

The Strategic Importance of Cyprus and the Prospect of Union with Greece, 1919–1931: The Greek Perspective

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The outbreak of the First World War brought about an important change in the status of Cyprus which was officially annexed by Great Britain. In the years that followed, successive Greek governments preferred not to pose openly the prospect of the island's cession to Greece. Athens understood that, given London's strategic interest in Cyprus, a favourable solution of the issue was inevitably related with the satisfaction of British strategic interests in the wider Eastern Mediterranean region. In other words, the prospect of the creation of British military bases on Cyprus in the event that London actually consented to the island's union with Greece was not rejected on the part of Athens; on the contrary, it was seen as a necessary sacrifice in order to serve the final goal of Enosis.

Introduction

Situated in a strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus had been occupied over the centuries by several major powers of the wider region. Thus, in 1570, after almost four centuries of Latin/Venetian rule, the island was occupied by the armed forces of the Ottoman sultan and subsequently became a province of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman conquest of Cyprus was destined to last for a little more than three centuries. As a result of the Ottoman defeat in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 the Sublime Porte sought to secure British support during the forthcoming peace negotiations. Indeed, on 4 June 1878, only nine days before the Congress of Berlin opened its sessions (13 June–13 July 1878), Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire signed a secret Convention of Defensive Alliance, according to which Great Britain was given the right to occupy and administer Cyprus in exchange for London's promise to help the Ottomans in defending certain of their Asian

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