallagher, the Local Commandant of the Cyprus Military Police stationed at Limassol, 'instructed the Police to clear the streets and if necessary fire on the mob'. He then led a group himself to the Bazaar where:

⁶⁷ Major Sir Hamilton John Goold-Adams, a colonial administrator was born 27 June 1858 and died 12 April 1920. He was High Commissioner in Cyprus from 1911 until 1915, when he was demoted to the post of Governor of Queensland. See Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 262.

⁶⁸ W.W.D Hall, 'Letter to Chief Commandant to Local Commander of Police, Nicosia', 25 May 1912, p16, FCO141/2352

⁶⁹ Rebecca Bryant, *Imagining the Modern : The Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus* (London New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), p 91-92.

⁷⁰ *Kataklysmos* or the festival of Aphrodite is a series of Orthodox celebrations held before Easter which include the tradition of an Archbishop throwing a cross into the sea, which is then retrieved by competing boys and young men. It was in 1912 an island-wide celebration which attracted both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. See Rebecca Bryant, *Imagining the Modern : The Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus*, p 23.

⁷¹ Rebecca Bryant, *Imagining the Modern : The Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus*, p 91-92.

⁷² A map of the riot was produced by W.H Bolton the District Commissioner of Limassol on 11 June 1912 – see FCO 141/2352 p 317

⁷³ M Mackay to Bolton, 'Letter regarding recent disturbances', 4 June 1912, p 324, FCO 141/2352

⁷⁴ Inspector Kareclass, 'Copy of Inspector Kareclasses Statement made at the Inquest', attached to W.H. Bolton Commissioner to C.S., 'Letter giving account of the Riot', 13 June 1912, p 339, FCO 141/2352

it was perfect pandemonium a very large and infuriated Greek crowd was attacking the shops and Cafes and pulling out Turks from their hiding places and brutally assaulting them. I immediately gave the order to fire on the rioters I had to fire on the rioters I think three times before it had any effect and they began to disperse'⁷⁵

Greek Cypriots responded in an organised way to a random act of violence by a Turkish Cypriot. The ringing of the Church bells in particular suggests a level of sanction and organisation within the ranks of Greek Cypriot elites, of which the Church was certainly a part. Indeed the entire outbreak of violence although focused on a communal clash had taken place in a time of increased tension between Greek Cypriots and the British administration in Cyprus.⁷⁶ Varnava suggests that the British had mishandled this early period of rule. They did not co-opt Cypriot Orthodox Christians into governing structures, despite a willingness on their part, but rather they imposed a limited political modernity based on their understanding of Cyprus with the 'unitary ideal of modern Greece'.⁷⁷ The negative effect of this was that it removed pre-existing structures in society and allowed the growth of Hellenic nationalism. Political modernity in this context is the basic implementation of self-determination through democratic mechanisms, and includes normal features of such as system, in particular the separation of Church and state.

Cyprus had a complex social structure, a result of its population mix, representing both nationalisms and religions, and the waves of imperialism which carried through from Latin, to Ottoman to British.⁷⁸ Despite such an apparent cleavage between the two most numerous groups, the Greek Orthodox on the one hand and Turkish Muslim on the other, this is not the way in which social division occurred in Cyprus and especially so before British administration. In fact prior to the British the 'ruling class comprised a Muslim and Orthodox Christian secular and religious elite' and 'Cypriots [at all levels] were socially and culturally integrated'.⁷⁹ After 1878 Britain allowed or promoted the creation of nationalist elites.⁸⁰ The peasant class in Cyprus were not part of that social group, but became figures in the discourse and were 'recruits into the

⁷⁵ Captain Gallagher, 'Copy of Captain Gallagher's Statement Made at the Inquest', attached to W.H. Bolton Commissioner to C.S., 'Letter giving account of the Riot', 13 June 1912, p 339, FCO 141/2352

⁷⁶ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 186-90.

⁷⁷ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 190. See also Andrekos Varnava and Christalia Yakinthou, *Cyprus: Political modernity and the structures of democracy in a divided island* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷⁸ Latin includes both Frankish and Venetians. See Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 152.

⁷⁹ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 153.

⁸⁰ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 24.

nationalist ideal'.⁸¹ In 1931 Greek Cypriot elites were able to channel the discontent of the lower classes towards their own political aims much the same as Maltese elites had done in 1919.

On 2 June a more complete picture of casualties emerged. The tally was now five dead, seventeen severely wounded and 117 wounded. Tensions were still high in Cyprus and on 1 June a local newspaper article titled 'A want of Security' warned that:

almost the whole of Cyprus is, since last Saturday, in great emotion and agony as well as in a justified arousal because of the lack of security shown by the grievous events at Nicosia and the still more grievous and more touching events at Limassol, which latter town is, moreover wailing for victims and has seen blood streaming in the streets.⁸²

The British, as was typical, responded to the unrest with a commission and by 11 July 1912 the official Commission of Enquiry had made its findings that 'under the circumstances the Police were justified in taking the extreme measures which they did to quell the disturbances'.⁸³ Despite this in December 1912 a second, secret, commission was organised. The purpose of this body was to investigate whether the Cyprus military police needed to be reorganised, and whether a force recruited from 'amongst natives of the Island who are divided by acute racial and religious animosities, provide ... a sufficient safeguard for the lives and properties of the inhabitants'.⁸⁴ The secret commission reported on 5 February 1913. Their main recommendations were for longer training for recruits and for senior police roles to be filled by British men. They were of the opinion that in case of emergency 'native' officers could not be relied upon and that:

when it comes to racial and religious differences these take priority of their professional responsibilities, and it is for this reason that we have unhesitatingly recommended that all post of Inspectors and upwards should with very rare exception be held by men of British parentage.⁸⁵

This finding was tinged with 'orientalist' or racist views. Kareklas, the Greek Cypriot military policeman had after all carried out his duties effectively, unlike for instance the Royal Malta Artillery who had failed to intervene in 1919 when a house was being damaged. The Cypriot riot may be contrasted with that in Malta in 1919 in a number of respects. Unlike the Maltese

⁸¹ Andrekos Varnava, *British imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, p 24.

⁸² Reporter Unknown, 'Extract from Phone tes Kyprou [Voice of Cyprus]', 1 June 1912, p 264, FCO 141/2352

⁸³ Acting Chief Secretary to Chief Commandant of Police, 'Letter regarding findings of Commission', 11 July 1912, p 428, FCO 141/2352

⁸⁴ Chief Secretary to the C Wodehouse, 'Letter regarding Commission of Inquiry', 2 December 1912, p 2, FCO 141/2354

⁸⁵ C Wodehouse to the Chief Secretary, 'Letter submitting results of the Commission of Enquiry', 5 February 1913, p 15, FCO 141/2354

disturbance it was not motivated by food prices. *Enosis* was part of the political background, but the anti-Ottoman sentiment was central. The other stark contrast was in the use of force. In Cyprus the order was given to troops to fire and authority to make such an order was given to subordinates. Many rounds were expended and in turn at least one soldier was shot. In Malta much less shooting occurred and some of that was without authorisation.

The 1912 riots provide an insight into the state of affairs in Cyprus prior to World War One. It showed that not all unrest in empire was overtly political. The incidents were an example of the cultural links or sympathies between Turkish Cypriots and the Ottoman Empire. They also highlighted a fundamental flaw in the British administration of the Island which failed to engage with the complex ethnic make-up of Cyprus, instead relying upon a set of preconceptions which when implemented promoted Hellenic nationalism and set the scene for division and violence. It was a brief flare up, short and violent and its importance should not be exaggerated, but it did demonstrate the willingness of the local administration to use violence to maintain order, and in a less restrained way than later in 1931. The position in 1931 was different partly because the rules for imperial policing had been codified. The riot procedures support the argument that the state of exception in the Empire was inclusive, as it was provided for in the system.

Riot Procedures

After World War One there was an empire-wide program of putting in place a legal framework for dealing with unrest, using as a prototype unrest in Sri Lanka from May to August 1915.⁸⁶ The riots in Sri Lanka had been unexpected and the authorities had no plans for a coordinated response.⁸⁷ Cypriot authorities, having dealt with violence in 1912 had actually begun considering their response to civil unrest as early as February 1915.⁸⁸ By 1918 this process had resulted in a confidential red booklet titled *Memorandum on the Duties of Commissioners, Police and Military Forces in the event of Rioting in Cyprus* which was distributed to Judges, District Commissioners, and Commanders of Police and Army.⁸⁹ The guidelines called for one party of police armed with batons and another armed with carbines. The first group was to baton charge the rioters and if this was unsuccessful the commissioner was, after issuing a warning, and where life was being

⁸⁶ Walter Long, 'Secret Circular Dispatch', 11 November 1918, FCO 141/2367, p 3.

⁸⁷ AP Kannangara, "The riots of 1915 in Sri Lanka: a study in the roots of communal violence," *Past and Present* (1984): p 159.

⁸⁸ Commissioner of Paphos, 'Disposition of Troops and Police in the event of racial conflict', 20 February 1915, FCO 141/2367

⁸⁹ Unknown Author, 'Memorandum on the Duties of Commissioners, Police and Military Forces in the event of Rioting in Cyprus', Undated, p 96A, FCO 141/2367

endangered, to bring up the armed party and open fire. The Memorandum specifically states that the:

object should be to disable the ringleaders. The fire must **not** be directed over the heads of the most daring and guilty to the possible sacrifice of innocent bystanders. General experience of dealing with riots has shown that mobs will not stand their ground after a few leading rioters have fallen.⁹⁰ [my emphasis]

The memorandum allowed for reinforcement of the police by the military and on the declaration of martial law, the rules were relaxed further. In such a situation troops and police were able to fire without warning on any crowd armed with dangerous weapons or on all persons looting, injuring property or persons or running away with loot or from looted premises.⁹¹ This is a real world example of the link between the State of Exception and violence described by Agamben, albeit his 'juridico-political killing machine' emerged from completely unfettered sovereignty.⁹² Under the procedure set forth in Cyprus, martial law suspended legal protection and people running away from a 'looted premise' could be lawfully shot.

Within the same file which held a copy of the guidelines was the source material for Cypriot authorities, enclosures from the Report of Commission appointed to inquire into the Featherstone Colliery Riots (1893) and material referring to riots in Jamaica in 1866 and Ceylon in 1915 and the experience gained there.⁹³ The British were able to draw lessons from a long history of imperial control and repression.⁹⁴ These documents give an insight into the way in which Britain marshalled its resources for the maintenance and defence of empire. In the inter-war period the British administration had the ability to bring these resources to bear. They may have come from neighbouring countries, but they were rapidly deployed. It is only very late in the period, from 1938 onwards, that there is any sense that the deteriorating international situation may prevent the imposition of force to maintain order in Cyprus. The carefully written and distributed procedures were tested in 1931, by which time Sir Ronald Storrs had become Governor of Cyprus.

⁹⁰ Unknown Author, 'Duties of Commissioners, Police and Military Forces', Undated, p 96A, FCO 141/2367

⁹¹ Unknown Author, 'Duties of Commissioners, Police and Military Forces', Undated, p 96A, FCO 141/2367

⁹² G. Agamben and K. Attell, *State of Exception*, p 86.

⁹³ These riots occurred in Yorkshire and resulted in the deaths of two men at the hands of police who fired into the crowd. Being inside the UK and not in the colonies it was politically important and resulted in a Commission

⁹⁴ For more information on later forms of colonial policing see G. Sinclair, *At the end of the line: Colonial policing and the imperial endgame, 1945-80* (Manchester University Press, 2006). And for a comparative study which includes Cyprus see D.J. Clark, *The Colonial Police and Anti-terrorism: Bengal 1930-1936, Palestine 1937-1947, and Cyprus 1955-1959* (University of Oxford, 1978).

Storrs, the Great Depression and Internal Dissent

Sir Ronald Storrs was an important figure because he came in with high expectations but instead oversaw the destruction of the constitutional system in Cyprus. He came to Cyprus at a time when internal dissent dismantled the façade of self-government. Storrs attempted to address economic issues in his period in office, but he mishandled the politics. He was an experienced colonial administrator, trained in the classics, but in the end he exhibited the same blindness to local concerns found throughout the empire and he, along with many others, was surprised by the events that ended his term in office.

After the First World War Britain held onto Cyprus out of what Georghallides calls ‘imperialist inertia’. They did not have a defined strategic role for Cyprus, and they were motivated by a policy of denial. Britain had no interest in getting closer to Greece; Venizelos was aware of this and had no desire to jeopardise relations with Britain by taking up the *enosis* cause.⁹⁵ In Cyprus the unpopular High Commissioner Malcolm Stevenson faced a hostile political environment. Greek Cypriot members upset about the political loss suffered by Venizelos in Greece and prospects for *enosis* (after the failure of a 1919 deputation to London) had again resigned en masse from the Legislative Council.⁹⁶ Stevenson carried on with the normal administration despite the absence of seven members. The Greek Cypriot politicians then settled on a policy of complete abstention from Legislative Council elections.⁹⁷ The system was in place, but it was not operating as intended. After six years Stevenson was replaced by Storrs who was described as ‘ambitious, erudite and charming with a taste for theatricality and display’.⁹⁸

Sir Ronald Storrs arrived in Cyprus as Governor in November 1926, having been given the post by Amery, and was well received by both Cypriots and the British Press.⁹⁹ He made efforts to improve relations between the British and the Cypriots, taking measures such as ordering that the word ‘native’ be replaced by the term ‘Cypriot’ in all official correspondence.¹⁰⁰ He spoke Greek (among other languages) fluently and was seen as a philhellene, but his ‘compulsion to

⁹⁵ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis* (Nicosia: Zavallis Press, 1985), p 663.

⁹⁶ A. Varnava and M.N. Michael, *The Archbishops of Cyprus in the Modern Age: The Changing Role of the Archbishop-Ethnarch, their Identities and Politics* (Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2013), p 193-6.

⁹⁷ G.S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918 - 1926*, p 208.

⁹⁸ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 112.

⁹⁹ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 5-7. For further information on Storrs see his bibliography, R. Storrs, *Orientalisms: Ronald Storrs* (Nicholson & Watson, 1945). and his papers, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs

¹⁰⁰ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 11.

demonstrate his erudition, particularly his mastery of classical Greek, gave Cypriots the impression that they were being mocked'.¹⁰¹ Storrs did not agree with *enosis*. He married his appreciation of classical Greece with imperialism and believed that Cyprus could only achieve or recreate the values of the classical Greek past through a period of benevolent British imperial control,¹⁰² a position consistent with Hannah Arendt's notion that colonial leaders 'construed themselves as the embodiment of superior civilizational forces'.¹⁰³ This conception of Cyprus, a paradigmatic view influenced by an education in the classics and philhellenism is a continuation of the ineffective approach to Cypriot administration that existed prior to World War One. It is also an example of the same sort of dynamic identified by Said in *Orientalism*, albeit pushed west somewhat. The trouble encountered by Storrs may also be characterised as a failure to come to grips with an increasing level of nationalist and communist consciousness amongst certain sections of Cypriot society. In the six years Storrs was in the role he implemented many reforms, the most high profile of which was the 'ending' of the Tribute.¹⁰⁴

The Tribute, repayment of Ottoman debt by Cyprus to Britain, was a burning political issue. The Ottoman Empire had by now ceased to exist and yet Cyprus continued to pay off a debt on its behalf. The Tribute payment was £92,000 per year which totalled £2,640,000 for the years 1878-1927, amounting to 17% of total revenue.¹⁰⁵ As a newspaper wrote in 1926, Cyprus was a 'poor agricultural country' and already in that year the Greek and Turkish Cypriot members of the Legislative Council were together creating a constitutional issue by rejecting budget estimates that included any appropriation for the payment of the Tribute.¹⁰⁶ This forced Storrs to rule by Orders in Council, a practical but politically unsustainable measure that was used in other places such as Malta. The constant use of Orders in Council was viewed as undesirable by the Colonial Office because it was a 'work-around' which sidelined the governance structure put in place. It demonstrated the failure of the system, and did so publicly.

As he had been for Malta some time earlier the new Colonial Secretary, Leo Amery, was sympathetic to the Cypriot case regarding the Tribute but he came up against opposition from

¹⁰¹ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 126. For Morgan's quote see G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 701.

¹⁰² Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 126.

¹⁰³ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 17. citing H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973), p 275-80.

¹⁰⁴ R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 205.

¹⁰⁵ James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 84.

¹⁰⁶ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 9.

the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill. Amery appealed to a higher power, the British Cabinet and argued that:

We must face the fact that in taking up their stand on this particular issue the Elected Members [of Cyprus] are in a strong moral position. The payment against which they are protesting is, in my opinion one which can no longer be justified by His Majesty's Government. In recent months I have urged strongly upon the Treasury that the payment should be remitted or at least considerably abated. Unfortunately they have been unable to agree to this course. In view of the advice which I am receiving from the Governor regarding the importance of removing this burning local issue, and from my own conviction that by exacting this payment Great Britain is not doing the fair thing by Cyprus, I feel compelled to submit the matter for the decision of Cabinet.¹⁰⁷

The problem for Churchill was that in 1907 he had argued strongly against the Tribute. A.J. Dawe from the Colonial Office had included quotes from Churchill in a memorandum presented to the Cabinet at the same time as the speech. Churchill found himself in the unenviable position of arguing against his earlier views and soon surrendered.¹⁰⁸

The Cabinet agreed to relieve Cyprus of the burden of the Tribute, via an increase of the grant in aid to an amount £10,000 less than that owed annually.¹⁰⁹ This was effectively a cancellation of the majority of this long running payment that had been resting on a shaky moral foundation for some time. The announcement of the changes was made on 31 August 1927 to an extraordinary meeting of the Legislative Council and met with acclamation in the chamber and congratulations from a crowd gathered outside.¹¹⁰ This could have been the basis of a period of stability for Storrs who had brought reform to Cyprus with the backing of Amery. It seemed that Storrs was meeting the high expectations he set himself and that he would be able to limit the level of dissent in Cyprus. Unfortunately for him the gloss began to wear off this political and economic victory very quickly.

The 1928 budget, which should have benefited so clearly from end of the Tribute, was a disappointment to Cypriots who were not consulted on how the additional funds were to be spent.¹¹¹ The dropping of the Tribute took away one unifying issue between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot members of the Legislative Council. Storrs could now attract 'Turkish'

¹⁰⁷ Louis Amery, 'The Political Situation in Cyprus', 14 July 1927, C.P. 198/27, CHAR 22/160

¹⁰⁸ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 51.

¹⁰⁹ They reasoned that Cyprus should contribute £10,000 annually as a contribution towards the cost of its defence.

¹¹⁰ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 54.

¹¹¹ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 54.

votes and push some legislation through, but in the longer terms this ethnic division was harmful to the Cypriot polity and alienated the Greek Cypriot members. Cyprus also had deep underlying issues connected to poverty and education standards which were not being addressed.

The elitist nature of the Legislative Council was contrasted by the harsh conditions in rural Cyprus, a country where the population of the six major towns only accounted for 18% of the total population.¹¹² In Cyprus 49.19% of the work force was employed in agriculture. By comparison in Malta this figure was much lower at 15.75%.¹¹³ A Survey of Rural Life in Cyprus conducted in 1927-28 by B.J. Surridge, an experienced official in Cyprus, found that over a quarter of the rural population lived below subsistence level, that most were illiterate, and 70% were chronically in debt.¹¹⁴ The low literacy level combined with the borderline sustainability limited the ability of rural Cypriots to actively take part in local politics and advocate *enosis*. This could perhaps explain why only one out of eight members on the Legislative council was a farmer/peasant.¹¹⁵ The Survey also found that sanitation was in a primitive state in rural areas, and disease particularly malaria was a problem. It criticised the elementary school system and suggested that it required a 'complete overhaul'. It noted that usury had created a 'not inconsiderable volume of debt' and stress was 'laid on the evils arising from a system which compels producers to hand over their produce to their creditors'.¹¹⁶ The report supported the creation of co-operative credit societies to meet the demand for credit amongst rural communities. Despite apparent gains for Storrs in the dropping of the tribute, serious structural problems for poor and rural Cypriots remained.

By 1928 the Storrs' honeymoon period was well and truly over. In the Legislative Council relations between the Storrs and the Greek Cypriots reached a 'peak of bitterness' and when the members realised that no political changes were likely they went back to the tactic of blocking appropriations and of agitation for change.¹¹⁷ Storrs then instituted controversial reform in the education system in 1929, whereby teachers were put on the government payroll, in effect 'nationalising' a system which had been under the control of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish

¹¹² G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 161.

¹¹³ Office Cyprus. Census and Charles Henry Hart, *Cyprus. Report and general abstracts of the census of 1931 taken on April 27-28, 1931* (Nicosia: Printed by F.S. Passingham, Government Printer, 1932), p 15. Note the figure for agriculture is derived by combining the following occupations listed in the census: 'Farmers and cultivators', 'Ploughmen and Agricultural Labourers', and 'Shepherds'. Malta, *Census of the Maltese Islands, taken on ... 26th April, 1931*, p xxvii.

¹¹⁴ B.J. Surridge, *A Survey of Rural Life in Cyprus: Based on Reports of Investigators ... During 1927 and 1928, and Amplified by Statistical and Other Information from the Records of Government* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930).

¹¹⁵ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 163.

¹¹⁶ B.J. Surridge, *A Survey of Rural Life in Cyprus*, p 74.

¹¹⁷ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 114.

Cypriot communities. Such a move was yet another provocation in the eyes of the Greek Cypriot elites.¹¹⁸ In a speech to the Royal Colonial Institute in London on 19 June Storrs described Cyprus as being in a 'transitional stage'. Cyprus possessed he said 'all the physical essentials, but had been held back; chiefly for want of financial resources' and only needed 'encouragement and development to transform her latent energies from the potential into the kinetic'.¹¹⁹ Storrs was undoubtedly trying to portray a positive picture of the situation in Cyprus but amongst his colleagues there was growing concern about the political situation in the island.

In April 1929, Dawe minuted a despatch from Acting Governor Nicholson.¹²⁰ Well before the 1931 riot they were discussing the problems with government in Cyprus and even whether representative institutions were suitable for Cyprus at all. Nicholson proposed that the constitution be abolished and replaced with another that allowed for a new Legislative Council which represented agriculturalists (peasants) rather than the usury and lawyer classes. Dawe agreed with Nicholson that time for change had arrived and that the constitution should be abolished. He said quite openly that the Executive Government in Cyprus relied on the 'exploitation of the racial cleavage between the Greeks and Turks' and 'brings too much into prominence the noisy anti-British section of the community'.¹²¹ The colonial Government in Cyprus was also resorting repeatedly to Orders-in-Council for things like criminal legislation and budgetary matters. Dawe noted that the significant efforts of Storrs toward conciliation had failed and had rather made 'the anti-British elements more vocal and more embittered than before'. He then took a turn towards racial characterisation. The Cypriot Greeks he said were 'unable to appreciate the Anglo-Saxon system of conciliation' and were 'apt to regard every concession which we make them as proceeding from motives of weakness and surrender'. He opined:

The Cypriots have an oriental mentality. They are inclined, therefore, to regard liberal gestures rather with contempt than with gratitude. It is frequently said that the most popular Governors of Cyprus have been those who have treated the Cypriots with firmness. There is no doubt a large element of truth in this. They respect a firm policy, and the most important thing we can do

¹¹⁸ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 480.

¹¹⁹ Speech titled 'Cyprus, Past, Present, and Future', Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 25, Box VI, Folder 16

¹²⁰ CO 67/227/4, 23 April 1929 [Cyprus]: Minute by A J Dawe on a despatch from the acting governor, R Nicholson, proposing that the constitution should be abolished. Minutes by H R Cowell (Assistant Secretary in the CO and Head of the Ceylon and Mediterranean Department) and Sir J Shuckburgh. Document 45 in S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p 249.

¹²¹ S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p 250.

in Cyprus is to keep up the feeling of respect with which the British were regarded in the past. This is the thing we may be in danger of losing under the present system by which we are giving them a kick one day and a caress the next.¹²²

Dawe's comments raise immediately the idea of the 'orientalist' mindset, or as discussed the conception of a Cypriot identity which was held by colonial administrators. Here it would seem to inform an authoritarian paternalism. Dawe's comments also display a core dynamic at work; dissent was met with repression, greater resistance led to greater control. Dawe was of the view that 'benevolent autocracy' was the only practical alternative because Cyprus was 'not ready for responsible government'. According to Dawe, Josiah Wedgwood, a Member of Parliament, had described the Cypriot Legislative Council as a 'sham responsible parliament'.¹²³ Dawe's extensive and detailed minute never made it to Colonial Secretary Amery, as Labour won the British election on 30 May 1929 some five weeks after it was produced.

While the Colonial Office was expressing the view that all representative government in Cyprus should be withdrawn, another Greek Cypriot delegation, continuing the constant agitation for *enosis*, travelled to London in 1929 in the hope that the new MacDonald Labour Government would be more open to reform than the Baldwin Conservative Government which preceded it. In a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Storrs, trying to damage the delegation, described Nicodemos, a member of the delegation and Bishop of Kitium as a:

clever, determined and extremely ambitious man aspiring to the succession of the Archiepiscopal Throne of Cyprus on the demise of his kinsman the present archbishop, and hoping to assist his candidature by the publicity shed upon him by the mission. He is a master of intrigue and behind most of the anti-British agitations, and his moral character and private life is a matter of public notoriety.¹²⁴

This private and personal view of Storrs was typical of the view taken by British colonial administrators of local politicians who 'stirred up trouble'. The delegation met with the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Passfield on 25 October who told them that he 'could hold out no hope that His Majesty's Government would accede to their request for union with

¹²² S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p 253.

¹²³ S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p 253. - Wedgwood was an MP and author of Josiah Wedgwood, *The Seventh Dominion* (Labour Pub. Co, 1928).

¹²⁴ 'Personal and Private' undated letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 11

Greece'.¹²⁵ The delegation was a failure but they left behind a lawyer, Zenon Rossides, who continued to advocate on their behalf and was successful in generating newspaper articles and questions in Parliament about the situation in Cyprus.¹²⁶

The visit was followed up by continual lobbying by Greek Cypriot political elites and in 1930 Archbishop Kyrillos wrote to Dr Drummond Shiels, the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, to express his belief that:

the unremitting and unyielding desire of the people of Cyprus is to be united with Free Mother Greece because it is only by this means that its well-being and prosperity will be secured in all respects.¹²⁷

Dawe, who remained in his position through the change in government, noted on the file that 'the local supporters of the union with Greece movement still cling to the hope that a Labour Government in this country may be prepared to hand the Island over to Greece'.¹²⁸ Dawe then reiterated the determination of the government to retain Cyprus. Next to Dawes' signature and seemingly in his handwriting is the notation 'Sir R Storrs agrees'. After receiving subsequent communications from Kyrillos, Dawes lost patience noting that:

This memorial, coming immediately after Dr Shiels' uncompromising pronouncements about the Union agitation is a piece of impudence. It illustrates the complete childishness of Cypriot politicians... As shown by the memorial, any gesture of politeness towards the Enosis party is interpreted as weakness.¹²⁹

Dawe was reiterating the 'not ready for democracy' paternalism of the Colonial Office and his preference for hard line policies, the kick instead of the caress. The strength of feeling in Cyprus was understood across government departments; Patrick Ramsay, an envoy in Athens¹³⁰ wrote to the Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson in May 1930 and expressed the view that 'liberal concessions in Cyprus are not going to retard the movement here for the union of Cyprus to Greece'. He indicated a belief that the situation in Cyprus was similar to that prevailing in the Ionian Islands which eventually lead to that territory being restored to Greece, 'as the only alternative to the abolition of parliament and government by arbitrary measures unworthy of His

¹²⁵ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 237.

¹²⁶ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 554.

¹²⁷ Archbishop Kyrillos, 'Letter to Drummond Shiels from Archbishop Kyrillos', 10 November 1930, p 28, CO 67/234/1

¹²⁸ AJ Dawe, 'Minute re Enosis', 14 July 1930, p 8, CO 67/234/1

¹²⁹ AJ Dawe, 'Minute re Enosis', 14 July 1930, p 8, CO 67/234/1

¹³⁰ Patrick Ramsay's full title was Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Hellenic Republic.

Majesty's Government'.¹³¹ These arbitrary measures were in reality a standard part of the British tool kit for the management of their colonies. Ramsay seems to have developed sympathies for the country from which he operated, a common theme when reading sources such as these. He was supporting a particular discourse and a movement within Cyprus, which represented but one view. *Enosis* was most popular among and promoted by the ruling and upper class Greek Cypriots. This discontent was driven by the worst economic disaster of the 20th century an event pivotal to understanding the events of 1931 in Cyprus.

Cyprus was hit hard by the Great Depression. Gross domestic product in 1932 was 18.8% lower than in 1929 and Cyprus did not recover until 1935.¹³² The effect of the depression was exacerbated by a drought from 1932-33. Farmers were unable to grow a high volume of produce and food prices were dropping. The depression 'wiped out ten years of economic growth and progress'¹³³ and was perhaps felt hardest in agricultural areas. The situation improved as imports rose from £1,419,162 in 1934 to £2,219,427 in 1937 while exports moved from £1,079,427 to £2,180,048.¹³⁴ The recovery of the Cypriot economy from the effects of the depression was rapid and sustained in the late 1930s, but this did not offer any consolation to those affected in 1930.¹³⁵

In 1930 Storrs had to plan a budget for the following year but the estimates caused consternation amongst the members of the Legislative Council who were concerned about the economy and the deficit. The Council was voting on ethnic lines and the Turkish Cypriots were voting with the government. The estimates passed by only one vote, the casting vote of Storrs himself.¹³⁶ Officials in the Colonial Office such as Dawe were of the view that Storrs had both overestimated the revenue for 1931 and not made enough cuts in spending. This would result in Storrs using a Reserve Fund to cover the shortfall, a situation which prompted a serious rebuke in the form of a telegram from Passfield to Storrs.¹³⁷

The next blow for Storrs was the election defeat in October 1930 of Munir Bey, one of the three Turkish Cypriot representatives on the Legislative Council on whom he had relied to pass

¹³¹ Patrick Ramsay, 'Letter to Arthur Henderson from Patrick Ramsay re Enosis', 7 May 1930, C3706/255/19, CO 67/234/1

¹³² Alexander Apostolides, "The growth of two small economies in the Great Depression", p 17.

¹³³ Alexander Apostolides, "The growth of two small economies in the Great Depression", p 17.

¹³⁴ James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 108.

¹³⁵ Alexander Apostolides, "The growth of two small economies in the Great Depression", p 17.

¹³⁶ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 451.

¹³⁷ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 459.

legislation and a 'linchpin in the intimate Anglo-Turkish relationship'.¹³⁸ Munir had been deposed by Cypriot Kemalists¹³⁹ known as the 'populists'. Led by Necati Özkan who campaigned on a nationalist platform, they drew their success from 'unprecedented efforts to politically mobilise the Turkish Cypriot masses'.¹⁴⁰ Outside influences were again at work in Cyprus. This theme of established representatives being deposed by new movements outside would repeat on the Greek Cypriot side of the Legislative Council the following year. Storrs meanwhile pejoratively described the new Turkish Cypriot representatives as the 'New Turks' of Cyprus.¹⁴¹

By January 1931 Storrs expressed in personal correspondence that he was 'not exactly restless' but felt that he had 'to a certain extent' done his work in Cyprus and was ready for something else.¹⁴² Around this time Passfield took the exceptional step of refusing to sanction the 1931 estimates. The Greek Cypriot members of the Legislative Council were critical of profligacy in Cypriot administration and the payment of high wages to senior civil servants.¹⁴³ As Georghallides suggested these economic problems substantially contributed to the crisis in Anglo-Cypriot relations. In the face of continual opposition to his financial measures Storrs fell back on Orders in Council to push through the unpopular measures, a move which attracted 'immense hostility'.¹⁴⁴

Communists in Cyprus

In 1931, in the midst of this economic downturn and perhaps because of it, the British government was terribly pre-occupied with another internal problem, the emergence of the Communist party. The progenitor of the Communist Party in Cyprus, known as the Cyprus Workers Party, was formed from both trade unionists and communists in 1922.¹⁴⁵ After internal wrangling and the emergence of the communists as the dominant partner the party was renamed

¹³⁸ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 461.

¹³⁹ Kemalism is described as 'the set of ideas that led the National Independence War (1919–23) [in Turkey] and the following reform measures carried out during Atatürk's regime. Anti-imperialism, popular sovereignty, nationalism, populism, and republicanism were among the earliest principles of this ideology. These ideas were later institutionalized as the six principles—the so-called "six arrows," representing republicanism, nationalism, secularism, populism, statism, and revolutionism. They were incorporated into the program of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in 1931 and officially described as Kemalism in 1935.' Özlem Demirtaş Bagdonas, "The clash of Kemalism? Reflections on the past and present politics of Kemalism in Turkish political discourse," *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 1 (2008): p 100.

¹⁴⁰ Altay Nevzat, "Nationalism amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave", p 357.

¹⁴¹ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 471.

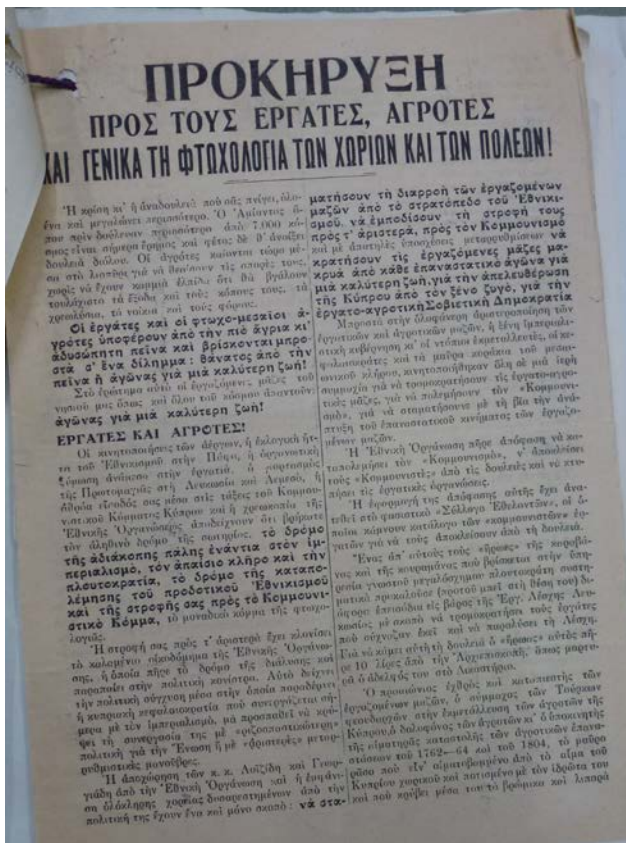
¹⁴² Letter to Blanche Lloyd dated 14 January 1931, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 11

¹⁴³ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 541.

¹⁴⁴ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 591.

¹⁴⁵ Yiannos Katsourides, "The National Question in Cyprus and the Cypriot Communist Left in the Era of British Colonialism (1922–59)," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 4 (2014): p 478.

the Communist Party of Cyprus (CPC) in 1924.¹⁴⁶ Its dominance prevented the formation of a pluralistic labour movement in Cyprus.¹⁴⁷ It also had the effect of producing a more radical form of 'left' politics than existed in Malta, where a labour movement and Labour Party cooperated with the British. The CPC had a Marxist outlook and program. As it saw the expansionist policies of Greece as bourgeois the party argued instead for autonomy and independence.¹⁴⁸ More specifically it supported autonomy within the British Empire or an independent worker-peasant democracy if Britain withdrew from Cyprus.¹⁴⁹ The policy position of the CPC meant that it could appeal to Turkish and Greek Cypriots alike (and this was a conscious decision), but its opposition to *enosis*, placed it offside with Greek Cypriot nationalists. A file created by the British administration in Cyprus in mid-1931 and marked 'Secret' contained copies of proclamations put out by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cyprus.



¹⁴⁶ For more on the Communist Party see Y. Katsourides, *History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left* (I. B. Tauris, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ Andrekos Varnava, "Katsourides, Y.(2014). The History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left. London," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 26, no. 1 (2015): p 184.

¹⁴⁸ Yiannos Katsourides, "The National Question in Cyprus and the Cypriot Communist Left in the Era of British Colonialism (1922–59)", p 478.

¹⁴⁹ Andrekos Varnava, "Katsourides, Y.(2014). The History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left. London", p 186.

Figure 6 – Communist Proclamation¹⁵⁰

In the proclamation they invited Cypriots to:

Struggle with spite and fanaticism (sic) with persistence and self-sacrifice against the usurers, the merchants, the chiflick-owners and the manufacturers against the reactive clergy of the orthodox church ...

Struggle for the land, for your delivery from the taxes for seven hours of work, for succours to the unemployed labourers etc.

Struggle against the terrorism of the imperialism and of the native exploiters, empower the labour Aid, organize assemblies in towns and villages in order to protest against the terrorism and to ask the release of our imprisoned communists.¹⁵¹

The file notes that in 1931 there were a total of 356 registered communists, but Storrs wrote that the ‘Turkish and Communist movements, while mischievous, are in no way alarming’.¹⁵²

Although it did not take part in the burning down of government house the CPC did take part in the general unrest afterwards going so far as to reconcile with the Orthodox Church and pledge the support of the party in the struggle against the government.¹⁵³ The party was swept up in the widespread oppression of political activity after October (when Government House burned). It was declared illegal and two of its leaders were exiled.¹⁵⁴ The British policy of repression of the CPC continued for the rest of the inter-war period and the party, although losing membership in the early 1930s, survived until its rebranding as the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL) in 1941 at a time when oppressive measures were relaxed. The preoccupation with Communism in Cyprus was really out of proportion to their impact on domestic politics in the inter-war period. This concern, borne out in many pages of official reports, is more symptomatic of the international threat rather than the domestic. The British administration in Cyprus did not exploit the communist position of opposition to *enosis* and they made no effort to promote a British style labour movement. Clearly however the activity and the concern for local

¹⁵⁰ Proclamation to the Labourers, Countryment and generally to the Proletariat of the Villages and of the Towns, Limmasol, 15 May 1931., in Sir Ronald Storrs, 'Letter to Lord Passfield from Ronald Storrs regarding political situation in Cyprus', 4 June 1931, FCO 141/2445 .

¹⁵¹ Proclamation to the Labourers., in Sir Ronald Storrs, 'Letter regarding Political Situation in Cyprus', 4 June 1931, FCO 141/2445 . Chiflik-owners were hereditary land owners under an Ottoman system of land management.

¹⁵² Sir Ronald Storrs, 'Letter regarding Political Situation in Cyprus', 4 June 1931, FCO 141/2445 The first overt action of the CPC was on 25 March 1931, the Greek National Independence Day, when they organised counter-demonstrations. See G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 651.

¹⁵³ Altay Nevzat, "Nationalism amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave".

¹⁵⁴ Yiannos Katsourides, "The National Question in Cyprus and the Cypriot Communist Left in the Era of British Colonialism (1922–59)", p 481.

Communism in Cyprus is part of a more general increased political consciousness in this period. On the other hand the British failed to appreciate the magnitude of the nationalist threat and when the peak of trouble came for Storrs in 1931 the Communist Party was really only on the sidelines.

From Dissent to Violence

In June 1931 Storrs remained concerned about the National Organisation of Greek Unionists. This group had enormous influence on the Greek Cypriot Members of the Legislative Council who were, in his view, playing a wrecking role in governance in order to draw attention to their cause.¹⁵⁵ Politically dominant, the National Organisation was led by religious figures such as Nicodemos Mylonas (Bishop of Kitium) and Makarios Myrianthis (Bishop of Kyrenia). There were deep internal divisions within the movement. Non-radical nationalists such as Nicodemos Mylonas were elected representatives and their approach to achieving *enosis* was to promote Anglo-Greek relations and influence the two countries to reach an agreement on Cyprus joining Greece.¹⁵⁶ The young radicals on the other hand favoured a tactic of civil disobedience and ‘the use of increasingly forceful means in voicing Greek [Cypriot] opposition to British Rule’.¹⁵⁷ Their emergence helped to further radicalise Cypriot politics.

Given the role the economy played in domestic politics, it was politically difficult for Storrs when Phillip Snowden, Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced to the House of Commons on 8 July 1931 that the ‘tribute surplus’ (funds built up from the tribute), would not be applied or spent in Cyprus, but had instead been used to amortise the 1855 Turkish loan.¹⁵⁸ The political situation in Cyprus had reached fever pitch. Storrs put through an Order in Council for tax increases which had previously been rejected by the Legislative Council. Cypriots became aware of this order in August. The local newspapers carried calls for the deputies to resign, but the deputies instead agreed to recommend a tax boycott Cyprus-wide. This policy was met with public disapproval in Cyprus and the deputies and Nicodemos in particular came under increasing pressure in the weeks following the meeting to resign as a form of protest. Nicodemos was aware of the political threat posed by the Greek Cypriot Nationalist Radicals who were planning to form a political group known as Radical National Union of Cyprus (EREK). On 17 October he took the initiative and pre-empted the radicals by writing a public manifesto in which

¹⁵⁵ Sir Ronald Storrs, 'Letter regarding Political Situation in Cyprus', 4 June 1931, FCO 141/2445

¹⁵⁶ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 683.

¹⁵⁷ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 665.

¹⁵⁸ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 653.

he resigned from the council, denounced British rule and asked Greek Cypriots to join in a united anti-colonial campaign.¹⁵⁹ Addressed directly to Storrs, the manifesto claimed:

It is a fact, Your Excellency, that even the most Christian patience has its limits; we have suffered for fifty-three whole years an administration by people of a foreign race, foreign to our sentiments and the most elementary of our rights and indifferent to the needs of this unfortunate island in the hope that the petty colonial interests of Great Britain would at last be overcome by those considerations which had so much assisted our great mother-country in regaining her liberty.¹⁶⁰

Storrs notes that after writing this manifesto Nicodemus continued to make several ‘vaguely seditious speeches’.¹⁶¹ Nicodemus now became the figurehead of the Greek Cypriot nationalists. He addressed a large crowd in Limassol on 20 October; Cyprus was on the cusp of a riot, an outbreak of violence and an extended period of political authoritarianism.

Cyprus - The 1931 Outbreak of Violence

News of the gathering at Limassol reached Nicosia by telegram the next day (21 October 1931) where EREK was meeting in Ledra Street in old Nicosia. The Faneromenis Church bells were rung and some three to five thousand people gathered.¹⁶² After listening to these impassioned speeches, the crowd, aware that Storrs was going on leave, proceeded to Government House, a building three kilometres south of the old city of Nicosia.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ For full translated text of manifesto see G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 688.

¹⁶⁰ Governor of Cyprus, 'Secret Despatch regarding Riot', 31 October 1931, X41397/F/31[No.1], CO 883/8 Enclosure 2.

¹⁶¹ Governor of Cyprus, 'Secret Despatch regarding Riot', 31 October 1931, X41397/F/31[No.1], CO 883/8

¹⁶² Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 127. – The priest from that church unfurled a Greek flag shouting ‘I declare the revolution’.

¹⁶³ C.W. Gwynn, *Imperial policing*, p 341. – On the way they passed a timber yard and were able to arm themselves with lengths of wood.

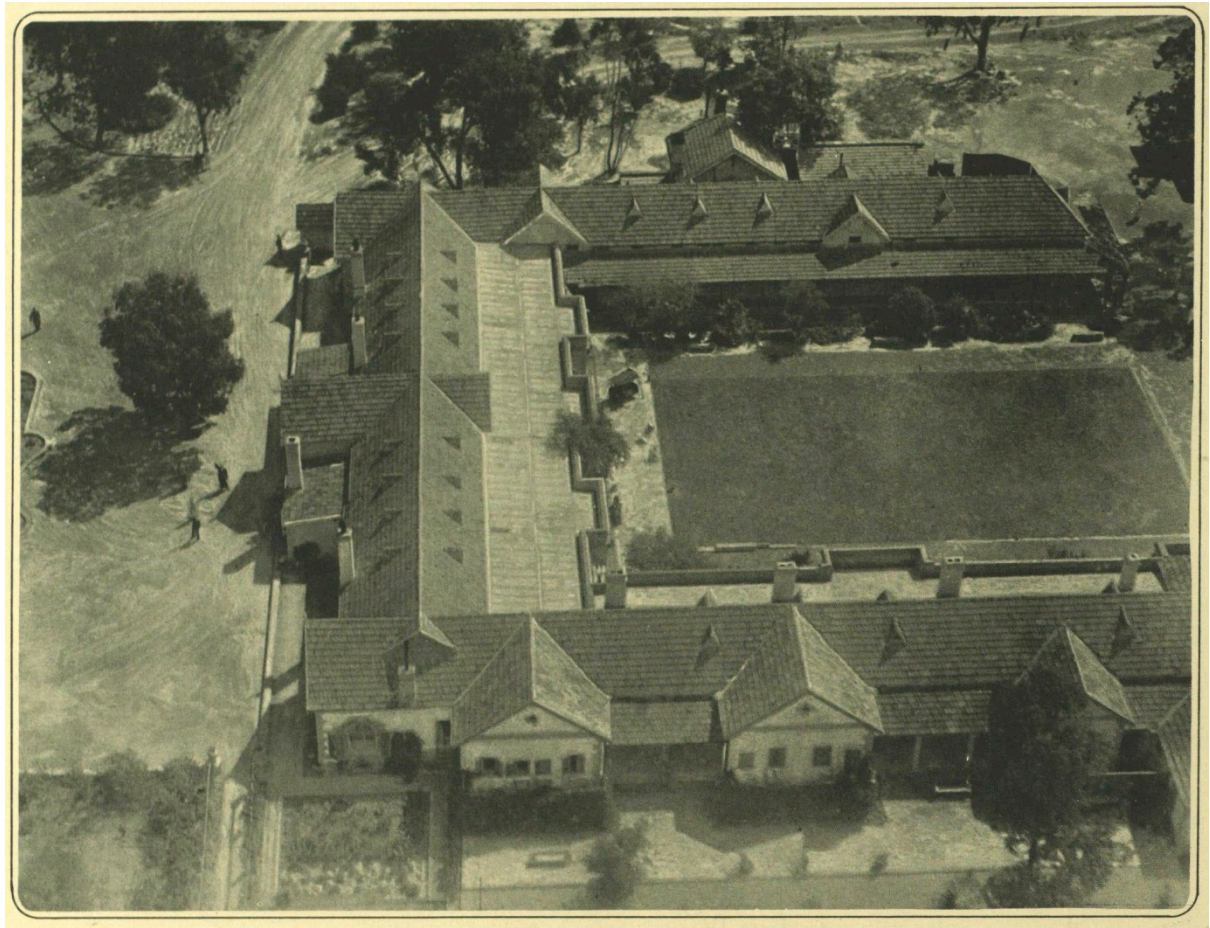


Figure 7 – Government House, Nicosia, before the 1931 Riot.

Source: *The Illustrated London News*, 7 November 1931

A small, and ultimately inadequate, force of five mounted and eight foot police were sent out to guard the entrance to Government House. They were stoned by the crowd which reached the front door of the building. The Commissioner of Nicosia, Charles Hart-Davis, spoke to the leaders of the crowd, who then attempted to disperse the group, but events had overtaken their authority. At nine pm cars were burnt, windows were broken by stones and at approximately eleven pm the police, following guidelines, attempted a baton charge which failed.¹⁶⁴

Concerted attempts were then made by the crowd to light the building. The police followed procedure and shouted a final warning before firing a volley of shots into the crowd, at which time the crowd fled.¹⁶⁵ One of the protesters subsequently died from his wounds.¹⁶⁶ Despite the

¹⁶⁴ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931," *Army Quarterly* XXV no. No 2 (1933): p 270.

¹⁶⁵ Sir Ronald Storrs, "Telegram from Storrs to Colonial Secretary", 22 October 1931, p 135, CO67/240/10 - The behaviour of the troops seems to have been broadly in line with guidelines developed earlier and printed out in booklets mentioned above, although at least one source suggests the troopers were ordered to fire at the legs of the protesters. See G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 699.

shooting the fire had taken hold of the wooden structure and Government House and Storrs's possessions were lost.¹⁶⁷



Figure 8 – The burnt out remains of Government House, Nicosia

Source: *The Illustrated London News*, 7 November 1931

On 22 October 1931, Storrs, who had escaped harm, telegraphed the Colonial Secretary, James Henry Thomas, to inform him that a:

Large procession led by three Greek Elected Members of the Council demonstrated for 3 ½ hours last night Wednesday before Government House, threw stones thereat (sic) kept police at bay with missiles and finally set fire to Government House which was burnt to the ground. ... At present Capital quiet. I have summoned troops. Disturbance shows signs of spreading. I am requesting Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, send aircraft carrier or cruiser Larnaca and asking for troops by air from Egypt. My leave cancelled. All cyphers thought to be destroyed.¹⁶⁸

Tabitha Morgan suggests that the British colonial government and the British community were stunned, that ‘cocooned by privilege they were detached from the social and political tension within Cypriot society and for the most part ignorant of the extent of economic deprivation’.¹⁶⁹ This played into the hands of the Greek Cypriot nationalists, which the British also failed to

¹⁶⁶ Sir Ronald Storrs, 'Telegram from Storrs to Colonial Secretary', 23 October 1931, X41397/31[No.43] CO 883/8

¹⁶⁷ Governor of Cyprus, 'Secret Despatch regarding Riot', 31 October 1931, X41397/F/31[No.1], CO 883/8

¹⁶⁸ Sir Ronald Storrs, 'Telegram from Storrs to Colonial Secretary', 22 October 1931, p 135, CO67/240/10

¹⁶⁹ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 128.

realise. British administrators of the Empire were on the defensive, Burton argues more generally that because empire was 'undefended or underdefended, against the sheer possibility' of dissent and disruption.¹⁷⁰ This blindness she contends can be attributed to 'orientalism or racism or whatever sets of belief that account for the incapacity of will or self-governing deficits empire builders only too willingly attributed to those they attempted to colonize'.¹⁷¹ Burton's suggestion is supported by the example of Cyprus in 1931.

The immediate solution to unrest and the path to restoration of power was violence. The telegram sent by Storrs asked for military support. This practice, known as 'Military Aid to Civil Power' had become a key part of the work of the British Armed Forces in the inter war period.¹⁷² Because Cyprus continued to be an inconsequential possession militarily the permanent garrison, consisted of only three officers and 123 men.¹⁷³ The garrison was constituted mainly of 'C' Company 1st Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers which was stationed at its summer base at the Troodos Hill Station in October, under the command of Captain H. A. Freeman when the violence broke out.¹⁷⁴ Shortly after midnight on 22 October he received a call from Nicosia, alerting him to the disturbance and he utilised all available motor vehicles and a train to get his troops to Nicosia by 7:30 the next morning.¹⁷⁵ Freeman thought the police protecting Government House could not 'be blamed for not firing sooner, as permission to do so was not given by the local inspector until too late'.¹⁷⁶ Freeman, it seems, thought that the order should have been given earlier. Certainly in 1912 the police had been less inhibited in their use of force.

As they had in the past, Cypriot authorities sought troops from Egypt.¹⁷⁷ On 22 October six Victoria aircraft each carrying 20 infantry left Heliopolis for Cyprus¹⁷⁸ and three cruisers and two destroyers were also despatched.¹⁷⁹ The use of Vickers 'Victoria' troop carrying aircraft was still relatively novel and so their use featured in the *Illustrated London News*.¹⁸⁰ Storrs even requested

¹⁷⁰ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 214.

¹⁷¹ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, p 214.

¹⁷² Robert Johnson, "Command of the Army, Charles Gwynn and Imperial Policing: The British Doctrinal Approach to Internal Security in Palestine 1919–29," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 4 (2015): p 571.

¹⁷³ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 130.

¹⁷⁴ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931".

¹⁷⁵ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931", p 269.

¹⁷⁶ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931", p 271.

¹⁷⁷ For greater detail of troop numbers and equipment see G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 703.

¹⁷⁸ Royal Air Force Middle East Headquarters, 'Secret Telegram re airlift of troops', 22 October 1931, p 123, CO67/240/10

¹⁷⁹ HC Debate, 12 November 1931, vol 259 cc254-6 54

¹⁸⁰ "Troop-Transport Oversea by Air," *Illustrated London News* (1931).

bomber aircraft equipped with machine guns which could engage large groups of insurgents. These aircraft were provided but only used in demonstration flights.¹⁸¹ The violence that was countenanced by the system, and allowable under the suspension of law was extensive. The request by Storrs envisaged the aerial machine-gunning of large groups of people.



Figure 9 – Original caption read: ‘British Troops “Emplaning” at the Aerodrome at Heliopolis for transport by air to Cyprus: men of the King’s regiment entering one of the seven Vickers “Victoria” troop carrying aeroplanes, each of which can accommodate 22 men, fully armed and equipped besides the crew of two’.

Source: *The Illustrated London News*, 14 November 1931

The burning down of Government House was symbolic, but was just one part of a broader outbreak of dissent and unrest. On 22 October outbreaks of violence spread to Limassol, Larnaca, Famagusta, Paphos and later Kyrenia.¹⁸² There was unrest in up to one-third of all villages in Cyprus and in Limassol the Commissioner’s House was burnt down.¹⁸³ The naval reinforcements arrived at 9 am on the morning of 23 October. Two cruisers *London* and *Shropshire* went to Larnaca and Limassol and two destroyers *Agasta* and *Achates* went to Paphos and Famagusta; all landed troops.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 703.

¹⁸² HC Debate, 12 November 1931, vol 259 cc254-6 54

¹⁸³ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 703-4.

¹⁸⁴ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931", p 275. For a detailed description of Naval activity see Rear Admiral Henley, 'Report: Disturbances in Cyprus', 16 November 1931, CO 67 242/4

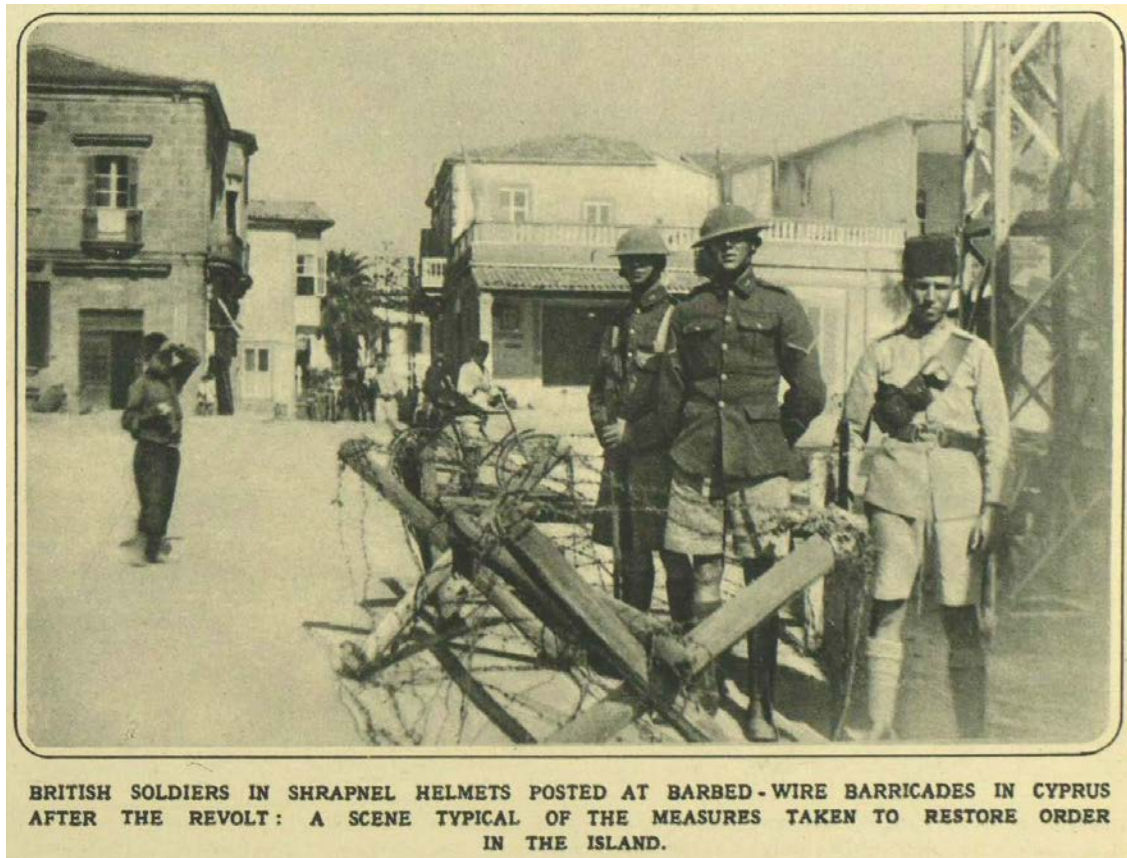


Figure 10 – British troops ‘restoring order’

Source: *The Illustrated London News*, 31 October 1931

By 27 October the towns had been pacified, but the disturbances in the rural areas, such as ‘cutting telephone wires, tampering with roads and railway, burning forest huts and police stations and stealing from salt stores’ continued until the first week of November.¹⁸⁵ The Legislative Council, which had no meaningful role in the response to the violence, was abolished on 12 November. This was the classic state of emergency scenario discussed by Agamben, when a state suspended the normal operation of government and the law to maintain control. Captain Freeman attributed the end of the ‘badly organized rebellion’ to the presence of troops in every district along with the enforcement of a strict curfew.¹⁸⁶ Major-General Sir Charles W. Gwynn, an expert in ‘imperial policing’ wrote in 1934 that:

altogether the fighting Services emerged with much credit from the Cyprus episode. Their mobility and power of mutual co-operation was strikingly illustrated ... a high standard of

¹⁸⁵ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931", p 279.

¹⁸⁶ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931", p 279.

firmness, promptitude, initiative and a well-balanced appreciation of political considerations were displayed by junior officers who found themselves in a responsible position.¹⁸⁷

Following on from the suspension of the Legislative Council, severe political repression and police state tactics, not acceptable with Britain itself, were used. Storrs implemented a range of measures including prohibiting the carrying of arms, holding of assemblies, banning Greek flags and the ringing of church bells and a collective fine of £35,000. He ordered the censoring of telegrams, reading and stopping letters and prevented Greek newspapers sympathetic to *enosis* from being imported to the island.¹⁸⁸ In addition to this there were 'several thousand arrests trials and convictions'.¹⁸⁹ The Cypriot Court system tried 3,359 people as a result of the disturbances of whom 2,606 were convicted.¹⁹⁰ Storrs began immediately arresting and deporting 'ringleaders' including the Bishop of Kitium (Nicodemos), Elected Member of Council Theodotou Haji Pavlou and Dionysiois Kykkotis Chief Priest of the Phaneromeni Church in Nicosia.¹⁹¹ Storrs was acting in an arbitrary, non-democratic and extra-legal way; his administration was operating in a state of exception.

Bishop Makarios of Kyrenia was arrested in the early morning of the 26th making for a total of ten deportations.¹⁹² Storrs wanted to deport more but his zealotry was reined in by a more cautious Colonial Office.¹⁹³ His fondness for this method was disclosed in a letter which does not have an addressee, but which was probably written to Clive Wigram, the King's private secretary. In it he shared his view that 'during 3 or 4 days the situation was really critical' but that:

the insurgents began to be down and out so soon as the sudden and totally unexpected deportation of the ringleaders became known. It was assumed (not without justification after our 52 years of easy-going tolerance) that we would not dare to arrest them for fear of exciting their followers to massacres and so provoking universal havoc.¹⁹⁴

Storrs then went to describe a 'careful plan' wherein troops and police allowed the leaders to operate unimpeded but then raided their house at two thirty in the morning and 'removed them

¹⁸⁷ C.W. Gwynn, *Imperial policing*, p 366.

¹⁸⁸ Sir Ronald Storrs, 'Letter to Colonial Secretary re censorship', 16 December 1931, p 3, CO67/242/3

¹⁸⁹ Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997*, p 614. For response see also Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 132-3.

¹⁹⁰ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 708.

¹⁹¹ Sir Ronald Storrs, 'Telegram from Storrs to Colonial Secretary re deportations', 24 October 1931, p 97, CO 67/240/10

¹⁹² Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931", p 278.

¹⁹³ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 705-6.

¹⁹⁴ Letter marked Private and dated 17 November 1931, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 13, Box IV, Folder 3

from their beds, homes, districts and country in custody of H.M's Cruisers *London* and *Shropshire* off Larnaca and Limmasol'.¹⁹⁵ The Colonial Secretary, James Henry Thomas, wrote to Storrs, expressing support for these measures:

You have already taken action against the ringleaders. You have my full support in dealing with them and in any necessary action to put down this sedition or to make it clear to those who have been so unfortunately misled that neither now, or in the future, will disorder be tolerated. It is obvious that the liberties given under the present constitution have been abused by disloyal political leaders. Accordingly in the general interest of the people of Cyprus His Majesty's Government will have to review, in consultation with you, the whole question of the constitutional future of the Island.¹⁹⁶

The constitutional future of the Island had been a live issue, before the violence. Storrs made the telegram publicly available; in both Greek and Turkish. He wrote to his friend George Lloyd on December 1931 and described the 'numberless tributes' he had received for his handling of the crisis and his opinion that his 'stock is not unenhanced' in the eyes of the government.¹⁹⁷ This perception was not accurate; despite the initial support of Thomas, Storrs was 'broken and his career shattered'. He was in line to be appointed Governor of Bombay but instead on 27 May 1932 it was announced that he was appointed Governor of Northern Rhodesia and would be replaced by Edward Stubbs.¹⁹⁸ Storrs had encouraged hope but brought disillusionment to Cyprus.¹⁹⁹ He was in Cyprus from 1926 to 1932. Considered an able and educated administrator he was unsuccessful in managing the internal tension and dissent in empire.

In the British Parliament on 12 November 1931, Colonial Secretary Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister,²⁰⁰ a Conservative newly appointed as a member of the National Government formed in August, noted that:

The situation is now fully in hand. There are in the Island two companies of troops, in addition to the normal garrison of one company, and the naval parties which were temporarily landed have been withdrawn.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ Letter marked Private and dated 17 November 1931, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 13, Box IV, Folder 3

¹⁹⁶ Colonial Secretary, 'Telegram to the Governor re disturbances', 28 October 1931, X41397/31 [No. 155A] CO 883/8

¹⁹⁷ Personal and Private letter from Sir Ronald Storrs to George Lloyd dated 3 December 1931, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 13, Box IV, Folder 3

¹⁹⁸ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 132.

¹⁹⁹ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 700.

²⁰⁰ Cunliffe Lister was an active Colonial Secretary, who travelled in the Middle East and visited Cyprus and Palestine specifically. Keith Robbins, "Lister, Philip Cunliffe- , first earl of Swinton (1884–1972)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

He also noted that ‘the casualties reported among civilians are six killed and thirty wounded’ and ‘thirty nine cases of injuries to the police’.²⁰² Aside from the high profile burning down of Government House Cunliffe-Lister noted the destruction of the Commissioner’s house in Limassol, the destruction of a bridge and telegraph wires in the Famagusta district, and damage to a number of village police stations.²⁰³

As promised by his predecessor, Cunliffe-Lister oversaw the suspension of the Cypriot Constitution in November and all powers to make laws were granted to the Governor.²⁰⁴ He informed Storrs on 17 November that ‘no question of union of Cyprus with Greece can be entertained and the determination of the future constitution should be deferred until the present agitation has died down in Cyprus and Greece as well’.²⁰⁵ A newspaper in Egypt writing about events in Cyprus told its readers in April 1932 that ‘for the time being, Cyprus is being governed under a kind of absolutism, the Governor exercising exceptional powers, conferred to meet an exceptional situation’. Under the British flag, the special correspondent wrote, ‘such a system of government cannot last indefinitely’.²⁰⁶ The newspaper and others miss the crucial point however. If a power can resort to the state of exception whenever it is challenged, then that position, the exception, is the position that matters. That is the accurate measurement of the limit, or extent of the governing power. In Cyprus, after 1931, the British made less attempt to conceal the limits of that power, deciding against a restoration of systems of ‘self-government’ and instead relying on simple authoritarianism. As previously discussed this was a point of departure from the way in which Malta was managed.

The elected members were bitterly upset about the changes and Storrs’ handling of the matter in particular. Politician Phidias Kyriakides for example wrote in his resignation letter (from the Legislative Council) that

had I hated England and desired the humiliation and collapse of the British Empire I would have wished for this only – to see England entrusting the administration of the vast British Empire to fifty Storrs’ in order that I might see it crumbling to ruins from the very morrow.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ HC Debate, 12 November 1931, vol 259 cc254-6 54

²⁰² HC Debate, 12 November 1931, vol 259 cc254-6 54

²⁰³ HC Debate, 12 November 1931, vol 259 cc254-6 54

²⁰⁴ HC Debate, 12 November 1931, vol 259 cc254-6 54

²⁰⁵ Colonial Secretary, 'Letter to Storrs re constitution', 17 November 1931, p 13, CO 67/240/11

²⁰⁶ Special Correspondent, 'Intermission Cyprus - Aftermath of the Riots - Waiting for Policy' in 'The Egyptian Gazette', 26 April 1932, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 14, Box IV, Folder 4

²⁰⁷ PH. I. Kyriakides, 'Letter to Storrs', 20 October 1931, p 11, CO 67/240/13

Many of these politicians were, like the British, surprised by the events of October and they failed to take any political advantage from the situation.²⁰⁸ An important aspect of the trouble in the Mediterranean Empire was the turbulence of local politics. In Cyprus the Turkish Cypriots, quite logically, saw *enosis* as a threat to their interests and after 1931 they saw an opportunity to suppress the movement. Turkish Cypriot Mehmet Munir Bey, now Chairman of the Government Body of the Turkish Cypriot Elementary Schools and a member of the Board of Education, argued that 'the recent serious disturbances were the outcome of 50 years of tolerance and leniency on the part of the Government' and 'now was the opportunity to stamp out the trouble once and for all'.²⁰⁹ The Turkish Cypriots felt that they were suffering punishment for something they had not done and this drove support for Kemalism.²¹⁰ There was a sense of generational change in Turkish Cypriot politics. The younger Turkish Cypriots were attracted to Kemalist values, but Britain continued to back Munir Bey who was becoming increasingly unpopular. Palmer (Governor from 1933) in particular backed Munir, while Dawe described him as a rather 'unsound person' and believed that Palmer's attitudes were driving young Turkish Cypriots into the 'arms of the Kemalists'.²¹¹ Morgan suggested that Kemalism was now seen as a 'counter-balance to British intransigence and Greek Cypriot support for *enosis*'.²¹² This is a reasonable argument, as for Turkish-Cypriots the obvious place to look for outside help was modern Turkey and its current government. The Turkish-Cypriots were part of the multi-dimensional problems in Cyprus. It is also a further example of the manner in which the British became embroiled in the local politics of their colonies.

After the riots anxious British administrators watched local politics very closely. On 2 December 1932 the acting governor of Cyprus, H Henniker-Heaton, appraised the General Officer Commander of the British Troops in Egypt and the Colonial Secretary Cunliffe-Lister of the political situation in Cyprus. He noted that the nationalists were mostly quiet, and that the people were tired of political agitation as they realised that the unrest was an expensive failure, that notables were inclined to cooperate 'when cooperation does not conflict with other interests' and that *enosis* was 'scotched not killed'.²¹³ The most serious concern according to his report was Communism that was 'tending to increase rapidly in the present economic

²⁰⁸ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 131.

²⁰⁹ "Turkish Minority In Cyprus", *The Times*, 13 November 1931

²¹⁰ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 132.

²¹¹ Altay Nevzat, "Nationalism amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave", p 421.

²¹² Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 133.

²¹³ H Henniker-Heaton, 'Letter regarding political situation reports from Cyprus', 2 December 1932, red 26, FCO141/2464

conditions'. By contrast no mention of fascism was made in the report. Henniker-Heaton noted that:

Political unrest is keenest in the towns. The villager wants political quiet so that he can devote himself to earning a livelihood. In the towns and larger villages there is a body of unemployed, rascallions, criminals, and excitable school boys, irresponsible persons with little or nothing to lose, among whom disturbances might be created by malevolent persons which might easily become serious.²¹⁴

This supports the argument, consistently put in this study, that the general unrest in the Mediterranean colonies was motivated in part by economic distress. The violence in Cyprus took place in 1931, when the Depression was in full swing.²¹⁵

In December 1931, a company of troops, the armoured cars and aeroplanes returned to Egypt.²¹⁶ The military solution was a short term proposition. Freeman's permanent garrison increased to only 175 men and his troops were spread across four towns until February. Before this withdrawal all Englishmen were asked to join an armed 'special constabulary' which was intended to act as a reserve force in the crucial period before the military could mobilise.²¹⁷ This arrangement notwithstanding, it is remarkable that so few troops remained in Cyprus. After the unrest the British government debated but then decided against a royal commission, partly because they did not want to appear 'weak', something Rappas describes as a new colonial 'obsession'.²¹⁸ Hyam, looking at the empire as a whole also identified this feature. He argues that 'for nearly ten years from 1929 the country scarcely had any foreign policy worth the name, as more and more reliance was placed on the League of Nations'. This malaise he suggests led to 'an obsessive governmental anxiety about the imperial weakness'.²¹⁹ Both Rappas and Hyam are right to point out the importance of prestige and the appearance of weakness. This was a

²¹⁴ H Henniker-Heaton, 'Letter regarding political situation reports from Cyprus', 2 December 1932, red 26, FCO141/2464

²¹⁵ These 'political situation reports' contained in the same file continued for another two years as the Colonial Secretary requested monthly updates which dropped down to quarterly in 1933. Each of these reports contained a breakdown, 'notables, attitudes of', then 'Religious Authorities attitude of', 'Press, attitude of', 'Communists and other Agitators' and 'Clubs, improper use of'. Perhaps the most significant section was that on Communism which provided a town by town breakdown of communist activity and the occasional imprisonment of an active member. As an example of communist suppression, Harlambo Sominides a 'leading communist' in Limassol was, in March 1933, sentenced to four months imprisonment for 'being found in possession of prohibited books'. - R.E. Stubbs, 'Digest of Information received from the Commissioners on the political situation in their respective districts during the month of March 1933', 24 April 1933, Red 116, FCO141/2464

²¹⁶ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931", p 279.

²¹⁷ Captain H. A. Freeman, "The Rebellion in Cyprus 1931", p 279.

²¹⁸ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 20. Rappas also notes that concessions prior to 1931 were seen as weakness in government.

²¹⁹ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's declining empire*, p 76.

constant feature of communication within the Colonial and Foreign Offices. The belief that concessions were a sign of weakness also meant that the British government and local administrators were more inclined to follow repressive measures.

The riots 'marked a profound transformation in British attitude to Cypriot culture' and from that point the administration championed 'Cypriot nationalism' as distinct from Greek Cypriot nationalism.²²⁰ This was not a new approach but one that had developed since the 1915 offer of Cyprus to Greece. In Malta a similar approach had centred on a distinct Maltese language but in Cyprus was based on the spurious archaeological concept of an 'eteo-Cypriot', a distinct ethnic group.²²¹ Dawe, commenting on changes to elementary (primary) schools, said that they were 'one of the most important laws we have enacted in Cyprus since 1878; one cannot help wondering how far the history of British rule might have been if it had been passed two generations ago'.²²² Dawe had been the Secretary of the 1931 Maltese Royal Commission that had made the recommendation to stop teaching Italian in Malta, a position which produced strong opposition.

The October 1931 events were ultimately seen by many in the British government as a positive. It was the excuse they needed to dispense with the old constitution. Dawe, who was still in Malta, wrote to Storrs on 5 November 1931 and after passing on his sympathies adopted a philosophical approach:

Looking at it from a broad point of view, I imagine it may be rather a good thing for Cyprus that this has happened. It has, at any rate, enabled you to get rid of some of the more poisonous and dangerous of the agitators, and, after fifty years of indecision has, I hope, brought home to the authorities here the fundamental rottenness of the Constitution granted in the sentimental 'eighties'.²²³

The 'rottenness' Dawe was referring to were the tendencies towards liberality and self-government, however limited, which were embodied in the Cypriot constitution. Storrs agreed with Dawe and was keen to enforce long term repressive measures. He wrote in a private letter that:

²²⁰ Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and Bitter Island*, p 133.

²²¹ Michael Given, "Inventing the Eteocypriots: Imperialist Archaeology and the Manipulation of Ethnic Identity," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 11, no. 1 (1998).

²²² Letter from Governor Herbert Henniker-Heaton to Secretary of State, 'Cyprus Secondary Education, 1932', 30 November 1932, CO 67/249/13 as referred to in A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 45.

²²³ Letter from AJ Dawe to Sir Ronald Storrs date 5 November 1931, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 13, Box IV, Folder 3

we shall at last have that reform of the constitution which I have been attempting for over 3 years. Each time I pressed it my ideas were sympathetically received by a Government which almost immediately after went out of office, so that I had to begin again trying to persuade a new set of Ministers and Under-Secretaries. We shall be able to abolish that incessant and seditious waving of the Greek flag as indeed might have been done better and easier by my first predecessor, Lord Wolseley, in 1878 or again on the Annexation of the island in 1914 or lastly when it was proclaimed a Crown Colony in 1925.²²⁴

As Rappas suggests ‘the October 1931 revolt constituted an auspicious event as it enabled the removal of the last obstacles in the colonial state’s expansion, promoting at the same time the role of colonial administrators’.²²⁵ For years the old constitution had left the British in the undesirable position of relying upon the Turkish Cypriot voting bloc in the Legislative Council, always anxious that their measures might be blocked.

Georghallides agrees that the Colonial Office were happy to bring in a new autocratic regime and were almost glad of the riot as it provided a justification for this turn in policy.²²⁶ He argues that ‘the causes of the destabilisation of the colonial political order were complex and cumulatively interactive’.²²⁷ The basis of the crisis was the governing of the empire without the islander’s consent, and their exclusion from decisions making. This he says meant that no genuine feelings of loyalty developed towards the British Empire.²²⁸ Georghallides seems to be pointing to what are really the basic precepts of imperialism. He properly identifies part of the political dynamic, but he does not see Cyprus in a broader colonial context. He also fails to mention the economic aspect of the colony and of the events of 1931. As had happened in Malta in 1919 there was a groundswell of economic discontent that was directed by a dissatisfied elite prosecuting its own political objectives.

Aside from the economic aspect his suggestion that political maturity and stability such as existed within Britain itself, or the dominions of Australia and Canada (also operating on a Westminster model) required a genuine grant of political independence and autonomy is very convincing. Cyprus, like Malta, instead endured its own ‘sham responsible parliament’ which allowed for a stultification of local politics, a fixation upon the messiah of *enosis* among elites and a broad anger amongst the working and rural classes that in a climate of economic privation

²²⁴ Letter marked Private and dated 17 November 1931, Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 13, Box IV, Folder 3

²²⁵ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 18.

²²⁶ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 702.

²²⁷ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 700.

²²⁸ G.S. Georghallides, *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, p 700.

could be harnessed by that elite. The British administration did not have, and could not foster an acquiescence to be ruled among the Cypriot people. The administration knew this but was still surprised when violence broke out. Furthermore the events of 1931 saw a rocking back on to an authoritarian mode of government which lacked moral legitimacy, a deficiency that was papered over by military resources. This post-1931 period of government in Cyprus will be a focus in the next chapter. The shift to a long-term authoritarian system did not occur in the strategically important, fortress colony of Malta where, despite a series of constitutional crises, the British government doggedly persisted in introducing new constitutions and new systems of government.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the high levels of internal unrest in Malta and Cyprus, punctuated by violent incidents in 1912, 1919 and 1931. These events demonstrate the way in which internal dissent drove forward the development of empires as the authorities deployed violence and law to subdue and control colonial populations. Both places show the role of the economy in creating the basic conditions for dissent. Malta and Cyprus also show how the strategic value of these places led the British authorities to pursue different legal and constitutional solutions to dissent.

The significant unrest in Malta in 1919 was driven by concern over unemployment and the cost of living that was directed by nationalist elites. The violence was not widespread and there was no general order to fire. While there was no punishment for the troops, the response included the introduction of food subsidies, and the Colonial Office moving to a view that Malta should be granted more self-government. Financial concerns were also a factor and it was cheaper to allow self-government than continually placate unrest through subsidies.

The immediate result of the *Sette Giugno* riots was the 1921 constitution, the high point of Maltese self-representation in the inter-war period and an indication of the way in which Britain persistently pursued constitutional reform over punitive measures or indeed excessive spending.

The correspondence between Colonial officials in 1919 revealed the nature of constitutional rule in Malta. They correctly labelled all previous regimes 'illusory constitutions'. The new 1921 constitution appeared to offer more local representation, but it maintained the important ability to resort to exceptional powers when needed. The entire 1919 incident supports the argument that the internal dissent in Malta was significant. The unrest, the trouble, in Malta was suppressed

by war-time conditions, and by war-time spending, but the dissent reasserted itself after the War, and it would continue to do so after 1921, as the next chapter will discuss.

The inter-war period in Cyprus experienced many of the threats common to the British Empire but displayed some unique aspects also. The complicating factor for Cyprus was always the ethnic divide on the island and the two 'home' countries which had an affinity with and provided support for those communities. As this chapter has discussed this separation was not always the dominant paradigm, but it was reinforced by early British rule. 'Nationalistic' feeling in the majority Greek Cypriot community was skewed to *enosis*. It was not Cypriot but Hellenic, it ignored at least twenty per cent of the population (Turkish-Cypriots) and it was divisive rather than inclusive. Over the twenty years from 1919 the situation in the colony deteriorated, and the British administration regressed from a position of providing some local representation to a period of authoritarian and repressive rule.

The British authorities had the resources to easily put down violence in Cyprus during 1912. The local police were used, and there was no broad scale challenge to the British right to rule. This was typical of all the revolts in Malta and Cyprus in the inter-war period, where Britain was able to quickly bring force to bear, and overcome resistance. What the violence in 1912 did show was the way in which the British Empire had, since 1878, applied a modernity to Cyprus that was affected by philhellenism and served to create a cultural divide in a previously integrated society; a gap that would continue to widen. There was also tension between the British and the Greek Cypriot community in the background, a feature common to later outbreaks of violence. The British showed a lack of concern for the welfare of the people of Cyprus, and a tendency toward the preservation of British self-interest.

The re-orientation of British focus to the Levant and the Middle East that happened during and after World War One, meant that Cyprus was now viewed by the British through a different paradigm. Colonial Office officials said explicitly that maintaining prestige in Cyprus was important because of its position on the western end of the Levant. More generally of course World War One ushered in a change of international circumstances too broad to list here, although perhaps chief among them was the enormous material and economic cost for Britain.

The post-war period in Cyprus witnessed the increased strength of feeling for *enosis* amongst Cypriot elites. In the climate of Wilsonian self-determination representatives of this movement sent repeated delegations to London arguing for a change of status. British governments were never sympathetic to this cause and gave it short thrift. The continued agitation did however

make it clear that the continued acquiescence of Cypriots to British rule could not be counted upon.

It was into this environment that Storrs arrived in 1926 and endured perhaps the most difficult time in the administration of Cyprus in the inter-war period. Storrs failed to understand the changing polity of Cyprus and, under his administration, the hollow nature of the limited representation afforded to Cypriots in the Legislative council was highlighted. The population displayed an increased political consciousness, facilitated by the effects of the depression which allowed the Cypriot elite to co-opt the discontent of the lower classes and direct it toward agitation for *Enosis* and ultimately to use violence against the British in Cyprus.

This chapter has looked at the considerable challenges to the operation of empire in Malta and Cyprus. Constant unrest, dissent and challenge were met with multiple reforms and changes in administration. The British government was willing to deploy a series of constitutional schemes to limit internal dissent but was also very willing to take the authoritarian turn, to work within the state of exception when challenged. The response from Britain in each case was adapted to local conditions and considerations. In Malta Britain was willing to use violence, but always granted legal reform whereas in Cyprus they made a much greater turn toward repression and authoritarianism. This was due to Malta's strategic importance and due to the more serious nature of Cypriot violent resistance, a source of embarrassment to British authorities. This shift in approaches has long-term consequences for Malta and Cyprus, as the former transitioned to independence peacefully and Cyprus endured violent conflict and partition after British rule.

British administrators in both places got their 'hands dirty' in local politics, fighting to maintain their rule and the legitimacy of their position. When seriously challenged they deployed short term violence and followed it with long term constitutional change. The British sought calm hegemony, but what they had was a turbulent empire.

Chapter 5 – Continuing trouble for the British in Malta and Cyprus 1931-1939

*Malta is a fortress and an important link in the chain of Imperial defence, and the state of mind of the population of the fortress is an important factor from the defence standpoint.*¹

A.J. Dawe, senior official in the Colonial Office – 1936

This chapter will consider the development of the challenge in Malta and Cyprus in the latter half of the inter-war period. The internal dissent in both places was more actively encouraged or exacerbated by Italian activity. In Cyprus the powerful events of 1931 continued to influence the political future of the island. In relation to Cyprus the Italian Fascist regime both posed the threat and provided the model for an authoritarian turn. In Malta the new constitutional make-up was challenged by intense internal politics which led to two constitutional suspensions in short order. The influence of Italy was direct in Malta. Malta was one of the few places that Italian and British territory were contiguous and so the colony was a gauge for the state of the Anglo-Italian relationship.²

‘Two Bishops for one Knight’³ – The Suspension of the Maltese Constitution

In 1919 a Maltese man, Ganni Miller was arrested and sentenced to five years hard labour for his involvement in the anti-British riot described in the previous chapter.⁴ In 1930 that same man, having lost his right arm in the intervening decade, used his left and perhaps non-preferred hand to hold a pistol and fire two wayward shots, one which was close to hitting controversial politician Gerald Strickland in a corridor of the Court of Appeal building. Strickland was unharmed and Miller was promptly arrested for a second time. One of Strickland’s friends wrote to him after his escape and said ‘even a lunatic requires an atmosphere’.⁵ Malta was perceived as one of the more successful colonies in the Mediterranean but the strong undercurrent of

¹ Dawe to Vansittart, 'Italian activities in Malta', 30 May 1936, R3153, FO 371/20407

² P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 73.

³ Sargent to Dawe, 'Letter regarding Malta Dispute', 16 June 1930, p 221, CO 158/451

⁴ Du Cane to Passfield, 'Telegram regarding attempted assassination', 23 May 1930, X 40126/30 [No. 1], CO 883/8/4

⁵ Victor Aquilina, *Strickland House - The standard bearers and launching of the Times of Malta - Book One 1921-1935* (2010). as referred to in Mario Vella, "Lord Strickland in context", *Times of Malta*, 12 September 2011

discontent, the political atmosphere, was enough to drive at least one man to violence on two separate occasions.

This section focuses on how the British maintained their imperial control of Malta despite challenges to their rule in this later period. It will cover the controversial elections of 1930, the activities of the Catholic Church and of course the increasing attempts of Italian Fascists to stir up anti-British feeling in the late 1930s. Britain's inclination to appeasement hampered its ability to combat increasing Italian interference in its colonies. The section also explores the interaction, the nexus between the external pressure from Italy and the internal dissent within Malta. A fundamental dilemma for Maltese governance was the tension between granting independence and the 'position of Malta as an essential part of its [Britain's] defence system'.⁶

The form of government resulting from the post *Sette Giugno* reforms lasted nearly ten years before internal unrest again led to British government intervention. In the 1920s in Malta, the political situation settled into what was essentially a two party system. This was despite the aspirations of the framers of the constitution who wanted a diverse and non-party political system.⁷ The pro-British Constitutionalist Party was formed in order to contest the 1921 election, and led by Strickland who was also a member of the Parliament at Westminster where his natural pre-occupation with Maltese issues led to him be referred to as the 'member for Malta'.⁸ In Malta his Constitutional Party did not achieve government until 1927 when it formed a coalition with the Labour Party. This has been described as a 'loose coalition between a new Labour Party with its core support in the naval dockyards and the overtly "imperial" Constitutional Party'.⁹ It also began a period a time of 'unprecedented internecine political violence'.¹⁰

The Maltese Labour Party emerged from the trade union movement, particularly those operating in the dockyards.¹¹ The new Labour Party, formed in 1921 and led by William Savona, contested the elections under the new constitution.¹² Its policies were pro-British and included a

⁶ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p vii.

⁷ Dominic Fenech, "How Malta lost self-government, 1930-1933," in *Proceedings of History Week 2011*, ed. Krystle Farrugia Emanuel Buttigieg Joan Abela (Midsea books, 2013), p 154.

⁸ HC Debate, 2 July 1926, vol 197, cc1483-576. He was elected as the Tory Member for Lancaster in 1924 and he was elevated to the peerage in 1928. See Henry Frenedo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*, p 196.

⁹ R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 198.

¹⁰ Henry Frenedo, "Britain's European Mediterranean", p 54.

¹¹ Its roots went back as far as a *Society of Workers* which was founded in 1885 but the union movement began in earnest in the docks during the First World War. - Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 80.

¹² Michael Briguglio, "Malta's labour party and the politics of hegemony," *Socialism and Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2010).

commitment to English as the future official language of Malta.¹³ The arrival of the Maltese Labour Party as the dominant representative of the left in Malta is in contrast to Cyprus where a Communist Party emerged and caused great concern to the Cypriot administration. The difference between the two situations was economic. The dockyards and naval spending produced many jobs and created a strong labour movement in Malta. The Labour Party policies made for a natural alignment with the Constitutional Party and an antipathy to the Nationalist Party.

At the 1927 election the Labour Party and the Constitutional Party formed a 'compact' which defeated the *Partito Nazjonale* or Nationalist Party led by Enrico Mizzi.¹⁴ This may have appeared to be a positive for British administrators but in actual fact the divisive, polemical style of the Constitutional Party led by Strickland made it less amenable to stable government than the Nationalist Party. Italian newspaper *La Tribuna* attacked Strickland the day after the 1927 election and said that his government would be 'factious, violent, coarse and corrupt'.¹⁵ The loser of the election, the Nationalist Party was pro-Italian language, in favour of Maltese autonomy, anti-imperialist and pro-Church. Their form of nationalism is often referred to as *italianita*. It was not a crass Italian irredentist movement but a culturally based movement focussing on issues such as language, education and culture. In Malta, nationalism was a product of firstly the geographic and historical link to Italy (especially through language) and secondly a common religion.¹⁶ The Maltese cultural elites had an attachment to language that was in part rooted in their professions. Italian was the language of work for them, they had a privileged position in the establishment, and maintained a conservative position when it came to change. As in other colonies the nationalist movement adopted the English discourse of liberalism in support of their argument for independence from Britain.¹⁷ This is an example of the people in a colony using the British system to further their own aims, as discussed by Ford. The nationalists were Maltese elites whose dissent was based on a political platform.

¹³ Henry Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*, p 185.

¹⁴ Henry Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*, p 200-9. Mizzi was court martialled under the Malta Defence Regulations in 1917 for sedition and sentenced to a year's imprisonment and the loss of civil rights and his lawyer's warrant. The imprisonment was commuted by Governor Methuen, and the other aspects were reversed in 1918. For further information see Austin Sammut, *The Court Martial of Enrico Mizzi* (Midsea Books, 2006).

¹⁵ P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 78.

¹⁶ Henry Frendo, "The naughty European twins of empire: The constitutional breakdown in Malta and Cyprus 1930-1933," *The European Legacy* 3, no. 1 (1998): p 47.

¹⁷ Henry Frendo, "Italy and Britain in Maltese colonial nationalism," *History of European Ideas* 15, no. 4-6 (1992): p 734.

The Nationalist Party had the misfortune to coincide with the rise of assertive fascism.¹⁸ The presence of Fascist Italy was counter-productive to Maltese nationalists seeking to limit de-Italianisation. The nationalists had to contend with Italian commentators who 'readily mistook *italianita* for an irredentist programme' and portrayed the Maltese as 'Italians under the British flag' who yearned for Italian annexation.¹⁹ One commentator declared that the 'heart of Malta remains Italian' and argued that while Piedmontese or Romans do not forget their origins, they did not stand absent from the name more august (Italy).²⁰ The Maltese nationalists, seeking to preserve Italian culture had sympathies with the fascist regime, but should not be crudely conflated with the political views emanating from Italy.²¹

Strickland was able to make great political capital out of the situation. He sought to associate Mizzi and the nationalists with this more extreme position, and also court the support of the Labour Party, which was particularly conscious of jobs in an imperial economy.²² Strickland had formed a partnership with Labour, won government, and found an issue with which to damage the Nationalist Party. He was however a confrontational politician and he clashed with the strongest cultural institution in Malta, the Catholic Church. This was the dispute which led to the constitutional suspension of 1930. Although not violent, it was a serious constitutional crisis.

The Catholic Church had tended to cooperate with the British in Malta, so long as the administration respected their hierarchy, religious beliefs and practices.²³ This lack of irredentist sentiment in the Church was due in part to the running dispute between the Holy See and the Italian government, which was not resolved until the Lateran Treaties of 1929 between Pope Pious XI and Mussolini.²⁴ Italy and France, both 'Catholic' nations, were competing for influence in Yugoslavia and the Middle East, and to represent Catholic interests. The Lateran Treaty was seen as a win for Italy, and the Church, not wanting to promote a conflict between France and Italy then saw Malta as a place where it could encourage Italian imperialism against Britain.²⁵

¹⁸ Henry Frenco, *Europe and empire*, p 199.

¹⁹ Carlo Richelmy: 'Il Cuore Italiano', ASD enc. de Probizer/Mussolini (13 May 1925). as quoted in Henry Frenco, "Italy and Britain in Maltese colonial nationalism", p 736.

²⁰ Carlo Richelmy: 'Il Cuore Italiano', ASD enc. de Probizer/Mussolini (13 May 1925). as quoted in Henry Frenco, "Italy and Britain in Maltese colonial nationalism", p 736.

²¹ Kent argues that there was a faction of the nationalists who were admirers of fascism. - P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 76.

²² Henry Frenco, "Italy and Britain in Maltese colonial nationalism", p 736.

²³ Henry Frenco, *Europe and empire*, p 345-6.

²⁴ The Pact was signed on 11 Feb 1929 - Stuart E. Knee, "The strange alliance: Mussolini, Pope Pius XI, and the Lateran treaty," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 5, no. 2 (1990).

²⁵ See P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 82-83.

After the conclusion of the Lateran Agreements, Mussolini was under pressure from both the Italian public and the Vatican to further Italian interests in Malta.²⁶ When conflict emerged the Italian Fascist Government firmly supported the Church in its conflict with the British.²⁷ It was somewhat of a contradictory position for the Fascist government which was promoting traditional religious values in Malta and spurning modernism at home.²⁸ While contradictory it was not unusual, given that the changing and vague nature of the fascist platform was a feature of Mussolini's government. Add to this imperialism was a priority for Mussolini, which outweighed notions of modernism.

Although the Church's position had changed, this was not the cause of the clash. Strickland was on a mission to de-Italianise Malta and provoked the troubles that followed.²⁹ Like Cyprus, Malta did not have the Church-State divide present in many modern democracies. Rural Malta was a model clerical organic society until 1921 (when the diarchy constitution was implemented) and this meant that the Catholic Church in Malta played an important political role in the absence of local government.³⁰ In the late 1920s Catholic clergy cast votes that prevented passage of bills.³¹ This inevitably led to a politicisation of the Catholic Church in Malta. In 1928 two members of the clergy sitting in nominated seats in the Senate chose to vote with the opposition (the nationalists) against the Strickland Government's appropriation bill.³² This angered Strickland and began a period of antagonism between himself and the Church. The Governor of Malta, General Sir John Philip Du Cane warned Lord Passfield, the Labour Colonial Secretary, that the Catholic Church had 'formed an alliance with the Nationalist Party with a view to defeating the Constitutionalist Party at the coming elections'.³³ It was in this tense atmosphere that Strickland was able to politicise a Church disciplinary matter.

An Italian national, Father Felice Romolo Carta, tried to impose a temporal (i.e. not spiritual) penalty on a wayward Monk, Father Guido Micallef, by sending him to Italy.³⁴ Micallef had been drinking and returning to his accommodation late at night in a 'breach of monastic discipline'.³⁵ Strickland's Government, believing that the Church was targeting a constitutionalist, responded

²⁶ P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 73.

²⁷ C. Baldoli, "The 'Northern Dominator' and the Mare Nostrum", p 7.

²⁸ C. Baldoli, "The 'Northern Dominator' and the Mare Nostrum", p 12.

²⁹ R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 198.

³⁰ P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 74.

³¹ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 94.

³² Great Britain. Malta Royal Commission and G.R. Askwith, *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission*, p 30.

³³ Du Cane to Passfield, 'Letter re dispute with Church', 9 January 1930, 39936/30[No.9], CO 158/451

³⁴ Ernest Gesghegan to Mr Anderson, 'Letter regarding deportation of Priests', 18 December 1929, CO 158/451

³⁵ Great Britain. Malta Royal Commission and G.R. Askwith, *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission*, p 39.

by attempting to prosecute and deport Father Carta, a foreign national, under the Post Office Law for communicating with the Vatican via an Italian Steamship company.³⁶ The government also asked that he be deported. In August 1929, Mussolini involved himself personally in the matter. He instructed Antonio Bordonaro (Ambassador to London) to express Italy's concern over Strickland.

In September a series of letters were exchanged between the Church and the Maltese Government where the Church tried to claim a right of *Privilegium Fori* (Privilege of the Forum – a right for a priest to be tried before a Canon Court) for Father Carta, a claim strongly rejected by the Maltese Government.³⁷ The Holy See did not have to exercise the same level of restraint and reacted to Strickland's anti-clericalism. Strickland on the other hand believed that there was collusion between the Pope and the Duce.³⁸ The Foreign Office became involved due to the international aspect of the dispute and it led a more aggressive position under Permanent Under-Secretary Vansittart.³⁹ Vansittart was, as discussed above, determined to appease Italy but to maintain a strong line elsewhere and this included a firm position against the actions of the confident, post-Lateran and legally separate, Holy See.

The British Government by way of H.G. Chilton at the British Legation to the Holy See wrote to Cardinal Gasparri of the Vatican and requested an investigation by an Apostolic Visitor. The letter also made this pointed observation:

It is understood, and Your Eminence has emphasised this, that the Holy See wishes to discourage political agitation by priests. The disregard of this rule, and the intense participation of Maltese priests in local politics, it is considered, lie at the root of the present trouble, and the probability is that this trouble will continue, whichever party may happen to hold office until such political activity is ended.⁴⁰

In an article from January 1930 the Canon Marshall of St Pauls Cathedral (Anglican) Valletta, declared that 'the leaders of the opposition ... at least tend to be pro-Italian, claiming that to be the natural culture of the Maltese'. They had 'the sympathy of the Fascist Press in Italy, and also the support of a large number of lawyers and the more *ultramontane* priests who are trained in

³⁶ (Act No 111 of 1924)

³⁷ Arth Galea, 'Correspondence with the Ecclesiastical Authorities regarding the claim of the Clergy to the *Privilegium Fori*', 2 October 1929, CO 158/451

³⁸ P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 80.

³⁹ Dominic Fenech, "How Malta lost self-government, 1930-1933," p 147.

⁴⁰ H.G. Chilton, 'Letter from Chilton to Gasparri', 1 March 1929, CO 158/451

Sicily or Italy'.⁴¹ Put simply the Strickland-led Constitutional Party government of Malta had aligned with the British, and the Nationalist Party had aligned itself with supporters of an Italian form of Maltese nationalism including the Catholic Church. The political situation in Malta became more intense as the electoral campaign began and the legislature was dissolved in April 1930 as part of the usual electoral process.⁴² On 1 May 1930 the Catholic Archbishop of Malta, Dom Maurus Caruana, and the Bishop of Gozo, Monsignor Michael Gonzi, with Vatican approval, took the dramatic step of issuing a highly political pastoral letter. After a long preamble the letter came to the point:

1. You may not, without committing a grave sin, vote for Lord Strickland and his candidates, or for all those even of other parties, who in the past have helped and supported him in his fights against the rights and the discipline of the Church, or who propose to help and support him in the coming elections.
2. For even stronger reasons you may not present yourselves as candidates in the electoral lists proposed by Lord Strickland or by other parties who propose to support him in the coming election:
3. You are also solemnly bound in conscience in the present circumstances to take part in the elections and to vote for those persons, who by their attitude in the past offer greater guarantee both for religious welfare and for social welfare.⁴³

This was followed up by a threat to withhold the Sacraments to those who refused to obey these instructions. When considering the impact of this missive it should be emphasised that the Maltese people were nearly entirely Catholic. The estimated total population of Malta in 1930 was 234,454 people. Of these it was estimated that 234,000 were followers of the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁴

In a letter from Archbishop Maurus to the Governor he said that

⁴¹ Canon Marshall, 'The Malta Controversy and some of its Implications', January 1930, CO 158/451 . *Ultramontane* refers to a philosophy which places strong emphasis on the authority of the Pope over local hierarchies be they temporal or spiritual.

⁴² Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 97.

⁴³ Archbishop Caruana and Bishop Gonzi, 'Joint Pastoral of the Bishops (Translation)', 27 April 1930, CO 158/451

⁴⁴ Colonial Office, 'Malta Blue Book', 1930, Section 16, CO 163/148

the conduct of the Leaders of the Constitutional Party towards the Church has been unworthy of men calling themselves Catholics. They have defied the authority of the Church and persist in their attitude. They are therefore not fit to represent Catholic people.⁴⁵

He then went on to remind the Governor, General Sir John Philip Du Cane,⁴⁶ that Malta was a Catholic country and the men who defied the Church professed themselves Catholic so a peaceful solution could only be obtained 'by the matter being treated on those lines which command the obedience and respect of a Catholic country'.⁴⁷ Presumably this meant a respect of the authority of the Church. Ministers in the Maltese government made it plain that the Bishops were prompted by the Vatican 'who in turn was under Italian influence'.⁴⁸ This was a continuation of their politically advantageous claims that the Maltese nationalists were actually Italian irredentists. Governor Du Cane wrote that he was 'strongly of the opinion that the issue of the Pastoral Letter makes a free election impossible, and that it discloses pretensions on the part of the Church which cannot be tolerated, as they amount to undue influence in an aggravated form'.⁴⁹ Maltese domestic affairs had reached a point where the British again felt they needed to reassert control.

The Maltese Constitution and the election were suspended on 3 May 1930 by the promulgation of an ordinance by Du Cane. No military power was needed, but rather the tried and true legal mechanisms were again employed. *The Times* supported the actions of the Governor writing that 'in Malta the Church undoubtedly constitutes a spiritual autocracy and its partisan intervention in secular affairs was a flagrant challenge to the Government'.⁵⁰ The suspension was opposed by the opposition Nationalist Party.⁵¹ They were likely to have won the election without interference from the Catholic Church but the letter prevented this and led to the temporary disenfranchisement of those Maltese who were qualified to vote.

This crisis was primarily a domestic colonial affair but it had an imperial dimension. In both Malta and Cyprus the domestic politics were tumultuous, and kinetic. The unsettled domestic environment provided opportunities for an interaction with the external influence. In the view of the British the political system of their colony was being destabilised by a religious hierarchy

⁴⁵ Archbishop Maurus, 'Letter from Archbishop Maurus to Governor Du Cane', 1 May 1930, CO 158/451

⁴⁶ General Sir John (Philip) Du Cane was a British Army General who was Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Malta from 1927 until 1931

⁴⁷ Archbishop Maurus, 'Letter from Archbishop Maurus to Governor Du Cane', 1 May 1930, CO 158/451

⁴⁸ Du Cane to Passfield, 'Letter regarding Pastoral Letter', 2 May 1930, X 39936/30 [No 113], CO 883/8/4

⁴⁹ Du Cane to Passfield, 'Telegram regarding Pastoral Letter', 3 May 1930, X 39936/30 [No 105], CO 883/8/4

⁵⁰ Editorial, "A Challenge to Malta", *The Times*, 8 May 1930, 1930, p 17

⁵¹ Sir Ugo Misfud to Passfield, 'Letter re Suspension of Constitution', 20 May 1930, CO 158/415

based in the Vatican which was sympathetic to the Italian viewpoint, namely that Malta was Italian. The situation in Italy changed however. Mussolini believed that the Vatican had gone too far. He muzzled the Italian press and by mid-1931 the Italian government (which had fallen into its own dispute with the Vatican) was encouraging the British government to take a strong position with the Holy See.⁵²

In a telegram to London, Du Cane predicted that if an election were held within a few weeks the Constitutional party would be wiped out and:

the influence of pro-Italians would be increased to an extent that might become a potential danger to security of the fortress. From many sources I hear that the Fascist Government is behind this trouble ... The result of the recent Naval Disarmament Conference, however, has no doubt shifted the naval strategic centre of gravity to the Mediterranean thus enhancing the importance of Malta as a naval base. I cannot say whether there is a potential Italian menace in the Mediterranean, but before you discard this point of view I beg you to consult the Service Departments.⁵³

Du Cane had the broader picture in mind, but he was exaggerating the direct interference of the Fascists. The actions of the Catholic Church occurred in line with the general political atmosphere, and in its general Maltese nationalist and *italianita* sympathies.

The whole episode was a point of friction also between the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office. The former believed that the latter was unduly interfering and needlessly making the situation in Malta more difficult. A. J. Dawe said that:

It would be a good thing if the Foreign Office would cease inflicting their embarrassing attentions on the Island. They have magnified into a matter of international principle a matter which might have been kept within much smaller limits; and they have got no change at all out of the Vatican. However it looks as if they will keep quiet for a bit now as they cannot think of anything else to do!⁵⁴

⁵² J.F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism, 1929-32: A Study in Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p 133.

⁵³ Du Cane to Passfield, 'Telegram regarding suspension of Constitution', 22 May 1930, X 39936/30/A [No. 18], CO 883/8/4. Du Cane did receive some support from London with the appointment of Sir Harry Luke as the new Lieutenant-Governor of Malta, see Lord Stamfordham of Buckingham Palace to Mr. E. B. Boyd, 'Letter regarding Royal assent for appointment of Luke', 31 May 1930, 71012, CO 323/1097/3 - The Naval Disarmament Conference referred to by Du Cane resulted in the London Naval Treaty (signed on 22 April 1930). This was an extension of the Washington Naval Treaty which dealt *inter alia* with submarine warfare.

⁵⁴ CO158/454/40176/Part III, Dawe to Cowell, 18 Aug 1930. As referred to in Dominic Fenech, "How Malta lost self-government, 1930-1933," p 148.

The suspension was deeply unpopular and, as mentioned above, on 23 May Ganni Miller made the attempt to assassinate Strickland as he entered the Court of Appeal.⁵⁵ By June 1930 there were indications that the British would replace constitutional Government with the more autocratic Crown Colony Government.⁵⁶ The British government was negotiating with the Vatican and in June, Orme Sargent⁵⁷ of the Foreign Office wrote to Dawe of the Colonial Office noting a general view at the Holy See that the problem in Malta could be fixed by exchanging ‘two Bishops for one Knight’,⁵⁸ by which he meant that the Vatican would withdraw the two offending bishops in return for the British government removing Strickland from office.

This solution was not adopted and on 24 June 1930, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald formalised the suspension and stated in Parliament that:

The position which has been created by this intervention has, in the opinion of the Governor, made it undesirable for the time being to hold the General Election which is now due. In these circumstances, His Majesty's Government with considerable reluctance have decided that they have no alternative but to sanction a temporary suspension of the Constitution. ... The effect will be to place as an emergency measure the full legislative and executive authority in the hands of the Governor.⁵⁹

This suspension was the typical response to threat, seen across both Malta and Cyprus and elsewhere and used familiar language, such as ‘emergency measure’. The resort to a state of exception removed the veil of democratic legitimacy and laid bare the power relationship between Britain and the people of Malta.

Again *The Times* fully supported this action noting that the decision to retain Strickland as an advisor was ‘a satisfactory answer to the Vatican’s demand for his removal’. And that ‘it was in the highest degree tactless, it was indeed intolerable, that a foreign State - for such is the Vatican

⁵⁵ Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 231.

⁵⁶ Diplomatic Correspondent, "The Crisis in Malta", *The Morning Post*, 6 June 1930

⁵⁷ Sargent was an important figure in the Foreign Office. Although his views were more complex he is commonly grouped with Sir Robert Vansittart in the anti-appeasement camp and his influence in the Foreign Office waned as Vansittart fell out of favour with Eden. See Keith Neilson, "Orme Sargent, Appeasement and British Policy in Europe, 1933–39," *Twentieth Century British History* 21, no. 1 (2010).

⁵⁸ Sargent to Dawe, 'Letter regarding Malta Dispute', 16 June 1930, p 221, CO 158/451

⁵⁹ HC Debate, 24 June 1930, vol 240, cc 967

to-day - should have coolly suggested, in a document officially published, that Lord Strickland should be “peacefully eliminated from politics in Malta” .⁶⁰

A Royal Commission led by high profile industrial arbitrator Lord Askwith⁶¹ into the suspension of the Constitution began in April 1931.⁶² In February 1932 it reported that the Maltese constitution had not worked well, but the Commissioners were of the opinion that a new election should be held and Parliamentary Government restored.⁶³ The report rejected any notion that the Maltese could not govern themselves, and it specifically found that Maltese Nationalists were not disloyal, they were not Italian irredentists, and the accusation was made for political reasons. Strickland did not fare well in the report. He was described as

a dominating and aggressive force, with a manner calculated to cause irritation and annoyance and with methods of attack ... which involved personal animosity on the part of many of those who were attacked leading to a tendency for the whole Island to be divided into embittered cliques.⁶⁴

The finding supported the view that Strickland was responsible for ratcheting up the political tension in 1930.

After the Royal Commission and the new election in which the Nationalists were elected, Mussolini continued to back down on Malta and said to the British that ‘no sane Italian cast an eye on Malta or desired to encourage an irredentist movement in that island.’⁶⁵ This policy continued into 1934 when, after the suspension of the Nationalist government in Malta, Mussolini said that as relations with Britain were so good, he regretted ‘this little cloud’ arising between them.⁶⁶ The Duce was under considerable public pressure, willing to support the Vatican, but not willing to seriously jeopardise the Anglo-Italian relationship. Peter Kent argues that ‘he was never sufficiently interested in the fate of the island to allow it to become touchstone of Anglo-Italian relations as the Vatican would have wished’.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Editorial, "A Bold Expedient in Malta", *The Times*, 25 June 1930. Strickland defended himself in British Parliament on three different occasions, see 25 June 1930, cols. 129-62; 5 November 1930, cols 44-62 and 3 March 1931, cols 216-23

⁶¹ Askwith, George Ranken, Baron Askwith (1861–1942) was an industrial arbitrator and civil servant who was raised to the peerage for his work as the governments leader arbitrator prior to WW1.

⁶² Great Britain. Malta Royal Commission and G.R. Askwith, *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission*.

⁶³ Great Britain. Malta Royal Commission and G.R. Askwith, *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission*.

⁶⁴ Great Britain. Malta Royal Commission and G.R. Askwith, *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission*, p 38.

⁶⁵ P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 95.

⁶⁶ P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 96.

⁶⁷ P.C. Kent, *The Pope and the Duce: The International Impact of the Lateran Agreements*, p 96.

Although the Commission was in favour of limited self-government and had both protected the Nationalists and been tough on Strickland, it was not all good news for the Nationalists. The Commission:

expressed strongly the view that in the interests of the Maltese and of education in Malta a change should be made in the curriculum of the elementary schools in order to make English the only extra language to be taught in addition to the Maltese vernacular.⁶⁸

This was an attack on the core Nationalist issue and created conditions for the next crisis. Malta did not suffer the level of repression seen in Cyprus, but the British still pushed their agenda forcefully and on key cultural issues. The Commission's findings were enacted in the Letters Patent of May 1932 which effectively reinstated the diarchy or dual government model. This is another point of departure from Cyprus in terms of the way in which Britain exerted control. The British administration in Malta constantly tried to reassert their illusory constitutions, while in Cyprus, a less valuable colony, an autocratic regime was implemented. The Letters Patent also included language provisions that specifically limited the teaching of Italian to secondary school.⁶⁹ This was a move designed to suppress the Italian language especially given the low rate of students continuing their education at secondary level. The policy was not popular in Italy where one newspaper wrote that 'England has committed a crime against Italy'.⁷⁰ The Foreign Office often urged caution on matters in Malta which had the possibility of adversely affecting relations with Italy but on the language issue they took a counter-intuitive position. Aware that language was a cause of friction, they believed that if the Italian language was banned it would effectively eradicate the problem, after some short-term pain in the relationship. So in 1932 they encouraged the Colonial Office to adopt a policy which stopped the teaching of Italian.⁷¹ The Commission had considered and written about one great political problem, but in making recommendations about the highly politically charged issue of language it had set the stage for the next controversy. This flow on from one crisis to the next underlines the persistent nature of the 'trouble' in the Empire.

⁶⁸ HC Debate, 2 March 1932, vol 262, cc 1089-91, Great Britain. Malta Royal Commission and G.R. Askwith, *Report [of The] Malta Royal Commission*, p 127.

⁶⁹ Letters Patent (from the Latin *potente* or 'open') is a type of legal document issued by a monarch or other person in authority that grants an office, right, property or monopoly or authorises something to be done. See Patricia Seed, "Taking possession and reading texts: Establishing the authority of overseas empires," *The William and Mary Quarterly* (1992).

⁷⁰ Il Giornale di Politica e di Letteratura, 22 May 1932, p10 as quoted in W.K. and Latham Hancock, R.T.E., *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, p 421.

⁷¹ Dominic Fenech, "How Malta lost self-government, 1930-1933," p 149. This policy did not last long, by 1933 they were advocating a softer approach on the language issue. See p 150

In line with the Commission's recommendations a new election was called in 1932, which the Nationalists won comfortably. Led by Sir Ugo Mifsud and Dr Enrico Mizzi, future Minister of Education, the party campaigned on a platform of return to *pari passu*, the system of teaching both English and Italian in schools at both elementary and secondary level (Maltese had been used in the schools system predominantly at primary school level).⁷² They were in effect politically committed to a course of action that was in breach of the Letters Patent. Defence of the Italian language was for the Nationalists a core part of their defence of *italianita* and the culture of Malta. The new government allocated £5000 to run evening classes teaching Italian language in June 1933.⁷³ They made knowledge of Italian language a prerequisite for minor government jobs. They also allowed the *Istituto di Culturo* and an Italian bookshop to distribute materials, and allowed the establishment of an Italian elementary school with nominal fees.⁷⁴ They were sympathetic to Italian influence and so allowed these institutions, supported by Mussolini's government, to establish themselves in Malta. It was however the impasse over language classes that led to another dismissal of the Nationalist government⁷⁵ and the suspension of the constitution in November 1933.⁷⁶ The £5000 was the convenient trigger, as the Secretary of State declared a financial emergency and suspended the constitution. Sir Harry Luke, the Lieutenant-Governor at this time,⁷⁷ wrote that:

in view of Malta's position as a key point of Imperial defence, wider issues than purely local ones were also involved; and, the Ministry having failed to heed the warning of the Imperial Government as to the course it was following, it was dismissed on November 2, 1933.⁷⁸

In a statement to Parliament, Conservative Colonial Secretary Philip Cunliffe-Lister, recited the language provisions and said that Maltese pro-Italian nationalist ministers had 'made it clear that the main object of their policy has been to frustrate the effective operation of these conditions'. He went on claim that it was estimated that the nationalist government would spend £151,000 in excess of their income of £900,000.⁷⁹ His actions were criticised in Parliament where

⁷² Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 450.

⁷³ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 107.

⁷⁴ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 107.

⁷⁵ Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 453.

⁷⁶ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 106-7.

⁷⁷ Luke was a career colonial administrator who specialised in the Mediterranean. He held posts in Cyprus before and during the First World War, followed by Palestine in the 1920's and then held the title of Lieutenant Governor, that is second in charge, in Malta from mid-1930 to 1938. See Robert Holland, "Luke, Sir Harry Charles (1884–1969)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

⁷⁸ Harry Luke, *Malta : an account and an appreciation* (London: Harrap, 1949), p 111.

⁷⁹ HC Debate, 07 November 1933, vol 281, cc31-3

Labour politicians questioned the basis of the suspension and emphasised the loyalty of the Maltese people.⁸⁰

On 18 April 1934, Cunliffe-Lister wrote a Cabinet Memorandum about the possibility of abolishing the Maltese constitution.⁸¹ The Governor of Malta had recently sent a despatch to London requesting that the Constitution, which was then suspended, be abolished altogether. This could only be done by an Act of the Imperial Parliament (i.e. British Parliament). Cunliffe-Lister was in favour and noted that ‘for 100 years we have, by our expenditure on the Fighting Services, provided a more prosperous economic basis for the Island than it could otherwise have expected’ and that the Maltese people would accept a Crown Colony regime. The current suspension was making it difficult for the government to be active and Cunliffe-Lister argued that it was losing prestige. Cunliffe-Lister was also worried about the foundation of the suspension, which legally rested on the idea that there was an emergency. As the suspension dragged on this was more difficult to maintain. Cunliffe-Lister also set out the legal position which was that the Crown had granted self-government in Malta, without reserving the power to revoke the grant. The 1921 letters patent did not reserve these powers. This meant that only an Act of Imperial Parliament could revoke the Maltese constitution. This was a mistake in ‘form’ but practically and functionally this did not threaten the basis of British power.

On 16 August 1934 Letters Patent effectively removed Italian as an official language.⁸² The change meant that Maltese now became the language of the law, that Italian was no longer used in university teaching and that it was not used in public life. The change brought with it a measure of political and social inclusion and those most negatively affected by the change were the middle and upper classes who maintained the use of Italian. Considering the language issue more generally, it is asserted by historians such as Henry Frendo that the whole language policy was ‘driven by Anglicisation at the expense of Italian – with Maltese mainly as a ruse’.⁸³ This is a correct interpretation; the British concern for an autochthonous language was far secondary to their desire to reduce Italian influence.

In 1936 the Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore made a speech at the second reading for the Malta (Letters Patent) Bill, the purpose of which was to restore the power of the Crown to make

⁸⁰ HC Debate, 12 July 1934, vol 292 cc643-47

⁸¹ CAB 24/248, CP 110(34) 18 April 1934 ‘Malta’: Cabinet memorandum by Sir P Cunliffe Lister on the question of abolishing the constitution, Document 53 in S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p 287.

⁸² Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 468.

⁸³ Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 471.

laws with regard to Malta.⁸⁴ He said that in certain cases a new law in parliament was necessary and this was set out in the case of *Campbell v Hall*.⁸⁵ This case related to the constitution of the island of Grenada and it found that ‘once the Crown by letters patent had created a legislative assembly with power to make laws, it had parted with its prerogative right to legislate and could not resume the right unless in so far as that right had been expressly reserved in the letters patent’.⁸⁶ In more recent constitutions this right had been reserved, Gore noted, but in Malta it had not and hence legislation was necessary. He noted that the 1921 Constitution was set up in the normal way by letters patent but that it was an experimental constitution modelled after the diarchy India.

The above discussion shows how the British government manoeuvred around the difficulties it created for itself with relation to the 1921 constitution, but it also shows the way in which the previous revocations were perfectly legal. The crown could give and take away these constitutions by letters patent, without parliamentary involvement. In truth Britain as a political entity did not lose control of its colony at any time; these legal machinations, although important were partly matters of convenience. To go through parliament was more open, more public, and subject to opposition scrutiny and the tribulations of passing any bill, but ultimately the ability to revoke colonial constitutions was never seriously threatened.

The bill was being introduced also in the face of continued legal action by Strickland. His case was finally decided on appeal in the Privy Council in *Edgar Sammut v Strickland*, where the court extended the *Campbell v Hall* principles to states that had been ceded rather than conquered and found in favour of the government in upholding the powers of the governor to make laws even before the precautionary Malta (Letters Patent) Act 1936.⁸⁷

In Malta governance returned to a form of colonial autocracy where the governor ruled supreme. This position was formalised in 1936 with a new constitution, which stipulated that ‘all power is placed in the Governor who, subject to the instruction of His Majesty’s Government, exercises it within his unfettered discretion’.⁸⁸ The constitutional position in Malta had regressed to a point similar to that in Cyprus after 1931. Advisory councils were established in 1936, but

⁸⁴ HC Debate, 01 July 1936, vol 314 cc487-539

⁸⁵ *Campbell v Hall*, 1 Cowper's Reports 204(1774).

⁸⁶ HC Debate, 01 July 1936, vol 314 cc487-539

⁸⁷ *Edgar Sammut and another v Strickland (Malta)* 43 UKPC(1938).

⁸⁸ HC Debate, 5 May 1936, 100, 748-84

they were often ignored and serving on them was not desirable.⁸⁹ Strickland bitterly opposed the bill in the UK House of Lords. He made many references to history pointing out that the Maltese were not a conquered people (a technicality) and suggested that the circumstances of Malta joining the empire in Napoleonic times meant it was entitled to representative government. Strickland's power in Malta suffered as a result of the constitutional suspension and he was, ironically, a victim of his own aggression towards the Nationalists and Italian culture in Malta. The Earl of Plymouth (Colonial Under-Secretary) rejected Strickland's assertions making it clear that there was not 'an intrinsic obligation on the Government of this country [Britain] permanently to maintain representative institutions in Malta'. He did say however that it was the intention that this constitution 'should not be of more than an interim and provisional character'.⁹⁰ He was right. The British government could arbitrarily withdraw self-government in Malta if it chose, but there was a preference for 'settled' self-governance.

During the period of strict crown colony rule an effort was made by the administration towards material improvements on the island. The spending of funds in Malta was consistent with the new development policy embodied under the *Colonial Development Act* 1929 under which colonial governments could apply for development funds.⁹¹ The changes in Malta were highlighted in Hancock's survey and in Hansard.⁹² Both talk about the investment in health measures, agriculture, fisheries and infrastructure. Such reference to their own good deeds should be expected but they do nonetheless suggest that money was being spent on the island, and an attempt made to persuade the Maltese people of the good intentions of the administration. This can be contrasted strongly with Cyprus where the repressive measures far outweighed investment and good will.

The 'pastoral letter' dispute was essentially a domestic dispute with international overtones. It demonstrated the significant influence of the Catholic Church in Malta acting with Italian Government support. The British saw the imperial strategic angle and proceeded on that basis, but the unrest was not directly sponsored by the Italian government. The whole affair showed the willingness of the British government to revoke elections when threatened by external power. Britain took the Vatican seriously. They spent much time and energy negotiating with religious

⁸⁹ Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 330.

⁹⁰ HC Debate, 5 May 1936, 100, 748-84

⁹¹ S.R. Ashton, S.E. Stockwell, and University of London. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*, p lxi.

⁹² W.K. and Latham Hancock, R.T.E., *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, p 426. and HC Debate, 5 May 1936, 100, 748-84

authorities and the Foreign Office took an assertive position. This was a policy mistake, as they should have been aware that language was a critical issue to the Maltese, as demonstrated in 1902 when Conservative Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain had to reverse a decision to replace Italian. The international aspect interacted with the local and created the conditions for a suspension of the constitution.

The constitutional suspension of 1930 does not represent a sharp decline in the ability of the British to suppress such challenges to their authority but it does show the enduring support of Maltese elites for the nationalist cause. The British did not want to let Malta go, so the government carefully managed retention of control after a failure in the self-government mechanism. The suspension did not stop Italian sympathies and influence. Indeed it was during the 1930s that Italian influence increased as the Fascist government became more active in the Mediterranean.

Increasing Fascist Influence in the colonies

The influence of Malta's northern neighbour was increasingly of concern to British authorities in the 1930s. Although the documents regarding Malta do not always discuss the bigger picture, there is a real elevation of concern prior to and during the Abyssinian Crisis and War, when the Italian Navy had, on Mussolini's order, gone as far as preparing plans for an attack on Malta.⁹³ During the Abyssinian War the British instituted an 'increasingly authoritarian regime and undertook a major attack against Italian language and culture'.⁹⁴

At least one form of fascism in Malta came, ironically, by way of Britain rather than by way of Italy. The British Union of Fascists, led by Oswald Mosely, was active in the early 1930s and they had a branch in Malta. The roughly one hundred members of the Union of Maltese Fascists under Baron Giuseppe Chappelle were pro-British. Composed of aristocracy and soldiers, they pledged loyalty to the King and were actually a faction of the Constitutionalists.⁹⁵ This irony arises from the paradox of exporting a nationalist movement overseas. Does nationalism in this new place mean loyalty to their country, or to the country from which the movement is exported? This particular branch shut down in May 1935, but Maltese fascists reformed as the Maltese Union of Fascists in April 1936. This small band wore black shirts and paraded down a

⁹³ Douglas Austin, *Malta and British strategic policy, 1925-43*, p 43.

⁹⁴ C. Baldoli, "The 'Northern Dominator' and the Mare Nostrum", p 16.

⁹⁵ Dennis A. Castillo, "The Maltese Cross : a strategic history of Malta," *Contributions in military studies* (2006): p 151.

working class street on 8 September 1937, singing songs and receiving much abuse from a large crowd.⁹⁶ The shaky ideological underpinnings remained; these people may have been confused as they 'carried the Union Jack together with the Maltese colours and swore loyalty to the British King'.⁹⁷ This small movement's membership did not exceed fifty and only fifteen people marched. The brief history of this indigenous fascist movement in Malta shows that it was the Italian fascist movement with all of its state apparatus and not the local movement that caused real concern.

The overt form of Fascism was less important in many ways than what is referred to as a 'cultural war' that occurred in Malta, as the Italian Fascist Government made a concerted effort to spread its influence. According to the 1931 census of 7,638 foreign born people living in Malta only 567 were born in Italy.⁹⁸ This small number underlines some of the political realities in Malta at that time. Fascist organisations had limited traction in Malta and there was never the same irredentist movement, seen in places such as Cyprus. Italian culture, language and religion were however viewed as part of Maltese national identity and this gave them a chance to be influential.

The *Instituto di Culturo* opened in July 1936, had gathered around 800 members and was a source of concern for the British. In July 1933 the Foreign Office made representations to Mussolini about 'propagandist activity' in Malta, and he undertook to confine membership of the institute to Italian subjects but refused to close it altogether.⁹⁹ The British authorities placed strict controls on the institute which were attached to its licence. It was finally closed down completely on 4 July 1936 as it was viewed by the Governor as 'a centre for undesirable Italian propagandist activities'.¹⁰⁰ The Italian *Casa Paula* School, opened in October 1932, was closed in 1933 under the licensing system introduced by the Malta Aliens Ordinance, 1933.¹⁰¹ The *Umberto Primo* school, founded in 1913, was not closed but under new rules 50% of the total student population, and 25% of the teaching staff, had to be British Subjects (persons)¹⁰²

In March 1935, Maffey of the Colonial Office wrote to Vansittart of the Foreign Office regarding Italian activities in Malta, quoting numerous examples (press criticisms, spying

⁹⁶ Henry Frenco, *Europe and empire*, p 614.

⁹⁷ Henry Frenco, *Europe and empire*, p 615.

⁹⁸ Malta, *Census of the Maltese Islands, taken on ... 26th April, 1931*.

⁹⁹ Foreign Office, 'Italian institutions in Malta', 9 July 1936, R4377/20/22, FO 371/20408 p 91.

¹⁰⁰ Foreign Office, 'Italian institutions in Malta', 9 July 1936, R4377/20/22, FO 371/20408 p 93.

¹⁰¹ Foreign Office, 'Italian institutions in Malta', 9 July 1936, R4377/20/22, FO 371/20408

¹⁰² Foreign Office, 'Italian institutions in Malta', 9 July 1936, R4377/20/22, FO 371/20408

activities, and the subsidising of pro-Italian newspapers) to show that if there was tension between Britain and Italy over Malta then it was not all of Britain's making and that Italy was actually very active in stirring up trouble.¹⁰³ An unidentified officer in the Foreign Office made the comment on the file reading this situation:

I have ventured to suggest that the advisors of the Governor of Malta have been leading him towards a pin-prick anti-Italian policy in Malta likely to produce undesirable repercussions in Rome, at a period when we particularly do not want to spoil the Anglo-Italian ship for a ha'p'orth of Maltese tar.¹⁰⁴

On the same file there appeared a comment from E.H. Carr from his time as a diplomat. He wrote that 'unless they [Italy] do something much worse or we get far more tangible evidence of their nefarious activities we had better let well alone'.¹⁰⁵ Carr was aware of British double standards with respect to Italy. In 1937 Carr gave a Lecture at which he said:

It was not Italy's fault that she started the race when other competitors were already far down the course. She does not see why she should be blamed for following, rather belatedly, the example of her more fortunate rivals.¹⁰⁶

The Foreign Office noted that that 'Italian propaganda has been distressingly on the increase in Malta as elsewhere' and H. Lambert of the Colonial Office suggested that perhaps Mussolini himself should be approached at the Stresa negotiations and prevailed upon to order the cessation of Italian activities in Malta.¹⁰⁷ This was not the universal view expressed in the Foreign Office minutes however. Sargent thought that the issue should only be raised with the Italian ambassador in London, Dino Grandi, and then only generally. The Foreign Office was conciliatory. It did not want the issue of Malta to damage relations and it played down Italian activities when corresponding with the Colonial Office. These instincts towards prudent caution would grow later into appeasement. Maffey responded by saying that while these activities may be innocent elsewhere, in Malta 'the only motive can be the spread of political irredentism among the inhabitants of an important British fortress'.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless he promised to restrain the Governor of Malta from reacting to Italian propaganda as much as possible. There was a

¹⁰³ Maffey to Vansittart, 'Policy of His Majesty's Government in Malta', 28 March 1935, R2166, FO 371/19535

¹⁰⁴ Maffey to Vansittart, 'Policy of His Majesty's Government in Malta', 28 March 1935, R2166, FO 371/19535

¹⁰⁵ Maffey to Vansittart, 'Policy of His Majesty's Government in Malta', 28 March 1935, R2166, FO 371/19535

¹⁰⁶ Edward Hallett Carr, *Great Britain as a Mediterranean power: Cust Foundation lecture 1937*, Cust Foundation lecture (Nottingham: University College, 1937). as referred to in Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 532.

¹⁰⁷ Maffey to Vansittart, 'Policy of His Majesty's Government in Malta', 28 March 1935, R2166, FO 371/19535 p 179, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Maffey to Vansittart, 'Policy of His Majesty's Government in Malta [No 2]', 15 May 1935, R3282, FO 371/19536

split in the approaches from the two offices. The concerns of the Foreign Office took precedence and limited the options and responses available to the Colonial Office.

Two months later, in May 1935, the Colonial Office consulted the Foreign Office on Campbell's proposals to crackdown on Italian activity in Malta.¹⁰⁹ This would have included press censorship, raids on houses of dissidents and deportations. Campbell was also worried about the activities of the *Instituto di Cultura Italiana* and the *Umberto Primo*. As evidence of pro-Italian sentiment the Governor included an obituary for Fortunato Mizzi a nationalist and, as noted above, father of then nationalist leader Enrico Mizzi.¹¹⁰ The Foreign Office maintained its position and came back to the Colonial Office with a strong message; these grievances could not be raised during such a delicate time in Anglo-Italian relations. As one official wrote, 'Abyssinia made the present moment most unpropitious for any action'.¹¹¹ The British government supported Abyssinia in its political conflict with Italy. The government's commitment to collective action placed it in conflict with Italy and the Foreign Office did not wish to further aggravate Italy through anti-Italian action in Malta. The Foreign Office was of the view that the whole drive for this repression came from Major Bertram Ede, an MI5 security officer based in Malta whom they thought was too caught up in the cloak and dagger aspect of his work and could not see the greater picture.¹¹² Ede was ambitious,¹¹³ he 'transformed the [Maltese] defence security office, which had started functioning in 1931, into a ubiquitous ever-so-thorough spy machine, not immune to cloak-and-dagger conspiracy theory and over-statement, with telling consequences'.¹¹⁴

In the Colonial Office the concern and search for signs of Italian sympathy or influence in Malta continued. In August 1935 the Colonial Secretary wrote to Sir Harry Luke (Lieutenant Governor of Malta) seeking a description of public opinion. Luke claimed that the Nationalist press was being pro-Italian while the Constitutionalist press described Italian policy as selfish and brutally aggressive, noting that the pro-Italian press such as *Malta* and *Poplu* were more

¹⁰⁹ Campbell to Cunliffe-Lister, 'License Issued to Instituto di Cultura in Malta', 27 May 1935, R4092, FO 371/19536

¹¹⁰ Campbell to Cunliffe-Lister, 'License Issued to Instituto di Cultura in Malta', 27 May 1935, R4092, FO 371/19536

¹¹¹ Campbell to Cunliffe-Lister, 'License Issued to Instituto di Cultura in Malta', 27 May 1935, R4092, FO 371/19536

¹¹² Campbell to Cunliffe-Lister, 'License Issued to Instituto di Cultura in Malta', 27 May 1935, R4092, FO 371/19536 p 120.

¹¹³ Bertram Ede was the top MI5 official in Malta, he reported to the head of MI5, Vernon Kell, and worked closely with Luke, see Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 554.

¹¹⁴ Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 555.

vociferous.¹¹⁵ Luke informed Colonial Secretary Malcolm McDonald, in September 1935 that 'there has been a certain change in public opinion here in favour of Italy' caused in part by:

persistent anti-British propaganda emanating from the Italian wireless stations, the manifestations of Italian military power at the recent manoeuvres in North Italy and the insistence upon Italian might and upon the Italian point of view to the detriment of the British in the local pro-Italian press.¹¹⁶

The broadcasts were coming nightly from Rome and Naples. Luke acknowledged that the local authorities would like to take stronger actions but broader considerations were preventing this. In a secret report attached to Luke's letter an unknown author noted that the pro-Italian and anti-British feelings were felt particularly amongst the 'middle and upper middle classes, shopkeepers etc' and argued,

It is regrettable that the general European situation does not permit of taking at this juncture strong action against one or two prominent Italians in this Island, since any strong action on the part of the Government would immediately tend to swing over sympathy to ourselves and deter others through fear.¹¹⁷

Both Luke and the anonymous author were alluding to the same issues that caused a split in approaches between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office. The British were aware of Italian espionage emanating from the Italian Consulate in Malta and on 30 September 1935 the local authorities deported five people including Luigi Mazzone¹¹⁸ and later another seven people.¹¹⁹ The new Italian Consul General Marchese Ferrante also carried on espionage in Malta, but his tradecraft was weak; the British were intercepting telegrams and listening into conversations in the Italian Consulate. Ede was reporting to Kell and was attaching a day by day account of what was occurring in the Italian Consulate including a detailed description of conversations.¹²⁰ Luke was pushing for the expulsion of Ferrante, and Vice-Consul Blais.¹²¹ This did not happen immediately. The previous expulsions from Malta had caused some diplomatic

¹¹⁵ Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Public opinion in Malta.', 22 August 1935, J3958, FO 371/19127

¹¹⁶ Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Opinion in Malta.', 11 September 1935, J4707, FO 371/19133 . During the World War Two there were broadcasts from Rome in the Maltese language

¹¹⁷ Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 'Italo-Ethiopian dispute. Opinion in Malta.', 11 September 1935, J4707, FO 371/19133

¹¹⁸ For more information on Mazzone see Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 249.

¹¹⁹ Vernon Kell of Security Service, 'Situation Report from the 20th July to 30th December, 1935', 202a, KV 3/352

¹²⁰ Ede to Kell, 'Letter regarding Intelligence on Ferrante attaching transcript', 7 January 1936, 194a, KV 3/352

¹²¹ Dawe to Carr, 'Italians in Malta', 31 January 1936, R596/G, FO371/20406

protest from Italy and Anthony Eden had a discussion with Signor Grandi on 20 February 1936 where Grandi specifically referred to the deportations that had occurred in the previous year.¹²²

On a more practical level the danger of attack from Italy was being taken seriously enough that Luke was running an air raid practice, reportedly the first in the Empire.¹²³ A fly-by of aircraft was organised and smoke candles laced with teargas were 'dropped' from motor cars. Italy used poison gas in Abyssinia so many of the precautions were against such an attack. Luke's report does not mention Italy but the implication was obvious. A prescient minute, in so far as future enemies are concerned, on the front of the file notes:

the report may be of interest to those Colonies which might conceivably be subject to air attack in the event of our becoming involved in hostilities with, say, Japan, Germany or Italy. I would suggest, therefore, it be sent to Gibraltar, Cyprus, Palestine, Aden, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika territory, Zanzibar, Singapore, and Hong Kong.¹²⁴

The position of Malta with regard to Italy also resulted in repeated parliamentary questions about the future of Malta as the home of the Mediterranean Fleet. As discussed, in September 1935, Great Britain made the decision to withdraw its fleet from Malta and move to Alexandria.¹²⁵

In 1936 Italian newspapers, free from the need for diplomacy, were among the strongest critics of the change in language policy that had occurred in 1934. In April *Giornale d'Italia* responding to an ordinance that substituted English for Italian in courses in Medicine and Science at the University of Malta wrote:

the British Government, which boasts before the world of defending the independence of barbarous and slave-trading Abyssinia against Italy, the mother of every civilisation, is striving to destroy, by one device after another, this civilisation of ours where it is gloriously and everlastingly alive – in Malta.¹²⁶

The newspaper reinforced Italian perceptions of kinship and ownership over Malta.

¹²² Eden to Drummond, 'Italo-Ethiopian Dispute. Attitude of Signor Mussolini', 20 February 1936, J1630, FO 371/20190 .

¹²³ Luke to J.H. Thomas MP, 'Letter regarding practice air raid', 18 March 1936, CO 323/1396/4

¹²⁴ Luke to J.H. Thomas MP, 'Letter regarding practice air raid', 18 March 1936, CO 323/1396/4

¹²⁵ For more on the topic of alternative locations for the Mediterranean Fleet see Manolis Koumas, "Patterns of the Future? British Mediterranean Strategy and the Choice Between Alexandria and Cyprus 1935–8," *The International History Review* 33, no. 3 (2011).

¹²⁶ Drummond to Eden, 'Use of English Language in the University of Malta', 3 April 1936, R 2017, FO 371/20406

In May 1936 the presence of Ferrante was still causing great concern to those on the ground in Malta. Sir Charles Bonham-Carter, a General in the British Army replaced General Sir David Campbell as Governor following his death.¹²⁷ A well-known member of British society, Bonham-Carter's appointment demonstrated the precedence of Malta over other locations such as Cyprus. He wrote to Labour Colonial Secretary James Thomas¹²⁸ about Ferrante noting that 'were the country he represents actually at war with Great Britain he could not conduct himself in a more hostile manner'.¹²⁹ London supported Bonham Carter's efforts to crackdown further on the presence of Italian culture in Malta.¹³⁰ Ferrante was apparently gathering information on military and naval preparations and using his influence to promote hostility against British rule.¹³¹ This type of correspondence provoked meetings and discussion in London about further means of suppressing Italian activity in Malta. At one meeting, with representatives of the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office and MI5 present, measures discussed included the immediate removal of Ferrante, limitation of *Instituto di Cultura* and the *Umberto Primo* to Italian subjects only, disciplinary action against British subjects working against British interests, the closing down of two pro-Italian newspapers and deportations or removal of persons from positions of influence, such as editorships.¹³² Dawe noted that

the conclusion reached at this meeting was that, having regard to the local situation and the information respecting anti-British activities on the part of the Italians which had come into possession of the Defence Security Officer, there was as strong case for taking immediate action further to limit Italian activities in the Island.¹³³

In particular they agreed that there were grounds for sending Ferrante home earlier than planned.¹³⁴ Dawe noted that:

The conquest of Ethiopia by Italy, in spite of the action taken by the League of Nations, has naturally had an effect upon public opinion in Malta. This factor makes it desirable that action

¹²⁷ Sir Charles Bonham-Carter was appointed governor and commander-in-chief of Malta in February 1936 when he was aged sixty. He is seen as having formed good relationships with both the Maltese people and Colonial Secretary Malcolm Macdonald. Bonham-Carter remained governor when the war began but had to retire after suffering a heart attack in April 1940. See Joan Carnwath, "Bonham-Carter, Sir Charles (1876–1955)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

¹²⁸ James Henry Thomas was a Labour politician and Colonial Secretary from 22 November 1935 to 22 May 1936

¹²⁹ Bonham-Carter to Thomas, 'Confession of Dr Delia', 15 May 1936, R2903/G, FO 371/20407

¹³⁰ R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 216.

¹³¹ Bonham-Carter to Thomas, 'Confession of Dr Delia', 15 May 1936, R2903/G, FO 371/20407

¹³² Dawe to O'Malley, 'Maltese Affairs', 20 May 1936, R 2942, FO 371/20407

¹³³ Dawe to Vansittart, 'Italian activities in Malta', 30 May 1936, R3153, FO 371/20407

¹³⁴ The Foreign Office had already made an arrangement *a l'amiable* with Italy under which Ferrante and his deputy Blais would be recalled and the Foreign Office would in return recall a Major Dodds from Palermo.

should be taken as early as possible to counteract the loss of British prestige and to make clear the determination of His Majesty's Government to uphold British interests in the Island. Malta is a fortress and an important link in the chain of Imperial defence, and the state of mind of the population of the fortress is an important factor from the defence standpoint.¹³⁵

The actions of Fascist Italy affected British prestige and power in Malta and the relationship between the Maltese and the British. This was impacting on the British ability to govern its Mediterranean Empire more broadly. Part of the reason that the Ferrante issue was occupying the minds of the Foreign Office so strongly was that Dr Delia, a former Nationalist member of the Legislative assembly of Malta was arrested under the Official Secrets Act, and subsequently made a full confession to spying, 'implicating the Italian Consul-General [Ferrante] as the instigator of the offence'.¹³⁶ Given the comprehensive counter-espionage being done by MI5, this was not a shock to the authorities but the issue really was how much of this confession should be made public as the British did not wish to compromise the activities of MI5.

The Delia confession was finally made public on or around 30 May 1936 with the Governor reporting that a 'big local sensation has been created by the publication of the confession of Dr Delia and members of all parties are united in indignation at the action of the Italian Consul General'.¹³⁷ On 26 June, Delia was sentenced to three years hard labour for espionage in the Malta Dockyard.¹³⁸ In Italy Sir Eric Drummond, the Ambassador in Rome, had a conversation with Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, where he requested the removal of Ferrante from Malta. Ciano would not admit that Ferrante had acted improperly, but promised an answer within two days.¹³⁹ The next day Ciano told Drummond that he had instructed Ferrante to leave Malta at once.¹⁴⁰ How the Italians really felt however may be judged by the fact that Ferrate was nominated Commander of Order of St Maurice and Lazarus on proposal of the Italian Government and that his honour was 'awarded in recognition of Consul-General's services in defence of Italian Culture in Malta'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Dawe to Vansittart, 'Italian activities in Malta', 30 May 1936, R3153, FO 371/20407

¹³⁶ Dawe to Vansittart, 'Italian activities in Malta', 30 May 1936, R3153, FO 371/20407

¹³⁷ Bonham-Carter to Ormsby-Gore, 'Italian Activities in Malta', 30 May 1936, R3203, FO 371/20407

¹³⁸ Ormsby-Gore to Eden, 'Italian Activities in Malta', 19 June 1936, R3771, FO 371/20407

¹³⁹ Drummond, 'Italian activities in Malta', 30 June 1936, R3831, FO 371/20407

¹⁴⁰ Drummond, 'Italian Activities in Malta (R3857)', 1 July 1936, R3857, FO 371/20407

¹⁴¹ Drummond, 'Italian Activities in Malta (R3982)', 7 July 1936, R3982, FO 371/20407

In Parliament new Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore, in response to a question from Labour politician Lieutenant Commander Reginald Fletcher,¹⁴² (later Governor of Cyprus) who often expressed concern about Italian propaganda, noted that the Institute of Italian Culture 'was closed because the Government was satisfied that it had exceeded the scope of the legitimate functions for which it was established and had become the centre of undesirable activities'.¹⁴³ The British government acted carefully, taking account of the international situation, but it was prepared to take active steps to combat Italian influence in the fortress colony. This is consistent with the argument that Britain met Italian aggression with internal repression.

Britain's problems with Italy were replicated on a global scale. Darwin suggests that in this period only Britain and France were committed to the existing world order, that British leaders did not adequately understand the ethnic and ideological conflicts in Europe, they did not know how to deal with Hitler and they were lurching into a crisis of their world system.¹⁴⁴ In Malta they dealt with consistent constitutional crises as the cleavage between Maltese Nationalists and Strickland's Constitutionals allied with the Labour movement continued to produce political uncertainty. Added to these problems was continued external pressure from Italy, with a burgeoning ideological mission and deep rooted cultural and religious influences in Maltese society. In Malta as across Empire the existing order was subject to opposition from within and without.

New Letters patent for Malta were promulgated on 12 August 1936 and came into force on 2 September. Under these the Governor was aided in ruling the colony by an Executive Council, whose advice he could disregard if he so chose, with the proviso only that he must report to the British Government. Malta was not returned to the position of self-government as had existed under the 1921 constitution. The Executive Council consisted of four *ex-officio* members, three nominated members and any extraordinary member who could be appointed by the Governor.¹⁴⁵ Under this new constitution English and Maltese were the two official languages.¹⁴⁶ Sir Bonham-Carter described the constitution as an 'interim constitution, the duration of which will depend

¹⁴² Reginald Fletcher worked in naval intelligence in the Near-Eastern Section. As an MP he spoke chiefly on naval matters, and his apparent interest in Italy can be attributed to his professional background. Fletcher was appointed Governor of Cyprus from 1946-49 a time he regarded as 'exile' - see British Academy and National Portrait Gallery (Great Britain), "Oxford dictionary of national biography."

¹⁴³ HC Debate, 15 July 1936, vol 314, cc2028-9

¹⁴⁴ J. Darwin, *Unfinished Empire*, p 335.

¹⁴⁵ Statutes Malta. Laws, etc, *The Malta Constitution, 1936* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936).

¹⁴⁶ Correspondent, "Constitution of Malta - Crown Colony - Governor's Wide Powers", *The Times*, 1936

on the people's cooperation with the Government and the extent of their good will'.¹⁴⁷ This was a holding pattern, with Bonham-Carter in complete control, able to feed out partial sovereignty at will. He was the sovereign, able to decide how long Malta remained in the state of exception. It was also clear that Empire was indeed being shaped by the dissent on the ground.

As if to demonstrate his complete control Bonham-Carter moved quickly to terminate the use of the Italian language in the Maltese Law Courts¹⁴⁸ and to repeal the *Pari Passu Act*, the second measure having been foreshadowed by Campbell in January. In relation to *Pari Passu* Bonham-Carter argued that it was 'entirely contrary to the principle adopted in regard to languages in the new Constitution and its repeal is clearly necessary in order to remove what otherwise must be a glaring anomaly and one which certainly would call forth considerable adverse public criticism'.¹⁴⁹ The Colonial Office recommended it to the Foreign Office and the latter thought it logical but wondered

whether the repeal of the *Pari Passu Act*, coming on top of other measures taken recently, will cause an explosion of feeling in Italy at a moment when appeasement is the order of the day. (The measures in question include the expulsion of the Italian Consul-General and another member of the Consular Staff and of other Italian undesirables; the closing of the Italian Institute of Culture; limitation of the scope of the Umberto School; and abolition of the use of Italian as an official language in the Law Courts and for notarial acts.) The Colonial Office apparently feel that Italians in Malta have discounted all this and will not raise any particular outcry. Therefore one must suppose that no great fuss will be made in Italy either. I feel (a) that we cannot refuse the Colonial Office's request and (b) that we must risk a certain amount of Italian displeasure.¹⁵⁰

Strained Relations with Italy

As occurred in other parts of the Mediterranean a veil of normalcy continued in the late 1930s despite all the tension and strategic preparations.¹⁵¹ On 16 April 1938 Britain and Italy signed the

¹⁴⁷ Correspondent, "Constitution of Malta - Crown Colony - Governor's Wide Powers", *The Times*

¹⁴⁸ Foreign Office, "The question of the Termination of the use of the Italian Language in the Maltese Law Courts", 17 August 1936, R4951/20/22, FO371/20408

¹⁴⁹ Charles Bonham-Carter to Ormsby-Gore, 'Proposed repeal of Maltese *Pari Passu Act* (No IX of 1923)', 19 August 1936, R5144, FO371/20408

¹⁵⁰ File note in Colonial Office, 'Proposed repeal of Maltese *Pari Passu Act* (No IX of 1923)', 28 August 1936, R5144, FO371/20408 p 196.

¹⁵¹ The complex interplay between Catholicism, Italian loyalties and fascism was again demonstrated in Malta during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The alignment of the Spanish Catholic Church with Franco was reflected in Malta where cleric Monsignor Pantalleresco telegraphed Franco in February 1937: 'Catholic Malta gathered in its

Anglo-Italian Easter Accord or Agreement and on 21 June, the Italian Navy visited Malta, where the Governor formally received them. *The Times* commented that the visit was ‘welcomed as a sign of Anglo-Italian *rapprochement*’.¹⁵² The visit was not totally without controversy however. Labour politician Josiah Wedgwood,¹⁵³ a critic of appeasement, questioned why the Italian fleet was invited when the Italian Air Force was still attacking British shipping.¹⁵⁴ Wedgwood was referring to the bombing of twenty-two British Merchant ships during the Spanish Civil War by planes that were nominally Nationalist, but were operated by Italy.¹⁵⁵ The answer was simply that this was a return visit.

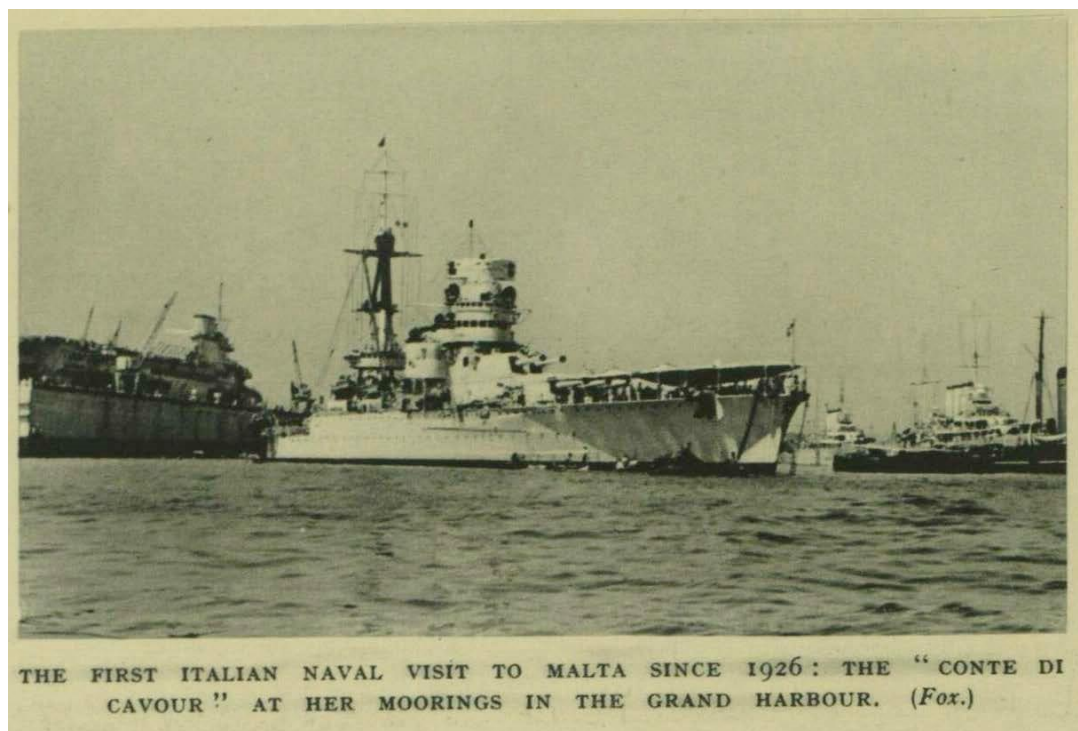


Figure 11 - Source *The London Illustrated News*, 2 July 1938

By 1939 there was a renewed focus on the defence of Malta. Governor Bonham-Carter noted that ‘Great Britain’s new policy of guaranteeing support to other nations if attacked had caused a large and rapid increase in the garrison of Malta and in the strength of its defences’.¹⁵⁶ Bonham-Carter also pushed for a new constitution in Malta which was proclaimed on 25 March

thousands feast Christ King in communion of spirit pray final victory of arms of Catholic Spain’. HC Debate, 17 February 1937, vol 320, cc1156

¹⁵² "Italian Naval Visit To Malta", *The Times*, 22 June 1938, 1938

¹⁵³ Wedgwood was in parliament from 1906 to 1942. Formerly a Liberal, he joined the Labour Party in 1919. During the 1930’s he condemned appeasement and advocated re-armament - British Academy and National Portrait Gallery (Great Britain), "Oxford dictionary of national biography."

¹⁵⁴ HC Debate, 23 June 1938, vol 337 cc1277-8

¹⁵⁵ HC Debate, 04 July 1938, vol 338, cc 2-6

¹⁵⁶ "Malta Safe Air Defences Doubled", *The Times*, 26 May 1939, p 13

1939. This constitution which was similar to those of 1849 and 1903 provided for elections but elected members were in a minority and did not include the clergy. The Council of Government would have ten elected (a minority), two nominated unofficial and eight official members (together a majority). Crucially all matters connected with language were the preserve of the Governor.¹⁵⁷

This arrangement was very unpopular with the Maltese; all parties were unhappy with the constitution and all lobbied against it.¹⁵⁸ But while the Nationalist Party boycotted the proclamation, Strickland's Constitutional Party and the Labour Party wanted to work within the boundaries of the Constitution and then reform it. Elections were held under this constitution in July 1939, and given the international atmosphere it is not surprising that the Constitutional and Labour parties attracted 63% of the vote and won seven out of ten seats (one to Labour), while the Nationalist vote decreased from 66% in 1932 to 33% and won only three seats.¹⁵⁹ The conflict between these parties and their movements was mostly settled by the events of the war, in which Italy and then Germany severely bombed Malta. The cultural ties ran deep however; the Nationalists ran and won seats in the 1947 elections.¹⁶⁰

This look at Malta in the 1930s shows the powerful Italian influence at work, exacerbating internal tensions and dissent. The pastoral dispute, followed by the language dispute and post-Abyssinian Fascist cultural aggression all speak to the level of influence. Such activity produced a period of constant constitutional and legal change and a willingness to revert to authoritarian rule that was tempered by a desire to appear at least to be granting some level of local representation. This position was not replicated in Cyprus. Italy did not have a cultural link to Cyprus as it did with Malta. Instead it posed a strategic threat to the British, and diminished Britain's standing in the region as it asserted itself. The reinstatement of a constitution in Malta helped create the post-war stability, unlike in Cyprus which experienced stunted political modernity in a period devoid of representative government. The generation of political activists who group up in that authoritarian era became members of groups such as EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) and participated in the violence of the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁵⁷ Edith Dobie, *Malta's Road to Independence*, p 111.

¹⁵⁸ Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 634.

¹⁵⁹ Henry Frendo, *Europe and empire*, p 635.

¹⁶⁰ C. Baldoli, "The 'Northern Dominator' and the Mare Nostrum", p 17.

Cyprus and Palmer's Authoritarian Turn

On 16 December 1938 Governor Richmond Palmer nearing the end of his tenure (which ended in July 1939) expressed his view about the position in Cyprus:

As the prestige which goes with Naval power in the Levant is at the root of Great Britain's friendship with Greece and Turkey, and as the sentiment of all Cypriots toward Great Britain is at present very largely conditioned by her relations with Greece and Turkey respectively, it is clear that Cypriot loyalty to Great Britain would not survive her naval eclipse by Italy in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁶¹

Such fears were held by many British officials in the Mediterranean. Loyalty to the empire, Palmer felt, was resting upon military superiority and prestige rather than any deeper commitment and the warning in his letter implies the neglect of strategic interests in the central and eastern Mediterranean. By 1938 Cyprus had been under British control for 60 years but had not developed a solid attachment to empire. This section will focus on the 'authoritarian turn', the use of strict control in the face of external threat.

In 1932 Storrs was replaced as Governor by Reginald Stubbs who had only a short tenure. Stubbs had a very low opinion of the capacity of Cypriots to govern themselves and believed they were 'utterly unfit to take any responsible part in the government' of their country.¹⁶² He saw only a limited role for Cypriot representation and set the tone for the incoming Sir Richmond Palmer who took over in November 1933 and implemented a strict regime known locally as *Palmerokratia* or 'Palmerocracy'. Palmer was the next step in a regression of treatment of the Cypriots and under his rule the situation in Cyprus deviated sharply from that in Malta. His rule was authoritarian, quasi-fascist and culturally damaging.

Palmer had learnt his craft in colonial Nigeria where he was of the view that 'that the place of a people on the ladder of cultural evolution is reflected by the nature of their polity'.¹⁶³ Whereas Cyprus had been distinguished in the past by its Europeaness, Palmer brought a 'new grammar of racial difference' whereby he viewed Cypriots as 'Asiatics' and 'Orientals'.¹⁶⁴ Rappas suggests that Palmer's authoritarianism was a 'personality trait which fed his political and ideological

¹⁶¹ Palmer, 'Letter from Palmer to Colonial Secretary re political situation during Sudetan Crisis', 16 December 1938, 'Red' 109, FCO141/2594 p 99.

¹⁶² CO 67/254/4: *Cyprus politics Situation, 1934*. 'Memorandum by Sir R.E. Stubbs', 16 October 1933 as quoted in A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 29.

¹⁶³ A. E. Afigbo, "Herbert Richmond Palmer and indirect rule in Eastern Nigeria: 1915-1928," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 2 (1965).

¹⁶⁴ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 485.

inclinations for far-right ideas'.¹⁶⁵ His attitude toward Cyprus was uncompromising; an example of his excess was the suppression of any extracts from either *Hansard* or the *Crown Colonist*, the latter declaring it was 'honoured to be classed in subversion with such a notoriously bolshy rag as *Hansard*'.¹⁶⁶ Palmer's rule in Cyprus was even seen as excessive back in London where one official wrote that the administration there was 'becoming imbued with the political philosophy of Mussolini ... thoroughly afraid of criticism in any form'.¹⁶⁷

The Legislative Council was not reinstated after the events of 1931. The pretence of self-representation was dispensed with and Cypriots were deprived of a platform for protest rather than a real base of power. Palmer's rule was deserving of the 'Palmerocracy' label; he continued the restrictions imposed by Storrs and Stubbs, limited public meetings and press freedom, controlled the Church, including the ringing of Church bells and prevented the replacement of the Archbishop when the incumbent, Kyrillos III, died in 1933.¹⁶⁸ Palmer carried on government with the 'assistance' of a nominated advisory council consisting of four Greek Cypriots and one Turkish Cypriot, a tokenistic form of local representation. The Greek Cypriots who worked with Palmer in this way were subject to accusations of collaboration and one such figure, Antonios Triantaphyllides was assassinated in January 1934.¹⁶⁹ The Palmer administration was the most repressive of the interwar period and together with the British government it 'pushed back' against political discontent and agitation by implementing a harsh regime.

The grudging approval of the Colonial Office for Palmer was due in part to the 'deteriorating international and specifically regional context'.¹⁷⁰ The perceived external pressure was interacting with decisions about the control of internal dissent. There was also a general sympathy for the 'modernising project', a form of quasi fascist-directed social engineering. In this way the British looked to the Dodecanese as a colony being managed on such lines.¹⁷¹ Rappas called this 'a certain fascination for the Italian fascist colonial administration' of the Dodecanese where 'political repression was combined with economic development'.¹⁷² The repression consisted of 'censorship, prohibition of assemblies, martial law, the banning of public displays of the national

¹⁶⁵ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 31.

¹⁶⁶ James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 106.

¹⁶⁷ Colonial Office official quoted in R. F. Holland, *Blue-water empire*, p 222.

¹⁶⁸ R. F. Holland and Diana Weston Markides, *The British and the Hellenes*, p 214.

¹⁶⁹ George Francis Hill, *A history of Cyprus*, p 432. and see National Archives FCO 141/2497 for recently released files regarding this event.

¹⁷⁰ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 32.

¹⁷¹ For a comparison of Cyprus and the Dodecanese colonies see Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe".

¹⁷² A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 34.

symbols of 'foreign countries' and eventually, the deportation of local activists and even of the Orthodox Bishops of Rhodes and of Kaphathos in 1921'.¹⁷³ The dual action of Italian fascism can be seen at work in this period. The outright military threat posed by Italy meant that the Colonial Office was prepared to countenance a stricter regime in Cyprus. At the same time the ideology the fascists espoused was winning some admirers in Britain who cast an admiring glance at Italian colonies and were prepared to emulate some of their features. In implementing such policies however Britain did great damage to the development of local politics. The process of challenging and response was constitutive both of the regime put in place and of the future of Cypriot politics.

Holland and Markides wrongly suggest that in this period a 'moral and political vacuum prevailed, filled only by the Church in its traditional ethnarchic role, embodying the strong feeling in its surrounding community that the receding prospect of *enosis* only heightened the necessity to preserve the Hellenic cultural heritage'.¹⁷⁴ Rappas gives a much more subtle analysis of the role of the Church as it and the labour movement emerged after the repression of a more broad-based constitutionalist movement. The constitutional movement arose in 1937 and its goal was to upgrade the status of the colony to that of a dominion.¹⁷⁵ It was moderate, it sought limited autonomy and it worked within a 'loyalist' paradigm, but the British thought that it was a Trojan horse for *enosis*. In fact the moderate nature of the claims was in itself enough to draw suspicion from officials such as Dawe.¹⁷⁶ The movement was also novel in that it was inter-communal, 'a tactical alliance of Greek and Turkish Cypriots nationalists, communist sympathisers, villagers and townsmen who only shared the notion that they were unofficial members of a "*syndicat des mecontents*" (union of the discontented)'.¹⁷⁷ Its broad appeal allowed for a mass politicisation.

Supporters of the constitutional movement drafted a constitution which was interestingly, along the lines of that in Malta, which in turn had been based on the diarchy model from India. Britain would retain diplomatic and defence control, while Cypriots would govern on domestic issues.¹⁷⁸ This was not a radical anti-British movement. It was a threat to Britain only in as far as it was pan-Cypriot and bridged the divide which had been exploited by the British in Legislative

¹⁷³ Alexis Rappas, "The Transnational Formation of Imperial Rule on the Margins of Europe", p 477.

¹⁷⁴ R. F. Holland and Diana Weston Markides, *The British and the Hellenes*, p 214.

¹⁷⁵ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 88.

¹⁷⁶ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 91.

¹⁷⁷ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 122.

¹⁷⁸ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 97.

Council, in particular to resist *enosis*. Both the British administration in Cyprus and the Colonial Office had failed to understand the complexities of the constitutional movement. It was defeated by the British but it opened up awareness and avenues for mass politicisation. Unfortunately this awareness was channelled into new and less constructive movements, led by the Church on one hand and the labour movement on the other.

Positions in the Church from Bishop and above were elected by adult male Christians in their district and Archbishops in Cyprus occupied a position unlike that of religious leaders in, for example, Britain.¹⁷⁹ They have been described a 'archbishop-ethnarchs' and they were central to politics in Cyprus. The Church had a strong position prior to British rule and, as the Church saw its position threatened under British modernity, it co-opted nationalism in Cyprus.¹⁸⁰ This is an important point. The church took a crude quasi-nationalist (*enosis*) approach. During the period of Storrs, Stubbs, and Palmer there were two 'Archbishops', Kyrillos III and Leondios Savva.¹⁸¹ Both of these men maintained a nationalist, pro-*enosis* position. Kyrillos maintained this position during the events of October 1931, but he was not the main provocateur, and he was not deported. Indeed he counselled Cypriots to stay within the law in the aftermath of the burning down of Government house, a position which earned him the ire of many Cypriots.¹⁸² Kyrillos III died in 1933 and his *Locum Tenens* replacement Leondios Savva maintained a very strong nationalist position during the oppression of the Palmer era.¹⁸³ The archbishops and the Church more generally did indeed play a leading political role but to suggest that only they could fill the moral and political vacuum is to ignore the political complexity of the situation and ignores the existence of the constitutional movement. Only two years into Palmer's tenure Mussolini's Italy decided to further its expansionist agenda in North Africa and the threat increased rather than diminished.

¹⁷⁹ Rebecca Bryant, *Imagining the Modern : The Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus*, p 22.

¹⁸⁰ M.N. Michael A. Varnava, "Chapter One - Archbishop-Ethnarchs since 1767," in *The Archbishops of Cyprus in the Modern Age: The Changing Role of the Archbishop-Ethnarch, Their Identities and Politics*, ed. and M.N. Michael A. Varnava (Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2013).

¹⁸¹ Savva was *Locum Tenens*, but in a practical sense occupied the top position

¹⁸² Irene Pophaides, "Kyrillos III, 1916-33: Between Sophronios III and Kyrillos II," in *The Archbishops of Cyprus in the Modern Age: The Changing Role of the Archbishop-Ethnarch, their Identities and Politics*, ed. A. Varnava and M.N. Michael (Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2013), p 204.

¹⁸³ Alexis Rappas, "Leondios and the Archiepiscopal Question, 1933-47: The Demise of an Apolitical Ethnarchy?," in *The Archbishops of Cyprus in the Modern Age: The Changing Role of the Archbishop-Ethnarch, their Identities and Politics*, ed. A. Varnava and M.N. Michael (Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2013), p 211.

The Debate over the Development of Cyprus

The Abyssinian War changed the strategic picture in the central and eastern Mediterranean. It presented a significant diplomatic and strategic dilemma for the British government which had concerns about its naval disposition. The debate over a new naval base in Cyprus is another example of the way in which Italy affected British decision-making. The dilemma and the debate indicate the level of anxiety within the British Government and the armed services and the level of threat that Italy posed. During the Abyssinian Crisis the First Sea Lord Ernle Chatfield, aware that Malta was only 80 kilometres from Sicily and vulnerable to air attack, made the decision (on 28 August 1935) to relocate the Mediterranean Fleet to Alexandria. This was not seen as a permanent solution as Alexandria did not have the same maintenance and operational capability as Malta. Cyprus, as British controlled territory and more politically stable than Palestine (another option) was an obvious candidate to replace Malta as main naval base in the central and eastern Mediterranean.

This issue, of where to locate the naval base was a vexed question and a series of reports were created. In March 1936 the Parliamentary Secretary for the Admiralty, Lord Stanley, was asked whether in view of the vulnerability of Malta to air attack, the government was considering the transfer of the naval base to Cyprus. The bald answer was that no such transfer was under consideration.¹⁸⁴ This was true, but it was also true that a naval base had been considered for Cyprus but had been rejected. In 1935 the Admiralty concluded that due to the risk of air attack, Cyprus should replace Malta as the main naval base in the Mediterranean. The British government rejected this idea because of the high cost, estimated to be £22 million plus £3.3 million for defences.¹⁸⁵

In July 1936 the Committee for Imperial Defence (CID) looked at a report written by the Chief of Staff Sub-Committee (COS) on this issue.¹⁸⁶ The report argued that Britain now needed an additional naval base in the Mediterranean. The three alternatives to Malta were Haifa in Palestine, Alexandria in Egypt and Famagusta in Cyprus. Haifa and Alexandria had the disadvantage of not being officially in British territory. The report was in favour of Cyprus noting its advantages as a British territory, that it could not be invaded over land, and that it had

¹⁸⁴ HC Debate, 17 March 1936, vol 310 c232

¹⁸⁵ Manolis Koumas, "Patterns of the Future?", p 493.

¹⁸⁶ Cabinet Paper Memorandum: *Eastern Mediterranean: Understanding with Turkey and Greece*, 31 July 1936, CAB 24/263/41 CP 211 (36)

room to accommodate aerodromes and military training facilities.¹⁸⁷ However it also noted that ‘the development of a naval base at Famagusta entailed the protection of the whole of Cyprus’ and secondly the danger of air attacks from Turkey.¹⁸⁸ It was, the report suggested, important to maintain a friendly relationship with Turkey as the geographical position of Cyprus ‘in relation to the [Turkish] mainland would lay it open to a scale of attack similar to that which might have to be faced at Malta’.¹⁸⁹

The report expressly excluded economic considerations, which were considerable. Sir Samuel Hoare, the First Lord of the Admiralty,¹⁹⁰ was in favour of developing Cyprus so that it could ‘take its proper place in imperial defence’,¹⁹¹ intimating that Cyprus was not yet useful. On 26 August 1936 the British government signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.¹⁹² Under the terms of the treaty Britain was entitled to use of Egyptian ports ‘in the event of war, imminent menace of war or apprehended international emergency’.¹⁹³ This made Alexandria a more viable long-term option but did not rule Cyprus out for future development.

Another Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee report dated 24 April 1937 took into account economic factors and the anticipated treaty. This report set out schemes A, B and C for the development of Famagusta with A costing £25 million and providing for a full naval base, while options B and C costs £15.5 million and £4.5 million respectively and provided for a maintenance and repair facility only with the operational base remaining at Alexandria. The COS thought that option A was too expensive, and that options B and C were undesirable as they were ‘split’ options. They recommended Alexandria become the new base, with a projected cost of only £3.5 million and once again under this plan Cyprus was not developed.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁷ Manolis Koumas, "Patterns of the Future?", p 494.

¹⁸⁸ Cabinet Paper Memorandum: *Eastern Mediterranean: Understanding with Turkey and Greece*, 31 July 1936, CAB 24/263/41 CP 211 (36) p 9.

¹⁸⁹ Cabinet Paper Memorandum: *Eastern Mediterranean: Understanding with Turkey and Greece*, 31 July 1936, CAB 24/263/41 CP 211 (36) p 2. - This policy of remaining onside with Turkey resurfaced after WW2, when there was an alignment of Anglo-Turkish interests, as Britain wanted to maintain air bases on an independent Cyprus and where Turkey was concerned for Turkish Cypriots if Cyprus were united with Greece. Later American interests would also align as Turkey became crucial to the NATO containment of the Soviet Union. See Yasin Coşkun, "The Cyprus Problem and Anglo-Turkish Relations 1967" (University of East Anglia, 2015), p 11.

¹⁹⁰ The First Lord of the Admiralty was a cabinet position, filled by a politician. The First Sea Lord was the professional head of the Navy, a position filled by a sailor.

¹⁹¹ James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 64.

¹⁹² See Steven Morewood, "Appeasement from strength: The making of the 1936 Anglo - Egyptian treaty of friendship and alliance," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 7, no. 3 (1996).

¹⁹³ Manolis Koumas, "Patterns of the Future?", p 495.

¹⁹⁴ Manolis Koumas, "Patterns of the Future?", p 495.

The debate over the Naval base continued. Another Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) report from 1937, which included economic factors, noted that

the establishment of an operation and repair base at Cyprus would take many years to complete, and, as we have already shown would cost £20 million. It would moreover present us with a heavy additional military commitment.¹⁹⁵

The Foreign Office objected to the alternative proposal that Alexandria be developed as Britain still did not have sovereignty over that territory, the existence of the Treaty, notwithstanding. The Foreign Office was supported in this position by the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore was in favour of the plan to develop Cyprus, but the Air Ministry were opposed.¹⁹⁶ This was the end of the push for a Cypriot Naval Base. By late 1937 it was clear that the British government intended to proceed with the base at Alexandria. During the war Britain based its Mediterranean naval resources at either end of the Mediterranean, Gibraltar and Alexandria. They may not have had outright sovereignty over Alexandria, but it was an established base, at a safe distance from Italy, and it was by far the cheapest option.

In July 1937 the Foreign Office considered another type of development in Cyprus again in response to Italian activity. The Foreign Office was aware of the Italian development of Rhodes and considered adopting a similar approach in Cyprus. Italy had improved general infrastructure; built roads, erected grand buildings and undertaken public works in an effort to showcase the benefits of fascism and make Rhodes a tourist destination. The Southern Department argued that in the context of poor Anglo-Italian relations following Abyssinia it was ‘undoubtedly desirable that we should do some counter-propaganda; and Cyprus seems the obvious place’ but if relations with Italy improved the need for this would disappear.¹⁹⁷

Later that year (November 1937) the Foreign Office wrote a Memorandum titled ‘British Influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the development of Cyprus’, where it was noted that

¹⁹⁵ Cabinet Paper Memorandum: *Situation in the Mediterranean and Middle East*, 6 December 1937, CAB 24/273/22 CP297 (37).

¹⁹⁶ James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 64.

¹⁹⁷ P Nicolls, 'Minute on File giving view of Southern Department', 4 October 1937, p 289 FO371/21142

Not only Italian rivalry, but the loosening of direct British control in Egypt and Iraq, the economic and political development of Palestine and Syria and the rapid construction in Turkey of a nationalist State on modern lines have all profoundly affected the British position.¹⁹⁸

The British view of Cyprus had shifted towards the Levant and the Middle East. Cyprus could influence and be influenced by events in the Middle East. Britain had less control of Egypt and was heavily engaged in managing the Palestinian mandate. The mandate of Syria had undergone significant upheaval and a nationwide strike resulted in an (unratified) Treaty of Independence which allowed for the election of a Syrian President, Hashim al-Atassi, in November 1936. Iraq was granted independence in 1932. Britain had an increased presence in the Levant but its imperial hegemony was under challenge. In the late 1930s the various external pressures 'generated among British official circles a feeling of imminent threat to Britain's Mediterranean interests' and concerns about projecting an image of weakness.¹⁹⁹ The favourable geopolitical circumstances in the central and eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East were eroding.

The 'British Influence in the Eastern Mediterranean' memorandum said that 'the Fascist effort [in Rhodes] is in some respects not unimpressive both in its energy and its achievement, however short-lived it may prove to be'. The solution to this could be to use the 'territorial base in the Eastern Mediterranean [Cyprus] as a power-house of British influence by making it a model of administration and material development', a repetition of the ideas expressed in the July 1937 Memorandum.²⁰⁰ The report also comments on the difference between Cyprus and its two other naval bases Malta and Gibraltar. These, it said were:

armed posts, existing for the purposes of defence in regions where the predominating political influence is not, and cannot be British. The Levant, on the other hand, is the western border of region in which it is vitally necessary that British political influence should be predominant and in which we cannot in consequence limit ourselves to questions of security.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Foreign Office, 'British Prestige in Eastern Mediterranean and possible Development of Cyprus: Memorandum reviewing position', 9 November 1937, R 7439, FO371/21142 p 296.

¹⁹⁹ A. Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict*, p 21.

²⁰⁰ Foreign Office, 'British Prestige in Eastern Mediterranean and possible Development of Cyprus: Memorandum reviewing position', 9 November 1937, R 7439, FO371/21142 p 296.

²⁰¹ Foreign Office, 'British Prestige in Eastern Mediterranean and possible Development of Cyprus: Memorandum reviewing position', 9 November 1937, R 7439, FO371/21142 p 296. Another more incidental consideration was the need to relocate Maltese who were prevented from obtaining employment in Turkey under the 'nationalistic' government and who were being supported financially by the British Government. Cyprus was the only practical place for them to go in the view of the writers of the report.

The report specifically refers to British prestige. The development and the management of Cyprus had a political element, this report asserts, that neither Malta nor Gibraltar had. Malta was viewed as an armed post, not a part of a British controlled region. Cyprus, by contrast, was in a 'political space', and policy within Cyprus affected the British Empire in the Levant and the Middle East. In early 1938 Prime Minister Chamberlain suggested telling the Italians that Cyprus would be fortified, as a sort of bargaining chip in negotiations with Italy.²⁰² Despite some significant support, redevelopment of Cyprus envisioned in the report did not occur and the Committee of Imperial Defence meeting on 7 April 1938 concluded that 'it was unnecessary to proceed any further with the idea of developing a base at Cyprus'.²⁰³ A policy of appeasement of Italy was pursued and the Anglo-Italian agreements were concluded on 15 April 1938 just eight days later. Relations with Italy had seemingly improved and so the impetus to develop Cyprus was lost. The British government worked hard to improve the Anglo-Italian relationship despite the obvious way in which Italy sought to undermine the British position in the central and eastern Mediterranean. In dealing with Malta and Cyprus, Britain had to have one eye on the culturally linked Italy and Greece. In this period, British policy was to placate Italy, despite their aggressive posture. Greece did not have anywhere near the same influence and the British did not have to moderate their control because of the relationship between Cyprus and Greece.

The wave of reports into development of a naval base, or of Cyprus more generally allow an insight into the British opinion of Italy in the late 1930s. It shows genuine concern, financial constraints, the role of prestige and the crucial differences between the British Mediterranean colonies, which in turn explains the difference in the way they were administered. The reports, and the discussion reinforce the idea that Fascist Italy had a dual effect on Malta and Cyprus, the strategic and the ideological, with the second aspect obviously having more influence in Malta and less in Cyprus.

Late 1930s – Combatting Fascist influence in Cyprus

As discussed in Chapter Three, the Anglo-Italian relationship became increasingly strained after 1935 and this deterioration was felt in Cyprus. Direct fascist influence can perhaps best be described as patchy. There are some small incidents in the period, but no strong movement toward fascism. In 1937 a law was passed prohibiting the wearing of unauthorised uniforms in

²⁰² James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 67.

²⁰³ James A. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus*, p 64.

Cyprus, a common response to fascism as seen with the British Union of Fascists.²⁰⁴ Some Foreign Office officials did not believe the threat from fascism was very serious; commenting on a report about Italian activities, A.N. Noble wrote that, 'so far as Italian and Fascist propaganda is concerned, this report seems to me completely to exonerate the Italian authorities'.²⁰⁵ The report listed two fascist organisations, and the activities of a local branch of the *Balilla* Organisation.²⁰⁶ It also noted the activities of an Italian Catholic school, the Italian Consular service, and the effect of Radio Bari broadcasting its propaganda in Greek. It concluded by noting that

for the most part Italian propaganda such as it is, fell on deaf ears in Cyprus with the exception of a few Cypriot Italian subjects and persons dependent upon them. The Cypriot as a whole very definitely dislikes the Italians and Italian methods, ever present in their minds is the treatment of the Dodecanese Islands by Italy. The Spanish Civil War has gone a long way to strengthen the dislike of Italy, on account of her alliance with the anti-Government forces.²⁰⁷

The report included a detailed list of 45 persons known as Italian Fascists in Cyprus. The list sets out the name, age, address, occupation, marital status, number of children and nationality of these persons. Of the 45, four were listed as 'British Subject, Native of the colony' and the rest were listed as either 'Italian, Native of the colony' or just straight 'Italian'. This document makes it plain that even as late as 1938 Foreign Office officials were of the view that Italy was not successfully promoting fascism in Cyprus.

²⁰⁴ Colonial Office, 'Wearing of Uniforms in Cyprus', 13 January 1937, R266 FO 371/21141

²⁰⁵ J. H. Ashmore, 'Report on Italian Activities and Propaganda in Cyprus', 14 February 1938, R1363 FO 371/22366

²⁰⁶ The *Opera Nazionale Balilla* was an Italian Fascist youth organisation which operated from between 1926 and 1937. According to the report the *Balilla* existed 'on a small scale at Larnaca under Carmello Guarnera and is composed of children who have attended camps in Italy.' In 1936 five children were sent to these camps. See J. H. Ashmore, 'Report on Italian Activities and Propaganda in Cyprus', 14 February 1938, R1363 FO 371/22366 p 4.

²⁰⁷ J. H. Ashmore, 'Report on Italian Activities and Propaganda in Cyprus', 14 February 1938, R1363 FO 371/22366

10.

LIST OF PERSONS KNOWN AS ITALIAN FASCISTS IN CYPRUS

| Ser. No. | Name: | Age: | Address: | Occupation: | Married or single | No. of children: | Nationality: |
|----------|--------------------------|------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| | | | | <u>N I C O S I A:</u> | | | |
| 1. | E. Santi | 28 | Lefka | Surveyor, C.M.C. | Single | - | Italian, Native of the Colony. |
| 2. | Giacomo Rence | 47 | Xeros | Mechanic, C.M.C. | Married | 5 | Italian. |
| 3. | Marco Varlase | 50 | Nicosia | Advocate | Married | - | Italian. Native of the Colony. |
| 4. | Colombo Stephano Ferrari | 35 | Nicosia | - | Single | - | Italian. Native of the Colony. |
| 5. | Mariano Ragusin | 72 | Nicosia | Pensioner, E.T. Co. | Married | 4 | Italian. Native of the Colony. |
| 6. | Favio Fatitoucci | 60 | Nicosia | Water diviner | Married | 1 | Italian. Native of the Colony. |
| 7. | George Dandolo | 50 | Nicosia | Commission Agent | Married | 5 | Italian. |
| 8. | Margarita Carletti | 68 | Nicosia | - | Widow | 1 | Italian. Native of the Colony. |
| 9. | Angelo Giucca | 25 | Lythrodonda | Designer at Mathisti Mines | Single | - | Italian. Native of the Colony. |
| 10. | | | | | | | |

Figure 12 - List of Persons known as Italian Fascists in Cyprus – 1938.²⁰⁸

The primary documents show that the effect of the Italian propaganda in Cyprus was strategic and was linked to prestige. This is what concerned the British. This report on the activities of the Fascists in Cyprus was not met with any sense of disquiet. Noble's comments, sprinkled throughout the document, demonstrated the lack of alarm generated by the report. *Enosis* was still the dominant paradigm. Despite the low-key reception of this report the local authorities continued to have concerns and reported regularly on incidents involving local fascists and Italian dignitaries.²⁰⁹

In December 1938 Palmer wrote to Malcolm McDonald, the Colonial Secretary, about the local situation during the Sudeten Crisis. He said that:

though "Enosis" is dormant in Cyprus itself, it is a lever which in the absence of evidence of an enhanced value placed on Cyprus by Great Britain, can readily be used to their own advantage by Italy or Germany, particularly if it is possible to do so in collusion with Greece itself.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ J. H. Ashmore, 'Report on Italian Activities and Propaganda in Cyprus', 14 February 1938, R1363 FO 371/22366

²⁰⁹ For an examination of fascist activity in Cyprus see Ilia Xypolia, "From Mare Nostrum to Insula Nostra: British Colonial Cyprus and the Italian Imperial Threat," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 105, no. 3 (2016).

²¹⁰ Palmer, 'Letter re political situation during Sudeten Crisis', 16 December 1938, 'Red' 109, FCO141/2594

And that 'there are only seventy Italian subjects in Cyprus, yet the Italian Government thinks it worthwhile to maintain a full complement of Consuls, and to use all means available to spread Fascist influences in Cyprus'. Palmer concluded that:

the internal security of Cyprus depends in the last resort upon the preponderance of the British Navy in Levantine waters. Withdraw that stabilising factors and the result in Cyprus would probably be internal strife, fanned by rival outside propagandist influences.²¹¹

This is an excellent example of the interaction of external and internal challenge. Finally he notes that prestige from naval power in the Levant is at the root of Britain's relationship with Greece and Turkey and consequently 'Cypriot loyalty to Great Britain would not survive her naval eclipse by Italy in the Eastern Mediterranean...'²¹² A challenge to British prestige, while perhaps seemingly inconsequential, did in fact have far-reaching implications for Cyprus.

Ronald Storrs, back in London and giving speeches after the publication of his memoirs shared Palmer's sentiment. He told a meeting of the Chatham House on 8 March 1938 that to abandon the Mediterranean would be a 'dereliction of duty' and a 'blow from which our [Britain's] prestige would never recover'. Vastly overreaching he spoke also of his conviction that

the desertion of Palestine, of Egypt or Cyprus or of Malta to our enemies would constitute the immediate decline and ultimate fall of the British Empire with the disappearance of Great Britain as a great nation.²¹³

Palmer's views support the argument that the influence of Italian Fascism on Cyprus was political and strategic. It was about British prestige in the region and its pre-eminence. A loss of prestige would, he felt, encourage *enosis* in Cyprus. The British government was restricted from making greater efforts to counter this influence as it maintained the policy of appeasement towards Italy. There are many complaints about Italian behaviour in the archival documents, but there are constant reminders to tread carefully and maintain the relationship. Damage to its prestige interacted with local resistance to imperialism. The direct influence of fascism was muted, Black-Shirts were not marching through the streets of Nicosia. But Cyprus did not exist in a bubble; the unfolding international events continued to have domestic implications.

²¹¹ Palmer, 'Letter re political situation during Sudetan Crisis', 16 December 1938, 'Red' 109, FCO141/2594

²¹² Palmer, 'Letter re political situation during Sudetan Crisis', 16 December 1938, 'Red' 109, FCO141/2594

²¹³ Speech titled 'The Shifting situation in the Eastern Mediterranean', Ronald Storrs, Papers of Sir Ronald Storrs Reel 25, Box VI, Folder 16

Conclusion

Malta had a period of tumultuous internal politics after 1927 that interacted at times with deliberate Italian influence. The 'Pastoral Letter' dispute of 1930 was an example of the turbulence of local politics overwhelming the functionality of the constitutional arrangements. It was also an Italian cultural intervention in Maltese affairs. The Catholic Church emboldened after signing the Lateran treaties targeted Strickland and the Constitutionalist Party directly and not the British administration. The British response fits the pattern of the reassertion of constitutional frameworks which gave at least some form of representation but never full sovereignty.

Malta was increasingly the site of Italian influence in the 1930s. Italy posed a real military threat, which of course was not realised until 1940. It did not inspire a powerful local fascist movement, but it did affect prestige and opinion. Italy's invasion of Abyssinia and the cautious response to this and other provocations, led by the Foreign Office were of great concern to Foreign and Colonial Office officials, who often referred to it in correspondence.

Malta and Cyprus shared the unusual position of having important European powers with a vested interest in their administration. As a result there was a Britain-Malta-Italy dynamic and a Britain-Cyprus-Greece-Turkey dynamic. This meant that the Colonial Office was not able to operate freely but rather had to seek advice from the Foreign Office and at times compromise their handling of sensitive issues because of greater interests.

Malta was in many ways viewed as the model colony in the Mediterranean. Certainly the events of the Second World War have fixed it in the public mind as loyal and brave. Amongst Cyprus, Palestine and Egypt, it was the most successful, and endured the least unrest and violence. But Malta was not a site of calm administration and political acquiescence but was politically tumultuous. Maltese nationalism infused with Italian cultural heritage was strong and persistent. It led to repeated constitutional rearrangements as the British tried to placate public opinion with various forms of 'local' government. As the situation developed in the 1930s it became apparent that the favourable international circumstances were also wavering, and the Colonial Office had to repeatedly compromise as the Foreign Office applied pressure to limit anti-Italian activity. Malta was in a privileged position; it was strategically valuable and small enough to rely upon large British spending, which should have bought considerable loyalty. It is perhaps surprising to some that even here however the challenges to the European Empire were evident.

After the rude shock of the 1931 uprising Cyprus took a sharp authoritarian turn. The repression perpetrated by Storrs, Stubbs and particularly Palmer after the burning down of Government House in 1931 was a rocking back on an authoritarianism that lacked moral legitimacy, a mode of rule described by an official as ‘unworthy of His Majesty’s Government’.²¹⁴ It was a more permanent suspension and abandonment of the façade of self-government. It was perhaps easier to justify in the colonial possession which had not developed a specific role in the empire. The resistance of the people was clear in this period and the British administration compensated for this through the use of increased military and martial resources, a policy that could not suffice in the long term. This period was also characterised by the nexus between the changing geopolitical context and domestic resistance. The British realised that prestige in particular was an important factor in maintaining empire. Colonial officers in London and administrators in Cyprus were both concerned about appearing weak. British prestige could be damaged by the actions of regional players, Italy in particular, and the loss of prestige could be felt at the ground level in the colonies as colonial subjects formed a different view about Britain. The second and important aspect of this period was the damage it caused to the political development of Cyprus. This was perhaps most obvious in the way in which a fledgling constitutionalist movement was quashed and then replaced by an increasingly active Orthodox Church with its ethnarchs, and a strong labour movement with limited vision and goals.

The mid to late 1930s were characterised by worsening external circumstances, strong repression and continued discontent. The British were faced with an extremely difficult time in foreign policy. A rejuvenated and expansionist Italy was a threat to Cyprus. The foreign policy malaise manifested itself in Cyprus in lengthy discussions of the desirability of placing a naval base somewhere on the island. The economic constraints of the period, coupled with a persistent desire to appease Italy, prevented the building of a base, or the economic development of Cyprus. Fascism had limited ideological penetration within Cyprus itself, but the damage to British prestige, and the concern that Italy could lever *enosis* in Cyprus was a genuine fear in this period. By December 1938, Palmer’s fear of losing the backing of the Royal Navy are among the first signs that the international climate might limit the ability of Britain to bring its resources to bear to defend or police its Mediterranean Empire.

²¹⁴ Patrick Ramsay, 'Letter to Arthur Henderson from Patrick Ramsay re Enosis', 7 May 1930, C3706/255/19, CO 67/234/1

Conclusion

In a memo dated 3 January 1919 Lord Curzon said, in relation to Cyprus, that it would be ‘a signal act of unwisdom on our part to surrender any position so central and commanding, and, if not actually vital to ourselves, certain to be so vital to our neighbours and possible rivals’.¹ For Malta, an older and more strategically important colony, this sentiment would have been even more strident.

This study has asked how the British government was able to maintain its inter-war hegemony and control in the Mediterranean when it was challenged at both the international level by Italy and the colonial level by local unrest, dissent and violence. The consideration of roughly twenty years of empire in the Mediterranean in this thesis shows that successive British governments did not surrender their position. They skilfully and resolutely maintained their control of places such as Malta and Cyprus but they did not have it all their own way. This thesis has found that despite purporting to grant self-rule, Britain implemented a strict and at times authoritarian rule to meet considerable and complex challenges to its powerful position in the Mediterranean. That is to say that the type of empire in the Mediterranean was shaped, constrained and indeed formed out of the dynamic of challenge and control. Burton’s ‘empire of constant challenge’² was met, says Mackenzie, by a strong desire to retain empire.³ This desire was evident in archival documents where officials constantly reported trouble, exhibited anxiety about challenges to their rule, and devised strategies to retain colonial control. This study suggests that although Britain was challenged by Italy and did not respond well to the regional threat, at the colonial level it was able to maintain control through a combination of short-term violence and long term use of illusory constitutions.

When this study was conceived the focus was on the internal and external challenges to British imperial hegemony and their link to the decline of empire. A consideration of the archival evidence did not find decline, but rather firm control in Malta and Cyprus punctuated by brief outbursts of violence and protest. It found that the Italian threat, while significant and capable of interacting with local anti-colonialism was not enough to seriously threaten the continued existence of the British colonies or to contribute to or cause decline. When Italy did interfere

¹ John Fisher, "The Cyprus Proposition: Lord Curzon and Cyprus in British Imperial Strategy, 1914 to 1919," *Byzantine and modern Greek studies* 23, no. 1 (1999): p 150.

² A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*.

³ John M. MacKenzie, "The First World War and the cultural, political and environmental transformation of the British Empire" (paper presented at the *The British Empire during the Great War: Colonial Societies/ Cultural Responses*, Singapore, 20 February 2014).

with colonial administration the British response was always measured against the constant desire to placate and appease Mussolini's Italian government.

In Malta and Cyprus the British Empire continued as it had done for many years, with local administrators resolutely and firmly governing their colonies. At the same time these outbreaks of violence, and of political unrest pointed to a complex picture, where resistance had to be managed and contained. In Malta, the remarkably frequent constitutional reform was a symptom of political instability. In Cyprus, a more difficult colony, the constitutional self-rule mechanism proceeded in fits and starts before being abandoned altogether in 1931 in favour of authoritarian rule. The approach in Malta did not give real self-representation and repeatedly withdrew what little they were willing to devolve. This created frustration, anger and unrest. Something was better than nothing however. In Cyprus the authoritarian turn created lasting damage as it stunted political development and modernity.

What emerges from this study is neither a story of marching British decline, nor a period of serene and stable hegemony. Instead it was a scene of challenge and dissent, of anxiety and concern, and of legal and constitutional innovation and change backed by short and intense periods of overwhelming military superiority.

This thesis has focussed in particular upon the exogenous threat posed by Italy at the international level and the endogenous threat from constant trouble at the colonial level. It has noted the overlap between the two after the Abyssinian Crisis when Italy damaged the reputation of the British in the region, giving hope or succour to anti-colonial movements in British colonies. The regional challenge permeated down to the colonial level, while local disputes took on a broader significance in light of international challenges such as the rise of Germany aligned Fascist Italy.

The British response to the exogenous threat was layered and evolved over the period. From the beginning the Foreign Office identified the less desirable aspects of the Italian fascist regime, but the British government was also determined to work with Mussolini. This determination increased as the geo-strategic overreach dilemma became more apparent, and improved relations with Italy was seen by many, but not all, within the Foreign Office and the Cabinet as the best possible solution. The geo-strategic position for the British in the inter-war period was not favourable. Italy was astride the all red-route and it emerged as the 'third' hostile power. By joining Germany and Japan and siding against Britain in a possible future conflict it could tip the scales in the Mediterranean and make the strategic situation overwhelming. This led to the

flawed policy of appeasement, and other decisions based on the principle of compromise. Britain was being curtailed in its diplomatic and policy decision making by the desire and the need to placate Italy.

British governments pursued three compromised policies in three different areas. These were Italian appeasement, Maltese constitutionalism and the Cypriot authoritarian turn. The policy of Italian appeasement was first seen in Corfu and reaching a high point in the pusillanimous reaction to the invasion of Abyssinia. It was a major failure in policy that encouraged Italian aggression and damaged Britain's reputations internationally and regionally. A weak response at the regional level was coupled, ironically, with a very strong response at the colonial level as Britain used violence, constitutional exceptionalism and reform, and authoritarianism to maintain strict control. In Malta, British administrators pursued a policy of constitutional reform for many years prior to and including the inter-war period. They ruled through a 'state of exception' under which Britain work around constitutional self-rule mechanisms. In reality the fortress colony of Malta remained under strict control at all times. It was flawed because it purported to devolve power, but never did so, creating instability and unrest within the Maltese population. Although it had these effects, the re-institution of colonial rule at least allowed political development. This did not occur as a result of the third compromised policy; the authoritarian turn in Cyprus. A resort to harsh repression and rule devoid of any self-government, it caused long term damage to the political development in that colony. We have already seen that Britain was willing use violence in an immediate response to internal unrest. The flawed policy response of Britain in three different areas during the inter-war period leads to the broader suggestion that empires and colonial powers use force and make compromised policy decisions in response to both internal and external pressures.

At the colonial level, the British measured their response and tailored it to each colony. In Malta and Cyprus some things were similar, for instance the use of revokable constitutions and self-government mechanisms. But they did depart in their approach, particularly after the burning of Government House in 1931 in Cyprus, after which British rule took an aggressively 'authoritarian turn' and introduced repressive measures. Despite high levels of interference in the electoral process in 1930 in Malta from the Italian based Catholic Church there was an inclination on the part of the British to return Malta to self-government, and less desire to implement authoritarian government. This desire was linked to Malta's ongoing strategic importance to the British during the inter-war period. In Cyprus there was no such inclination. Cyprus did not have the same strategic value and it was in close proximity to the Levant and the

Middle-East, a far more politically sensitive area. Britain was stung by the outbreak of 1931 and chose authoritarian rule.

This thesis has considered the way in which Britain administered its colonies, the use of local constitutions, methods of governance, and methods of control. The theoretical framework for this is built on the work of Burton who considers the unevenness of dissent, and Agamben who analyses the suspension of constitutional norms to impose power.⁴ This study has also worked with the ideas of Said and those working in the area of sovereignty such as Burton, Benton and Ford.⁵ Together, these ideas offer an understanding of the British conception of who the Maltese and Cypriots were, and an understanding of the fluid nature of colonial sovereignty within which the British could operate.

Popular outbreaks of dissent and or violence as were experienced in 1919 and 1930-33 in Malta and in 1912 and 1931 in Cyprus were met with short-term violence and long term legal control. The long term legal controls showcase Agamben's 'state of exception', the ability of those in power to rule outside of the legal system of the state, or in this case, colony. Those methods exposed the power relationships at work in the colonies. The British government, and its relevant departments the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office were adept in meeting dissent with colonial innovation and the 'continual adaptation of rule'. Professional colonial administrators with experience were able to manage constitutions which purported to give self-rule, so as to always retain ultimate control, as was intended. This does not mean that the British ruled over settled and acquiescent populations, rather that they operated within a model of flexible sovereignty, resorting to violence and authoritarian rule when needed, and re-instituting constitutional rule, if directed to do so by their seniors in London.

Malta and Cyprus were acquired for strategic and economic reasons, but they do not fit into any simplistic rise and fall narrative. Following Burton this study has suggested that the situation in these places was messy and protean,⁶ that the constant dissent revealed the changing power relationships between the colonised and the coloniser and led to constantly changing forms of government. Although superficially similar, Malta and Cyprus were not the same, nor were they treated as such. In particular, the communal divide in Cyprus between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots (a divide, which had been emphasised and demarcated by the British

⁴ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire.*, G. Agamben and K. Attell, *State of Exception.*

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism.*, L. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*; A. Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain.* and L. Ford, *Settler Sovereignty.*

⁶ A. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire.*

administration since 1878) deeply influenced the British view of what Cyprus was and who its people were.

Within the colonies local politics were tumultuous. The contest was particularly heated between those that collaborated with the British and those who opposed them. The British, far from being above it all, were heavily involved, they were steeped in it. This is evident from the official correspondence regarding Malta and Cyprus. In Malta the collaboration was clear cut; the pro-British Constitutional Party led by Lord Strickland over-zealously played the role of British proxy in local politics, provoking the constitutional crisis of 1930. In Cyprus the situation was more complicated, but there were varying levels of collaboration. Turkish-Cypriots would collaborate when it suited them and as a voting bloc in the Legislative Council they were able to join the British and stymie Greek Cypriot positions that were inimical to both. British officials in both colonies kept a very close eye on local politics. They were aware of local subtleties and permutations, even as they retained an inexhaustible capacity for miscalculation and misinterpretation. This was due in part to their perception of who they were ruling over. This phenomenon was similar to Orientalism, but has to be modified to suit the liminal space of the Mediterranean. It was not a complete 'othering', but a belief in the inferiority of Maltese and Cypriots, as a basis for paternalist rule, and a slow introduction of democratic principles.

This thesis has considered the Mediterranean Empire and those that controlled it. Malta and Cyprus both had limited forms of representation and changing constitutional forms. In both places Britain maintained control, albeit through different methods. The political issues and lines of demarcation had emerged in Malta and Cyprus well before the inter-war period. The place of Italian culture and language, known as *Italianita* was a big issue in Malta, and the proposal for union with Greece known as *enosis* was a central preoccupation in Cyprus. These were elite concerns in both places, and these elites, despite being a small proportion of the population were able to co-opt working class support at times of economic stress. No popular protest could have been possible without this co-option. In both places the British used the flexibility of sovereignty, granting self-rule, but retreating to a state of exception when necessary to protect British power and interests against these challenges.

The government in London ruled the empire and the policy direction of the inter-war period was dominated by the most successful political party, the Conservatives. This party was pro-empire, but as the inter-war period unfolded and Britain faced increasingly difficult times, the party position began to drift. The professionals within the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office both advised government and implemented policy. They had significant corporate

memory leading to stability, and high ranking officials such as Vansittart were able to wield significant influence.

The general trend in colonial administration in the Mediterranean during this period was towards greater control. As alluded to above this study repeatedly shows the level of concern amongst colonial administrators, and the tight control placed on the administration of the colonies as a result. The constitutional mechanisms in Malta and Cyprus promised self-government, but were an obfuscation, drawing attention away from the authoritarian dominance of these small Mediterranean colonies.

Motivating this authoritarianism was the external threat to empire in the Mediterranean posed by Italy. Although Britain and its empire faced a range of threats around the world, in the Mediterranean it was Italy that embodied the worsening international environment in the inter-war period. Italy drifted from war-time ally to outright hostility over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. It had a continuity of expansionist foreign policy from Liberal to Fascist Italy which posed a real problem for the British Mediterranean Empire, because of Italy's central position, and because it threatened the route through the Suez Canal. As discussed Italy was one hostile power too many for British defence considerations and many in government and in the Foreign Office believed that of the three potentially hostile powers (Germany, Japan and Italy), Italy could be brought back into the fold, solving the over-extension dilemma. Despite many overtures and constant appeasement, Italy continued on a course of hostility toward Britain. It damaged British prestige in the Mediterranean and it produced an anxiety within the British government which resulted in compromised policy. The Hoare-Laval Pact and the divided response to the Abyssinian Crisis and War are the best examples of this compromised decision making. The threat from Italy caused political splits within the Foreign Office and the Cabinet as opinions over appeasement differed. British fear of Italian expansionism also encouraged the authoritarian turn in local colonial administration, as the British government sought to hold on more tightly to what it had.

The British position in the Mediterranean only worsened as a result of the Abyssinian War. The whole affair exposed British weakness, and damaged its regional prestige further. Italy, now actively hostile, deployed extensive anti-British propaganda, and actively worked against British interests in Egypt and Palestine. Defence planning in the region was compromised, as Britain held on to the idea or hope that Italy might not be hostile in any upcoming conflict. The British position on Italy and particularly on Italian appeasement continued to divide opinion in both Cabinet and the Foreign Office. This division led to the resignation of Eden, leaving

Chamberlain to pursue an even stronger course of appeasement. Italy had become a multi-faceted threat to British hegemony in the Mediterranean, and this response was not successful. British governments remained determined to maintain control of their Mediterranean colonies come what may, and they did this even where it required a resort to martial and authoritarian methods.

Situated in the central and eastern Mediterranean and subject to external pressure from Italy, Malta and Cyprus are excellent examples of Britain's varying methods of imperial control, even between colonies in such proximity to each other. The internal dissent in these places helped to shape and constitute Britain's Mediterranean Empire. There were always differences between the two places, and a varying strategic value in particular contributed to the divergence in imperial administrations. Malta's importance as a fortress colony wavered only with the strategic threat from the bomber, and it was still perceived as more valuable than Cyprus, which in fact had made a valuable contribution in World War One. In 1919 the outbreak of violence in Malta was met with military control, but followed by constitutional adjustments. The communal violence in Cyprus in 1912 was an early indication of the harm caused by the British division of a previously integrated community. The communal violence was met by official violence, as police, less constrained than their 1931 counterparts opened fire, killing some, and restoring control.

This study notes that dissent in the colonies was not always anti-colonial. As noted above, *Italianita* in Malta and *enosis* in Cyprus were elite movements that co-opted more basic concerns to further their political goals. The most powerful drivers for unrest in Malta and Cyprus were everyday problems such as unemployment and the cost of food. The uncertainty and anger around these issues were channelled toward anti-colonial movements, but the unrest was not always explicitly anti-colonial in origin.

The British view of Cyprus continued to change in the inter-war period, as a shifting focus toward the Levant and the Middle East meant that British prestige in the region mattered more than ever. It was into this environment that a major figure in this thesis, Ronald Storrs, arrived and endured the worst outbreak of violence in colonial Cyprus. The violence of 1931 was an important moment in Cypriot colonial history. Unlike in Malta the British did not feel compelled to re-introduce illusory constitutions in Cyprus; instead they deployed a new form of authoritarianism. The British did not rule comfortably in Cyprus. Rather they endured constant challenge as they tried to contain the dissent within their empire.

The problems at the colonial level became more pronounced as the inter-war period wore on. In particular the nexus of fascist influence and colonial dissent became stronger. In Malta the pastoral dispute again demonstrated the ability of local turbulence to overwhelm constitutional arrangements. Italy, through the Vatican, was intervening in Malta, and the Foreign Office faced the difficult challenge of managing the diplomatic implications of British administration in that colony. What becomes apparent is that Malta, viewed as the model colony, was in fact politically tumultuous in the inter-war period, while in Cyprus the local population endured a more dramatic and damaging authoritarian turn after 1931, the result of an abandonment of pretensions to self-government in a less useful colony with stronger communal divisions. The harsh regime of the Palmer period and thereafter damaged the polity of Cyprus but failed to engender loyalty among Cypriots. This challenging period in colonial rule reached the point, in the late 1930s where administrators such as Palmer believed that Cyprus was held by naval power alone.⁷

This study allows a consideration of the maintenance of empire in a difficult period. It argues that maintaining empire in this period was problematic, and that the colonised were often resistant and challenging. This thesis acknowledges the sustained British post-World War One aspirations to maintain empire and identifies the methods and the mechanisms by which such an empire was managed. These methods were not benign and they challenge the idea of a benevolent empire. In Malta and Cyprus, as they did in many places over the world, the British purported to grant self-rule as part of some sort of staged introduction of democracy to a lesser people. This study has demonstrated the false nature of those claims. The swift withdrawal of legal rights and the equally quick resort to violence lays bare the absolute self-interest of British rule, a conclusion that is not novel, but not hitherto established in the case of the Mediterranean island colonies.

This thesis has demonstrated the turbulence and challenges that afflicted the interwar British Empire in the Mediterranean. During a period of great geopolitical flux, the British Empire faced significant problems in one of the oldest parts of its Empire. Accommodating Italy's rise was a complex problem and both Malta and Cyprus endured internal unrest and division. Despite these challenges, the British were not entering a period of decline; they were re-committed to empire after the rigours of the First World War. Britain maintained its imperial hegemony and found that in these smaller colonies military force was able to overwhelm violent resistance, but that

⁷ Palmer, 'Letter re political situation during Sudetan Crisis', 16 December 1938, 'Red' 109, FCO141/2594 p 99.

local dissent continued and would not abate. This led to authoritarian rule being promoted or accentuated. This strict control exercised by Britain was veiled by complex constitutional structures that seemed to offer a modicum of local sovereignty. However the multi-pronged nature of colonial rule in the Mediterranean, a product of both ongoing exogenous and endogenous challenges, came at the enduring cost of the sovereignty of the Maltese and Cypriot people.

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