In September 1955 Ian Fleming visited Turkey to cover an Interpol meeting for The Sunday Times, an event that also happened to be attended by his good friend, CIA Director Allen Dulles. Fleming ended up filing a more notable article after witnessing “riots” in Istanbul on the night of September 6. In his eye-witness report, “The Great Riot of Istanbul”, Fleming describes an outbreak of violence between “embittered neighbours”, with mutual hatred going back centuries (Fleming 1955, n.p.). The language is quite deliberate: the word “riot” implies spontaneity and random violence, and unlike comparable accounts from eyewitnesses at the time, Fleming either failed to notice, or failed to report, the organised and one-sided nature of the attacks targeting ethnic-Greeks (Rum) and other non-Muslim communities.

The “great riot” and Fleming’s return from Istanbul on the Orient Express clearly helped shape the fifth Bond novel, From Russia with Love (1957), written in the months following his Turkish assignment. The themes and dialogue reflect the Cold War ideological divide, and Fleming specifically references the Istanbul events of early September 1955, no longer as random neighbourly “fisticuffs”, but as subversion conceived in Moscow. General Grubozabozhikov, Head of SMERSH, boasts to senior officers of the Russian military and intelligence agencies of Soviet advances abroad:
What fools we are making of them in the West! [...] we continue to forge everywhere stealthily ahead – revolution in Morocco, arms to Egypt, trouble in Cyprus, riots in Turkey [...] there is no front in the world on which we are not quietly advancing. (Fleming 1957, 47)

Between writing the *Times* article and the Bond novel, Fleming had aligned with Dulles and the Turkish government in blaming the “riots” on communists supported by Soviet Russia, a narrative that would be applied to Western reporting of world events for the next 40 years. In reality the events leading up to September 6 had more to do with “trouble in Cyprus”, and secret diplomacy between the governments in Istanbul and London, than any provocation planned in Moscow.

This article will examine the roots and consequences of the “Great Riot of Istanbul”, which was in fact a well organised pogrom against ethnic Greek communities in the city. It will analyse the role of British and Turkish strategic interests, which came to align in the mid-1950s. An examination of declassified files at the National Archives in London will show how post-war influence operations organised secretly in London, targeting public opinion and political leaders both in Turkey and internationally, sought to shape events abroad according to the priorities of the British government. Combining these findings with primary and secondary research will show that, while Ian Fleming’s imagination and flair for deceptive plots provided British Intelligence with some dramatic operations during the Second World War, and his contribution to the early development of American foreign intelligence agencies was also notable, Fleming’s writing, particularly in *From Russia With Love*, is representative of a broader campaign of British psychological warfare during the early Cold War. Fleming’s voice, in his journalism and his novels, is the voice of British superiority. His narratives, orientalist and ideological, ignore local political realities, concerned only for the maintenance of British power overseas. In an ironic twist of history, Fleming’s reputation, and James Bond’s centrality to modern perceptions of spying and intelligence, are such that Fleming himself has recently been accused, in government-supporting sections of the Turkish press, of coming to Istanbul to oversee the 1955 Istanbul Pogrom, an MI6 “provokasyon” plot to destabilise the country. There is little doubt that in reality the plot was “made in Turkey”. The aim, here, is to determine the extent to which the British government, its overt and secret agencies, and Ian Fleming’s golden typewriter, were complicit in the ethnic cleansing of ethnic minorities in Istanbul.
The article will begin with the historical background of the Turkish nation-state emerging from the defeated Ottoman Empire, and the importance of Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean to British strategic interests. It will review British approaches to influence and propaganda in two important but neutral countries during the Second World War – Turkey and the United States – as it sought to outmanoeuvre Germany and the Axis powers. The article then discusses the development of British psychological and political warfare after 1945, including the part played by Ian Fleming in the world of news media and fiction. Following a study of political propaganda operations that targeted Turkey specifically, the article will explore the importance of shared interests leading to overt and covert collaboration in successful propaganda operations. Mutual strategic and political interests over Britain’s control of Cyprus led to the “riots in Turkey” in September 1955, and the article will discuss the complicity of the British and Turkish governments and their agencies. Finally, we will consider the role of Ian Fleming in this dark episode of Turkish history; the impact of Fleming and Bond on public perceptions of intelligence; and how this is exploited in modern Turkish political narratives.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Turkey, like its predecessor the Ottoman Empire, has long occupied a strategically important geopolitical position. From at least the sixteenth century, it occupied land at the crossroads of eastern trading routes and markets to the West. Developments in central governance, trade, and technology meant that information collection, news gathering, and reporting were vital to rulers of the great empires. The importance of information gathering and espionage increased or decreased depending on military confrontation or peace between Ottomans, Habsburgs, and Persians. Conflict between the Great Powers in the nineteenth century would continue to dominate between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, as Russian expansionism towards warmer ports and British colonial interests in the Middle East and India made influence over Ottoman lands essential. The demise and partition of the Ottoman Empire in 1915, and defeat by the British in the First World War, led to the Turkish War of Independence against occupation by British, French, Italian, and Greek forces. Victory over the British, French, and Italians would be largely diplomatic, with military defeat of the Greeks by October 1922 leading to the founding of the Turkish Republic the following year.
The need to create a new national identity from the ruins of the multi-cultural
Ottoman Empire drove the Young Turk leaders, educated in Europe, to adopt an
ethnic and religious definition of what it meant to be Turkish. The resulting
“Turkification” policies would lead to the murder and deportation of millions of
Armenians and Greeks, and the forced immigration of around 70,000 Muslims
from Greece. In demographic terms, while Christians had made up over 20% of
the population in 1912, by 1924 the proportion was 2.6% (Çağaptay 2002, 67).
Turkish Prime Minister Mustafa İsmet İnönü made clear that the job remained
unfinished, declaring that “our immediate duty is to make Turks all those who
live in the Turkish Fatherland. We will cut out and throw away the minorities
who oppose Turks and Turkism” (qtd. in Bali 2006, 44). The process of “Turkifi-
cation”, and the Othering of non-Muslim Turks would continue to feature in the
internal politics in Turkey for the rest of the twentieth century.

INFLUENCING TURKEY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

During the 1930s, the British prioritised good relations with Turkey, a country
occupying a strategic geographic location between southern Europe and British
colonial territories in the Mediterranean, Middle East and India (Marzari 1971,
75). Turkish leaders had no intention of joining the war on any side, and the
countries had been on opposite sides of the 1914-18 war. Britain came to realise
that efforts to persuade the Turks to enter the war on its side would be futile.
Turkey’s determination to remain neutral was confirmed not only at in wartime
conferences in Tehran, Cairo, and Adana (Foreign Relations of the United States b,
1943), but also via covert intelligence gathering. While Signals Intelligence (SIG-
INT) stations in Cyprus decrypted Turkish radio communications (cf. Denniston
1997), MI5 agent (and Soviet spy) Anthony Blunt broke into Turkey’s diplomatic
mailbags in London (Aldrich and Cormac 2021, 302).

Britain was not alone in hoping to manipulate or influence Turkey, which
found itself subject to an espionage and propaganda tug-of-war between the
Great Powers, as Germany and Russia also aimed to drag Turkey onto its side of
the conflict. British covert agencies were employed in efforts to influence public
opinion in Turkey, with printed materials distributed by agents of the Special
Operations Executive (SOE) (Corse 2021, 908-909), fake “news agencies” im-
planting “journalists” who used their cover to contribute to the SOE’s propa-
ganda and rumour mills (Richards 2010, 41-42), and the secret funding of local
newspapers to help shape editorial opinion with a camouflaged British hand (HS
3/224).
By the end of the spring of 1942, however, the UK Foreign Office were persuaded to ban all SOE covert activities in Turkey (including propaganda) by the cautious British Ambassador in Ankara who prioritised maintaining good relations with the Turks. Some post-war planning for future “stay-behind armies” was permitted in case of Soviet occupation following the war, as this would demonstrate ongoing British commitment to defending Turkey against possible Russian aggression (Kelly 2005, 132). As the war progressed, Britain came to better understand the Turkish position, and realised that Turkish neutrality benefited the Allied war effort. A new front in Turkey would require diverting materiel and supplies from other fronts, not least Operation Overlord (Foreign Relations of the United Nations a 1943, 121). Turkish neutrality, and the post-war vision of a strong Turkey allied with the West, laid the foundations for shared interests and closer intelligence cooperation.

Rather than attempting to influence Turkish opinion about the war, British propaganda operations focussed on targeting international opinion about Turkey, via influence over news reporting from Turkey. Between 1942 and 1944, a punitive varlık (wealth) tax targeted the remaining non-Muslim population of Turkey, mainly in Istanbul, with the aim of dispossessing that population of its properties and businesses. Influenced by events in Nazi Germany, thousands of Turkey’s non-Muslims were sent to labour camps for non-payment of inflated taxes. In one example of discriminatory taxation, Barsilay and Benjamin (Jewish) shipowners were overtaxed, paying 2 million liras on five ships owned; the Kalkavans (Muslim) were less onerously taxed, paying only 60 thousand liras tax on their five ships (Alexandris 1983, 226). Such extreme social engineering terrorised and impoverished non-Muslim communities of Turkey, and resulted in the state-organised appropriation of wealth and real estate to ethnic-Turks and their businesses (Vryonis 2005, 34). An increasingly wealthy family such as the Kalkavans, on the other hand, could afford to send their son to Oxford University after the war. Nazim Kalkavan would be befriended by both the CIA and SIS (MI6), hosting Fleming and Dulles when the restaurant planned for the evening was burned down in the September 6th “riots”. The discriminative wealth/asset tax against non-Muslims was a continuation of the ethnically-driven “Turkification” policies initiated at the dawn of the Turkish Republic. British newspaper articles about the tax and its effects on Istanbul’s Greeks, Armenians, and Jews were

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1 Fleming was much impressed by the extrovert Kalkavan, modelling Bond’s Istanbul guide and MI6 Station Head Darko Kerim on him in From Russia with Love (Gingeras, 2013, 790-91; Lycett 1995, 273).
censored, however, helping to shield Turkey from what would have been a hostile international reaction (Tamkin 2009, 103).

As we shall see, this would not be the last time that the British press, driven by government policy and national interest, engaged in international influence or perception-management on behalf of its Turkish ally, at the great expense of non-Muslims in Turkey. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the greatest influence operation of the Second world War, that which brought the United States into the war on the side of the British, would influence future British propaganda and psychological warfare for years to come.

**INFLUENCING AMERICA DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

Ian Fleming’s position as assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) Rear Admiral John Godfrey saw him liaising with a variety of secret government departments during the war, including MI5, the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), SIS (MI6), Bletchley Park, and SOE. His standing within the British Intelligence community is demonstrated by his chairmanship of meetings of the government’s Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in the absence of the official chairman (Goodman 2014, 166). His penchant for crazy schemes and daring commando operations are now well documented (see McCrisken and Moran 2019, 340-342; Macintyre 2010), but Fleming’s influence reached well beyond British Intelligence, all the way to New York and Washington. America’s participation in the First World War had been decisive for Britain and the Allied powers, helping to bring about the defeat of Germany and its allies, including Turkey, within eighteen months. During the Second World War, the British government and intelligence chiefs understood that close relationships with American political, military, and future Intelligence leaders provided an opportunity to persuade the United States to enter the war. In 1940 President Roosevelt was all for cooperation with the British, but he wanted to be sure that the UK was in a position to benefit should the US provide more support – that the British were not “staring defeat in the face”, as US Ambassador in London, the Irish-American Joe Kennedy, insisted (Smith 2022, 58). Between July and August 1940, Roosevelt sent missions to London, with the first led General William (“Wild Bill”) Donovan, an Anglophile determined to stand up to Hitler. In the early stages of the war, Britain faced a variety of subversive threats from Germans, pro-Nazi aristocrats and fascists, and Irish Republicans (Cormac 2018, 29). Roosevelt, keen to learn the dark arts of anti-subversion, tasked Donovan to assess “fifth column” threats and Britain’s security response. SIS Chief Stewart Menzies ensured the red-carpet treatment for General Donovan, including audiences with the King,
the Prime Minister, and a full briefing on the propaganda and covert operations activities of SOE. Menzies and DNI Godfrey impressed upon Donovan the need for a US intelligence agency to work alongside SIS and SOE (Smith 2022, 59). Subsequently, with an agreement to exchange intelligence announced between the two countries, Fleming joined Godfrey on a top-secret mission to America, via the Estoril Casino in Lisbon. Fleming would assist Donovan in particular to develop “ideas for the prospectus the American was putting together for the new American secret intelligence service” (ibid.).

In New York and Washington, Fleming formed relationships with the key players in the nascent American intelligence scene. The British Security Coordination (BSC) on the 36th floor of the Rockefeller Centre became a New York hub for British Intelligence operations in the US, staffed by officers from SIS, MI5, and the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Led by Sir William Stephenson (“Little Bill”), with whom Fleming worked closely, the BSC had the overt mission of supporting American foreign intelligence planning, as well as a more covert aim: to persuade US leaders and public opinion to abandon its isolationist stance and join the war against Hitler and the Axis powers. On the former plan, Fleming worked closely with “Little Bill” Stephenson, who set up Special Training School No. 103 (“Camp X”) in his native Ontario. Here, SOE military trainers taught the subtle arts of working behind enemy lines, radio communications, intelligence gathering, agent recruitment and handling, as well as the not-so-subtle arts of using explosives, handling small arms, unarmed combat, and silent killing. Fleming advised “Wild Bill” Donovan as he planned the creation of the Coordinator of Information (COI), the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and after the war, the CIA, all drawing on British experience and intelligence models. The future value to American intelligence and security of this cooperation, giving access to British code-breaking skills, secret files, sources, methods, procedures, and operations, would be “almost literally beyond reckoning” (Smith 2022, 83). In recognition of his efforts in assisting the development of these intelligence networks, “Wild Bill” Donovan presented Fleming with a .38 calibre Colt revolver, inscribed with the dedication “For Special Services” (Moran 2013, 130). Fleming would provide Bond with a similar model in Casino Royale (1953).

The operation to persuade America to abandon isolationism and enter the war required extensive covert political lobbying and the production of cultural propaganda. Front organisations were established by the BSC to counter the isolationist narrative of the majority of US media editorial positions. For example, the Council for Democracy (CfD), consisting of influential politicians and intel-
lectuals, “became an effective and highly visible counterweight to the isolation rhetoric” of the American Right wing, in particular the America First Committee and the American Legion of war veterans (Bird 1992, 109). The CfD was soon “placing anti-Hitler editorials and articles in eleven hundred newspapers a week around the country” (ibid.). At the same time, British journalists were implanted in a New York branch of international “press agency” network Britanova, an SOE propaganda unit centred in London, run by former Daily Mirror news editor Leslie Sheridan (Lashmar 2020, 63).

On the cultural side, British screenwriters, movie producers, radio presenters, and theatre actors were brought into the war effort. Noël Coward, who was determined “to play as much of a part as the powers-that-be allow” (qtd. in Day 2008, 375), completed the screenplay for a big-screen propaganda movie, *In Which We Serve* (1942), which he co-directed with David Lean, and played a starring role. The movie was praised by the *New York Times* as “an excellent expression of British strength” (qtd. in Andrew and Green 2021, 278). *Lady Hamilton* (1941) starred Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in a story set during the Napoleonic Wars, with the immortal line from Olivier (playing Nelson), “You cannot make peace with dictators, you have to destroy them, wipe them out!”. The political message of this cultural propaganda was not universally well-received. The isolationist America First Committee called for a boycott of this and other “pro-war” movies, such as Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* (1941) (Chambers 2006, 51). The American Legion warned of a British “fifth column” working to drag America into the war (Day, 375), and *Lady Hamilton* would earn its director (and SIS asset) Alexander Korda a summons to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to answer charges of inciting the American people to war.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour meant that Korda’s hearing would never take place. It also rendered superfluous the work of Eric Maschwitz and Ivar Bryce (Ian Fleming’s oldest friend from Eton College). Together they produced forgeries for the BSC, in “Station M” in Toronto, including a map that supposedly showed German plans for an invasion of South America. Unaware of its origin, in October 1941 Roosevelt revealed the existence of the map proving Nazi designs “not only against South America but against the United States as well”. Roosevelt also denounced a Nazi plan to abolish all world religions, which was again a Station M fabrication (Andrew 1995, 102-103).

Britain had learned some valuable lessons about influencing allies by the end of the Second World War. Influencing neutral countries’ leaders and public opinion had benefitted from a blend of overt cultural propaganda, covert (“black”) propaganda in the media, and creative deception campaigns. This bal-
ance of techniques formed a blueprint for psychological warfare in the near-peace of the Cold War era that followed. With a creative and deceptive skillset, elite intelligence connections and establishment networks, a job in journalism and a desire to emulate the spy novels of Eric Ambler, John Buchan, and “Sapper” (creator of Bulldog Drummond), Ian Fleming could give the .38 Cold Revolver to James Bond and serve his country using a custom-made, gold-plated Royal Quiet Deluxe typewriter (Lycett 1995, 225).

BRITISH ANTI-COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA AFTER 1945

As Britain and America gradually understood the extent of Soviet expansionist aims in Europe after the war, combined with ideological propaganda in support of communism, it became clear on both sides of the Atlantic that wartime political and cultural propaganda would be important as the new ideological Cold War divided the Soviet Union and the West. British and American intelligence communities would also continue their special, if complicated, relationship. The creation, in September 1947, of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), an evolution from the OSS, would lead to cooperation in SIGINT, Human Intelligence (stay-behind units under NATO supervision), and Open-Source monitoring of foreign radio broadcasts, thanks to the BBC monitoring service (Smith 2022, 111).

In Washington, the CIA was authorised by Congress to perform covert foreign actions, and the Marshall Plan provided funds to help safeguard regions susceptible to communism and Soviet dominance – starting with Turkey and Greece. In 1948, the National Security Council formed a “special projects” office for covert operations against communist powers, while the CIA established the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) to run “a shadow war against the enemies of Western liberal democracy” (Rid 2020, 64). The US Congress Act of 1949 allocated increasing budgets (1949: $4.7M; 1952: $82M) to finance a cultural Cold War, a “battle for men’s minds” that would involve magazines and fiction, as well as conferences, seminars, art exhibitions, and concerts around the world (see Saunders 1999). Simultaneously in Britain, similar plans to counter Soviet propaganda were taking shape.

THE INFORMATION RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

As the Iron Curtain descended between East and West, British intelligence experts recommended the continued application of “psychological pressures of various kinds” in peacetime, exploiting the growth in “popular education”, advances in “sound and vision broadcasting”, in “advertising” and “the study of
mass psychology”. Combined, these advances created new opportunities for channelling propaganda (FO 1110/61, 1948).

It was at the Foreign Office that a Junior Minister’s difficulties – in countering Russian accusations of British colonialism before the United Nations Assembly – led to the creation of a new propaganda department, the Information Research Department (IRD) (see Smith, 1980). Although officially part of the Foreign Office, the IRD was a secret department, supported by the same “secret vote” money that funded SIS. Its classified, ideological role was to produce, collate, and distribute anti-communist propaganda around the world, including “factual material dealing with the deficiencies of the Soviet system and the advantages of Western Social Democracy” (ibid., 69).

The IRD employed two channels to reach a global audience. Firstly, non-attributable press releases were supplied to newspapers in the UK and Europe, and then syndicated (second rights) to media outlets in target countries, particularly in the Middle East, either via Leslie Sheridan’s Britanova network of journalists (Lashmar, 63), or via Information Officers within British embassies who supplied stories to local editors. The local knowledge available at those embassies, collected overtly and covertly, would be fed back to the IRD in London to help shape the content of future articles tailored to the target audience. For example, in 1950 the Information Officer in Ankara requested more anti-communist articles to be placed in Halk Dostu, a newspaper in a coal-mining area of Turkey where “underground communist propaganda is always more or less active” (FO 1110/284, 1950). The IRD also provided propaganda to be broadcast by fake radio stations based in Cyprus, targeting countries selected for SIS operations, as was the case with Albania in 1949/50 (see Cormac, 51).

Secondly, the IRD collaborated with the CIA’s (significantly better financed) cultural “shadow war” to develop centres of leftist thought and writing that took a harder stance against the Kremlin than existing UK publications, such as the New Statesman or Tribune. The result, a highbrow intellectual magazine, Encounter, was an “integer of anti-communist Cold War thinking” (Saunders, 165), a disguised joint production with UK editors and CIA funding, plus additional “secret vote” money which covered the cost distributing the magazine in UK spheres of influence via British Council offices and libraries. Also benefitting from this global distribution, a publishing house (Ampersand) was secretly established by the Foreign Office, to distribute books containing “background information” on history, world affairs, and ideas. Writers and intellectuals that met with the British and American “supra-national ‘understanding’” (Hitchens 1998, 262) for conveying the right ideological message also attracted funding for
greater exposure, either knowingly or deniably (Saunders, 194-195). In the 1950s beneficiaries of such support included Graham Greene, Malcolm Muggeridge, Nicolas Nabokov, Freya Stark, and Arthur Koestler. George Orwell was a particular favourite of both the CIA and IRD: Former OSS black propaganda specialists secured the movie rights for *Animal Farm* (1945) after Orwell’s death, to be financed and distributed by the CIA, changing details of the original books to appear anti-communist and totalitarian, rather than Orwell’s intended protest against all authoritarian tyranny (ibid, 295-296). Orwell’s books were frequently offered by the IRD for redistribution, translation, and serialisation to newspapers in the Balkans and Middle East, although Ralph Murray, Director of IRD in London, was advised that thrillers “which say forcefully what we want to get over” were likely to be the most effective (FO 1110/180, March 1949). It is no great stretch to think that this message reached the ears of London clubland’s best connected intelligence man and baccarat player, with an urge to write popular spy novels while relaxing in Jamaica.

**INFORMAL/SEMI-OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA**

Propaganda on behalf of the vested interests of the state are not always “accomplished by crude intervention, but by the selection of right-thinking personnel and by the editors” and working journalists’ “internalisation of priorities and definitions of newsworthiness that conform to the institution’s policy” (Herman and Chomsky 2002, x). Just as British actors and directors were motivated by their own patriotism to develop propaganda during the Second World War, journalism designed to exert political influence did not always need to be formally directed from Whitehall. British “press barons” were ennobled members of the establishment, patriotically publishing – or censoring – in line with the national interest. The “blackest page in MI6’s post-war history” – an anti-refugee operation to destroy Zionist ships bound for British Palestine – went unreported, for example (Dorril 2002, 549). Newspapers, like secret agencies, are in the business of information gathering and influencing the public. They make a natural fit, therefore, for former and current intelligence officers. Following the war, the British press was populated by, and voluntarily colluded with, SIS officers (Lycett, 169; Knightley 2006, 7-11). Kemsley newspapers – whose flagship title was *The Sunday Times* – provides a good example of the close links between journalism and intelligence in the early Cold War. The group was owned by James Gomer Berry, better known as Viscount Kemsley, who employed Ian Fleming as “foreign manager”, with a generous salary and holiday allowance that would allow Flem-
ing the time to pursue his ambitions as a novelist. Fleming wrote for *The Sunday Times* and ran the Kemsley Imperial and Foreign Service, a news agency staffed by former SIS officers and assets stationed abroad. The Kemsley agency “allowed many of their correspondents to co-operate with SIS and even took on [active] SIS operatives as foreign correspondents” (Anthony Cavendish, former SIS officer, qtd. in Knightley, 8), all reporting to Fleming’s office at 200 Gray’s Inn Road, from where the news/intelligence to editors desks or SIS would be disseminated, as required.

While Fleming was collecting reports from his global network of spy/journalists, by the mid-1950s, newspapers in Turkey and across the Middle East were printing stories originating in London, the content either written directly by the IRD in Whitehall, or written by British newspaper journalists and disseminated by the IRD and British Embassies abroad. Any division between government, intelligence, and the media had become imperceptible. If one man embodied this synthesis of secret intelligence and “right-thinking” journalism, it was Ian Fleming – former naval intelligence officer, manager of Kemsley Imperial and Foreign Service, and, in September 1955, “Special Correspondent” of *The Sunday Times* in Istanbul.

### INFLUENCING TURKEY IN THE EARLY COLD WAR

Turkey emerged from the Second World War as a vital strategic partner for Western powers against the growing Soviet threat. For Britain in particular, Turkey acted as a buffer between the Soviet Union and vital economic and colonial interests in the Middle East. Oil fields in Iran and Iraq, the Suez Canal in Egypt, and the military and intelligence bases in Cyprus were vital strategic interests, making the region a priority target for IRD propaganda and intelligence planning, as rising nationalist aspirations and the threat of subversive Soviet influence challenged British colonial power. Britain’s foreign policy was driven, therefore, not only by the Cold War struggle to contain communist influence and potential expansion, but by a post-colonial strategy to maintain the economic, military, and intelligence assets that enabled it to project power in the Middle East and beyond.

For Turkey, land and sea borders with the Soviet Union represented its greatest security threat, both from an external and internal point of view. Turkish concerns were only increased by Stalin’s demands at the Yalta Conference to revise the 1936 Montreux Convention governing access through the straits in favour of the Soviet Union (see Howard 1974). Soviet political and military expansion in eastern Europe brought Soviet troops to Turkey’s northern and east-
ern frontiers within marching distance of Istanbul. Turkey and the West’s shared security interests in the early Cold War aligned, leading to Turkish membership of NATO (1952) in the interests of mutual defence, and CENTO (1955) (The Baghdad Pact and the Central Treaty Organization, undated), which included British-led security assistance. The Soviet threat also came in the form of subversion, propaganda, and espionage activities inside Turkey. The fear of the young Republic (and its allies) was that Soviet penetration would exploit Kurdish minority nationalism to penetrate and divide the country. Shared Turkish and British concerns about these external and internal security threats would shape the themes of British propaganda distributed in Turkey, leading to secret collaboration to shape media narratives in ways that served both governments interests.

BRITISH PROPAGANDA IN TURKEY 1948-1955

The declassification of Foreign Office documents relating to the IRD has given access to records that clarify the aims and progress of its covert propaganda campaign to insert anti-communist articles into the Turkish press in the early Cold War period. Reporting from Ankara to the IRD in London provided numbers (e.g., “November 1950, 31 articles, 19 IRD, 10 second rights, 1 book extract”) and article headlines, such as “Crime wave in the Soviet Union”, or “Communists try to eliminate Islam” (FO 1110/416, 1950). The content was apparently in great demand, as “six to eight” anti-communist articles were “printed every month and the Turkish language papers demand more and more” (FO 1110/180 PR 38, PR 1677/38/913, 1949). The use of bribery is also evident in reporting, in particular for “the sweetening of officials of the Anatolian News Agency” and for information, from a “police official”, on “communist activities in factories, among the Istanbul porters, taxi drivers, dock workers and so on”; the official might also distribute “anti-communist literature or [conduct] a whispering campaign” (FO 1110/127 PR861/G, 1948).

Declassified reporting from the British Embassy, Ankara, in the early 1950s reveals that the IRD were knocking at an open door as far as anti-communist propaganda was concerned, as the Turkish government had been targeting communists for years: “[c]ommunism is illegal and police action against it is severe. The headquarters of the Communist Party was unearthed about two years ago and those of its members who were caught were imprisoned” (FO 11110/585, 1953). Similarly, “[t]he traditional and unanimous anti-Russian sentiment is of first importance, and there is growing pride in the role which Turkey is playing
as a Western Power.” (FO 1110/683, 1954). Indeed, communism as a force in Turkey had already been severely suppressed: “[t]he Turkish Communist Party, never of great numerical importance, has been almost completely rounded up by police action during the past 12 months” (ibid). While the Turkish government took nothing for granted, encouraging more IRD material to be distributed to the Turkish press, the Ankara Embassy confirmed that there was “still little sign of any impact of communism on labour or the peasants” (ibid). These Foreign Office diplomatic communications illustrate that the British knew communism was no threat in Turkey by the mid-1950s, quite undermining later claims that communists were behind unrest or political violence.

The declassified communications also show that Russian targeting of Kurdish minorities was not effective. BBC Monitoring from Caversham (UK) and SIGINT stations in Cyprus identified Russian broadcasts from Poznan in Poland, to southern Turkey, in Turkish and Kurdish, aiming to create a “nuisance” in Kurdish areas (FO 1110/180, PR588/G, 1949). Reporting from the British Information Officer in Ankara was dismissive, however. The “proportion of sets owned in the eastern provinces is considerably lower than in the western provinces”, and “in the poorer villages of the eastern provinces the receiving sets are almost entirely limited to public institutions and cafés”, within earshot of the police, limiting the ability of people to tune in to foreign stations. Therefore, advised the officer, British propaganda via IRD articles placed in the Turkish press “referring to Soviet persecution of Islam and emphasising the incompatibility of Islam and communism” would be suitable, Kurds in Turkey being “strong Moslems” (ibid.). Articles such as “Communists desecrate mosques” duly continued to appear in regional newspapers (FO 1110/416, 1950).

Overall, British diplomatic reporting from Ankara in the early Cold War illustrates that the provision of anti-communist articles to the Turkish press relied on Foreign Office feedback and reporting, bribery of local contacts, and SIGINT monitoring of Russian broadcasting. By 1955 newspapers all over Turkey were reprinting British newspaper “second rights” stories, and IRD-written articles, and the Ankara Embassy clearly had an extensive network of media contacts. Turkish security interests aligned with the British on countering Russia, suppressing communism, and the preventing any Soviet exploitation of Kurdish minority nationalism. The British Foreign office, its secret propaganda unit, the IRD, and the Turkish government were effectively on the same page.
UK-TURKEY INTELLIGENCE COOPERATION

In the 1950s, Ankara would continue to collaborate with the UK and America through regional alliances (CENTO and NATO), although MI5-directed anti-subversion efforts struggled to satisfy the needs of its members, who faced diverse types of internal subversion (see Bezci 2020, 193-199). There was more progress for Britain and Turkey in developing bilateral intelligence cooperation. On covert propaganda, the Turkish government’s welcome for the IRD’s work described in the previous section was more than just passive. Turkish intelligence (MAH) developed a close relationship with the Information Officer at the British Embassy, assisting with the translation and placement of articles into Turkish newspapers, and organising research trips to the UK for chosen journalists (ibid., 196). Such cooperation undoubtedly boosted the reach of IRD articles to newspapers in Turkey, both geographically and politically (FO 1110/1251, 1959).

Cooperation with the British was not only motivated by the goal of suppressing communism – a goal already achieved in Turkey – or potential Russian influence generally; it also allowed the Turkish government a measure of cover to monitor and arrest Kurdish minority activists, whether communist-related or not. Studies have shown that communism had no more appeal for Turkish Kurds than Turks in general at this time (Landau 1974). However, the Turkish government had been targeting Kurds, and ethnic minorities in general, since before the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, founded as it was on an ethnic Turkish identity (see Protner 2018). Up to two million Armenians had been the first to suffer from the ethno-nationalist policies of the young Turks in 1915, followed in the early years of the Republic by the forced migration and population exchanges of ethnic-Greeks, or Rums (Güven 2006, 86).

A vicious cycle of discrimination against Kurds in the Southeast and Kurdish rebellion against the state was a feature of Turkish south-eastern provinces prior to the war (see Zeydanlioglu 2008), only now, in the era of McCarthyism, the state could claim to be fighting communism to win US and British support. The British provided security, counter-intelligence, and propaganda training, while turning a blind eye to that training being used in repressive or inhumane ways against the Turkish Kurds (McDowall 2004, 169). Britain’s approach, prioritising its strategic interests over democratic or human rights concerns, echoed that it had taken when the Turkish government imposed its discriminative Varlık (wealth) tax on non-Muslims (ethnic Greeks, Armenians, and Jews) in the 1940s, discussed earlier. As Chikara Hashimoto has noted, such a politically realist ap-
proach “raises significant questions about British complicity in undemocratic and repressive activity including human rights abuses” (2017, 147). Such questions are particularly relevant with regard to the events in Turkey between 1954 and September 1955, when British and Turkish interests would come together with tragic consequences for Istanbul’s remaining ethnic-Greek (Rum) community.

“TROUBLE IN CYPRUS”

Cyprus, a small island to the South of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean, was a British overseas territory since the transfer of sovereignty by the Ottoman Empire in 1878. British military presence increased significantly to defend the island from Axis aggression during the war. As Britain’s footprint in the Middle East shrank in the 1950s, Cyprus became home to the only significant bases on British-controlled soil in the region, and therefore was a regional military, intelligence, and propaganda hub. Air bases were suitable for heavy bombers, with the base at Famagusta capable of hosting nuclear weapons. The island was home to western SIGINT operations, with hundreds of RAF personnel, and British and American listening stations intercepted signals traffic across the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Together with American installations in Samsun, Turkey, Cyprus became a key centre for listening in to Soviet missile bases (see Aldrich 2001, 567-569). With increasing resistance to the British presence in Egypt, the Middle East hub of Security Intelligence (SIME) was moved to Cyprus from 1954. It was responsible for “the collation and dissemination of security intelligence relating to counter-espionage and countersubversion, which might have had implications for British authorities throughout the region” (Hashimoto, 67). Additionally, Cyprus was a convenient back-up base when covert SIS operations elsewhere encountered difficulties, for example when diplomats and intelligence personnel were banished from Iran by Mossadeq in the course of Operation Boot (see Wilber 1954, 22, 52, 58, 63). Cyprus was also the home of British overt and covert broadcasting in the region. Radio had become an important means of propaganda and influence, as it was the principal way by which local populations learned about the rest of the world, in particular the illiterate majority outside of principle urban areas. A powerful transmitter in Cyprus could reach Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iran, northern Egypt, and even parts of Saudi Arabia (see Aldrich, 567-580). By the mid-1950s Cyprus had assumed a strategic importance for British and American military and intelligence operations far beyond the size of the island, and one that continues to this day (“Britain has Flown” 2024, n.p.).

As elsewhere in the British Empire, Britain’s rule over Cyprus was subject to local anti-colonial resistance. Since 1915 a growing Cypriot campaign sought
independence and enosis (union) with Greece, interrupted by the Second World War when the British militarised island against Axis aggression. After the war, Greek-Cypriot calls for independence increased once more, leading to an armed struggle against British rule. The resistance movement, EOKA, launched a bombing campaign from April 1955, which would kill ninety-one British service personnel and civilians by November 1956 (Aldrich, 574).

Turkish interest in Cyprus had been minimal up until the 1950s. In the election year of 1950, Necmettin Sadak, then Foreign Minister in the Republican People’s Party (CHP) government, stated in the Turkish parliament that Turkey did not have a Cyprus problem, while the incoming Democrat Party (DP) government of Adnan Menderes, from May 1950, continued the policy of respecting British sovereignty of the island (Gülmez 2020, 746). However, this indifference was to change, driven by internal factors – economic crisis in Turkey, and the resulting populist politics – and external, such as the impact of the EOKA uprising in Cyprus on British and Turkish foreign relations. Economic growth, which had been driven by pre-war industrialisation, and post-war investment from abroad in infrastructure and agricultural production, went into reverse from 1953. Greater consumption led to inflation, but as consumer prices rose, global market prices for Turkey’s primary goods collapsed. Combined with bad weather conditions impacting Turkish agricultural production, per-capita income fell by 11% in 1954 (Keyder 1987, 133). The unwise and politically-motivated awarding of government projects by the DP added further to the country’s economic crisis, feeding public discontent (Gülmez, 108). In response to the unrest, the government, supportive political groups, and the press created populist and nationalist narratives that invoked “millionaire” non-Muslims “hiding their banknotes” to deflect from government failures (Akan 2009, 209).

This period of economic crisis and unrest coincided with the anti-colonial uprising in Cyprus. The issue was raised by Greece at the United Nations in 1954, declaring the right of self-determination for the island. Initially, the Turkish government maintained a neutral stance on the matter, while Washington remained impartial to “which friendly flag flew over the island” (Holland 1999, 36). American ambivalence and Turkish neutrality severely weakened Britain’s position over the dispute. According to Foreign Office records, it became vital that the Turks be given “further encouragement” to reconsider this “passive” position (Güven 2011, 12). The encouragement came with from the EOKA armed campaign beginning in April 1955, which triggered protests in Istanbul by patriotic organisations like the National Turkish Student Union and the Cyprus is Turkish
association, in defence of the Cypriot Turkish population. The Menderes government, desperate to shift attention from socio-economic matters, saw an opportunity to manipulate the religious and nationalist sentiments of the discontented population. Furthermore, Britain’s increasingly weak position over Cyprus gave Ankara an opportunity to leverage its own interests, and in May 1955 Ankara formally requested consultations with London over the crisis (Vryonis, 46). Between May and August 1955, these “consultations” led to a Turkish position supporting the British plan of partition of Cyprus, confirmed in a late-August London conference between the three governments. The summer months saw a relentless campaign in Turkish newspapers stoking ethnic hatred of Greeks and “fifth column” ethnic-Greek Turkish citizens (Rums), and a hardening of public support for a tough stance on foreign policy (Hale 2013, 96). Rumours of a massacre of Turks in northern Cyprus, amplified by Turkish Prime Minister Menderes himself in a speech prior to leaving for London, “only helped to increase the level of aggression and agitation among the increasingly mobilised public” (Kuyucu 2005, 376).

“RIOTS IN TURKEY”: SEPTEMBER 6-7, 1955

Accounts of the events of September 6, 1955, tell a story of a bomb planted at Ataturk’s former home in Salonica, Greece, that may or may not have exploded, but led to massive demonstrations in Turkey provoked by TRT radio broadcasting the news, and the pro-government newspaper Istanbul Express publishing the headline “Our Founder’s House Attacked by a Bomb!”. Violence broke out on the night of the 6th of September 1955, in Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara. In Istanbul, a crowd began to gather in Taksim shouting “Cyprus is Turkish! It will remain Turkish!”. The demonstrations, led by the National Turkish Student’s Union and the Cyprus is Turkish association, quickly degenerated. Within four hours, thousands of shops and houses belonging to Rums and non-Muslims were seriously damaged, seventy-three churches were burned down, and schools, synagogues, and cemeteries were destroyed. According to official numbers three people were murdered, an unknown number of women were raped, and hundreds of people were injured. According to many testimonies, police and soldiers either did nothing, or joined in the violence (see Akan, Gülmez, Kuyucu, Vryonis).

There is an argument that the events of September were an intelligence failure, in as much as the violence should have been foreseen and prevented by Turkish security agencies, (Kadioğlu and Bezci 2020, 643). However, the literature describing the 1955 Istanbul Pogrom as being engineered by the Turkish
government and its covert agencies, in order to continue the “Turkification” project of the Turkish republic and to distract from socioeconomic problems of the time, is more persuasive (see Kuyucu, 365; de Zayas 2007, Güven, 2011). Later on, the former head of a secret, CIA-funded Turkish paramilitary organisation Tactical Mobilisation Group (later renamed Special Warfare Department) even claimed responsibility saying: “[i]he attacks of 6/7 September were certainly planned by the Special Operations Unit. It was an extremely premeditated operation and it accomplished its objective. Let me ask you; wasn’t it an extraordinarily successful action?” (qtd. in Gülapoglu 1991, 104). We must consider, therefore, the issue of Western involvement in the September provocation and violence.

Turkey’s support in 1955 for the partition of Cyprus, the related Turkish media campaign against Greece and EOKA, and the nationalistic and racist campaigns in Istanbul certainly served the British goal of making the Cypriot enosis issue a symptom of age-old neighbourly rivalry, rather than a modern independence struggle against an imperial power. Evidence for British support for the provocation in Salonica and incitements in Istanbul is circumstantial but worth reviewing. Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan supported counter-subversion training of Turkish security and intelligence agencies, delivered my MI5 via CENTO, and, impressed by the results of covert action in Iran in 1953, spoke of “trying MI6 stuff” in Cyprus (qtd. in Lockhart 1974, 7). Some sort of provocation was not far from the minds of other British officials: a year before the pogrom, a British Foreign Office official noted that, “[a] few riots in Ankara would do us nicely” (qtd. in Holland, 333). The British Ambassador in Athens had even remarked, in August 1954, that, “[i]t would be sufficient to incite a turmoil through an unimportant event such as inscribing a slogan with a piece chalk on the wall of the house where Atatürk was born.” (FO 371/117642, RG 1081, qtd. in Güven 2011, 13). Pushed by the Church of England to raise the destruction of Christian churches and graveyards in Istanbul, Macmillan decided against issuing a “stern warning” to Ankara, preferring a milder protest (FO 371/117/657, RG 1081/1019, 11 September 1955, qtd. in Güven 2011, 13). At the suggestion of both the Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles (who happened to be in Istanbul with Ian Fleming at an Interpol conference), and Prime Minister Menderes, the provocation and violent reaction in Turkey were blamed on communists (Jacoby 2010, 101), despite the almost total suppression of communism there noted by British diplomatic letters from Ankara to London, discussed above.
There is convincing evidence, then, that the September 1955 violence against ethnic-Greeks and non-Muslims resulted from the close relationships between, and the shared interests of, the British and Turkish governments, the IRD, British, American, and Turkish Intelligence agencies, and the power of the Turkish press. It is also clear that the British government were keen to suppress details of the pogrom from being reported. The Foreign Office “ordered the News Office to avoid emphasising” reporting of the pogrom and its effects on British nationals locally, in order to minimise press interest (Güven 2011, 13-14). Ian Fleming, coincidentally in Istanbul to report on an Interpol conference for The Sunday Times, instead described, with Orientalist undertones, a “great riot”, a consequence of “hatreds that fester” between neighbours over generations (Fleming 1955, n.p.). Despite witnessing the events first hand, Fleming’s view is an outlier among other eyewitness accounts of journalists and foreign officials, who described the violence against the ethnic-Greek community that night as a pogrom of immense savagery.

If Ian Fleming can be said to have had a hand in the Istanbul Pogrom of 1955, it was the hand of a skilled propagandist. The shared interests of British and Turkish governments benefitted from the myth of a “riot” between Turks and Greeks in 1955: it helped the British avoid United Nations involvement in the independence struggle of the Greek Cypriots, and it provided a struggling Turkish government with a distraction from domestic economic problems. The tabloid media created the hysteria that fuelled a crisis, unifying national popular support for tough action against the Greeks. It fed – and was protected by – the Cold War conspiracy-narrative that communists were behind unrest, revolutions, strikes, “trouble”, and “riots” everywhere. Planned by Prime Minster Menderes and his security and intelligence agencies, the violence and destruction on September 6 and 7 were motivated by the same ethno-nationalism that inspired the murder or removal of millions of Armenians in the last days of the Ottoman Empire. Fleming’s walk-on role concerned international perceptions, helping to create the myth of a “riot” via The Sunday Times, or a Russian (“SMERSH”) plot in From Russian With Love. Meanwhile, Britain and Turkey had conspired and achieved their goals, at the expense of the ethnic-Greek and Jewish communities in Istanbul. The harsh reality, that citizenship would never make them “Turks”, led to a new wave of emigration. The number of Greek-speaking residents in Istanbul fell from 65,108 in 1955 to 49,081 in 1960. Similarly, 10,000 Jews left Istanbul for Israel following the pogrom; the British consulate reported a sudden increase of visa applications from non-Muslim minorities after September 7th (Güven 2011, 14). The campaigns against non-Muslims did not end there. Be-
between 1964 and 1967, again following “trouble in Cyprus”, a further 10,000 Greek citizens were asset-stripped and evicted from Turkey, along with 30,000-40,000 blood-related Turkish citizens (Halstead 2019, 23). By 1970 there were fewer than 15,000 Rums remaining in Istanbul, and an estimated 3,000-4000 by 2009.

PERCEPTIONS OF INTELLIGENCE AND MODERN TURKISH DISINFORMATION

There is a final chapter to the story of Ian Fleming and the Istanbul pogrom, set in modern Turkey, some thirty years after the end of the Cold War. Since the 1950s, the character of James Bond has been responsible for shaping popular perceptions of intelligence and spying everywhere. These days, Bond represents differing ideas about British intelligence, broadly positive in Western countries, but less so elsewhere. The Turkish government is no longer concerned about Soviet or communist subversion, but is troubled by excessive “Anglo-Saxon” influence and malevolent foreign forces. Here, Fleming and his alter-ego are invoked as the icons of modern Western conspiracies that seek to provoke unrest in the interests of imperialist forces.

A recurring theme in the narratives of Turkish politicians and pro-government media invokes a conspiracy of Western intelligence agencies and media – let us call it the “spies and The Economist” narrative. According to such rhetoric, a “hidden hand” manipulates Turkish politics and society to serve an Anglo-Saxon, American, or British agenda. Ian Fleming, the intelligence officer, journalist, and novelist, and his creation, James Bond, are often invoked in the media as icons, the embodiment of Western espionage and subterfuge. The believable narrative of “foreign interference” is then used to justify political repression, or to deflect political controversies implicating the government.

Invoking the images of James Bond or Ian Fleming helps to spin narratives of past foreign conspiracies and espionage plots that appear in the Turkish media to justify government clampdowns on political protest. In February 2021, an article appeared in a pro-government newspaper revealing that Ian Fleming was in Istanbul on 6 September 1955, the evening when violence broke out, resulting in widespread destruction, death, and injury in ethnic-Greek and non-Muslim areas of the city (“Türkiye her dönem” 2021, n.p.). The article, illustrated with portraits of the Bond author and photographs of the destruction, makes no mention of Prime Minister Menderes, the Turkish government, its agencies, or the context of events in Cyprus. It claims that the unrest was caused by foreign “provokasyon”: “Turkey has always remained on the radar of foreign powers”, the article warns, “Intelligence organisations have never left our country. Now,
warnings come that there may be similar provocations”. In the Spring of 2021, to mitigate the danger of any similar “provokasyon”, demonstrations intended to mark International Women’s Day, LGBT Pride, and Labour Day were all banned by the Turkish government.

The “spies and The Economist” narrative also serves to distract or deflect from political controversy. When a 2021 article appeared in The Guardian, revealing the known links between the ultra-nationalist party (MHP) and the Turkish mafia, it was cited by nationalist politicians as “proof” that “the imperialist Anglo-Saxon mentality is trying to stage a coup d’état in Turkey […] through intelligence agencies such as the CIA and MI6” (“MHP Genel Başkan” 2022, n.p.). In 2023, in the run-up to presidential and parliamentary elections, an opposition party (CHP) rally was attacked by a stone-throwing gang, ostensibly supporters of the nationalist and Islamist MHP-AKP coalition government. The Deputy Leader of MHP, İzzet Yönter, appearing that evening on CNN Turk, and employed the “spies and The Economist” narrative to deflect blame for the attack: “[w]here there is an operation targeting a country […] The Economist is at work”. Asked by the presenter how foreign powers intervene, Yönter explained: “[b]y creating incidents, causing crises, instigating fights, stirring up confusion and chaos” (“İzzet Ulvi Yönter” 2023, n.p.).

What Yönter left out of his analysis, of course, was any mention of state “Turkification” policies, or the role of his forebears on the far-right of the Turkish political spectrum. However, as with all successful disinformation or propaganda, the modern Turkish nationalist narrative – that British or Anglo-Saxon media and secret agencies have historically interfered in Turkey for political ends and therefore still pose a threat – contains enough believable elements to be credible for the domestic audience, and politically expedient in the current news cycle. Very few people in Turkey are aware of the events of 1955, still fewer of the convergence of Turkish and British interests that led to a pogrom in Istanbul. Understanding the causes of current unrest and political conflict is challenging enough for most people. Historical accounts of past troubles can be opaque, complicated, or hard to swallow for a mainstream audience. Adding a spoonful of James Bond or Ian Fleming serves to sweeten the disinformation, making political narratives more believable or interesting for the general audience to swallow.

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2 Translations in this section by the author.
CONCLUSION

During the Second World War, Ian Fleming occupied a rare position in Western intelligence circles, being involved in events and the development of agencies in both the UK and the US. In the near-peace of the Cold War that followed, a propaganda and influence war became central to maintaining Western and British interests abroad. The Foreign Office coordinated UK propaganda operations, employing a variety of overt and covert agencies. Articles and literature were distributed worldwide — from the secret Information Research Department in London, to journalists, British embassies and consulates. Intellectuals and writers who represented the moderate-left political alternative were sponsored or amplified by the CIA with UK government support. Additionally, patriotic newspaper owners and staff (including Ian Fleming and his network of journalist-spies) ensured that British interests and foreign policy were represented in news reporting. In Turkey, strict counter-espionage and censorship meant that foreign propaganda efforts were impossible without government cooperation. Shared British and Turkish strategic interests facilitated the dissemination of anti-communist propaganda in the Turkish media. The goals of the Turkish government were not merely to suppress communism, however, but to continue the ethno-nationalist objective of “Turkification”. This was of no concern to the British, as long as cordial relations with Turkey enabled the continued use of Cyprus as a military, air, and intelligence base from which to project power in the region. Ian Fleming, spy, journalist, and author, the Head of the CIA Allen Dulles, and their local asset Nazim Kalkavan were eye-witnesses to one of the last major incidents of ethnic cleansing in Turkey of the twentieth century. With British strategic interest requiring Turkish government support, however, anti-colonial resistance in Cyprus was portrayed as communist agitation or “trouble” caused by “quietly advancing” Russians; anti-ethnic Greek violence in Istanbul either a spontaneous “riot” between quarrelling neighbours, or an example of communist subversion.

Today, British intelligence assets in Cyprus still provide support for the “operations” of an ethno-nationalist government in former Ottoman lands, and the media still provide the narratives or censorship as required. Bond is an icon for a fantasy version of British intelligence, referenced in every Western media article or feature about intelligence agencies. In modern Turkey, in pro-government political discourse at least, Ian Fleming and his 007 alter ego have come to symbolise the “hidden hand” of foreign intelligence and media playing “dirty games”. The negative public perceptions of (Western) interference that Bond
and Fleming represent have become useful for Turkey’s government as it constructs new historical narratives that justify the suppression of dissent, or deflects accusations of corruption or illegality. Protests in Istanbul, trouble in Ankara, scandals in the media – there is nothing that cannot be explained away by foreign conspiracy narratives, accompanied by pictures of the world’s most famous spy-journalist-author and his creation, James Bond.

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