

From Skeptical Disinterest To Ideological Crusade: The Road To American Participation In The Greek Civil War, 1943-1949

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FROM SKEPTICAL DISINTEREST TO IDEOLOGICAL CRUSADE: THE
ROAD TO AMERICAN PARTICIPATION IN THE GREEK CIVIL WAR,
1943-1949

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the way in which the United States formulated its policy toward Greece during the Greek civil war (1943-1949). It asserts that U.S. intervention in Greece was based on circumstantial evidence and the assumption of Soviet global intentions, rather than on dispatches from the field which consistently reported from 1943-1946 that the Soviets were not involved in that country's affairs. It also maintains that the post-Truman Doctrine American policy in Greece was in essence, a continuation of British policy there from 1943-1946, which meant to impose an unpopular government on the people of Greece, and tolerated unlawful violence of the extreme Greek right-wing.

For my Parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank first and foremost my parents for without whom, this undertaking would not have been possible. I could not imagine how my life would have turned out without your support. To my wife Stephanie, thank you for always believing in me. You are amazing.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMAG	American Mission for Aid to Greece
DAG	Democratic Army of Greece
EAM	National Liberation Front
EDES	National Republican Greek League
EKKA	National and Social Liberation
ELAS	Greek People's Liberation Army
GIE	Greek Government in Exile
GRN	Greek Royal Navy
KKE	Greek Communist Party
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PEEA	Political Committee of National Liberation
RN	British Royal Navy
SOE	Special Operations Executive

INTRODUCTION

In March 1947 while the British were on the verge of ending all assistance to Greece, President Harry Truman stood before the United States Congress and the American people to ask for unprecedented American funds for military and economic assistance for both Greece and Turkey so that those countries could resist falling into the Soviet Bloc. According to the administration, the Soviets intended to take over Greece by using the Greek Communist Party (KKE) as their instrument. The simultaneous pressure applied on Turkey for joint-use of their Dardanelle Straits was supposedly coordinated with their actions in Greece, and thus aimed at establishing regional hegemony. Although the President never mentioned the Soviets in his speech, his rhetoric was sufficiently transparent for the audience to understand to whom he was referring. Conjuring up visions of a terrifying world dominated by communists, President Truman was successful in his quest to “scare the hell out of the American people” in order to receive the funding he sought.¹

The declaration of the Truman Doctrine on March 12, 1947 marked a turning point in American foreign relations as the United States continued its shift from one of isolationism to one of global confrontation with the Soviet Union. This is widely viewed as the starting point of what would become known as America’s “containment” policy – a rigid response and projection of American strength deemed necessary to combat the perceived Soviet intentions to communize

¹ Robert A. Divine, *Policy and U.S. Presidential Elections*, (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 170. In meetings with congressional leaders to discuss American aid to Greece and Turkey, Senator Arthur Vandenberg suggested that the President make an appearance in front of Congress in order to “scare the hell out of the country” in order to gain public support.

the world. The origin of this new American position in world affairs – or so it appeared at the time – stemmed from the situation that occurred in Greece in the last two-thirds of the 1940s.

The Greek civil war was, at first, a domestic conflict that played out as a result of decades of political instability in Greece. After World War II, the conflict took on broader international significance and became the first military conflict of the Cold War. It was fought in three separate phases from 1943 to 1949 between political adherents of both the Greek left and Greek right. By the end of the conflict, 80,000 were killed in the fighting, 5000 had been executed, 50,000 were imprisoned, 140,000 fled the nation, and 700,000 were internally displaced.²

Upon their decision to buttress one side in the Greek domestic conflict, the United States committed vast amounts of military, economic, and logistical support to the Greek government from 1947-1950 in order to prevent Greece from falling into the Soviet sphere of influence. But the way in which the United States developed the policy that committed itself to the defense of the Greek anti-communist government requires further clarification. This thesis attempts to highlight what information American statesmen received from the field, the level of accuracy of that information, whether or not policymakers trusted and applied the information to the formation of policy, and how their understanding of the global situation affected the way in which they intervened in Greece's civil war.

² Thomas W. Gallant, *Modern Greece*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 178-179; David Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War*, (New York: Longman Group Limited, 1995), 219-220.

Historiography

This work embraces two distinct historiographical fields: that of the Greek civil war, and that of the formation of the Truman Doctrine. The review of the former is necessary in order to trace the evolution of scholar's views on the origin and dynamics of the Greek civil war. The brief review of the latter is meant to better situate this work within the rich and constantly growing field of the history of American foreign policy in the early post-World War II years.

The historiography of civil war Greece is marked most notably by competing views on when the war actually took place, as early histories of the civil war were derived from ideological considerations. The historiographical landscape evolved from politically charged "traditionalist" histories until the 1970s, then shifted to "revisionist" histories of the left, and ultimately to a more balanced "post-revisionist" perspective after the fall of the Soviet Union.³

The earliest histories of the civil war were produced outside of Greece, only a few years after the conflict, and by actors who took part in it. In most of the early historical works, the issue of attributing blame for the civil war was a central topic, with most of them giving that distinction to the wartime Allied resistance organization, the National Liberation Front (EAM) whose leadership was comprised of Greek communists, and its armed wing, the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS). Historians also argued about the role of external forces in the conflict with British, American, and Soviet roles examined. The earliest histories of Greek civil war were

³ Cultural and social histories have also made an appearance into the contemporary discourse on the civil war. See Mark Mazower, *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

written in the paranoid context of the Cold War with a reliance on western sources, and made the assumption that the Soviets controlled the Greek communists.⁴

A commonly held trend among the early historians was to look at the war in the concept of “rounds”, all three of which constituted different phases of supposed communist attempts at revolution in Greece. In this perspective the first round marked the fighting that occurred between the various Greek resistance groups while Greece was occupied by Nazi Germany. The second round designated the fighting in Athens between EAM/ELAS and British soldiers from December 1944 to February 1945, ending with ELAS’ retreat and the signing of the Varkiza Agreement in March 1945.⁵ All other events in the civil war supposedly constituted the third round of the conflict which lasted until 1949. Looking at the civil war in concepts of “rounds” however, assumed a ubiquitous, systematic attempt on the part of Greek communists to seize power in Greece from 1943 to 1949. The result of this first phase of historical writing was a one-sided portrayal of the way events had unfolded.⁶

A revisionist approach in the 1970’s helped to bring about a more balanced depiction of the civil war and the strategy of the Greek communists. John Iatrides made the earliest attempt to reinterpret the events of civil war. His book, *Revolt in Athens: The Greek Communist “Second Round”* was published in 1972 and incorporated the writings of U.S. ambassador to the Greek

⁴ The use of Winston Churchill and Harry S. Truman’s memoirs and autobiographies are a few examples of the western perspective in the early literature.

⁵ The Varkiza Agreement was the truce that temporarily ended hostilities between the British and Greek government forces, and EAM. Under the agreement, EAM’s armed wing ELAS was to trade its weapons in order to be incorporated into a coalition with the right-wing nationalists. The agreement was not adhered to by either.

⁶ For traditionalist interpretation of the civil war, see C.M. Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord: A Survey of Recent Greek Politics in Their International Setting* (Reston: 1948); and, George D. Kousoulas, *Revolution and Defeat: The Story of the Greek Communist Party*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

government, Lincoln MacVeagh. According to Iatrides, the conflict in Athens between EAM/ELAS and the British in December 1945 was the result of misunderstandings on the part of both, rather than an attempt by the communists to seize power. He contended that in the vacuum created in the wake of German withdrawal, neither side knew what the other's aspirations were, and this uncertainty led to the bloody events that neither side wanted.⁷

In 1981 Lawrence Wittner, author of *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949*, posed that contrary to earlier accounts that viewed the communists in Greece as an extension of Soviet power, Stalin had been mostly uninterested in Greek affairs. Wittner based this assertion on the fact that the Soviet Military Mission, which visited EAM/ELAS headquarters in the summer of 1944 directed the organization to agree to the demands of the exiled Greek government, in what surely must have amounted to a stunning blow to them.⁸ As further evidence that Stalin did not support armed revolution from Greek communists, the author highlighted Stalin and Churchill's "percentages agreement" which divided Eastern Europe into "spheres of influence" and claimed that Stalin would by no means risk his position in other areas of Europe for what he deemed a relatively unimportant strategic position in Greece.⁹ His book also highlighted many of the misperceptions that earlier historians had put forth which implied continued communists attempts to seize power. This study, as he boldly proclaimed, "bolster[ed] the revisionist case."¹⁰ He gave recognition to EAM/ELAS for their contributions to the resistance movement and

⁷ John O. Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens: The Greek Communist "Second Round," 1944-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

⁸ Lawrence S. Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xi.

showed that, “in the course of the war, EAM pinned down 300,000 enemy troops; accounted for enemy casualties in the tens of thousands; frustrated fascist plans for labor conscription; sabotaged German transportation, supply and communications networks; and rescued thousands of prisoners of war, Jews, and Allied airmen from occupation forces.”¹¹ Wittner also commented on the make-up of the communist-controlled EAM that consisted not only of communists as was perceived, but also republican officers, clergymen, peasants, and women.¹² Additionally, the author highlighted the level of U.S. involvement in Greek politics once they arrived in Greece, and the lengths the Americans went to in order to keep communists out of Greece.

In 1989, Peter J. Stavrakis, a historian specializing in the study of Stalin and Soviet policy published *Moscow and Greek Communism, 1944-1949*. The author challenged both the traditionalists and revisionists on the impracticality of both camp’s positions regarding the KKE and Soviet aims in Greece. He claimed that neither explanation – that is, that the Greek communists were an extension of Soviet advances, or that Stalin was completely uninterested in Greece – was sufficient to describe the actions of Soviet policy-makers regarding Greece.¹³ Viewing the conflict in larger terms as power politics, Stavrakis claimed that Soviet policy in Greece was dynamic and it evolved. “The most intriguing aspect of Soviet policy during this period is not its constancy, but its variability,” he asserted. According to Stavrakis, Stalin had

¹¹ Ibid., 3

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Peter J. Stavrakis, *Moscow and Greek Communism, 1944-1949* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989); See also, Peter J. Stavrakis, “Soviet Policy in Areas of Limited Control: The Case of Greece, 1944-1949” in John O. Iatrides and Linda Wrigley, eds., *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and its Legacy*, (London: University Park, 1995)

several uses for Greece.¹⁴ The author claimed that at the end of World War II, Stalin's main concern had been to secure his immediate borders. Greece figured into Stalin's plans, but only as a pawn for free reign in Romania. This was Stalin's only use for Greece from mid-1944 to mid-1945.¹⁵ Stavrakis also noted that Stalin went on to pursue a strategy of "political gradualism" to avoid waking the Americans to Greece, and in essence, he desired that EAM slowly build their influence within the legal confines of a coalition government. This strategy stemmed from the desire to "achieve the elimination of the western presence [in Greece]."¹⁶ Essentially, Stavrakis argued that Stalin was indeed interested in Greece, but in a much different way than the British, U.S. policy makers, and earlier historians of the civil war had assumed. Regarding the defeat of the Greek communists, the author is most critical of Stalin, because of his failure to communicate a clear political objective to the Greek communists from 1944 to 1947 despite their requests for such advice.

In 1995, David Close's *The Origins of the Greek Civil War* provided an excellent overview of the civil war and traced its beginnings back to the early 20th century which resulted in a "National Schism" and the political discord which followed from successive repressive right-wing Greek governments. Taking advantage of British, American, and Greek sources – both communist and non-communist – recently released memoirs, and a vast conglomeration of secondary sources, Close's work provided a vivid portrait of the Greek civil war and placed blame on all parties involved – the British, Americans, Greek communists, and Greek right-wing

¹⁴ Stavrakis, *Moscow and Greek Communism*, 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4

¹⁶ Stavrakis, "Soviet Policy in Areas," 228.

for the events that played out in Greece. The author shed new light on the unofficial machine of persecution known as the “White Terror”, that amounted to an “informal alliance of army officers, National Guards, police, armed thugs, political organizations” and gendarmerie, which altogether became known as the “Shadow State.” This unholy alliance, Close claimed, promoted and carried out extreme violence and persecution against the Greek left from the beginning of 1945 well past the end of the war in 1949.¹⁷

In the mid 1990s, several collections of essays were also produced which addressed the history of the Greek civil war. The most extensive and significant of these, *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and its Legacy*, edited by John Iatrides and Linda Wrigley, was published in 1995.¹⁸ One essay, “The 1940’s Between Past and Future,” by George Mavrogordatos asserted that the Greek fratricide was purely a domestic conflict. Mavrogordatos views events of the war as a continuation of the polarizing effects of the interwar period in Greece, and links the civil war to the “National Schism” to which the civil war was a *sui generis* resolution.¹⁹ The onus for the war, Mavrogordatos claims, was the monarch’s polarizing installation of the Metaxas dictatorship in 1936. The author highlights how the “radical republicanism” born in the wake of the dictatorship’s repressive tendencies had joined forces with the KKE to form the massive organization of EAM/ELAS. His study also showed how the

¹⁷ Close, *The Origins*, 156.

¹⁸ John O. Iatrides and Linda Wrigley, eds., *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and Its Legacy* (London: University Park, 1995).

¹⁹ George Mavrogordatos, “The 1940’s Between Past and Future,” in John O. Iatrides and Linda Wrigley, eds., *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and its Legacy*, (London: University Park, 1995), 31

post-World War II Greek right tried to keep power by promoting the perception that the entire spectrum of the left in Greece was communist.²⁰

Another contributor to this collection also places the conflict in the domestic rather than the international realm. Ole L. Smith, in “Communist Perceptions, Strategy, and Tactics, 1945-1949” used new sources – specifically the Greek communist Central Committee’s Twelfth Plenum Conferences and political decisions of their Seventh Congress – that he claimed supported the revisionist interpretations. Smith claimed that, “the KKE’s strategic goal was to create a representative government with EAM’s participation, a government that would be able to bridge the political gulf created by the war and to safeguard gains toward a fully democratic Greece.”²¹ Smith concluded that “what triggered [civil war] developments were not initiatives of the KKE, but the measures taken by the Greek government...including the escalation of rightist violence in the wake of the parliamentary elections of March 1946.”²²

In 2001, Thanasis D. Sfikas shed additional light on the strategies of the Greek communists during the civil war by using declassified archival materials in Athens. In “War and Peace in the Strategy of the Communist Party of Greece, 1945-1949,” Sfikas shows that the KKE’s actions during the civil war cannot be defined in terms of a singular objective, and claims that “the choices facing the KKE changed quite dramatically – more than once – in the years from 1945-1949.”²³ The author asserts that there were three distinct phases of Greek communist

²⁰ Ibid., 32

²¹ Ole L. Smith, “Communist Perceptions, Strategy, and Tactics, 1945 – 1949,” in John O. Iatrides and Linda Wrigley, eds., *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and its Legacy*, (London: University Park, 1995), 93

²² Ibid., 96

²³ Thanasis D. Sfikas, “War and Peace in the Strategy of the Communist Party of Greece, 1945-1949,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 3, no.3 (Fall 2001), 6.

actions which “revolved around competing concepts of war and peace.” First, the military actions they resorted to in 1946 aimed at restoring the KKE’s position it had before fighting broke out in December 1944 between the communists and the British. Secondly, until early 1947, the KKE worked towards a compromise, “and used the threat of insurrection to bring additional pressure to bear on the government.” Lastly, in 1947 Greek communists “stepped up [their] war effort...to force a settlement” because the alternative to this “was a capitulation under conditions and terms infinitely worse” than those of the White Terror.²⁴ Sfikas’ study added further legitimacy to the revisionist claim that the civil war in Greece cannot be looked at in terms of continued communist attempts at seizure of power – or rounds.

Adding to the discourse on the KKE’s goals, in his 2005 article, “Revolution or Self-Defense? Communist Goals, Strategy, and Tactics in the Greek Civil War”, John Iatrides attempted in his own words, to “reach definitive and documented conclusions” about the goals of the KKE. Using declassified documents of former KKE leaders, Iatrides places the onus of their defeat on Stalin for his failure to propagate a clear plan and notes that the KKE’s “grave miscalculations concerning its foreign patrons as well as its adversaries caused it to launch its armed revolution at the wrong time and under conditions that doomed it to defeat.”²⁵ In laying the blame for the KKE’s defeat on Stalin, Iatrides’ study also helped to dispel earlier notions that the KKE was an instrument of Soviet policy.

²⁴ Ibid., 30.

²⁵ John O. Iatrides, “Revolution or Self-Defense? Communist Goals, Strategy, and Tactics in the Greek Civil War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 7, no.3 (Summer 2005), 32.

British and U.S. policy towards Greece during the civil war and post-war years was also examined in numerous articles and monographs. G.M. Alexander's *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece 1944-1947* published in 1982, surveys British involvement in the political affairs of Greece from the end of occupation until the assumption by the United States as the leading player in Greek affairs. Using declassified British Foreign Office archival materials, Alexander points to western interests in the Middle East as the main reason for British and subsequent American involvement in Greece. Additionally, he focuses on the struggle of the British to reign in a reactionary right and their failure to place in Greece a constitutional monarchy, the form of government they so badly desired in Greece.²⁶ Alexander's book is particularly useful in viewing British attitudes toward Greece, but its weakness consists of a tendency to view the civil war in the traditionalist view as a continuous and sustained effort by EAM and the communists to create a revolution in Greece.

In "*A New Kind of War*" *America's Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece*, (1989), Howard Jones provides insight into U.S. perceptions of Soviet actions leading up to the Truman Doctrine of March 1947. Jones asserts that U.S. policymakers attached global significance to the Greek situation because of their belief that the Soviets were involved there. Jones, like Alexander and Wittner, also highlights American material interests in the Mediterranean and Middle East as a large contributing factor to intervention. By using American correspondence records, the author acknowledges that Greece's problems were domestic and not driven by the Soviets, but claimed that, in light of Soviet actions elsewhere in Europe, "Americans had to act on the basis of circumstantial evidence, an intelligence network that was

²⁶ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 8-9.

not always accurate in its assessments, and a deep suspicion of Soviet communist involvement.”²⁷ Although a highly valuable work, Jones’ book is lacking in information from American sources on the ground in Greece prior to the few months before the formulation of the Truman doctrine.

In the spring of 2000, John O. Iatrides and Nicholas X. Rizopoulos together penned “The International Dimension of the Greek Civil War,” an article which asserts that, although the traditional view of looking at the war in terms of sustained communist “rounds” inaccurately blamed the communists for hostilities in Greece, there indeed were three “phases” to the war. But the authors claim that each phase was “distinct in the sense that each had its specific domestic and international realities, its own immediate causes and dynamic, and, to a large extent, its own cast of characters.”²⁸ The article examines the international aspect of all three phases of the war and surveys British, Soviet, and American intentions and actions in Greece. The authors also show the extent of both British and American involvement in controlling Greek politics in their respective phases. Summing up their findings, Iatrides and Rizopoulos strongly assert that, “we now know – with a high degree of certainty – that, for his own good reasons, Stalin did *not*, in fact, encourage or significantly assist the Greek communists at any stage during the years 1942-1949.”²⁹ But the authors do concede that, without British and U.S. intervention, the Greek communists “would have turned Greece into (at best) a Titoist ‘worker’s paradise.’”³⁰

²⁷ Howard Jones, “*A New Kind of War: America’s Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5.

²⁸ John O. Iatrides and Nicholas X. Rizopoulos, “The International Dimension of the Greek Civil War,” *World Policy Journal* 17, no. 1 (Spring, 2000), 88..

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

In 2005, Iatrides shifted the focus of his studies to American involvement in the Greek civil war by surveying George F. Kennan's analysis of Russian motives in the post-WWII era and by showing how his analysis related to American intervention in Greece. In "George F. Kennan and the Birth of Containment: The Greek Test Case," Iatrides shows how, despite perceptions in Washington at the time, for Stalin, "Greece was a marginal battle in the emerging Cold War that he had not initiated but that he would have liked to win so long as it did not put at risk his newly acquired empire in Eastern Europe." Conversely, for the Americans, the Greek civil war "served as the first test of a grand strategy – to oppose what they perceived as Soviet expansion – which they were anxious to launch and determined to win."³¹ Iatrides emphasized that even before Kennan's broad analysis of Soviet intentions, "a yet-to-be-defined strategy of a more 'muscular response' to perceived Soviet challenges was already taking shape" when Harry Truman assumed the presidency in April 1945.³² Essentially, Kennan's analysis strengthened those suspicions.³³ In light of this fact, Iatrides claims that the Greek civil war and the Truman doctrine were fundamentally linked to one another because civil war in Greece "without any doubt helped trigger the Truman Doctrine" and "put to the test...Kennan's initial formulation of the policy of containment." The author suggests that the Truman Doctrine was both a success and a failure, claiming that, in military terms of blocking the Soviets, it "certainly contributed in keeping Greece outside the Iron Curtain." While on the other hand, "as an agent of major

³¹ John O. Iatrides, "Kennan and the Birth of Containment: The Greek Test Case," *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 3 (Fall, 2005), 141.

³² *Ibid.*, 128.

³³ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

institutional reform and democratization... [it] proved ineffective.”³⁴ This article is of tremendous importance because it seeks to converge the study of the formulation of American policy in Greece vis-à-vis events on the ground there.

The analysis of the preceding historical developments demonstrates that historian’s views of the civil war and its dynamics have changed drastically from the 1950s to the present time. While arguments about the intentions of Greek communists are still part of the contemporary discourse, in the international realm, historical consensus has mostly been reached regarding the lack of Soviet involvement in the conflict.

During the Greek Civil War (1943-1949), United States intelligence and diplomatic resources reported to policy makers in Washington that there was no evidence which linked Greek communist activities to the Soviet Union, nor could they find any evidence that showed an attempt by the Soviets to foment armed insurrection by the Greek Communist Party. The situation was probed time and again, but American resources in the field had mostly discounted Soviet involvement there from 1943-1946.

Existing evidence suggests that Moscow’s plans for Eastern Europe worked against the KKE’s progress in Greece from 1943-1947, and that Stalin was willing to use Greek communists as a pawn for a free hand in countries such as Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria towards the end of World War II and into the post-war period. The United States had some idea of this. Although there was no actual proof that the Soviets controlled the Greek communists or desired Greece in their security belt, the British, and subsequently the United States were unwilling to bet on this,

³⁴ Ibid., 143.

and were willing to use any means necessary to ensure that Greece stayed out of the sphere of Soviet influence.

By 1946, Soviet actions in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria, and their stated interest in the Turkish Straits led U.S. policymakers to believe it was inevitable that Greece was next in line for Soviet strategic and expansionist policies - albeit with no intelligence that explicitly proved this. Together, the administration and Congress worked on a plan that would allow the administration the ability to mobilize public support for extensive aid to the Greek and Turkish governments. The public campaign was successful and led to unprecedented economic and military aid to Greece by the summer of 1947.

Certain issues however, are in need of further clarification. The first issue concerns the relationship between the formulation of the Truman Doctrine and the developments in Greece: what was the evidence upon which President Truman built his case on developments in Greece and Soviet aims there? Did his views reflect a consensus among intelligence sources, diplomats, and the State Department? Was policy toward Greece based on a massive intelligence failure that provided an unclear picture of the situation, or was this a case of a conscientious manipulation of American public opinion by the President, designed to gain support for broader international initiatives based on the global situation? Another issue that requires additional clarification is that of the similarities of British and American policy in 1940s Greece.

Studies on the Greek civil war have noticeably lacked in their attention to the genesis of American involvement in the conflict, and studies on the formation of the Truman doctrine either gloss over the pre-Doctrine events in Greece, or hold the “traditionalist” interpretation of the Greek civil war. Also lacking are studies that compare British and American practices towards

Greece during the civil war. My thesis is an attempt to bridge the gap that exists between the historiographies of the Greek civil war and the formation of the Truman Doctrine. It also purports to trace continuity between British and American policy.

In this thesis, I will argue that U.S. policy on civil war Greece gradually shifted from non-involvement to massive intervention based not on evidence from the field that pointed to Soviet involvement in the conflict, but rather, the perceptions of Soviet actions in Eastern Europe. Additionally, it will be argued that once the United States became involved in Greece, their policy reflected a striking similarity to previous British policy there, which consistently tolerated right-wing violence and a corrupt Greek government, and continuously attempted to hide their level of involvement in Greece's political affairs.

In my primary source research, I have relied mostly on the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series published by the United States Department of State, years 1941-1949.³⁵ This source presents the official documented record of U.S. foreign policy and the diplomatic activity of the United States. The *Foreign Relations* volumes contain documents from presidential libraries, the Departments of State and Defense, the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Agency for International Development, Congressional and Senate hearings, and other foreign affairs agencies as well as the private papers of individuals involved in formulating U.S. foreign policy.

It was also determined necessary to obtain access to reports from the United States intelligence network during the period under review. Although I was unable to access these

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers*, (Washington D.C: GPO) (Hereafter cited as *FRUS*).

records from the National Archives, I was still able to view some of the most important reports from operatives in the field thanks to Richard Clogg's compilation of primary sources titled, *Greece 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War – A Documentary History* which includes reports from the United States Office of Strategic Services, (OSS), the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency.³⁶ These records are important because they provide information on how diplomats and leaders received their information from operatives in the field.

In the following, I present developments in Greece in both their domestic and international contexts, as well as British and American perceptions of them. My account is developed, for the most part, chronologically. Chapter one is a succinct explanation of Greece's pre-World War II domestic issues leading up to the occupation of the country and traces the rise of the Greek communists. It also concisely highlights the international situation towards the end of World War II. In order to understand British policy and highlight its aspects that were similar to America's subsequent efforts in Greece, chapters two and three focus on events on the ground there, the handling of the situation by the British, American views of that British involvement, and American perceptions of Soviet involvement in the Greek conflict. Chapter four focuses on the differences in perceptions from Washington and by American officials in Greece regarding Soviet involvement there, and the process in which American sources in Greece adjusted their reports to the changing moods in the U.S. capital. It additionally focuses on similarities between British and American involvement.

³⁶ Richard Clogg, eds., *Greece 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War – A Documentary History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

CHAPTER ONE: DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE GREEK CIVIL WAR

This chapter surveys both the Greek domestic and broader international situations prior to the outbreak of civil war in Greece. It argues that preconditions of the civil war lay in decades of political instability that had been building in the country since World War I. It also shows how the international developments pit two super powers in a perceived ideological stance against one another.

Domestic Background:

Prior to World War II, Greece had not been a model of political or national harmony. The political divisions inherent in Greece stemmed from the World War I era when much of Greece's population was divided over whether to support the monarchy and join the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and the Ottomans) or the Triple Entente (Britain, France, and Russia). A very small majority of popular opinion resided on the support of the latter, and found its hero in liberal republican politician Eleftherios Venizelos; but a considerable portion of Greeks still remained loyal to the monarch. The rift became defined in terms of the liberal republican left versus the monarchist right, and by the time World War I was over, the relative pre-war political stability that Greece had enjoyed was replaced by bitter divisions that would last for generations. This split is commonly referred to in Greece as the "National Schism."

A new organization also arrived on the Greek political scene during the first half of the 20th century, as the Greek communist party (KKE) made their first significant political appearance in Greek politics during the early part of 1936. While the left-leaning Venizelists and their anti-Venizelist foes jockeyed for political power, King George II of Greece made an attempt (under British pressure) to reign as a constitutional monarch and restore some semblance of collaborative government. By his orders, elections were held in January 1936. The results were a practical deadlock between the Venizelists and anti-Venizelists, with the former holding 142 parliamentary seats, and the later, 143. Neither was able to affect useful government on its own, and in essence, the government had reached a state of paralysis that created fear, frustration, and anger throughout Greek society. Most of Greece's social classes called for action as discontent with the government was widespread. Greece's small industrial proletariat shocked Greece with a wave of strikes during the spring of 1936, and in the January elections, they had 15 members of the communist party elected to parliament. Subsequently, neither the Venizelists or anti-Venizelists could attain any majority, or get anything done without the support of the communists.³⁷

In August 1936, as economic, social, and political discontent in Greece reached a breaking point, King George II, in preparation for rumored labor strikes, placed General Ioannis Metaxas as dictator. Metaxas subsequently instituted a broad policy of right-wing terror in order to quash the discontented left-wing and take back control of Greece in the midst of the chaotic political climate. The ferocity with which he instituted the suppression of dissenters of all

³⁷ G.M. Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British policy in Greece 1944-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 4

political persuasions, but especially of socialists and communists, created solidarity within the left that was eventually capitalized on by the KKE.³⁸

In October 1940, fascist Italy demanded that Greece surrender to its army, a request that was denied by the Greek dictator who on the spot exclaimed “Ohi!” (No!). Subsequently, Italy attempted to invade Greece, but was surprisingly pushed back into Yugoslavia by Greek military and voluntary forces.³⁹

The Greek success in fighting off the Italian invaders ensured that Hitler’s war machine would be needed to smash the Greek state, which it did with the help of its Bulgarian allies in April 1941.⁴⁰ The official Greek government - including the king - fled Greece to Turkey, then to Crete, and finally to Cairo until the war was over. The question of the monarch’s return after war’s end was one that would help inflame the already growing political tensions.⁴¹ A brutally vicious occupation by Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria ensued.

After the Greek government had fled the country, numerous Greek resistance forces were formed in the midst of the occupation; the most popular and effective of which was the National Liberation Front (EAM). By 1944, EAM was by far the leading resistance group in Greece, with an estimated 2 million followers and an army of about 50,000 armed soldiers.⁴² Although it was

³⁸ David Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War* (London: Longman Group, 1995), 50; George Mavrogordatos, “The 1940s Between Past and Future,” in John O. Iatrides and Linda Wrigley, eds., *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and its Legacy*, (London: University Park, 1995), 31-32.

³⁹ Alexander, *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 53.

⁴⁰ The Greek victory over the Italians had profound consequences for the Axis powers. It marked the first victory against the Axis powers, and some historians claim that it may even have affected the entire outcome of the war by forcing Hitler’s armies to postpone operation Barbarossa-the invasion of the Soviet Union.

⁴¹ King George II stayed in London after the Greek government in exile returned to Greece in October 1944, and remained there until called back by plebiscite in September 1946.

⁴² John Newsinger, “Churchill, Stalin, and the Greek Revolution,” *Monthly Review* 26, no. 11 (April 1999), 49.

comprised of a broad base of Greeks from many political persuasions, many of EAM's controlling elites were members of the KKE. Communists were at an advantage in this period, best suited to excel in occupation conditions because conspiratorial activity was not something new to its leaders. Many Greeks were disillusioned with the parties of the extreme right, the conservative parties, and the exiled Greek government, and saw no harm in collaborating with the communists. To many Greeks the communists and EAM had shown themselves to be "courageous and daring opponents to the Axis" and they were doubtlessly impressed by the Western Powers' alliance with the Soviet Union.⁴³

Other resistance bands existed in Greece during the early 1940s, such as the right-wing National Democratic Hellenic League (EDES), which gave its allegiance to Greece's exiled king, but had followers on a much smaller scale, with armed combatants estimated at about ten-thousand. EAM and EDES not only harassed the foreign occupiers in early 1940s Greece, but also each other in an attempt to assert political power in what would surely be a devastated nation once the war was over. During the occupation, each group was supplied with military support from the allies, mostly from the British, who had historically propped up Greece since her independence from the Ottoman's in 1831.⁴⁴ The British deemed Greece as vital to the strategic and imperial aims of the English empire which included a water route to the Suez Canal, and the southern Balkan corridor into the Middle East oil supply.

⁴³ Alexander, *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 7.

⁴⁴ Russia and France were also instrumental in helping Greece gain independence from the Ottomans in 1831. And in 1939 Britain had guaranteed Greece's borders.

The Rise of the KKE and the National Liberation Front

Along with most of the left in Greece, the KKE was neutralized by the repressive Metaxas regime from 1936 to 1941. Eighteen years before the dictatorship, the Greek Communist Party had been formed in 1918 in the wake of the October revolution in Russia. After the Italian invasion and German occupation however, the Greek communists evolved from a static unit into the core of the most cohesive and dynamic wartime resistance movement.⁴⁵ The organization was comprised of political progressives; intellectuals, professors, and writers from the organization spread “civilization” to the countryside. Along with them came hospitals, literacy, and education. EAM also integrated women into its movement, a demographic that had been completely marginalized in Greece historically. By the end of 1943, EAM had liberated much of the countryside from German control, and enjoyed support from the masses in the cities as well as the countryside.⁴⁶

EAM had initially gained popularity in Greece during the resistance against the Italian invaders and later on for its ability to liberate areas outside the cities. Additionally, people in occupied cities were excited about the rumors of areas freed from occupation by EAM. Logistical successes also helped the prestige of EAM and its armed wing ELAS which started out as a force of 300 bandits but eventually boasted numbers of up to fifty-thousand soldiers.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ John O. Iatrides, “Revolution or Self-Defense? Communist Goals, Strategy, and Tactics in the Greek Civil War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 no. 3 (2005), 5.

⁴⁶ John Newsinger, “Churchill, Stalin,” 49.

⁴⁷ Gallant, *Modern Greece*, 168.

At the end of 1943, EAM/ELAS held the majority of support in the countryside as well as the towns, and support was overwhelming in the working-class districts of Athens.⁴⁸ The Germans initially had trouble in setting up a puppet government in Greece due to the effective resistance organizations, but by April 1943, as they had done in France and Spain, they created a collaborationist puppet government in Greece under Greek General Ioannis Rallis. The Rallis government employed many of Greece's right-wing politicians, military leaders, and much of Greece's "old guard" in government positions. They also created an armed wing in the winter of 1943 known as the Security Battalions.⁴⁹ As early as the end of 1943, while the Allied victory was still not a foregone conclusion, the British would consider harnessing the Security Battalions as a check to EAM/ELAS power. By October of 1944, with the exception of Athens, nearly all of Greece was under the control of the resistance group EAM which boasted the support of about half the population of Greece.⁵⁰

Global Context:

The prestige gained by the United States and the Soviet Union due to their war efforts and glorious victories foreshadowed a bipolar conflict that would mark the beginning of half a century of animosity between the two superpowers. As World War II was in its closing stages

⁴⁸ Newsinger, "Churchill, Stalin," 49.

⁴⁹ Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Greek Civil War in Retrospect," *Correspondence: An International Review of Culture and Society* 4 (1999), 10-11

⁵⁰ Kalyvas, "The Greek Civil War in Retrospect," 10; for popular support of EAM, see also Lawrence S. Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

and the allies were heading toward victory, Britain's influence in the eastern Mediterranean was waning. A devastated, war-torn Europe and Asia needed to be rebuilt physically, politically, and economically. Popular communist movements challenged traditional political structures in many countries that had been affected by the war, most notably in China, Italy, France, Yugoslavia, and Greece.

In terms of human sacrifice, the Soviet Union suffered exponentially more than any other allied power with casualties roughly estimated at 27 million. Human sacrifice, combined with the historical threat of the invasion of Russia from the outside led Soviet policymakers to form security of its borders through "buffer states" as one of its major concerns.⁵¹ America, who looked to take Britain's place among the world's strongest nations, was fast becoming the leading county to symbolize representative democracy and political freedom throughout the world in contrast to its totalitarian Soviet counterpart.

⁵¹ American Secretary of State James Byrnes in October 1945 recognized the Soviet desire for security and proclaimed that the U.S. could not and would not "deny to other nations the right to develop such a policy as the Monroe Doctrine... We have sympathized with... the Soviet Union... to draw into closer... association with her Central and East European neighbors. We are fully aware of her special security interests in these countries. And U.S. Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson in a November 1945 speech noted that "We understand and agree with them [the Russians] that to have friendly governments along their borders is essential for the security of the Soviet Union." For more information see Brian Thomas, "Cold War Origins II," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no.1 (Jan., 1968).

CHAPTER TWO: ALLIED VIEWS ON DEVELOPMENTS IN GREECE FROM OCCUPATION TO EAM/ELAS DEFEAT (1942-1945)

This chapter surveys the events from 1942-1944 which led to the withdraw of German troops from Greece. It argues that there existed a growing hostility towards EAM/ELAS in British governing circles, that the British showed an outright preference for right-wing groups over the Greek-left, and that the British considered using wartime collaborators as a check to EAM/ELAS power. It also argues that Americans were generally critical of how the British handled the Greek situation during this period, even though British officials repeatedly tried to persuade the United States to come to their line of thinking in Greece.

The Germans entered northern Greece in April 1941 and by May most of Greece was in the beginning stages of a brutally oppressive occupation. By September 1941, the resistance groups that had formed inside Greece were complicating Hitler's plans. Published American documents during this phase show no mention of any resistance groups nor their makeup, possibly because the U.S. had not officially joined the war until the very end of 1941 and stayed relatively out of the European sphere until the end of 1943.

In the modern period, Britain had played the role of dominant power in the eastern Mediterranean, while also assuming responsibility for the defense of Greece. By World War I, Britain could claim to be the single major external force in Greek affairs. In November 1942, EAM/ELAS, with the help of the British, scored a major blow against German supply lines through Greece with the destruction of the Gorgopotamos Bridge, a major link in the German supply line route for German General Erwin Rommel's troops in Africa. Official U.S. documents

from the State Department as well as other intelligence outlets make no mention of the Greek success in this operation, nor of those who played a role in it, most likely because American resources were focused on theaters of war considered more important, such as the war in the Pacific. Also important to note, is that the Americans did not send significant intelligence resources into Greece until late in 1943. When the Americans started to survey events in Greece, their interest was comprised mostly of monitoring how the British were handling the situation.

Although the U.S. had only a small number of diplomats in Greece prior to the German occupation, the British sent vast amounts of correspondence regarding the Greek situation to the U.S. State Department. One of the central issues below is whether and to what extent the Americans trusted the British assessments of the situation in Greece. Based on the evidence at hand, it is clear that neither policymaking elites in Washington, nor their counterparts in the field trusted the British line. Nevertheless, the U.S. did eventually gain information through their own diplomatic presence. Around 200 U.S. officers from the OSS went into Greece starting in September of 1943, compared to 400 British officers of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), who entered the country the year before.⁵²

⁵² Close, *The Origins*, 103; The Special Operations Executive (SOE) was covert military organization of the British during WWII.

English and American Views of Developments in Greece, and British Policy There (April 1941

– February 1944)

EAM/ELAS had mass support among Greece's population during the occupation. But despite all of the aspects that endeared EAM/ELAS to much of the Greek population, the organization could not escape the one designation that made it impossible for the British, and especially Winston Churchill to support them: the fact that many known communists were in high positions in the organization played a large part in the refusal of the British to support them. To Churchill, accepting inclusion of EAM into the Greek government would be tantamount to giving Greece to the Soviets. But by 1943, EAM/ELAS had emerged as the most formidable opponent to British visions of a friendly ally in post-war Greece.⁵³ It seems that towards the end of 1942, the British became aware that their military and political interests were pulling in opposite directions; for the wartime effort demanded the use of EAM/ELAS for their exceptional resistance activities, yet long-term political concerns required some sort of counter to growing communist power.⁵⁴

In May 1943, British officials showed their anxieties at the prospects of a government in Greece headed by EAM. British Deputy Director of Military Intelligence Colonel T. Thornton after having surveyed these prospects, concluded:

⁵³ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 8-9. The ideal form of Greek government for the British would have been a constitutional monarch that would remain friendly to British interests in Greece.

⁵⁴ Mazower, *After the War Was Over*, 5.

Our aim in Greece is to prepare an efficient force ready to co-operate with us in the re-occupation of the country and the installment of a stable government. EAM cannot be relied on to give us such co-operation.⁵⁵

The admission by Thornton showed a growing trend of disdain for the leftist EAM amongst the British, quite possibly due to lingering suspicions about its communist leadership.

The British, and more specifically, Winston Churchill gave King George II unfettered support from the outset. In Britain's best case scenario, Greece would become a constitutional monarchy, run by the elite, which would guarantee close relations between the two countries and secure British interests. According to Winston Churchill, the king had remained a loyal ally against Axis aggressions. That the king had previously aligned himself with the right-wing dictatorship of General Metaxas in 1936 was not held against him by the British, for some believed that the conduct of Greece's political leaders left him no choice but to tighten his control on the country through Metaxas' dictatorship.⁵⁶

The British and Churchill were willing to do whatever it took to guarantee that Greece would not fall under communist influence, even if it meant supporting groups who collaborated with the enemy *during* the war. At the beginning of 1943, the British began to treat preferentially, the rivals of EAM/ELAS. As early as March 1943, the British were able to get right-wing resistance groups EDES and the National/Social Liberation Movement (EKKA) to pledge their support to the Greek monarch, regardless of the fact both organizations were

⁵⁵ Hondros, John L. "'Too Weighty a Weapon': Britain and the Greek Security Battalions, 1943-1944," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 15, (1988), 33
[http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/5504/Hondros_15_1-2\(A\).pdf?sequence=1](http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/5504/Hondros_15_1-2(A).pdf?sequence=1)

⁵⁶ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 9.

“havens for right-wing officers and gendarmes.”⁵⁷ In March 1943, Churchill sent a cable to the British Minister of State in Cairo, that stated, “subject to operational necessity, [the SOE] should always veer in the direction of groups willing to support the king.”⁵⁸

But Churchill’s respect and support for the king was not shared by the Greeks themselves. Greek opposition to the return of the king was widespread throughout Greece. Early in 1943, with the goal of polling Greek attitudes toward the post-occupation restoration of the king, Britain sent a military mission into the mountains of Greece. The findings of the mission showed an almost universal opposition to the restoration of the Greek monarch; these attitudes were formed by the 1936 installation of the Metaxas regime that was more closely affiliated ideologically with Nazism and Fascism than republicanism.⁵⁹

Initially, the British Foreign Office and Churchill discounted the findings on the assumption that Greece’s political appetite for republicanism had been squashed by the Metaxas dictatorship. But British assumptions started to change in mid-1943 when their ambassador to the Greek government-in-exile (GIE) Reginald Leeper visited Cairo in July for discussions with the GIE cabinet. Leeper found that republicanism was still a strong force in Greek politics, and he surmised that the British desire for a restoration of the monarchy could not come without some sort of compromise. He subsequently convinced Churchill and the Foreign Office that the king needed to try to appease the republican wave in Greece, and at the behest of the British, King George II agreed that six months after Greece was liberated a plebiscite would be held and the

⁵⁷ Close, *Origins*, 102; Thanasis D. Sfikas, “The People at the Top Can Do These Things, Which Others Can’t Do”: Winston Churchill and the Greeks, 1940-45,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26, no. 2 (April, 1991), 313.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Sfikas, “The people at the Top,” 313.

⁵⁹ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 10.; Sfikas, “The People at the Top”, 311.

results respected on the subject of the structure of the Greek government. The issue to be decided was whether Greece would become a republic or remain a monarchy.⁶⁰

The question of how to structure the GIE was not the only issue that concerned the British. By 1943, EAM/ELAS held prominent positions in Greece and the expansion of their influence in mid-1943 led to increasing tensions between EAM and other resistance organizations. A British officer remarked in May 1943 that “a state of undeclared war [existed] between ELAS and EDES...with each side constantly arresting the other’s members.”⁶¹ ELAS officers began dissolving rival resistance bands around this time in order to monopolize the resistance movement. The skirmishes were temporarily halted for roughly four months by the British-negotiated National Bands Agreement of July 1943, the aim of which, was to ensure that all resistance forces participate in a joint headquarters in order to coordinate resistance against the Germans.⁶²

But despite the National Bands Agreement, EAM/ELAS was confident of their popularity and hold over the resistance movement in Greece and felt the GIE would eventually have no choice but to include them into a government of national unity; EAM constantly applied pressure to the government and the British for this aim. The British had enough foresight to bring representatives of the resistance units, including EAM, to Cairo in August 1943 in order to have talks with the GIE, headed by Prime Minister Emmanuel Tsouderos at the time. Leading the visit, was the head of the British military mission to the Greek mountains, Brigadier E.C.

⁶⁰ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 10.

⁶¹ Quoted in Close, *The Origins*, 102.

⁶² Gallant, *Modern Greece*, 170.

Meyers. Meyers was aware of both the importance of the issues at hand and the tensions between the GIE and resistance organizations, and told his superiors to consider that the “future of Greece may be bound up with [the] forthcoming visit, but we have it in our power to prevent civil war.”⁶³ The issues at hand were to focus on re-making the GIE cabinet as a coalition which included the participation of EAM, and also to obtain a statement that the king would not return to Greece until the issue had been decided by a national plebiscite. But just as the Greek Prime Minister and his cabinet members were on the verge of agreement to these terms, Churchill, aware of what was about to happen, cut off the talks and sent EAM representatives back to Greece. The leaders of EAM were humiliated by such treatment and upon their return looked to secure their position in Greece.

Historians view this sequence events as a major turning point in British-EAM relations as it led EAM/ELAS to come to the conclusion that the British intended to eventually impose the monarch on Greece and that they were intent on disabling leftist resistance groups in favor of their right-wing rivals.⁶⁴ After the talks in Cairo failed to comply with the requests of the resistance groups in Greece, as David Close points out, “The Communist leaders were now convinced that the British were ready to use ruthless measures to destroy them.” Subsequently, EAM/ELAS embarked upon a course of disbanding all other resistance groups to ensure their supremacy in the country.⁶⁵

⁶³ E.C.W. Meyers, *Greek Entanglement* (London: Rupert-Hartt Davis, 1955), 149.

⁶⁴ Iatrides, “Revolution or Self-Defense,” 9.; Close, *The Origins*, 104.; Gallant, *Modern Greece*, 170.

⁶⁵ Close, *The Origins*, 105.

The first acts of civil war commenced in October 1943 with EAM/ELAS attacking their rivals; their goal however, was to dissolve EDES bands rather than to rack up high fatalities. C.M. Woodhouse, the newly installed leader of the British Military Mission wrote on October 19 that the “fighting has been fierce and noisy, but the casualties very small.”⁶⁶ This phase of fighting lasted until the British negotiated a ceasefire known as the Plaka Agreement of February 1944, which was intended to cease hostilities, combine resistance forces against the Axis enemy, and to place all resistance forces under the command of the GIE. In reality, it amounted merely to a temporary reduction of conflict.⁶⁷

The British informed the United States of happenings in Greece toward the end of 1943 and informed them of their plans to negotiate the cease-fire. As an Aide-Memoire from the British Embassy to the U.S. Department of State from December of 1943 shows, British officials intended to manipulate the information on the Greek situation reaching American officials in order to keep them in line with British thinking. The document also shows the British increasingly leaned toward toleration of EAM’s adversaries in order to keep the organization marginalized in the Greek political sphere. Without any mention whatsoever of EDES’ growing collaborationist ties in Greece, (a fact known in all British circles at the time), the letter opened with the statement, “In view of the Civil War started in Greece by the E.A.M-E.L.A.S.” and provided no earlier context of the situation.⁶⁸ The purpose of these statements might have been to persuade its readers against the leftist EAM by assigning blame to them for the civil war. The

⁶⁶ C.M. Woodhouse to the British Foreign Office, quoted in Close, *The Origins*, 106.

⁶⁷ Close, *The Origins*, 113.

⁶⁸ British Embassy to the Department of State, 22 December 1943, *FRUS*, 1943, IV: 160-162.

letter informed the Americans of the soon-to-be proposed terms of the Plaka Agreement, and showed British awareness that they needed to manipulate the situation to one that justified the support of right-wing resistance bands in order to counter EAM/ELAS.

The British were up-front with the Americans in explaining to them how they might try to politically maneuver EAM into a corner. They informed the Americans of how they intended to construct an agreement that would favor the right-wing groups, but leave the appearance of impartiality. One portion of the letter noted that because of this policy, it would appear that “His Majesty’s Government will avoid any direct responsibility of taking sides in Greek [internal] affairs.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, British intentions were transparent in taking sides, as were their anxieties towards appearances. The British plan was to neutralize EAM/ELAS and propose a plan that was “practically impossible for ELAS to refuse. If ELAS [did] refuse, the help given to Zervas will be justified to the full, whilst the authority of ELAS leaders will at the same time be undermined.”⁷⁰ EAM/ELAS in February 1944 did agree to the above provisions which eventually formed the Plaka Agreement, but they did not give up control over their armed wing.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Napoleon Zervas was the leader of the right-wing resistance group EDES, who favored a return of the monarch.

High-Handed British Actions and American Perceptions of Foreign Intervention in Greece

(December 1943 – September 1944)

American intelligence was starting to form its own opinions on the Greek situation in late 1943. The first significant American reports from Greece focused on British and Soviet involvement in the Greek conflict. In December of 1943, Charles Edson of the OSS Research and Analysis Branch wrote from Cairo to Washington about British management of the Greek situation, the exiled Greek government, the two major resistance groups EAM and EDES, and the likelihood of Soviet involvement in Greek affairs. Regarding Soviet involvement in EAM, Edson discounted any connection between Greek communists and the Soviet Union as hearsay. Offering what he called, “An American view of the situation in Greece,” Edson wrote to the analysis branch on how badly the British had mishandled the Greek situation because of their tendency to be “empire builders.” Also of concern to Edson was the fact that the right people were not making the decisions in Greece. Indeed, there were many “informed persons [among the British] who have an intimate understanding...of the Greek situation...but are in subordinate positions...and...their views have been disregarded.”⁷¹ In relation to a Soviet-Greek connection, Edson wrote:

⁷¹ Charles Edson, OSS Research and Analysis Branch, Cairo to Robert Wolff, Head of Balkan Section OSS Research and Analysis Branch, Washington. December 11, 1943, “An American View of the situation in Greece,” in Clogg, *Greece 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War*, 163-166.

I have never seen any real evidence for contact between Russia and the EAM. It is frequently asserted that such contact exists, but the sources for such assertions either cannot be established or, if established, turn out to be downright bad and/or highly suspicious. I have a moral certainty that there is some kind of, probably surreptitious, contact between Russia and EAM, but as I say, there is no evidence, let alone proof, at all.⁷²

Edson's assumption that there was probably some sort of clandestine contact between EAM and the Soviets was a popular sentiment among the British, but proof of cooperation between EAM and the Soviets was elusive and discounted by American intelligence.

While at the beginning of 1944 EAM had continued to enjoy popular support for their resistance activities, the opposite was true for the GIE, whom many in Greece had viewed as stale and useless. Added to this was the already controversial issue of the return of King George II to Greece, which most were opposed to, including the Greek armed forces in the Middle East. As the GIE resided in Cairo, EAM, in control of most of Greece, sought to form an umbrella organization of groups who actually resided in the country with the intent of forming a national unity government. This umbrella organization known as The Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA) was officially formed in March of 1944 and was an organization located in Greece's liberated mountain areas. PEEA enjoyed a great deal of popularity and support as an alternative to the hapless GIE and its formation was clearly a challenge to its authority.⁷³

The creation of PEEA in Greece however, had far-reaching repercussions. While the GIE resided in Cairo during the occupation, the British Royal Navy (RN) worked with the Greek

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Close, *The Origins*, 107.

Royal Hellenic Navy (RHN) whose fleet had retreated to bases in Egypt along with the Greek government during the occupation. As word of the creation of PEEA reached Cairo, many who served in the RHN supported the idea of a government without the British favored monarch, and the idea of including of other groups into a national unity government of Greece. In April of 1944, a mutiny in Greece's RHN occurred, which brought old political issues together with contemporary ones, partly because of the 1916 split between those who favored the monarch and those who favored the republicans and Prime Minister Venizelos.⁷⁴ The strife in 1916, as it had done to most of Greece's population, divided the RHN into 2 competing factions that pitted royalists against republicans from that year on, and constant changes in leadership tilted the odds to favor whichever political entity had power at the time, with both sides purging officers of different political persuasions.⁷⁵

In April 1944, Greek crews refused British orders to sail, as Greek naval crews protested the British and the GIE's reluctance to form a national unity government based on PEEA.⁷⁶ Although the GIE had a hard time finding soldiers who would quell the uprising, they eventually suppressed it without the need for interference of British troops. The mutiny caused 7 deaths and 37 injured, most of which were mutineers. When the British investigated the naval mutiny, it was discovered that at least 50 percent of all the crews involved in the mutiny supported it, without pressure.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Mark C. Jones, "Misunderstood and Forgotten: The Greek Naval Mutiny of 1944," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 20, (2002).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 379

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Subsequently, at the insistence of the British, republican and leftist elements of the GIE were purged from the Greek armed forces, leaving the military of the GIE comprised of a “right-wing royalist complexion.”⁷⁸ Greek officers with the help of British officers set out on a course of creating a Greek military that harbored no sympathy towards the left and EAM. The numbers to this effect are staggering, as out of the 18,500 troops that were in the GIE armed forces, 8000 were arrested and interned by the British for the remainder of the war.⁷⁹

British attitudes toward the Greek situation could have influenced the American ambassador to the Greek government in exile Lincoln MacVeagh, who reported inaccurate information on the mutiny in Greece’s navy during 1944. Although no evidence has ever surfaced that shows EAM had knowledge of, or influence in causing the naval mutiny, ambassador MacVeagh commented on the situation on April 14, 1944 by inferring not only that EAM had a hand in the mutiny, but also that possibly the Russians were interested in it. MacVeagh wrote to the U.S. Secretary of State on how GIE officials viewed the events:

Russian interest in the movement, as tending in general to swing the government of Greece to the left, and in particular to bring EAM more powerfully into the picture, is now widely recognized in Greek circles here, owing to the sympathetic attitude of the Soviet Ambassador and the propaganda activities of the Moscow press and radio and is causing some speculation as to how far it will go and whether Russia now aspires to supplant Britain as the dominating foreign power in connection with Greek affairs.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Sfikas, “The people at the Top,” 315.

⁷⁹ Close, *The Origins*, 109.

⁸⁰ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 14 April 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 95-96.

A few days later, a memorandum from Paul Alling, the U.S. Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs to the Secretary of State reiterated MacVeagh's sentiments that the Russians had some sort of interest or involvement in the RHN mutiny. The insinuation of Soviet involvement went a step further when ambassador MacVeagh reported again to the Secretary of State on April 19, that in his conversation with the British commander Reginald Leeper, the commander had suggested that the Soviets had helped instigate the mutiny, and could stop it at any time. MacVeagh reported that Leeper had told him that the Russian influence in the affair was "outrageous" and that "The Russians could stop the trouble in a minute if they would." In the same letter, MacVeagh wrote of how Leeper assumed that Soviet policy elsewhere in Europe and the Middle East had a connection with the mutinous events in Cairo. MacVeagh wrote:

Further, as regards the Russian angle, my colleague expressed the idea that the extent to which Soviet support is being given to this movement suggests a connection with Soviet policies elsewhere in Europe and the Middle East which would appear out of keeping with the spirit of Tehran.⁸¹

This correspondence, although not based on American intelligence, represents a case where British assertions could have influenced American ideas about the Greek situation, American perceptions of the role of EAM in the Greek naval mutiny, and the Soviet role in both.

⁸¹ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 19 April 1944, *FRUS*, V: 101; The Spirit of Tehran as mentioned by MacVeagh refers to the theme of broader international cooperation between the "Big Three" regarding postwar settlements. It's clear in this passage that Leeper was trying to convey that the Russians were not sticking with this agreement if they were fostering uprisings in Cairo among other places.

MacVeagh relayed more imprecise information to the U.S. State Department on April 20, 1944. Reporting on a conversation with new interim Prime Minister of Greece Georgios Papandreou, MacVeagh recalled that Papandreou seemed to validate Leeper's feelings on the tie between the Soviet Union and EAM. MacVeagh wrote that Papandreou had told him that the "EAM has become an instrument for the spreading of the Soviet influence in opposition to the hitherto dominant British throughout this region thus threatening Greece with possible further martyrdom as the crossroads of the powers."⁸²

Reporting on the Russian response to the situation, MacVeagh tended to be very skeptical of the veracity of Russian assertions. Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vyachislav Molotov, professed ignorance of the situation of Greece's naval mutiny, however, MacVeagh dismissed this statement when on May 1, 1944 he wrote to the Secretary of State that "[Molotov's]...profession of ignorance re Greek affairs is similar to Mr. Molotov's statements of last winter which are even harder to believe now than they were then."⁸³ While MacVeagh showed skepticism that the Russians were ignorant of Greek affairs, he did not, however, show a tendency to either validate or deny the claims of Russian involvement in the mutinies.

After the naval mutiny in Egypt, it was clear that many Greeks desired a government that incorporated not only a wider political demographic, but one that included the representatives of the highly popular EAM. The British and Papandreou realized that any Greek coalition

⁸² MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 20 April 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 102-103. Prime Minister Emmanuel Tsouderos, who was seen as a tool for the king, had stepped down after the mutiny in an attempt to appease the left. The king then insisted on installing Georgios Papandreou, a centrist-republican in his place. There are still questions as to why the King supported Papandreou, since he was a republican, but G.M. Alexander suggests in *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, that Papandreou, although a republican, was a staunch anti-communist.

⁸³ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 1 May 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 105.

government needed to include representatives of the left to be considered legitimate to Greece's population and decided to consider including EAM specifically. In May of 1944, under the chairmanship of Greece's newly installed Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou, a conference in Lebanon was convened by representatives of Greece's many political parties in order to hash out an agreement on a government of national unity, with the added intention of bringing ELAS under the military control of the British and the GIE.⁸⁴ For a moment, the agreement looked like a success and promised at least the prospect of peace. Although the "Lebanon Charter" was short lived, EAM was incorporated into this government of 24 ministers, 6 of whom were members of the political resistance group.⁸⁵

Since EAM's representatives at the Lebanon Conference were unable to correspond with their counterparts back in Greece (thanks to British interference), they conceded to the Lebanon Charter without the consultation of their members back in Greece. The "National Contract" conceived of by Papandreou and the British was to effectively put all resistance forces under the control of the GIE and British field General Ronald Scobie. However, the charter also succeeded in securing the promise from the king that he would not return until after a plebiscite. EAM's leaders back in Greece viewed the contract as a too favorable towards the GIE, and immediately refused to accept its terms. In the next few months however, EAM's leaders in Greece did an about-face and agreed to join the Papandreou coalition in July 1944 after likely Soviet pressure to do so. After a Soviet Military Mission to Greece visited EAM/ELAS headquarters in late July 1946 – the first known contact between the Soviets and EAM/ELAS - the latter developed more

⁸⁴ Sfikas, "The people at the Top," 316.

⁸⁵ EAM was able to secure 6 seats in the coalition.

cordial attitudes toward the GIE, and decided to join it. In all likelihood, the Soviet mission probably directed EAM to join the Papandreou government so as to keep in accordance with an agreement being worked out between the British and Soviets on spheres of influence.⁸⁶ EAM joined the Papandreou government in September 1944 under the Caserta Agreement, which defined the resistance army's zones of control and formally placed all ELAS troops under the command of British General Ronald Scobie. But the fact that German withdrawal was in sight foreshadowed a new conflict on the horizon for the Greeks.

Churchill lobbies Roosevelt (April 1944 – June 1944)

Up until mid - 1944, the Americans were mostly concerned that the British were asserting their imperial aspirations and mismanaging Greece, especially when Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin spoke of creating spheres of influence, which the U.S. State Department and Franklin Delano Roosevelt had firmly opposed. Prior to the percentages agreement made by Stalin and Churchill at the Moscow conference in October 1944, the State Department and Roosevelt suspected that Britain and the Soviets were already on this path.

In a series of telegrams to Roosevelt and the U.S. Department of State, Churchill made emotional appeals to get the U.S. on the same page as both he and Stalin regarding their plans for carving up Eastern Europe. At the end of May 1944, Churchill wrote Roosevelt asking if the U.S.

⁸⁶ Clogg, *Greece 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War*, 16.; Before the "Percentages Agreement" between Churchill and Stalin was formally agreed upon in an October 1944 meeting between the two, diplomatic representatives of both countries had already come to the same understanding in the summer of 1944.

would “give this proposal [their] blessing.”⁸⁷ On June 10th, acting Secretary of State E.R. Stettinius, skeptical of British plans, wrote to FDR that, “However adroitly the proposed arrangement [between the Soviets and the British] is presented, it seems to really amount to the establishment of spheres of influence, and an attempt to obtain American approval of such a policy.”⁸⁸ President Roosevelt, vehemently against the idea of partitioning Eastern Europe initially rejected such an approval. On June 12, the Department of State wrote to the British Embassy on U.S. objections to such a plan:

The Department firmly believes that the practical and military advantages sought in resorting to plans of this general nature do not counterbalance the evils inherent in such a system. It is consequently unwilling to give the approval of this government to the proposed arrangement.⁸⁹

But Churchill was persistent with the president. Knowing full well that Stalin had no immediate intentions on Greece, specifically because on May 18, 1944, the Soviet ambassador had agreed that the Soviets should “take the lead in Romanian affairs, while we [the British] should take the lead in Greek affairs,” Churchill once again used his political cunning in order to make the situation seem dire. Citing no evidence, Churchill wrote to FDR on June 23rd that, if nothing were to be done, the already unpopular king “would be forced to abdicate, and EAM

⁸⁷ Winston Churchill to Franklin Roosevelt, 31 May 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 114-115.

⁸⁸ E.R. Stettinius Jr. to Roosevelt, 10 June 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 117

⁸⁹ The State Department to the British Embassy, 12 June 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 120.

would work a reign of terror in Greece, forcing villagers and many other classes to form security battalions under German auspices to prevent utter anarchy.” Churchill then went a step further to insinuate knowledge that the Greek communists were bolstered by the Soviets. “The only way I can prevent this,” he wrote, “is by persuading the Russians to quit boosting EAM and ramming it forward with all their force.”⁹⁰ Churchill eventually convinced the President to go along with the “spheres of influence”, the latter being under the impression that the agreement would be temporary measure.⁹¹ The back and forth between Churchill and Roosevelt was likely a very influential factor in determining early views in Washington of EAM, the KKE, and Soviet involvement, but those views failed to elicit any concerned response by American policymakers.

British Options for EAM Counterweight and the Americans Perception of the Situation (May 1944 – September 1944).

By the last quarter of 1944, it was clear that German withdrawal from Greece was on the horizon. Rather than coming together and creating a unified government, however, both EAM/ELAS and EDES seemingly concluded that fighting the Germans was an unnecessary waste of resources. The deep mistrust of both groups toward each other inevitably ensured that hostilities would resume upon Axis withdrawal. Adjacent to this was Churchill’s stubborn desire to re-install the Greek king at any cost. To combat the possibility that EAM might take control in

⁹⁰ Churchill to Roosevelt, 23 June 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 126.

⁹¹ Clogg, Greece 1940-1949: *Occupation, Resistance, Civil War*, 14.

the power vacuum left by the retreating Germans, the British went so far as to consider incorporating the Greek Security Battalions - a collaborationist force created by the Germans under General Ioannis Rallis - into the new Greek armed forces in order to keep a pro-British, non-communist government in Greece. The prospect of siding with quisling Greeks, who were in essence “doing the work of the Germans” was not an easy decision for British policy-makers, but because of their fears of EAM power and a firm determination keep EAM from influencing the Greek government, they likely felt it was their only option. In any case, it became clear that as far as Churchill was concerned, the Greeks who collaborated with the Nazi occupiers were preferable to communist-influenced resisters.⁹²

After EAM had repudiated the Lebanon charter in May of 1944, but before their subsequent agreement to join the Papandreou government, the British contemplated breaking ties with EAM/ELAS and denouncing them publicly. But the new head of the British Military Mission in Greece, General C.M. Woodhouse advised Churchill and Eden against doing either. On June 21st, Woodhouse explained that if a break with EAM/ELAS were to occur, the British would have to rely on the Security Battalions in Greece; a prospect that would not help make the British or the GIE popular in Greece or in public opinion abroad. Until the matter was decided though, Woodhouse argued that the door should be left open to the security battalions.⁹³ In April of 1944, Woodhouse’s subordinate and next in command, Tom Barnes presented his judgment on the situation and suggested to his superiors in Cairo that he “[felt] certain that they [the

⁹² Newsinger, “Churchill, Stalin, and the Greek Revolution,” 48.

⁹³ Hondros, “Too Weighty a Weapon,” 37.

Security Battalions] [would] be wholeheartedly on the side of any Allied invasion force.”⁹⁴ This assertion is astonishing considering that the Security Battalions were the creation of the Germans and the quisling Greek government during the German occupation, and that Greece was still in the midst of that occupation. Barnes proposed to tread carefully and act with discernment:

Hence, although they are admittedly doing the work of the Germans, I think we should avoid publically denouncing them in such terms that the way to later reconciliation is irrevocably closed. There are good and bad among these Rallis battalions.⁹⁵

This predicament the British found themselves in was evident in the Political Intelligence Paper dated June 18, 1944 from British Deputy Director of Military Intelligence Captain D. Barrett to the Foreign Office. The paper accentuated the British dilemma in confronting EAM and the Security Battalions, and presented several options and their possible consequences. Transparent in the document was the British determination to leave no option off the table:

⁹⁴ Tom Barnes to the British Embassy in Cairo, quoted in Hondros, “Too Weighty a Weapon,” 37.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

1. Britain could encourage the state of equilibrium between EAM/ELAS and the Security Battalions, (which the report concluded would result in the continuation of the "bitter feud)."

2. Britain could give full support to EAM/ELAS and denounce the battalions. (The report concluded that this policy would probably result in a short-lived left dictatorship).

3. Britain could "countenance, though tacitly, the Security Battalions and denounce EAM/ELAS as a terroristic minority" which was unwilling to cooperate with the Allies. (This option, the report surmised, would win support inside Greece, but it would "alienate large sections of the international community").

4. Britain could denounce the Security Battalions and the "extremists" of EAM/ELAS, "whose actions enabled the Battalions to be formed." This policy, according to the report, offered the "best prospects" of drawing off the moderates from both sides into a national army.⁹⁶

Some in the U.S. were also willing to consider the support of collaborating units inside Greece as early as April 1944. Intelligence officer Moses Hadad wrote to the head of the Research and Analysis branch of the OSS that the right-wing Security Battalions had become "too weighty a weapon to be disposed of simply because they were creations of the Germans" showing an early willingness for tolerating the extreme Greek right-wing militias who since March, had accompanied German troops in frequently raiding EAM districts in the Athens area.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Barrett to the Foreign Office, quoted in Hondros, "Too Weighty a Weapon," 38.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 35; Close, *The Origins*, 115.

The Caserta Agreement of September 26, 1944 which brought EAM into the GIE gave some hope that the British, the GIE, and the Greek Left could cooperate. This short-lived agreement signed by the British, EAM, and EDES put all resistance groups in Greece under the command of British General Ronald Scobie and prohibited any resistance activity in Athens without specific orders from the British general; it also temporarily characterized the Security Battalions as enemy units. However, members of the quisling Security Battalions would be called upon by the British later on in 1944 and into 1945 as events came to a head in Athens upon German withdrawal.

The Americans, although not involved at this point, were doubtlessly keeping an eye on the situation through their diplomatic presence. Lincoln MacVeagh's diary entry on September 27th shows that the American intelligence and diplomatic presence was fully aware of the broader intricacies of British involvement in the Greece situation, and the significance of that involvement. MacVeagh wrote that "the British operational and liaison groups with which ours collaborate are actively engaged in promoting EDES against ELAS and thus participating to a certain degree in Greek internal strife." MacVeagh also made the astute observation that since the American officials were amongst the British, they too may be seen by the Greeks as involved in supporting ELAS' enemies, and he wrote that American officials, "must inevitably be regarded by the Greeks as involved so long as they remain[ed] with their British counterparts." In the same entry, MacVeagh's written thoughts are transparent regarding his view of British treatment of EAM/ELAS. MacVeagh spoke about rumors that General Scobie had ordered ELAS to keep out of Athens - where the British intended to make their entrance into Greece – and about the response from ELAS that British troops were not needed; MacVeagh wrote that

ELAS' response was "not unnatural, really, since the British have done so little for the Greeks to date, and are now only coming in after the German pull out!"⁹⁸ MacVeagh's insights on the Greek situation (with a few exceptions) joined with U.S. intelligence reports to provide the upper echelons of government a relatively clear picture of the Greek crisis.

German Withdrawal and the Defeat of EAM/ELAS: British Actions and American Reporting
(September 1944 – February 1945)

A major point of contention among early historians of the Greek civil war was the issue of the intentions of EAM and the Greek communists upon liberation from the occupation in October 1944. While the traditional view held that the Greek communists in EAM aimed at an armed seizure of power in December, revisionists claimed that this was not the case because no force inside the country could have stopped EAM from taking power upon German withdrawal in October.⁹⁹ When the GIE entered Greece on October 18 1944, all vital services of the country were controlled by EAM, and in most towns and villages, EAM was essentially the real authority.¹⁰⁰ But EAM did not attempt to take over the government in Athens between the October withdrawal and December 1944. This fact remains a central point in revisionist and post-revisionist interpretations of EAM intentions during the early part of the civil war.

⁹⁸ Lincoln MacVeagh Diary Entry, September 27, 1944 in John O. Iatrides, ed., *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece, 1933-1947* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 609.

⁹⁹ This argument holds a dominating place in the revisionist case.

¹⁰⁰ Close, *The Origins*, 127, 129.

However, armed conflict between EAM, the government forces and the British did occur in early December and lasted until the end of the month. The British stepped up their actions with a sustained campaign against the communists in December, and continued to encourage right-wing groups that vied for their position in the new Greek government, its police, and its armed forces.

The Germans started their withdrawal from Greece in September 1944 in order to avoid being trapped in the Balkan peninsula by the advancing Soviet army who occupied the northern part of it. The last Germans left Greece by October 14. After the Caserta Agreement in late September 1944, despite their requests that the British troops were not needed in Greece, EAM had resigned to the fact that the liberation of Athens would take place under British terms, and subsequently British troops entered Athens on October 15, 1944.¹⁰¹ King George began to press the British to assure his return to Athens. But the British were aware that a return of the king to such a precarious situation so soon after liberation could only raise tensions, and Churchill told the King on October 4 that he could not return until he was called to do so by the new Greek government in Athens. Churchill was by no means reneging on the British promise to return the king to Greece. To the contrary, he most likely wanted to make sure that EAM/ELAS propaganda could not make the claim that the British were imposing the king upon them.¹⁰² Two days later, Churchill cabled Eden that he “certainly had proposed to tell Papandreou that, as soon as he gets established, it is his duty to bring the king back, and that we should certainly use our influence to that end.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 55.

¹⁰² Sfikas, “The people at the Top,” 317-318.

¹⁰³ Churchill to Eden, June 10, 1944, quoted in Sfikas, “The people at the Top,” 318.

The Papandreou cabinet along with General Leeper entered Athens on October 18, 1944 to find Greece in a state of economic collapse due mostly to destruction wreaked by the Axis occupiers. His next objective was to obtain the demobilization of ELAS units in order to strip the Greek communists of their ability to dominate Greek society and politics. Papandreou entered into negotiations with KKE party Chairman at the time, George Siantos, with the hope of disbanding ELAS units. However, negotiations were stalled due to the insistence of Papandreou and the British that the well-known extreme right-wing Mountain Brigades – trained by the British from the remaining armed forces in exile after the April naval mutiny was quelled – be held intact and enter Greece as part of the new armed forces. General Leeper recognized that this might be a point of contention when he commented to the Foreign Office that members of the Mountain Brigades were as extreme in the political views as were the communists. However, he added that he was confident that they could be restrained by British General Ronald Scobie.¹⁰⁴

But Papandreou initially turned a deaf ear to Siantos' request that the Mountain Brigades stay out of the capital, and with General Scobie's consent, made plans for them to enter Athens in early November 1944. Most likely, EAM's suspicions of British intents were in their view coming to fruition, as on November 8, 1944, the Mountain Brigades indeed entered Athens. The communists feared that the use of these units again foreshadowed the British installation of the Greek monarch and the second coming of the events of the Metaxas dictatorship of 1936. Even some British officers could see these events as needlessly provoking tensions. British officer C.M. Woodhouse advised against bringing in the Mountain Brigades, seeing it as "the most

¹⁰⁴ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 70.

important single factor contributory to the loss of faith by EAM/ELAS.”¹⁰⁵ The communists argued that if ELAS bands had to disband, then so too should the royalist units, who would surely be a threat to anyone with leftist sympathies.

After the arrival of the Mountain Brigades in Athens, it seems as if Papandreou suddenly came to understand the severity of the crisis, and in negotiations with the KKE agreed that if ELAS bands would demobilize, the Mountain Brigades would be sent on leave, implying that they were to eventually be disbanded as well. However, Papandreou had to go back on his word, as objections from the British forced his hand; the Mountain Brigades were to remain intact in Greece.¹⁰⁶ Also a point of contention and suspicion for EAM and anyone on the left, was the make-up of a new National Guard which was mobilized on November 24. Upon their mobilization, the Greek Ministry of Defense posted a public list of the officers serving their ranks. Eight of the fourteen battalion commanders had been participants of the German created Security Battalions.¹⁰⁷ Although Papandreou had attempted to reconcile his position with the communists and the right-wing groups in Greece, the British forced his hand and browbeat him to side politically with the far-right, thus alienating him from the communists and even the moderate left.¹⁰⁸

After these events, the communist members of the recently formed coalition government resigned and on December 2, started plans for demonstrations, and a general strike on December 4. The mass demonstrations in Syntagma Square in Athens’ center, which had been rumored to

¹⁰⁵ Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, 215.

¹⁰⁶ Sfikas, “The people at the Top,” 320.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 73; Close, *The Origins*, 132.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

happen, were forbidden by the Papandreou cabinet, but took place nonetheless.¹⁰⁹ As thousands of EAM protestors marched on Syntagma Square on December 3, 1944, a panicked policeman opened fire on the crowd and his colleagues joined in, killing at least 16 people and injuring 60.¹¹⁰ Fighting on the streets of Athens broke out and became fierce once the British joined in on December 6. By now, the British were imposing their will on the main resistance group of an Allied country not only by their political maneuvering, but also by force.

The ELAS was initially hesitant to use force on the British soldiers, partly because in September 1944 they had agreed to be placed under British command in Greece, and partly because of their understanding that Stalin would not back an armed struggle. But ELAS troops took orders from their officers to capture and occupy all police stations in Athens, eventually successfully taking 19 out of 24. This was especially significant since the capture of arms from these positions allowed ELAS to increase its number of armed soldiers from 6,000 to 12,000 in Athens. The arrival of ELAS troops from outside the city had by December 7, 1944 raised the numbers of armed ELAS combatants to about 22,000, compared to only about 10,500 Greek anti-communist forces.¹¹¹ But ELAS' requests for support from the Russians – through Bulgarian communist channels - went unanswered, and British reinforcements to the tune of 75,000 soldiers in Greece by January 1945 greatly outnumbered ELAS. Combined with supplemental Greek National Guard Troops with numbers up to 23,000 (12,000 of which were former collaborationist troops whom the decision to arm was the British's), these were fatal

¹⁰⁹ Some blame the Papandreou government for waiting until too late in the day to issue a statement that no demonstrations would be tolerated by the security forces in Athens.

¹¹⁰ Thomas W. Gallant, *Modern Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 173.

¹¹¹ Close, *The Origins*, 138.

prospects for EAM/ELAS and the communists.¹¹² Hence, it was now the British who supplanted the Germans as the leaders of anti-communists in Greece.

The Americans were not in the dark on the December 1944 events in Greece. U.S. ambassador MacVeagh was up to date and aware of British actions and intentions during the “*Dekemvriana*” as those December events were subsequently dubbed. On December 8, 1944, MacVeagh astutely described the situation in a few words. According to him, this was not a simple conflict of two extremes, but it was much more complicated. The ambassador wrote that “many thousands of patriotic Greeks...[that were] siding with [the] extreme Left [were] undoubtedly doing so because they suspect[ed] that behind the governments actions [layed] an intention to bring back the king and possibly also the hated fascist dictatorship for which they [held] him personally responsible.” MacVeagh also conversely noted that many other patriotic Greeks were equally afraid that the communists were intending to “impose a communist dictatorship” and that “General Scobie [was] concentrating troops including the Greek Mountain Brigade in the center of Athens.” The same day he remarked that he and his British colleague were aware that the British were instigating the fighting by erroneously supporting one side, which, he opined, could only lead to further complications in Greece:

¹¹² Ibid., 139.

I feel certain that the present drastic foreign support being given to one side of local Greek quarrel in which so much genuine patriotic fervor and even fanaticism is enlisted in the other contains little if any hope of furnishing a durable solution unless it can be followed by some such clear proof of genuine impartial interest in the Greek people as a whole.¹¹³

The ambassador's reports were summarized in a memorandum by the Secretary of State to Roosevelt on the developments in Greece. The President took them seriously enough to cable Churchill the next day with suggestions that might help diffuse the situation. Roosevelt recommended another statement from the king that he would not return until called on to do so, and suggested that the Greeks establish a temporary regency that represented the king until the issue of his return could be decided. Additionally, Roosevelt told Churchill that it might be wise to create an agreement to disarm and disband the Mountain Brigades and the famous "Sacred Bands" who were trained by the British and fought with them in the Italian and African campaigns.¹¹⁴ On December 17, 1944 Churchill cabled back to the President that the king would not agree to the appointment of a regent, and again made an emotional appeal to the President that the "disarmament of the Mountain Brigades who took Rimini and Sacred Squadron who had fought so well at the side of the British and American troops would seriously weaken our forces

¹¹³ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 12 December 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 147.

¹¹⁴ Churchill to Roosevelt, 13 December 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 151. The "Sacred Band" was a GIE special forces unit comprised completely of right-wing Greek officers and officer cadets. By 1944, there were about 1000 officers in the Bands. These officers returned to Athens with the GIE and the British in October 1944.

and in any case we could not abandon them to massacre.”¹¹⁵ Churchill subsequently flew to Athens to get a firsthand look at the Greek situation. After seeing the political squabbling and lack of support for the king firsthand, he finally heeded Roosevelt’s advice to consider the appointment of a regency, and was able to convince the king to consent to the appointment of Archbishop Damaskinos as regent in the king’s absence. But on the subject of the dissolution of the Mountain Brigades, Churchill was silent.¹¹⁶

Having lost their position of strength in the capital once British reinforcements arrived, enormously outnumbered, and outclassed militarily, ELAS troops began to withdraw from the capital on January 5, 1945.¹¹⁷ After a month of fighting, peace returned to Athens. A new government was formed on January 3, 1945 with General Nikolas Plastiras, a retired Venizelist republican General as the new Prime Minister. Plastiras immediately made it clear that EAM’s time for negotiating their way into a coalition was over, as were ELAS’ requests for integration into a national army. Plastiras’ view was that “the situation could be put right only by force.”¹¹⁸ The new government was formed at the insistence of the British with no representation from EAM.

The Varkiza Agreement concluded between EAM and the British on February 15, 1945 had ended the hostilities for the moment with promises from ELAS to disband, and promises by the Greek government to grant amnesty to those who laid down their arms, to build a democracy,

¹¹⁵ Churchill to Roosevelt, 17 December 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, V: 159-160.

¹¹⁶ Sfikas, “The people at the Top,” 322.

¹¹⁷ Also important to note is the response of the Soviets during December, when Stalin appointed his ambassador to the Greek government while ELAS units were fighting in Athens. This must have been a major disappointment to the Greek communists.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Sfikas, “The People at the Top,” 323.

and to restore civil liberties in Greece. But Churchill, determined to break the power of the left, was not satisfied with the terms of the truce. His physician reported later that Churchill thought that the agreement “was a mistake” and that the British “ought to teach the communists a lesson.”¹¹⁹

Prior to the Soviet’s triumph at Stalingrad in January 1943, the intents and actions of the British were to fan the flames of armed resistance against the Axis occupiers in Greece and to support the GIE. Once the Stalingrad victories virtually assured Allied victory, the British objective was to prevent Greece from falling into the hands of the Greek communists, and thus into Soviet hands; to the British, this seemed to be the direction the country was headed if left to its own devices. Stalin’s promise to Churchill in October 1944 to keep Russian hands off of Greece was not enough for Churchill, despite the fact that the former had kept to the deal with strict perfection, and thus the British stepped up their campaign against their former allies. The Americans had stayed mostly out of British business in Greece, but were adequately aware of the situation there, the extent of British involvement, and the lack of a Soviet presence or interference in Greece. Reports and correspondence by the British attempted to persuade Americans that the Soviets were playing a role in the budding Greek crisis, but the Americans did not seem too concerned about it. However, by December 1944, the time of simply surveying the Greek situation was about over for the Americans. From 1945 on, the United States became increasingly interested in Greece’s domestic conflict.

¹¹⁹ Sfikas, “The people at the Top,” 324.

CHAPTER THREE: BRITISH TOLERATION OF THE RIGHT, POLITICAL INTERVENTION, AND AMERICAN ANALYSIS, FEBRUARY 1945 – MARCH 1946

Although EAM/ELAS' defeat in Athens strengthened the hold of the British and the Greek right in the capital, a political battle still lurked in the future for Athens and the whole of Greece. Astoundingly, in the span of approximately one month, the Greek communists found themselves in a position of weakness, with little choice but to concede to the demands of the new government and the British – something few could have foreseen, considering the previous strength and popularity of EAM/ELAS throughout the country. Indeed, their fall was swift. The Varkiza Agreement of February 12, 1945 signed by the Greek government and EAM/ELAS's leaders officially ended the December events. The treaty was intended to reconcile the positions of the extremes of both the left and right by affording amnesty to those in ELAS who would lay down their weapons, and to prepare the country for a plebiscite to be followed by general elections. It's initiatives failed almost from the beginning as few Greeks on the right were inclined to reconcile with the Greek left which they ultimately equated to Greek communism.

Just one week after having concluded peace terms that accorded amnesty for ELAS guerillas who would lay down their weapons, police in the capital had jailed over 4,000 people labeled as left-wing sympathizers, foreshadowing developments for the rest of 1945 and into 1946. Although the British were the only force in the country that could feasibly restrain the country's far swing to the right, they did virtually nothing to prevent it; the British had virtually

chosen, trained, financed, and equipped much of the Greek armed forces, police, and gendarmerie by the end of 1945.¹²⁰

From the start of 1945 until March of 1946, the Greek government underwent several changes at the insistence of the British. They hoped that by creating a stable government loyal to British interests, this would block perceived communist encroachment from the Soviets. To the British, blocking the Soviets from Greece started with blocking leftist access to representative power there. If all went according to plan, it would allow the British to successfully withdraw from Greece amid questions from a skeptical public in England that questioned British objectives there.¹²¹ But the British were seemingly unable to change the outcome of rightist violence against the left, even if they had tremendous influence on who headed the government. This failure led to a highly unstable situation in Greece.

From April of 1944 to April of 1945 four men held the position as Prime Minister in the Greek government, some bringing with them new cabinet members, with varying credentials and political leanings. But essentially, there were two competing factions of right-wing extremism in Greece during and after World War II. Indeed, the Populists (those who supported the monarch), and the right-wing factions of the republicans were not aligned, but competed not so much over who could lead the country, but rather, who could better apply reaction to and vendetta against the left. To their credit, the British were concerned that a return to the days of a right-wing dictatorship would bring about just as much instability as would a communist dictatorship of the

¹²⁰ Close, *The Origins*, 163-164.

¹²¹ Howard Jones, *A New Kind of War: America's Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 22.

left. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the “White Terror” – the period between February 1945 and March 1946 when various Greek institutions (the police, gendarmerie, Army, and National Guard) capitalized on their power and pursued a vendetta against the left – was made possible only by the backing of the British.¹²²

British Toleration, MacVeagh’s Preconceptions, and American Views of Early Post-Occupation
Greek Governments.

From late December 1944 to the beginning of January 1945, the Greek political landscape was realigned at the hands of the British. From this point, the British worked with the Greek government to ensure that there would be no more negotiations that would allow EAM to access any influence in government, nor would there be any further talk of incorporating ELAS units into a national military; for the next two years, the force directing successive Greek governments was for all intents and purposes the British Embassy and the Foreign Office.¹²³ While the British hoped stability would return and EAM’s influence would decline, they also hoped Plastiras would contain the expected reaction against EAM from the anti-communist army, police, National Guard, and right-wing thug groups.¹²⁴ Their hopes were nowhere close to being realized.

¹²² Close, *The Origins*, 163.

¹²³ Iatrides and Rizopoulos, “The International Dimension,” 95.

¹²⁴ Close, *The Origins*, 150.

While Papandreou's failure to unite Greece's political parties before the *Dekemvriana* stemmed from his desire to please the extremes, the same could not be said about his successor, General Plastiras. A subscriber of, and hero to the republican right, Plastiras was more concerned with punishing the left than fixing Greece's vast array of problems of rebuilding infrastructure, fixing the economy, or any other in the aftermath of the near total destruction of the state from Axis occupation. Under General Plastiras' ministry, violent excesses against the left became commonplace, as hooligans from the old Security Battalions threatened anyone with leftist sympathies in Athens, while trials of collaborators were endlessly postponed and many times even forgotten about. The police, too, were harassing and arresting anyone associated with the former resistance.¹²⁵ Under Plastiras' direction, there existed a fierce passion against communism in the Army and police. *Ethnikophron* officers – most with Metaxist backgrounds – made up 5 out of 8 of the General Staff of the army; 10 out of 13 military governors had held important posts under Metaxas; only 7 out of 56 colonels were made up of moderates.¹²⁶ Added to this was the problem of the distribution of crucially needed relief supplies that in the hands of the Greek government became political weapons.¹²⁷

Adjacently, the British, with no apparent inclination or foresight as to how this would be perceived, opposed any attempts by government officials to appoint anyone without an *Ethnikophron* background to the leadership of the armed forces, quite possibly because the British had fought alongside *Ethnikophron* members of the Greek Mountain Brigades in Italy,

¹²⁵ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 98.

¹²⁶ *Ethnikophron* is a Greek term which translates to "the nationally-minded."

¹²⁷ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 37.

the Aegean, and the Middle East during the Greek government's time in exile. Former members of the Security Battalions and collaborators were now also numerous in the officer corps. The reformation of the National Guard took place in large part with British meddling, excluded anyone with left-leaning sympathies, and like the officer corps, included former members of the Security Battalions.¹²⁸

The Americans were sufficiently aware of the new government's trending to the right. Alexander Kirk, the political advisor to the Supreme Allied Commander of the Mediterranean informed the U.S. Secretary of State on March 8, 1945 of his concern that the Greek Government was taking on a diabolical life of its own. Kirk told the Secretary of State that British Minister Resident in the Mediterranean, Harold Macmillan, had informed him that the situation in Greece, "was not going so well. He said [the] Plastiras government... [was]... veering more and more to the Right and that he [Macmillan] had to 'crack them on the head'."¹²⁹

Ambassador MacVeagh was also aware that the extreme right under the direction of government forces was in the midst of a reaction against the left. On March 10, 1945, MacVeagh visited with a leading member of EAM who protested the recent and plentiful violations of the Varkiza agreement by the Greek government, and in their conversation, he responded to the EAM representative that "violence must be expected as the result of violence" in what amounted to the Ambassador's justification of the violations. MacVeagh's prejudices toward the Greek left were apparent in his assertion to the Secretary of State that, "officials civil and military are

¹²⁸ Close, *The Origins*, 152-153; and Iatrides and Rizopoulos, "The International Dimension," 98.

¹²⁹ Kirk to the Secretary of State, 8 March 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VIII: 116.

human and retaliation for ELAS is unquestionably widespread,” offering further justification for rightist vengeance.¹³⁰

Charles Edson of the O.S.S., showing more uneasiness with the situation in Greece than MacVeagh had, commented on the expansion of right-wing violence, the lack of punishment for collaborators, and the consequences of both on March 29, 1945. Edson wrote to MacVeagh that:

It [is] quite clear that the present activities of the Greek Right, as well as the failure of the Government to press charges against quislings and collaborationists, have given the Communists and Leftists generally plenty of ammunition...[T]he intransigent attitude of the Right has enabled Greek Leftists to regain, or begin to regain, support which they otherwise would have lost irretrievably and has enormously complicated the British effort to bring internal peace and security to Greece.¹³¹

As the British were becoming aware that their interference in their formation of the government and its armed units was escalating the situation, it also became clear to them that Plastiras could not be the statesman to lead a reconciliation of Greek politics. As early as March 1945, the British informed U.S. Ambassador John Winant in the U.K that they were exploring the possibility of replacing Plastiras because, “It is evident that Plastiras is not capable of running a conciliatory government” because “His temperament [was] not suited to such a course.”¹³² A week after MacVeagh informed the Secretary of State of new complaints of Varkiza violations, Kirk wrote to the Secretary of State on March 22 that, “Macmillan informed us today that he

¹³⁰ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 10 March 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VIII: 116-118.

¹³¹ Edson to MacVeagh, March 29, 1945, National Archives and Records Service, OSS Records, RG 226, Entry I, Box I Office of Strategic Services in Clogg, *Occupation, Resistance, Civil War*, 193.

¹³² Winant to the Secretary of State, 14 March 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VIII: 119-120.

was somewhat exasperated with the Greek situation” because the British were “constantly obliged to step in to see to it that the Greek Government kept their side of the Varkiza Agreement.” Kirk continued that “a wave of reaction was sweeping [the] country and now that the Right felt the Government was firmly installed with British backing they were out for revenge.”¹³³ General Leeper had understood the effects of British policy in Greece earlier, and had suggested as early as February 22, 1945 that the Foreign Office allow him the right of intervention to put a stop to Plastiras’ excesses, which would not only help the situation in Greece, but also help with perceptions back in England. Leeper claimed that if Plastiras would be allowed to continue on:

we British...will be accused both by the opposition in Greece...and by public opinion in England of having secured the disarmament of one party in order to allow another party no more widely representative of public opinion to dominate the country. It was not for this that British soldiers gave their lives in recent fighting.¹³⁴

Both Macmillan and Leeper petitioned the Foreign Office to allow them to pressure Plastiras to sign a treaty that would force him to make every decision contingent on British approval. Thus, they surmised, he would have no choice but to govern impartially. But the Foreign Office was worried about the bigger picture and relations with the Soviets, and felt that outright intervention by the British might set a perilous precedent that would allow the Soviet

¹³³ Kirk to the Secretary of State, 22 March 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VIII: 122.

¹³⁴ Leeper to the Foreign office on February 26, 1945, quoted in Alexander, *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 100.

Union to do the same in Eastern Europe.¹³⁵ Therefore, if the British interfered it would have to be discreet. Thus, direct intervention by Leeper to quell rightist violence was refused by the Foreign Office. Nevertheless, Plastiras' own actions inevitably led to his downfall; his inability to curb right-wing violence, his excesses, and his tendency to appoint his friends to government positions regardless of their qualifications ended up being the tools which destroyed his credibility in the eyes of parties not aligned with the Greek right.

When Petros Voulgaris was installed as Prime Minister of Greece on April 8, 1945, many in the Royalist camp were initially ecstatic at the appointment since his past suggested an undying loyalty to the monarch. In April 1944 Voulgaris, as part of the GIE armed forces, helped to quell the April armed forces mutinies, so it was assumed that his premiership would greatly favor the Populists. But to their disappointment Voulgaris appointed mostly moderate ministers to his cabinet. The Populists expected Voulgaris to appoint a government brimming with Royalists. However, upon taking office, he pledged to work to restore power to the people by organizing elections and the plebiscite to decide the people's will and the fate of the monarch.¹³⁶ Despite Voulgaris' stated objectives, the White Terror quickly degenerated into a full-fledged purge of leftists from Greek society. Realizing the country was on the verge of civil war, the Foreign Office tried to curb the violence before it exploded. Less than two weeks after Voulgaris took office on April 19, 1945, Leeper was instructed by the Under-Secretary of State Foreign Affairs Sir Orme Sargent to make absolutely clear that:

¹³⁵ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 100-101.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

...assistance to the enemy [by those who collaborated with Nazis] [was] regarded by HM's government as much worse than membership of EAM"...[and that he was]... by no means satisfied that adequate purge of gendarmerie and other state services [from collaborators] has been carried out or is being seriously undertaken.¹³⁷

Churchill, obsessed with Greece, read the Foreign Office correspondence from Sargent to Leeper and questioned Sargent's comments in a subsequent letter, thus showcasing his dominating personality in Greek affairs and his preference for the Greek collaborators. Replying to Sargent regarding his instructions to Leeper, Churchill's reply on April 22, 1945 highlighted his one-sided views towards Greek politics. Churchill told Sargent:

I do not agree at all...It seems to me that the collaborators in Greece in many cases did the best they could to shelter the Greek population from German oppression. Anyhow they did nothing to stop the entry of liberating forces, nor did they give any support to the EAM designs. The Communists are the main foe, though the punishment of notorious pro-German collaborators, especially if concerned with the betrayal of loyal Greeks, should proceed in a regular and strict manner. There should be no question of increasing the severities against the collaborationists in order to win Communist approval. Their approval is not worth having¹³⁸

Some members of the Foreign Office, were shocked by Churchill's disclosure. William Hayter remarked on April 23rd 1945, "I should have thought it self-evident that collaboration with

¹³⁷ Foreign Office to Leeper, April 19, 1945, quoted in Sfikas, "The people at the Top," 324.

¹³⁸ Churchill to Sargent, April 22, 1945, quoted in Sfikas, "The people at the Top," 324.

Germany was a worse crime than Communism, even in Greece. It seems to me rather foolish if we suggested the contrary...”¹³⁹

By July 1945, the White Terror was perpetrated by what amounted to an unsanctioned informal alliance of right-wing armed gangs, the police, the gendarmerie, the National Guard, and the Army. The “Shadow State” as it became labeled, was the vessel by which all these groups were able to sustain the violence and persecution against left-leaning citizens in order to prepare the country for the return of the monarch through a rigged plebiscite.¹⁴⁰ Although there was apparently no formal link between Greek political elites and the rightist violence, Charles Edson wrote to MacVeagh on July 4, 1945 that “It is reliably reported that important members of the Greek General Staff are closely connected with the directing of this [White Terror] movement” while also noting that “a very high degree of [British] selection [was] being exercised in the recruiting of personnel for the Greek armed forces, the National Guard, the Gendarmerie and the police.” Putting the onus partly on the British for rightist violence, Edson asserted that:

¹³⁹ Minutes by Hayter and Howard from April 23, 1945, quoted in Sfikas, “The people at the Top,” 324.

¹⁴⁰ Close, *The Origins*, 156.

Clearly, the British are very well aware of what is going on, but they either do not choose, or are unable to exercise any pressure on the Greek government or on rightist circles which can put an end to the present conspiracy...Only the presence of British troops in Greece makes the existing rightists political conspiracy possible, and therefore the British cannot escape some responsibility for this conspiracy...By her acquiescence in, or toleration of...[it]...Britain is gratuitously presenting...[the Soviets]...most effective propaganda material...[that]...can be largely based on fact.¹⁴¹

Adding to the severity of the situation was the prospect of elections in Britain set for July 1945. The Greek Populists' feared that a victory for the British Labor Party would spell the end of the return of the king because of their assumption that the Labor government in England would not likely support a monarch. This seemingly set into motion a new wave of terror by the royalist right in June of 1945. Now, the monarchist National Guard began to distribute contraband to civilians who were of extreme right-wing persuasion. Rumors caused the fear that the Populists were planning for a *coup d'état* to restore the king, and by this time, confidence in Voulgaris' ability to quell rightist terror was scant in British circles. British threats to imprison for life anyone who bore illegal weapons, and further claims that the British would quell a rightist coup eventually calmed the situation, but Greece was still politically divided as ever.¹⁴² What the White Terror and the Shadow State accomplished was to push more people into the EAM camp, as Edson had astutely noted. Resentment over indiscriminate arrests and other atrocities helped EAM rebuild its base to about 700,000 by early 1946. "Prisoners go in as

¹⁴¹ Edson to MacVeagh, July 4, 1945, National Archives and Records Service, OSS Records, RG 226, Entry I, Box I Office of Strategic Services in Clogg, *Occupation, Resistance, Civil War*, 194, 196-197.

¹⁴² Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 121.

ordinary people and come out as communists” claimed an anonymous gendarme – a testament to a growing solidarity on the Left, as well as the communists ability to clearly disseminate their message.¹⁴³

The British Behind the Scenes, Growing American Awareness, and Their Shifting Views

The British elections on July 5, 1945 that replaced Churchill’s conservative party with the Labor party of Clement Attlee were perceived as beneficial for Greek right-wing republicans because surely, the Labor Party would favor a republican form of government over a monarch if given only those two choices.¹⁴⁴ But to their eventual dismay, the Labor government in England mostly continued Churchill’s policies which favored the return of the king.¹⁴⁵

Incessant bickering, continued waves of terror, and the failure to bring Greek politicians together into a coalition, forced Voulgaris to tender his resignation on August 3, 1945. The British eventually talked him out of resigning, but he again lost faith when amid his proclamation on October 6 that new elections would take place in January 1946, liberals, socialists, and communists informed him that they would abstain from the election because there was no possible way that the existing Greek government could restore law and order by that date; the failure of Voulgaris and the British to restore some semblance of law and order in Greece was a

¹⁴³ Close, *The Origins*, 172.

¹⁴⁴ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 125.

¹⁴⁵ Newsinger, “Churchill, Stalin, and the Greek Revolution,” 53.

major factor that negatively effected the ability to promote unity by successive governments in Greece.¹⁴⁶ For every party on the political spectrum except for the monarchical right, elections without law in order would be tantamount to handing the country over to the king and the monarchists. At first even the monarchists threatened to boycott elections because their demand for a plebiscite to precede elections was denied. But as they came to realize their hold on the state administration apparatus was as strong as ever, they became enthusiastic about their chances and recanted.¹⁴⁷

New British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin of the recently elected Labor government in England sought to remedy the situation and attempted to form a center-moderate government with yet another change in leadership. The eighty-three year-old leader of the Greek Liberal Party, Themistocles Sophoulis was chosen by Bevin to attempt this feat, and he became Premier in November 1945. The Greeks were now in the midst of their 5th change in government in roughly a year and a half. American concerns about how the British Labor Party would handle the Greek situation existed and showed that some Americans questioned the ability of Attlee's government to "hold the line" against future communist gains in Greece. Highlighting his prejudices against the left in general, MacVeagh voiced his concerns by asking the Secretary of State in December 1945, "what assurance have they [the Greek people] that British Labor Party preoccupation with socialist dogma, or an American lapse of interest in Balkan affairs, may not deliver Greece to communism...?"¹⁴⁸ In hindsight, MacVeagh had nothing to worry about,

¹⁴⁶ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 139.

¹⁴⁷ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 15 December 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, VIII: 286.

because Attlee's government was on board with previous administration's attempts to keep Greece under British influence, thereby securing control of the Middle East and Mediterranean.¹⁴⁹

Although British concern over right-wing excesses existed, their actions seemingly pulled against their intentions. Sophoulis, aware that the continuing White Terror combined with the fact that the true power of the state machinery lay in the hands of the shadow state, tried unsuccessfully to get Bevin to accept a delay of Greek general elections. In February 1946, roughly a month before elections were to take place, Sophoulis brought the request of an election delay to Bevin. Sophoulis worried that the "whole machinery of the state [was] in the hands of the extreme monarchist right" and that in these conditions, it would not be possible to guarantee "a genuine expression of the popular will."¹⁵⁰ When U.S. Charge d'affaires in Greece Karl Rankin wrote to the Secretary of State on March 8, 1946 regarding this issue, he inexplicably attributed the request for a delay to outside pressures. Rankin wrote that the "Regent and we both believe [that the] Leftist campaign for delays [was] ordered from abroad in order to sabotage the elections, gain time to build up leftist strength and when ready seize power."¹⁵¹ This statement to the Secretary of State not only highlights the growing U.S. suspicions of Soviet involvement in Greece but it also raises questions about the role of personal prejudices and ambitions of U.S. and British statesmen. It is common knowledge in the historical discourse of the Greek civil war

¹⁴⁹ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 31; Iatrides and Rizopoulos, "The International Dimension of the Greek Civil War," 98.

¹⁵⁰ Transmitted in Constantine Rendis to Bevin, February 15, 1946, FO/371/58675, R2633, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 39.

¹⁵¹ Rankin to the Secretary of State, 8 March 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII: 118-119.

that in the midst of their persecution, Greek communists sought to secure Stalin's support for armed insurrection; but the latter through Soviet channels advised them to participate in the elections of March 1946.¹⁵² Stalin, ever the pragmatist, had still not deviated from his agreement with Churchill from October 1944. Soviet policy towards Greece, it is now known, was similar to that of the British - geared toward containing the Greek left. Rankin could not have known that the Soviets were staying out of Greek affairs, but it is difficult to understand what evidence he used to formulate his opinions that they indeed were involved.

After the Varkiza Agreement of February 1945 the British started to face criticism from the Soviets that their involvement was equal to a disguised occupation.¹⁵³ Although Stalin was sticking to the percentages agreement and "most scrupulously" respecting Britain's' predominance in Greece, the British continued to criticize Stalin for foregoing free elections in eastern Europe and asserting Soviet dominance there. Probably realizing that their denunciations of Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe could be reciprocated, the British began to conceal how actively involved they were in Greece. During the Plastiras administration in early 1945 when Leeper requested a free hand to remove the Premier, the Foreign Office refused because the "whole essence of our position in Greece is that our authority must be exercised behind the scenes."¹⁵⁴ Additionally, in September 1945 in discussions with Leeper and the regent over choosing a date for the king's plebiscite, British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign

¹⁵² John O. Iatrides, "Kennan and the Birth of Containment: The Greek Test Case," *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 3 (Fall, 2005), 138.

¹⁵³ Close, *The Origins*, 173.

¹⁵⁴ FO Minutes, 14 Mar. 1945 (R 4771, FO 371/48260), quoted in Alexander, *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 102-103.

Affairs Orme Sargent agreed to lobby Greek politicians to move the decision to after the general elections. Sargent argued that the British should intervene in the interests of the country's long-term stability, but in the interests of appearances, the request for British help should come from the Greeks.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, the Americans too would employ this strategy in 1947 when they become heavily involved in Greece's internal affairs.

Nevertheless, to provide for free and fair elections across Europe's devastated nations as agreed upon by the powers at Yalta in February 1945, Anglo-American policy makers planned to offer Greece tripartite supervision of general elections and the plebiscite by using U.S., British, and Soviet representatives. Predictably, the Soviets declined, most likely so as not to provide the western powers a precedent for interfering in the Soviet sphere.¹⁵⁶

Despite Sophoulis' plea to postpone elections and the left's decision to abstain, elections were to go ahead as planned for the set date of March 31, 1946 with U.S., British, and French supervision. Amidst large scale intimidation of and abstention by the left, only 49 percent of registered Greek voters cast their ballots. What this amounted to was an astounding victory for the royalist right.¹⁵⁷ The majority of seats in the new government – 236 out of 354 – went to parties of the right, consisting of those that wished to continue malevolent policies against the left.¹⁵⁸ A week later, Constantine Tsaldaris of the Populist party took the Premiership. Adding insult to the left's injury, the new government ignored the country's earlier pledge to punish

¹⁵⁵ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 134.

¹⁵⁶ Close, *The Origins*, 173.

¹⁵⁷ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 41. This was no surprise. Expectations were that royalists would rig elections to their favor, which indeed they did.

¹⁵⁸ Close, *The Origins*, 175.

wartime collaborators. American intelligence was aware of this trend, and U.S. intelligence agent Thomas Karamessines reported 3 months later in July 1945 on the “wholesale acquittal or discharge of accused collaborationists, in which Greek official government agencies or personalities must be acquiescing.”¹⁵⁹

The Greek-right, emboldened by their questionable victory at the polls (to which the British and Americans were aware) stepped up its violent persecution of the left.¹⁶⁰ The newly elected regime in Athens wasted no time and set out on a course to institutionalize their campaign of terror. Monarchist politicians and their allies in the gendarmerie and the army pursued vindictive and partisan policies while appointing partisan supporters to all levels of government, and purging anyone assumed sympathetic to the left.¹⁶¹ Endorsing the White Terror, Tsaldaris and some of his ministers publically applauded the persecution of leftists, and in May 1946, enacted a ruthless and draconian “Security Law” which allowed the government to arrest, imprison, and deport citizens, without evidence. Arbitrarily applied, the law targeted not only active leftists and their sympathizers, but also their families and friends. Ex-ELAS members, republican officers, and heroes of the resistance under occupation were among those exiled. By the end of 1946, only seven months after the law was established, 4,876 people were

¹⁵⁹ T.H.K. to W. Witman, July 9, 1946, “850.3 Capital” folder, Box 2482, Athens post records, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 41.

¹⁶⁰ Close, *The Origins*, 173, 175-176; Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 41; Gallant, *Modern Greece*, 175. Awareness by U.S. statesmen of voting fraud and intimidation at the polls is also evident American diplomatic correspondence during the period.

¹⁶¹ Close, *The Origins*, 189.

deported from Greece while over a thousand waited for their fate. By the end of the civil war, estimates show that over 30,000 were deported.¹⁶²

Amidst the widespread terror, an EAM delegation, as they had the previous year, approached MacVeagh on July 31, 1946 for what amounted to an appeal for the United States to intervene. On August 3, MacVeagh brought the Secretary of State up to date on developments in Greece as he reported on the rise in violence and partisan activity. He reported that the Greek government was not only on the verge of outlawing the communist party, but had a growing tendency to “(1) consider all persons Communist unless Royalist, (2) to protect former Metaxists and collaborators and (3) to accept armed assistance from disreputable elements professing royalism.” MacVeagh also noticed that extremism had a several effects on the country when he commented on the “Increasing exasperation of members of all Parliamentary opposition groups apparent in this connection, and [the] strengthening rather than weakening of anti-king and even pro-communist sentiment...as a result of present extremist policy of governing authorities.”¹⁶³

Earlier in 1946 however, some in the United States showed an increasing tendency to follow the British example of toleration toward the Greek right, regardless of the latter’s actions. In April 1946 at a meeting with Bevin to discuss an early plebiscite for the king’s return, Bevin recounted the Secretary of State’s endorsement of the plebiscite and claimed that “Byrnes [had] said that it was essential that the Communists should not get into power in Greece. This must be avoided at all costs. He did not mind how it was done.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Close, *The Origins*, 190-191; Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 41; and Gallant, *Modern Greece*, 175.

¹⁶³ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 3 August 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII: 186-187.

¹⁶⁴ United Kingdom Delegation to the Conference of Foreign Ministers at Paris to Foreign Office, April 27, 1946, FO371/58687, R6382, FO Records, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 44.

It is a small wonder, then, that Tsaldaris' government was feeling empowered by its recognition from the British, and the latter's failure to do anything to stop the Greek right's quest to stamp out the Greek left. Amidst these highly favorable circumstances, the Greek government in May 1946 proclaimed that in September of that year, an early plebiscite would be held to determine the king's fate. In reality, his return was all but secured since the whole of the state machinery lay in the hands of the monarchist right. Henceforth, their campaign of terror virtually assured that the plebiscite would be rigged. Indeed, the results of the plebiscite which Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson considered "legitimate" returned the king to his throne in Greece. However, the tripartite observers from Britain, France, and The United States made note of a high degree of fraud, government harassment of individuals, and the unrealistic assertion by the Greek government that 94% of the population had participated in the plebiscite.¹⁶⁵

In the meantime, EAM and the left in Greece were preoccupied with survival and self-defense in light of the continued escalation of rightist violence. Their worst-case scenario was playing out in front of them: the combined White Terror, British inaction to stop it, and insistence on the return of the king amid shoddy election conditions surely must have signaled to them that a return of the days of Metaxas dictatorship was at hand.¹⁶⁶ The situation would only deteriorate for Greek leftists from 1946 onward as the American role increased and picked up where the British left off.

¹⁶⁵ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 44; Gallant, *Modern Greece*, 175.

¹⁶⁶ Close, *The Origins*, 177-178.

American intelligence and diplomatic sources had mostly reported accurate details of the situation in Greece and the British role in the conflict. The continuing extreme rightist violence and the British tolerance of it was something that concerned the Americans in the field. But American attitudes about, and involvement in the Greek situation were to drastically change in the near future.

CHAPTER FOUR: NEW ADMINISTRATION, NEW AGENDA - U.S. INVOLVEMENT AND CHANGING ATTITUDES, 1945 TO 1949

From 1943 to the beginning of 1946, the position of the United States in Greece was mostly one of discrete examination and criticisms of the British role there. MacVeagh and some other Americans had shown attitudes that somewhat reflected anti-communist prejudices, but the extent of rightist violence began to concern them. Nevertheless, regarding the question of Soviet involvement, American sources in the field were mostly on the same page. Up until the summer of 1946, American diplomats and intelligence sources in Greece dismissed British claims that the Soviets were in any way involved with events there, and some had shown concern that the British were supporting a reactionary regime in Athens. Indeed, Americans in the field were seemingly unanimous in their assertions that Stalin was strictly adhering to the percentages agreement between him and Churchill. But two very important changes in leadership occurred in 1945 with the death of President Roosevelt in April 1945, and the ousting of Churchill in July 1945, both of which eventually led to changes in British and American policy in Greece. In the course of one year, the United States took a new attitude towards the Greek conflict, and a new aggressive stance towards communism in general. This about-face had profound consequences for Greece. This chapter examines the development of this new American stance, which, led to growing U.S. involvement in the Greek conflict.

Changing American Perceptions of Soviet Involvement: 1945-1947

In January 1945 after the British had secured the defeat of EAM/ELAS in the capital, the U.S. embassy reported on the possibility of Soviet influence in the Greek conflict. On January 10, the American embassy replied that rumors of Soviet involvement were “alarmist and often hearsay material...tendentious and untrustworthy.” On February 27, 1945 after the Yalta conference attended by Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt, the U.S. embassy in Greece informed the State Department that evidence of Soviet involvement was non-existent. MacVeagh commented that the decisions reached at the Yalta conference must have been “disappointing to ELAS...[because] ELAS [had] found out that Russia will not support it against Britain.” The report concluded by highlighting that “[the] British ambassador [is] content [to] say that he can find no evidence [that] Russia’s supporting ELAS.” The British ambassador which MacVeagh referred to indeed had evidence, but “evidence to the contrary.”¹⁶⁷ Even Churchill, the ardent anti-communist ever distrustful of Stalin commented after Yalta that indeed, the Russians were “most scrupulously” respecting the predominance of Britain in Greece.¹⁶⁸

Nevertheless, Harry Truman upon his assumption of the presidency in April 1945 immediately took a firm stance against what he saw as Soviet aggression and expansion and surrounded himself with what historian Daniel Yergin describes as a “rigidly anti-Soviet group

¹⁶⁷ SDR 868.00/1-1045; SDR 868.00/1-1145; SDR 868.00/2-2745, quoted in “Perceptions of Soviet Involvement in the Greek Civil War 1945-1949,” in Lars Baerentzen, John O. Iatrides, and Ole L. Smith, ed., *Studies in the History of the Greek Civil War 1945-1949* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1987), 227.

¹⁶⁸ Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 99.

of American diplomats.”¹⁶⁹ Truman was initially perturbed by the Soviets and viewed their intentions suspiciously because of their violations of the agreed upon terms at the Yalta Conference of February 1945. Under the terms of Yalta, the Big Three were to assist the people of liberated Europe in solving their economic and political problems by democratic means. But the Soviet Union had recently imposed a government in Poland dominated by communists and was encouraging communist movements in Romania and Yugoslavia. On April 22, 1945 - ten days after Roosevelt died - Truman, in a demand to ensure that Russia abide by the terms of Yalta used what he himself called “sharp language” in a meeting with Soviet minister V.M. Molotov who subsequently complained of never having been talked to like that in his life. Additionally, in May 1945 the administration unexpectedly terminated lend-lease assistance to the Soviets, a decision that Stalin labeled as “unfortunate and brutal.”¹⁷⁰ And towards the end of 1945, the President was forming an increasingly suspicious view towards the Soviets in light of their interests in the Middle East and Turkey, and it was assumed the Soviets sought warm-water ports in the Persian Gulf area.¹⁷¹

Adding fuel to the fire Stalin delivered a speech on February 9, 1946 that was interpreted as proclaiming that socialism and capitalism were incompatible and that future wars between the two systems were inevitable, with socialism as the eventual victor.¹⁷² Already highly suspicious

¹⁶⁹ Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 170, 322.

¹⁷⁰ Iatrides, “Kennan and the Birth of Containment:,” 128.

¹⁷¹ Captured Nazi documents revealed that the Soviets desired an area in the Turkish Straits for the purpose of building a Mediterranean naval influence. See Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 33.

¹⁷² Kennan to the Secretary of State, 12 February 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VI: 694-696. For interpretations of Stalin’s speech, see Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*

of Stalin's plans, and because of his recent comments on socialism eventually replacing capitalism, the State Department subsequently asked well-respected U.S. Foreign Service officer in Moscow, George F. Kennan, to provide his analysis of what the U.S. might expect in the future from the Soviets. Kennan's analysis, known as the "Long Telegram" became what Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis called "to this day the single most influential explanation of postwar Soviet behavior" and "one which powerfully reinforced the growing tendency within the United States to interpret Moscow's actions in a sinister light."¹⁷³ In the telegram, Kennan portrayed the Soviet Union as a threatening monolith, but at the same time stated that the country was too weak to pursue their goals through war - the main threat, he asserted, was political. Soviet communism, "like a malignant parasite" would aim to penetrate and influence organizations such as labor unions, youth leagues, women's organizations, cultural groups, and racial societies, with the goal of tearing down "sources of strength beyond the reach of Soviet control." The Soviets would expose the "mistakes and weaknesses of the Western Powers" and try to gain "command of key positions in administration...of foreign countries."¹⁷⁴ The way to counter the threat, Kennan claimed, was through sustained projection of American strength, superiority, and patience.¹⁷⁵

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3; "Vladislav Zubok on Stalin's 1946 Speech," Public Broadcast System, *American Experience*, *Internet*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/filmmore/reference/interview/zubok3.html>. (Oct. 2, 2013).

¹⁷³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39.

¹⁷⁴ Kennan to the Secretary of State, 22 February 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VI: 696-709.

¹⁷⁵ Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, 33; Iatrides, "Kennan and the Birth of Containment:," 128.

Kennan's report from Moscow, although highly influential, was not the "lightning bolt" that awakened U.S. policymakers to the perceived dangers of the Soviet threat; as noted above, Truman and his aides had viewed the Soviets with suspicion as early as April 1945 when he took office. But widely circulated throughout the administration, the telegram must have strengthened the preexisting attitudes of those who already distrusted the Soviets, and it probably cemented Truman's inclination to a tougher stance toward Moscow. Additionally, its message became something of a rallying point for the administration, something that they could use in order to justify a strong stance in response to Soviet actions anywhere. What it also did, was help distort the view in Washington on the situation in Greece, and it reduced the complicated events there to a simplistic inaccurate view that Moscow responsible.¹⁷⁶ So as earlier reports from the field told one story, a radically different view was taking shape in Washington which assumed problems in Greece were part of a wider international situation.

On March 8, 1946, a few weeks prior to Greek elections that the Soviets advised the KKE to participate in, U.S. *Charge d'affaires* in Athens Karl Rankin commented to the Secretary of State on the call from centrist and leftist groups to delay the elections.¹⁷⁷ As stated previously, they did this for fear that in the atmosphere of persecution from forces of the Shadow State, fair elections could not possibly take place. Rankin, citing no source, claimed that "The Leftist campaign for delay [was] ordered from abroad in order to sabotage the elections, gain time to build up leftist strength, and when ready, seize power."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Iatrides, "Kennan and the Birth of Containment," 129.

¹⁷⁷ MacVeagh was in the United States from January 1946 to June 1946, accompanying his ill wife.

¹⁷⁸ Rankin to the Secretary of State, 8 March 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII: 118-119.

In August, after the Soviets requested a revision to the Montreux convention in order to permit a joint Turkish-Soviet defense of the Dardanelles Straits which connects the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, Dean Acheson in a meeting with U.S. officials claimed that this pressure on Turkey “reflected a desire to control and dominate that country” and that had these demands been accepted, they “would be followed next by infiltration and domination of Greece by Russia with the obvious consequences in the Middle East.”¹⁷⁹

Ambassador MacVeagh, the main source of American information on Greece had delivered mostly precise information to Washington regarding the actions of the communists, Soviets, British, and successive Greek governments up until mid-1946. Adding to MacVeagh’s skepticism of Soviet involvement back in January, again in July 1945 he dismissed the notion. Amidst more claims by the British that KKE policy and funding came from the Soviets, the American ambassador dismissed these claims as a “psychological element in the situation.” From a secret source, MacVeagh reported that there was “no direct evidence...found to prove a financial connection between the Soviets and [the] KKE” while also commenting that the Soviets were showing themselves “to be supreme realists...[who] do not feel it necessary...to do more than fan the flames with a sympathetic press and radio.”¹⁸⁰ And on August 10, 1946, MacVeagh, commenting on Greek government complaints that the KKE was a Soviet “fifth column” again dismissed them and stated that, “practically every one [of the Greek government’s complaints]

¹⁷⁹ From James Forrestal’s record of the meeting, Forrestal Diaries, August 15, 1946 in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 55. The Montreux Convention of 1936 gave Turkey control of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits. One might assume here that Acheson’s reference to the “obvious consequences in the Middle East” would have something to do with American interest and access to Mid-East oil supplies.

¹⁸⁰ MacVeagh to the State Department, SDR 868.00/7-1745, quoted in “Perceptions” in Baerentzen, Iatrides, and Smith, ed., *Studies*, 229.

against the KKE was made a year ago.” He also added a scathing critique of the Greek government:

Under the guise of royalism this program actually approximates Fascism...[and the government is]...continually enlarging their definition of Communism to include all who do not support the return of the King.¹⁸¹

Astonishingly, two weeks later, MacVeagh made a brisk about-face. In late August, with no apparent evidence, MacVeagh suddenly reversed his position and wrote to the Department of State that the KKE was secretly controlled by the Soviets.¹⁸² On September 30, 1946, in reply to the State Department’s request for his views on the Greek situation, MacVeagh wrote, “Add continued anti-Greek Moscow propaganda and secret Soviet control of Greek Communist Party...conclusion seems inevitable that Soviet Government in final analysis must be assigned responsibility for continued Greek strife.”¹⁸³

MacVeagh’s claims are difficult to explain in light of his earlier reports. John Iatrides has suggested that MacVeagh’s shift in thought quite possibly represented a case of “Groupthink” which could explain the “arbitrary adaptation of intelligence from the field” in order to “uphold the prevailing view at the center of the decision-making process.”¹⁸⁴ Iatrides calls attention to

¹⁸¹ SDR 868.00/8-1046 quoted in “Perceptions” in Baerentzen, Iatrides, and Smith, ed., *Studies*, 231; Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 42.

¹⁸² Iatrides, quoted in “Perceptions” in Baerentzen, Iatrides, and Smith, ed., *Studies*, 232.

¹⁸³ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 30 September 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII: 226-227.

¹⁸⁴ Iatrides, “Perceptions” in Baerentzen, Iatrides, and Smith, ed., *Studies*, 227. Iatrides cites author Irving L. Janis who has written on this phenomenon. Janis defines the term “groupthink” as “a mode of thinking that people engage

the fact that MacVeagh was in the United States from January 1946 to late June 1946 because his wife was seriously ill, and during his visit, he had protracted meetings in the Department of State where Greek issues were discussed at length. Additionally, discussions regarding the administration's frustration over Soviet policies in Europe took place between MacVeagh, the administration, and Truman. Iatrides, although admitting there is no way to prove this, asserts that it is possible to assume that MacVeagh's thought process on the Soviet role was highly influenced by his discussions in Washington. He also points out that MacVeagh suddenly became more amenable to British policy in Greece too, quite possibly because the British doctors who treated his wife had "practically saved her life."¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, MacVeagh continued these assertions throughout the next few years, following the lead of his superiors in Washington.

The charges against the Soviet Union concerning its role in Greece intensified toward end of 1946. On September 12, Acting Secretary of State William Clayton in a top secret note wrote to the Secretary of State about the need to help militarily and economically the countries under Soviet pressure, one of which he claimed, was Greece:

in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive ingroup, when members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action... (and) a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from ingroup pressures.

¹⁸⁵ Iatrides, "Perceptions" in Baerentzen, Iatrides, and Smith, ed., *Studies*, 227, 233.

...in view of the policy which the Soviet Union appears to be...endeavoring to undermine the stability and to obtain control of the countries in the Near and Middle East such as Greece, Turkey and Iran, we should make certain general changes in our policies, including those relating to the sale of combat equipment...to strengthen [the] will and ability...of the various countries under Soviet pressure to resist that pressure...Soviet agents are undoubtedly responsible for the smuggling of arms to, and for strengthening of, groups in Greece.¹⁸⁶

A memorandum regarding Greece prepared by the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs dated October 21, 1946 made over-the-top assumptions about Moscow's role in the Greek crisis by contending that hatreds in Greece were "being kept alive...by the activities of an apparently well-organized and armed Communist-dominated minority supported by the U.S.S.R." The memorandum co-opted a panicked theme while claiming:

We cannot afford to stand idly by in the face of [the] maneuvers and machinations [of the Soviets] which evidence an intention on the part of the Soviet Union to expand its power by subjugating Greece to its will, and then using Greece as an important stepping stone for further expansion of Soviet Power...There can be no question that the U.S.S.R. is providing military assistance to elements seeking to cause the fall of the Greek Government...Such [a] military threat against stability in Greece makes it urgent that the U.S. increase and intensify its political and economic assistance promptly, lest it come too late.

¹⁸⁶ Clayton to the Secretary of State, 12 September 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII: 209-211.

Not only was the U.S. stepping up its claims that Soviets were involved, but the theme of hurried assistance was also broached, as the memorandum called for assistance that was vital to U.S. security interests. It was important to aid the Greek Government “before the fact” so that in the case of renewed civil conflict, a sudden increase of assistance would not be necessary.¹⁸⁷

And in December 1946, another memorandum, this one by Harry N. Howard of the U.S. Division of Research for the Near East and Africa, elaborated on incidents on the northern Greek frontier. He claimed that, taken together, these incidents left “little doubt of Soviet intentions.” As evidence, Howard cited Moscow’s radio propaganda attacks against the Greek government.¹⁸⁸

Having come to the conclusion that the Soviets were responsible for Greek communist’s actions, the Truman administration demonstrated a growing willingness to render American help to the Greek government. Like the British, they were concerned lest that their actions would give the Soviets a pretext to criticize American involvement in the political affairs of another country at a time when the British and Americans were criticizing the Soviets for their actions in Eastern Europe.

The U.S. administration, although not yet completely decided on the question of military aid to the Greek government, proposed a curious solution. In a letter from November 8, 1946 to MacVeagh, the acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson commented on “the policy which we should pursue concerning the question of providing such arms and military supplies as might be

¹⁸⁷ Memorandum Regarding Greece, 21 October 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII: 240-243.

¹⁸⁸ December 9, 276-277. Memorandum by Harry N. Howard reporting on Incidents on the Northern Greek Frontiers, 9 December 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII: 276-277.

necessary to maintain law and order [in Greece].” According to Acheson, the U.S. did not want to give the Greeks the impression that U.S. interest in their plight was “not sufficiently deep to run the risk of internal or international criticism arising from the supply of arms and military equipment to Greece.” But on the other hand, he continued, “we have concern lest in case we supply [this equipment]...the impression be obtained that we are carrying on a provocative policy with regard to the Soviet Union.” Acheson proposed that “British troops [were] in Greece and since...Great Britain [had] been supplying Greece with arms and military equipment, it would be preferable for Greeks to obtain such supplies from Great Britain.” The Americans, Acheson claimed, would “endeavor to strengthen the economic position of Greece” but in the case that the British could not supply military equipment and weapons, Americans would “furnish such supplies to Great Britain for delivery to Greece.” Acheson instructed MacVeagh to inform Greek officials that American reluctance to openly furnish this assistance was not due to their lack of commitment towards their country, but “rather to our feeling that in the world situation, the wiser course would be for the Greeks to look to Great Britain.”¹⁸⁹ It is possible that Acheson was reluctant to openly aid the Greek government due to it being comprised of collaborators and right-wing reactionaries, which might have made aid difficult to justify.

It is apparent that by the end of 1946, the American government was working under the assumption that the Soviets were responsible for troubles in Greece and that they directed the communists there. In spite of continuous reports from Athens-based diplomats who refuted claims of direct Soviet involvement, this assumption held sway over decision-makers in

¹⁸⁹ Acheson to MacVeagh, 8 November 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, VII: 262-263.

Washington. This latter fact led, in its own turn, to the change in emphasis in relations from the field, and not the other way around.

Mobilizing Support for Aid to Greece

By February 1947, the British - exhausted from supporting a Greek government and in the midst of severe economic difficulties - alerted the Truman administration that it would stick to its March 31, 1947 date for termination of the aid to Greeks that it had set back in June 1946. A lot of credit has been given to this notification by the British as the wake up call for American involvement. But in reality, it only served to nudge more quickly the American commitment to Greece; the United States was well aware of British exhaustion and had been preparing for a new role the previous year.¹⁹⁰

Once the Truman administration convinced itself that the Soviets were responsible for the troubles in Greece, the issue then became how to sell the idea to a war-weary public that it was somehow in the interests of the United States to prevent the Soviets from further expansion into the southern-most country of the Balkans. By this very token, the stand against communism had to start in Greece. But a major problem facing the administration was in garnering the support it needed from a war-weary public and a Republican Congress who desired not a new international effort, but speedy demobilization and fiscal retrenchment.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Close, *The Origins*, 203.

¹⁹¹ Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, 34.

The administration subsequently decided that the easiest way to win public support for the Greece initiative was by propagating the simplistic and highly inaccurate idea that democracy in Greece was under fire from the Soviets. The administration organized a three week publicity campaign designed to win public and congressional approval for \$300 million aid to Greece, and \$100 million for Turkey.¹⁹² On February 24 1947, a State Department memorandum of a Special Committee to Study Assistance to Greece and Turkey, noted that attendees advised of a plan that “would have to be presented to Congress in such a fashion as to electrify the American people.”¹⁹³ In meetings with congressional leaders on February 28, 1947 George Marshall and Dean Acheson sought to convince them about the importance of aiding the Greeks. Marshall started the discussions by referencing the strategic and economic importance of Greece in the broader picture of the eastern Mediterranean.¹⁹⁴ Congressional leaders were not impressed by his “*realpolitik*” description of the situation. Acheson, aware of the relative disinterest in the room, took up the podium. In his presentation, he described a theoretically ominous picture of the international scene which, devoid of immediate U.S. aid would lead to a situation whereby “two-thirds...of the world...[would be]...controlled by communists.”¹⁹⁵ Especially impressed by Acheson’s depiction, Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Arthur

¹⁹² Close, *The Origins*, 204.

¹⁹³ Minutes of the First Meeting of the Special Committee to Study Assistance to Greece and Turkey, 24 February 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 47.

¹⁹⁴ Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, 49. For more information on American interests in the eastern Mediterranean, see Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 76. American interests aligned with the British as Greece represented a strategic corridor to Middle East oil supply and was situated near important sea trade routes.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-50; JMJ notes on Acheson’s presentation to Dep’t working group, Feb. 28, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 71.

Vandenberg recommended that Truman make an appearance in front of Congress in order to “scare the hell out of the country.”¹⁹⁶

But U.S. policymakers had reservations about what the exact message to Congress and the American people should be. Not wanting to provoke the Soviets outright, policymakers set out on a course to construct a message that emphasized a picture of a democratic Greece under pressure from the Soviet-led communists. But the challenge in forming this message, was to make it clear that the Soviets were to blame, without specifically mentioning them outright. Minutes of a February 27, 1947 meeting of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) Subcommittee on Foreign Policy Information, show that attendees struggled to find a way to do this. Shinning light on U.S. attempts to avoid directly blaming the Soviets, one participant noted that “There are ways of making [the] situation perfectly clear without specifically mentioning Russia.” Some were hesitant to include wording that emphasized the portrayal of America confronting world communist revolution.¹⁹⁷ Most participants agreed that American policy had to “relate military aid to the principle of supporting democracy.” One participant, Major General A.V. Arnold opined that emphasizing the threat to democracy was “the only thing that [could] sell [the foreign aid package to the] public.”¹⁹⁸ One wonders if policymakers realized the irony involved in framing the argument in terms of the defense of democracy, especially since the Greek government was anything but democratic.

¹⁹⁶ JMJ notes on Acheson’s presentation, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 73.

¹⁹⁷ American policymakers probably wished to avoid committing to the defense of all peoples under threat from communist revolutions because they realized this was impractical, especially given the situation in China where it was assumed Mao’s communist party would take power in China given the corruption and ineffectiveness of Chiang’s KMT.

¹⁹⁸ “SWNCC Subcommittee on Foreign Policy Information Meeting, 2/28/47,” Box 1, Jones Papers quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention*, 77.

The Greeks would have a part to play too in selling the aid package to the American public. The next day, on February 28, 1947 the State Department drafted a top secret letter for the Greek government to present to the United States requesting urgent aid. The Greeks under directions from the U.S. were to formally present the letter drafted by the U.S. to the U.S. “without delay” in order to “initiate immediate steps to implement extraordinary assistance.”¹⁹⁹ The Greek government responded three days later accepting it in its entirety. The next day on March 4, Secretary of State George Marshall told the press that the U.S. was considering aiding the Greek government.²⁰⁰ President Truman’s speech to Congress a few days later on March 12, 1947 contained a reference to the Greek government’s request for aid.

Those involved in engineering the official American position continued to have anxieties about certain information reaching the public. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the American public would have backed a program of massive foreign aid had they been more informed on the intricacies of Greek situation and the composition of its government. One of the statesmen who *was* concerned about this issue was Deputy Chief of the Mission of Economic Affairs, Paul Porter, who wrote directly to Truman on March 3, urging the President to precondition American aid upon the cessation of hostilities by the Greek government. He cabled, “You are aware of [the] complete reactionary nature of [the] present [Greek] Government. But one must work with them as I have to understand how incredibly weak, stupid, and venal they really are.” Porter continued by asking the President if the U.S. could “offer [the] people of Greece something more

¹⁹⁹ The Secretary of State to the Greek Embassy, 28 February 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 69.

²⁰⁰ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 73.

than bloodshed and tyranny?”²⁰¹ MacVeagh and Porter worked closely together in Greece during the beginning of 1947, but the former did not hold the same views as the latter. However, MacVeagh must have taken something from his time with Porter because he subsequently wrote to the Secretary of State on March 4 that the “Greatest care should be taken to avoid giving the impression that [the] U.S. aim[s] at financing Greek ‘civil war’ or maintaining in power an essentially reactionary govt incapable of developing sound economic program on democratic principles.” MacVeagh continued with suggestions that were intended to make aid more digestible to the public. He opined that “Perhaps the [American] aim might be stated to insure opportunity for broader democratic government and greater implementation of political, social, and economic responsibility than now is possible.”²⁰² Viewing Porter as dangerous to the aim of the new U.S. policy towards Greece, MacVeagh prompted the State Department to quiet him in the future by offering him a “regular” government job.²⁰³

Policymakers in Washington continued the careful formulation of their Greek-Turkish aid program into March 1947. Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson cabled Secretary George Marshall who was in Berlin on March 7, 1945 and described the meetings in Washington with committees and the President, informing him that they “had reached the conclusion that he [Truman] had no choice but to go forward with the [Greek-Turkish aid] program” and that the President would address a joint session of Congress, along with the public over radio. Acheson also noted that the President planned “to call together next week some financial, business, and

²⁰¹ Porter to Truman, March 3, 1947, “American Economic Mission to Greece – Correspondence and Memoranda, (1946 – 47)” folder, Porter papers, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 69.

²⁰² MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 4 March 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 90.

²⁰³ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 69.

labor people, both to get their energetic support at home and to provide recruits for missions which may have to go to Greece to work there.”²⁰⁴ Apparently, Acheson forwarded Marshall a draft of the President’s planned speech, to which Marshall on the same day requested changes to it that he deemed as a direct challenge to the Soviets.²⁰⁵

On March 11, 1947, Acheson wrote to the American embassy in Greece that U.S. policy would be different than that of the British, and that the U.S. would “abandon stopgap measures and embark on a program of substantial aid to maintain Greek independence which may require several years.” He then informed the U.S. embassy in Greece about how American aid to Greece should be broached with the U.S. public:

In order that Congress and [the] U.S. public be fully informed, [a] program [was] being implemented of frank and detailed background discussions with members of Congress, radio commentators, [and] columnists... One of the Dept’s main aims... is to make clear to the U.S. public and rest of the world... that any aid extended to Greece is in the interest of world peace and U.S. security, and is not to assist carrying on any Brit[ish] policy in Greece.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Acheson to the Secretary of State, 7 March 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 99-100.

²⁰⁵ The Secretary of State to Acheson, 7 March 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 100-101.

²⁰⁶ Acheson to the Greek Embassy, 11 March 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 107-108.

Truman's Speech to Congress and its Aftermath

Following the earlier advice from Vandenberg, Truman delivered his speech to Congress on March 12, 1947. In his opening sentences, the President got straight to the point by letting his audience know that, in the contents of this speech “The foreign policy and national security of this country [the United States were] involved.” He continued by citing the contrived Greek government request for aid by claiming, “The United States has received from the Greek government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance.” Citing “preliminary reports” from the U.S. presence in Greece, Truman claimed that assistance to Greece was “imperative if Greece [were] to survive as a free nation.” The President painted an ominous picture of a devastated Greece that was now under a threat “from a militant minority, exploiting human want and misery” who was able to “create political chaos” and in effect, had “made economic recovery impossible.” In his first few sentences, the President had placed the blame on Greek communists for nearly all of Greece’s post-war problems. President Truman continued and made questionable statements as to the reasons for the Greek governments problems. He claimed:

The very existence of the Greek state is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority... Meanwhile, the Greek Government is unable to cope with the situation... Greece must have assistance if it is to become a self-supporting and self-respecting democracy. The United States must supply this assistance... There is no other country to which democratic Greece can turn.

The President's address continued to use imprecise information meant to persuade Congress and the public of the need for American involvement. In commenting on the imperfections of the Greek government, but obviously aware of their true composition and knowing full-well that the Greek elections in March 1946 had been rigged, Truman proclaimed:

The government of Greece is not perfect. Nevertheless it represents eighty-five percent of the members of the Greek Parliament who were chosen in an election last year. Foreign observers, including 692 Americans, considered this election to be a fair expression of the views of the Greek people... The Greek government has been operating in an atmosphere of chaos and extremism.

The President then proceeded to make a broader ideological statement without, however, specifically mentioning the Soviets. There was nevertheless, little doubt however, as to whom the President was referring:

The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The Government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation in violation of the Yalta agreement in Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria... At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life... I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.²⁰⁷

As minutes of preceding discussions of top U.S. officials clearly indicate, the U.S. decision to assist Greece stemmed from its geostrategic significance to America's interests, rather than idealistic notions of democracy and freedom. But as Joseph M. Jones, former member of the State Department and author of *The Fifteen Weeks* noted, the former theme was deliberately excluded from the Truman Doctrine speech because "the American people were not accustomed to thinking...in strategic-military terms in time of peace."²⁰⁸ The theme of freedom and democracy under fire from the Soviet system offered a better chance to win the American public's support, so the President had strongly played on this theme in his speech.

Nevertheless, the President's message to Congress received mixed reviews. On March 13, 1947 Acheson wrote to George Marshall about the President's speech and informed him that at a Foreign Relations Committee hearing on March 13, there were "many doubts and worries" but the administration was going to soon "address a meeting of publishers" in order to get their

²⁰⁷ Harry Truman to Congress, March 12, 1947, quoted in Joseph M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks: February 21-June 5, 1947* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 269-274.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 151, 162. Jones was a member of the State Department staff which gave birth to the Marshall Plan and the American policy of "containment."

message to the public.²⁰⁹ The previous day, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal suggested the administration meet with major American publishers in order to lobby them for public support. Forrestal spoke with James Reston of the *New York Times* and stated that they “should...get the publishers like Arthur Sulzberger and Ed Hoyt and Paul Smith and [Henry] Luce...and make them aware that this...will need sustained educational effort.” He also added that it would be necessary to appraise “the radio people” as well.²¹⁰

From March 13, to April 3, 1947, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings to discuss the Greek-Turkish aid bill. In the process, the committee interviewed administration officials as well as diplomats from Greece. During the meeting certain members questioned unilateral action by the U.S. and asked why the U.N. could not handle the Greek situation. Senator Vandenberg replied that the U.N. “did not have the military resources available” nor did it have the funds. He also noted that if the Greek government were to be funded by the U.N., the money “would have to come largely from the United States, and the position of the United States has been that it wants to control funds supplied by it.”²¹¹ Vandenberg also expressed his concern about the public’s understanding of the situation. He claimed that the public would never understand it “unless we dramatize this thing in every possible way.” In another instance that highlighted American geostrategic concerns, Navy Secretary Forrestal stated that “American

²⁰⁹ Acheson to the Secretary of State, 13 March 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 116.

²¹⁰ Forrestal, “Memorandum to Secretary Snyder re: Names of Publishers” (March 12, 1947), Forrestal Papers, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 75. Arthur Sulzberger was publisher of the *New York Times*, Edwin Palmer (EP) Hoyt was editor and publisher of the *Denver Post*, & Henry Luce was founder of *TIME Magazine*.

²¹¹ Memorandum on the Foreign Relations Committee Hearing (Executive) on the Greek-Turkish Question, 13 March 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 114-115.

interest in the Mediterranean is not a new thing”, when specifically asked about U.S. interests in the region.

When MacVeagh was called to testify before the committee on March 28, he again betrayed all his previous findings in Greece. Explaining the road to Greece’s current situation, MacVeagh attributed the independent Greek Naval mutinies of April 1944 to the Greek communists:

the Communists had come up to take charge of the resistance when we were in Egypt, and they fomented mutinies in the Greek forces in Cairo...it was instigated by the communist organizers...the rank and file [of those instigating the mutinies]...were agents of the Communist movement.²¹²

Asked about who in his estimation was ultimately responsible for Greece’s postwar problems, MacVeagh stated that “the fellow to blame was the fellow who controls the little countries to the north of Greece, the fellow who is backing them right square back to the Moscow government.”²¹³ MacVeagh, in another questionable display noted that the President’s speech alone had positive far reaching effects. When asked by the chairman of the hearing if “these powerful minorities [Greek communists]...[are]...going to sit idly by and watch us come in and checkmate this entire prospectus” MacVeagh replied, “They are already on the run. Senator, with just the statement by the President. It has shocked those fellows so much that they

²¹² United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *A Bill to Provide for Assistance to Greece and Turkey*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, 38.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 40.

are already beginning to show weakness.”²¹⁴ The ambassador to Greece also downplayed the accomplishments of EAM, distorted actual numbers of leftist support in Greece at 9.3% of the electorate, and made the highly erroneous statement that only communist groups had abstained from the March 1946 elections.²¹⁵ Clearly, MacVeagh’s days of offering the United States government accurate information on the Greek situation had ended.

U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, Edwin C. Wilson was also debriefed by the committee and informed them on U.S. geopolitical interests relating to Turkey, especially regarding the position of that country as a barrier to Soviet encroachments in places of U.S. interest. Wilson claimed that if Turkey were “allowed to fall under Soviet domination...there [would be] nothing between them [the Soviets] then, and the Persian Gulf, Suez Canal, on out to the East – Afghanistan, India, and China...” Thus, he concluded, it was “vitally important to give assistance to the Turks to maintain their independent position there.”²¹⁶

In a rare display of candidness, Ambassador Wilson told the committee that “what we are doing here is not because we like the color of the eyes of the Turks or the Greeks... We are doing it because it is in our own interests. Continuing the budding trend of the U.S. to consider the toleration toward the Greek right, Wilson claimed, “we would do it regardless of what regime was in Turkey or Greece.”²¹⁷ But apparently the committee was concerned that telling this frankly to the American public was not a good idea. Vandenberg agreed with everything Wilson

²¹⁴ Ibid., 42

²¹⁵ Ibid., 41, 42, 45. The socialist and liberal parties also abstained from the elections of March 31, 1946. For more on leftist abstention, see Close, *The Origins*, 175 and Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, 184-187.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 57.

had said about the strategic value of Turkey and Greece, but identified that there was a problem with this. The chairman stated, “Now we are down to the question, what reason can you give the American people publically to identify our self-interest in this program?” The ambassador’s answer to this question began with a statement about supporting democratic principles and independence movements to which Vandenberg interjected, “Why does that involve ourselves?...it is a question that has to be answered, and we have got to know how far we can go in answering it.” Ambassador Wilson asked for more time to think the question over because he “[did] not know how far one could go in stating what are the facts publically.”²¹⁸

When the committee met again on April 1, 1947 to further discuss the bill, more U.S. interests were broached - this time oil. Senator Wiley in a frank discussion with Dean Acheson said that:

Our interest is in oil, and whatever other strategic material is furnished in the Near East...we have something with which to fight [for], and that is oil. That is strategic material. We have depleted our own in the last world war to such an extent that nobody knows what the cost is going to be to us in the future.

Senator Wiley seemed to suggest that politicians be upfront with the American people because “[they] are not as dumb as we sometimes assume they are. The question of self-interest here is the dominant factor. It is not simply feeding the Greeks.”²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Ibid., 61.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 94-95.

When the committee returned on April 3, the toleration of the Greek regime was again approached, among other topics, and the outcome of discussions was consistent with the earlier stance of “anyone but the communists.” Senator Walter F. George from Georgia asked Senator Henry Cabot Lodge from Massachusetts, “Have you not got to support whatever governments there are in Greece and Turkey?” to which Lodge replied, “You have to work through them, yes.” George seemed to agree and stated that, “We cannot go in there and upset them and set up another government. If we do that we are engaging in the exercise of a thing that we have always said we would not do, interfering directly with the internal affairs of another country.”²²⁰ Apparently, the vast economic, military, and logistical aid that the committee was endorsing was not considered by Senator George to be interference in Greece’s affairs. And so on April 3rd 1947, the bill regarding assistance to Greece and Turkey was approved by the committee and recommended to the Senate for passing.

American Intervention: June 1947 to October 1949

The President signed the bill for aid to Greece and Turkey into law on May 22, 1947. When officials of the American Mission for Aid to Greece (AMAG) entered the capital in June 1947, the Greek right was represented mostly by the Populists and Tsaldaris, while the moderate center parties were represented by Sophoulis. The KKE had stepped up guerilla activities back in June 1946 amidst rising persecution and created their new military wing, the Democratic Army

²²⁰ Ibid., 185.

of Greece (DAG) in December 1946.²²¹ In February 1947, the Greek communists again stepped up their guerilla activities and prepared for larger scale operations, quite possibly in anticipation of British withdrawal. The British however did not stick to their withdraw date of March 31, 1947 and kept their military and diplomatic presence in Greece, albeit on a smaller scale. King George II died in April 1947, and his brother Paul, who had in his earlier days directed General Metaxas' neo-fascist National Youth Organization, ascended the Greek throne.²²²

Americans would run into problems similar to what the British had encountered, mostly regarding questions about effective Greek leadership and the inability of Greece's politicians to form a useful coalition government representative of the broader population. American policymakers continued to have concerns over how their involvement was perceived and again took measures to conceal their level of involvement in Greek politics. Like the British before them, the new American patrons of Greece orchestrated Greek politics much the same – by tolerating the Greek right, and by blocking the left's access to representation in the government.

American intervention in Greek politics was swift. The attitude of the chief of the AMAG, Dwight Griswold immediately foreshadowed the American level of involvement into Greek affairs. In a memorandum of a conversation by the Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, it was noted that Griswold “asked several questions as to the policy of this government in Greece” and indicated that he was “interested particularly in such questions as the possibility of reorganizing the Greek government.” Griswold felt that “certain changes [to the government] might be necessary” and that some members of the Greek

²²¹ Close, *The Origins*, 193-195.

²²² Wittner, *American Intervention*, 119.

government who would not cooperate, “would have to be eliminated.” Initially, he understood that the administration wanted to keep American involvement in Greek politics out of the public eye. So as not to appear as intimately involved, Griswold thought that “it would however be necessary to proceed discretely” and it would be “desirable that any changes in the government...should be effected in such a manner that the Greeks would feel they themselves had brought about the changes.” Secretary of State George Marshall agreed with these assertions and pointed out that American ventures in Greece “would be under close scrutiny.”²²³

On July 11, 1947 the Secretary of State wrote to Griswold regarding American aims and official policy for Greece. Continuing to blame the Soviets, Marshall wrote that “Greece today should be viewed against the background of a world-wide Communist effort to subvert governments and institutions not already subservient to the Soviet Union.” Shedding light on an American policy that continued to tolerate the extreme right, Marshall told Griswold, not that the U.S. desired a Greek government that broadly represented the population, but one that included into it, anybody but communists:

We desire to see in Greece a government whose members are firmly united in their loyalty to Greece and who are primarily interested in keeping their country from falling under communist control or Soviet domination....they should...pursue [this] objective with complete single-mindedness of purpose.

²²³ Memorandum of Conversation by the Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, 9 July 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 215-216.

In the same letter to Griswold, Secretary of State Marshall also wrote about excesses of the right, but by no means condemned them. Marshall wrote:

We are aware of the fact that in its efforts to combat the subversive movement, there is a tendency on the part of certain elements in the Greek government to employ strong measures and to make use of strong personalities, such as Mr. Zervas, chief of the gendarmerie. We should realize that stern and determined measures... may be necessary to effect the termination of activities of the guerillas...

Indeed, at the insistence of the Americans, in July of 1947, known extreme right-wing commander Napoleon Zervas was to re-organize much of the gendarmerie into military battalions that subsequently intensified the white terror. Additionally, Marshall told Griswold that American officials should never criticize people in the Greek government, nor any British officials because this would “directly serve the communist purpose of discrediting the members of the present government.”²²⁴

During July 1947, the communists still hoped for a political solution to the Greek crisis and on July 13, submitted their demands for ending hostilities to the British through liberal leader Sophoulis. The following were the communists four terms:

²²⁴ The Secretary of State to Griswold, 11 July 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 219-223. For information on American’s use of Zervas, see Close, *The Origins*, 215.

1. Resignation of the present government
2. Dissolution of Parliament
3. Formation of “pure center government” under Sophoulis with cooperation [of] such leaders as Tsouderos, Plastiras, and Mylonas.
4. Agreement between new government and KKE on basis of “Sophoulis’s policy of appeasement”, i.e. general amnesty, guarantee of security to those laying down arms, and promise of new elections soonest on basis [of] revised electoral lists.²²⁵

Interesting to note is the fact that communists were willing to accept Plastiras into a reformed coalition government, especially in light of his attitudes toward them in the first half of 1945; it was under Plastiras’ premiership that the White Terror began shortly after the Dekemvriana. But as Lawrence Wittner noted, the former Prime Minister had slowly transformed into an advocate of attempts to end the fratricide by 1947.²²⁶

Although Greek communists signaled that they would be willing to end hostilities and be incorporated into a coalition government, U.S. policy, it seemed, would not allow this option. Five days after the KKE delivered its terms for peace, on July 18, 1947 Marshall cabled back to MacVeagh that although the KKE’s demands were “fair sounding...we consider [their]

²²⁵ MacVeagh to the Secretary of State, 13 July 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 231. Sophoulis’ “appeasement policy” worked under the notion that not all members of EAM/ELAS were communists.

²²⁶ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 133.

proposals to be insincere and dangerous, and that any serious consideration of them could only strengthen Communists hand...”²²⁷

A larger problem, though, began to develop for the Americans in Greece, as both the AMAG and the embassy claimed jurisdiction over politics there.²²⁸ In the Fall of 1947, a conflict developed between the AMAG and the American embassy in Greece, mostly over a dispute of which political group should lead a reformed Greek government; MacVeagh supported Populist leadership of Tsaldaris, but Griswold favored liberal leadership by Sophoulis. By August 1947, the Populists had won favor with the Americans and a new completely Populist government was set up with Tsaldaris once again taking the premiership.

Bickering between the embassy and AMAG was only part of the administration’s concerns. Failing to conceal the American level of involvement in Greece, the State Department was critical of Griswold’s lack of discretion because a recent article in the *New York Times* had dubbed him as the “most powerful man in Greece” at the beginning of October 1947.²²⁹ Acting Secretary of State Robert Lovett wrote Griswold on October 17, 1947 that the State Department considered the *New York Times* article “as [a] most unfortunate misrepresentation of [the] U.S. role in Greece” and that “U.S. officials...[were to]...avoid involvement in details of Greek internal politics.”²³⁰ Having changed his earlier stance that American involvement should be played behind the scenes, on October 24, 1947, Griswold responded to the Secretary of State, complaining that “it would be wrong for AMAG or for [the] U.S. government to attempt to

²²⁷ The Secretary of State to MacVeagh, 18 July 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 244.

²²⁸ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 117-118.

²²⁹ Lovett to Griswold, 17 October 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 370-371.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 371.

represent to world opinion that AMAG does not have great power or that it is not involved in Greek internal affairs.” Griswold explained that a projection of American power would be of good use to any U.S. aid missions if “good results [were] to be obtained and U.S. policy...[were] to be successful.”²³¹ Marshall, responding on November 4 to Griswold’s previous letter, admitted that indeed, “the U.S. government [was] in fact...necessarily involved [in] certain aspects [of] Greek internal affairs” but disagreed with Griswold’s suggestion that drawing attention to this fact would benefit the mission. Marshall told Griswold that “American influence [was to be] exercised as discreetly as possible” and that “credit and responsibility for all measures [were to] be attributed to the Greek government and people whenever possible.”²³²

Disputes between MacVeagh and Griswold led to the former’s removal from Greece at the end of October 1947, and his eventual reassignment as Ambassador to Portugal by November 1948. The State Department decided not to fill MacVeagh’s position in October 1947, and instead opted to unite the role of ambassador and head of AMAG into one position. By July 1948, Griswold was reassigned and replaced by former ambassador to India, Henry F. Grady.²³³

As the end of 1947 approached, the United States continued the implementation of their aid program alongside a Greek government that was still lacking effective leadership, with the ultimate aim of defeating communism in Greece as the most pressing concern. Democracy in Greece was of little concern to the Americans at this juncture, and their willingness to keep in power the Greek right was in line with past British policy. No options were off the table for the

²³¹ Griswold to the Secretary of State, 24 October 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 378-379.

²³² The Secretary of State to the American Mission for Aid to Greece, 4 November 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, V: 398.

²³³ Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 118-119.

Americans, as a right-wing dictatorship was even contemplated. This was highlighted by various American correspondence at the end of 1947 through 1948. On October 30, 1947, the first commander of the U.S. Army detachment in Greece, Colonel Charles R. Lehner, wrote to his superiors that “a government comparable to that formed by Metaxas” was what was needed in Greece because “A democratic form of government...[would be] too mild to counteract the powerful methods employed by enemies of the government.”²³⁴ And the coordinator of the aid program for Greece and Turkey, George McGhee wrote on February 24, 1948 to Marshall that, “the effectiveness of the Greek people [as] an instrument of our policy [could] be increased if certain further steps were taken, much as we might dislike taking them. This includes bringing about the creation of a more authoritarian government.”²³⁵

As the British had done during their tenure in Greece, the Americans too were willing to look the other way or even sanction executions, imprisonment, and exile of unwanted citizenry. This was especially apparent at the beginning of 1948. In March, as the Greek government planned a new round of ‘security arrests,’ *Charge d’affaires* Karl Rankin reported to the Secretary of State that he had informed Christos Ladas, Under-Secretary to current Greek Prime Minister Sophoulis that “such arrests were quite necessary and justifiable as long as they were not of ‘mass’ variety...”²³⁶ Marshall approved of the new wave of arrests, but concerned with bad publicity coming out of Greece he suggested on March 9 that, “unfavorable publicity would

²³⁴ Colonel Charles R. Lehner to Director, Plans and Operations Division, Department of the Army, October 30, 1947, P & O 091 Greece, Section IV, Case 52, P & O Division, Army General Staff Records, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 121.

²³⁵ McGhee to Marshall, February 24, 1948, 868.00/2-2448, SD records, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 121.

²³⁶ Rankin to the Secretary of State, 4 March 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, IV: 58.

be minimized if [the] press were...given background details justifying...arrests.”²³⁷

Commenting on a rising number of political executions by the Greek government, Rankin considered Ladas’ plan to start executing prisoners in small groups in order to hurry the process, a good idea. Rankin wrote to the Secretary of State that Ladas had expected that these executions “would have a wholesome effect upon the guerillas” and that grouping executions in widely separated areas might “avoid unfavorable publicity.” Rankin was fine with the fact that many people in prison or those up for execution might not have been communists, and claimed that even though “some of those imprisoned and sentenced to death after the December 1944 rebellion may not have been at that time hardened communists, it is unlikely that they have been able to resist the influence of communist indoctrination organizations existing within most prisons.”²³⁸ In viewing these comments, it is clear that, at least to one American, the execution of persons solely for their political beliefs was justifiable.

As 1948 unfolded, the military and political situation in Greece looked dire for the Greek government and the American mission. From October 1947 to March 1948, most of the national army was relegated to defensive measures against the communist’s DSE, and towards the end of 1948, the situation did not appear to be getting any better.²³⁹ This instability led the Americans to again consider authoritarian measures in November 1948, most notably in their consideration to allow the “Papagos Solution” whereby king Paul would appoint right-wing General Alexander Papagos as head of a new cabinet that, lacking support of the Greek parliament, would rule in the

²³⁷ The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Greece, 9 March 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, IV: 59.

²³⁸ Rankin to Secretary of State, March 17, 1948, 868.00/3-1748, SD records, quoted in Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 145.

²³⁹ Close, *The Origins*, 217.

king's name. To many Greeks, this must have been another sign that a return of the days of the Metaxas dictatorship of 1936 was in Greece's future. Nevertheless, on November 13, 1948 Ambassador Grady wrote to the Secretary of State that, although the U.S. still favored a "Populist-Liberal coalition government", if necessary, the U.S. would have "no objections to [the] appointment [of] Papagos as Commander-in-Chief."²⁴⁰ Marshall apparently had no objections to this solution, as evidenced by his letter to king Paul four days later on November 17th in which he wrote that he "sincerely hope[d] that the appointment of General Papagos and the declaration of martial law [would] bring about a definite improvement."²⁴¹ The imposition of General Papagos as the head of the Greek government did not play out, however, he did take over the reigns as Commander in Chief of the Greek National Army (GNA) in late January 1949 with quasi-dictatorial powers that gave him the authority to circumvent parliament, exclude politicians from significant influence, impose martial law, and replace military commanders as he saw fit.²⁴²

Although it was not evident as of yet, the military situation for the GNA became brighter towards the beginning of 1949. The army offensives from June to September of 1948, originally viewed as failures because of stalemate, were more effective than was originally assumed. In June 1948, the Tito-Stalin split forced the Greek communists to choose between supporting Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union. The Greek communists had always hoped for aid and acceptance from Stalin in their plight, but it was never forthcoming. On the other hand, Josip

²⁴⁰ Grady to the Secretary of State, 13 November 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, IV: 183.

²⁴¹ The Secretary of State to Grady, 17 November 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, IV: 183-184.

²⁴² Wittner, *American Intervention in Greece*, 248; Close, *The Origins*, 218-219.

Broz Tito, the leader of Yugoslavia's communist partisans had aided the Greek communists with weapons, funding, and access to Yugoslavia's borders during their struggle against the Greek right. But current KKE General Secretary Nikos Zachariades, who had lived and studied in the Soviet Union during his youth, was a loyal friend to Stalin. Accordingly, the Greek communists took Stalin's side in the rift which subsequently led to the end of all aid received from the Yugoslavs.²⁴³ The previous DAG losses taken during the GNA offensives from June to September 1948 were more significant when viewed in this light, as Greek communist supply lines and access to safe harbor in Yugoslavia virtually disappeared overnight. This, along with General Papagos' firm command on the military, successful GNA offensives in August 1949, and Zachariades' decision to change from guerilla tactics to conventional warfare, ultimately led to the a quick collapse of partisan warfare in Greece by October 1949.²⁴⁴

The change in U.S. attitudes toward the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1947 was drastic. It brought perceptions on Greece in line with U.S. attitudes and assumptions of Soviet behavior elsewhere in Europe. The change in American leadership vastly affected the new stance toward the Soviets, especially regarding Greece. For the Americans, the definition of what constituted direct evidence of Soviet involvement in Greece was fluid and changed to fit the needs of policymakers.

²⁴³ Tito's desire for aid from the Americans after he and Stalin had split most likely also factored into the decision to end support for Greek communists

Coupled with the new administration's tougher stance toward the Soviets, Kennan's widely circulated Long Telegram most likely aided in creating American views that blamed Moscow for Greece's problems. Ambassador MacVeagh's transformation is harder to explain, especially in light of his first-hand accounts of the situation in Greece and his documented dismissals of Soviet involvement in Greece time and again. It is not possible to prove, but his time in Washington amongst top policymakers and the President could have influenced his transformation, though the speed and ease with which this was accomplished is unsettling.

Like the British, the Americans believed that appearances needed to be maintained, and they tried to conceal what information the public received in order to gain and keep public approval for their initiatives. Mobilizing public support was not the only cause for controlling what information reached the public. American statesmen were careful to avoid accusations that they were interfering in the political affairs of other nations, supporting one side in the domestic conflict, jettisoning democracy, and that they were apathetic towards the executions of political prisoners – all of which they accused the Soviets for doing in eastern Europe.

CONCLUSION

During WWII, Americans in Washington and in the field had surveyed British actions in Greece with a budding curiosity. The nonchalance with which Greece was discussed in American diplomatic circles was apparent, with those few exceptions where they felt the need to criticize the British for their handling of certain situations. Sources on the ground had mostly scoffed at British claims that the Soviets had a hand in Greece's problems, time and again.

Once, however, they began to see civil war Greece as part of the global confrontation with communism, a clear majority of United States governmental elites favored economic and military aid to the country, regardless of the composition of the Greek government so long as there were no communists or sympathizers in its ranks. But selling the idea to the public required a creative marketing campaign that was designed not to inform the public of the geostrategic realities of the world situation, but rather to put forth a simplistic message that pitted freedom and democracy against communism and totalitarianism. President Truman's speech to Congress essentially reduced the situation in Greece to a distorted picture of a democratic Greece under threat from an evil minority backed by the Soviets. The fact that U.S. interests were seen as threatened by the Soviets was not something the U.S. government wished to inform the public of, most likely because it would have made selling the program more complicated, and hence, harder to sell. The most clever aspect of Truman's speech was the way it implicated the Soviets without blaming them outright.

Like the British, Americans dealt with inept and corrupt Greek politicians whose goals were to advance their own careers or to simply rid the country of opposition. In Greece this took the form of a mostly useless government hardly representative of the broader population, one that committed wide spread atrocities against not only communists, but anyone perceived to be sympathetic to their cause. Although the British first, and subsequently the Americans were not directly pulling the strings to make this happen, their acquiescence in the white terror unleashed by the shadow state on communists and their sympathizers made the wide-spread violations of civilian's rights possible. Once the United States became committed to the defense of Greece, an "all-in" mentality started to define their actions there. From that point on, neither the corrupt nature of the Greek government, nor right-wing illegalities were going to stand in the way of their broader global objectives to halt communism's perceived advance into the southern Balkan peninsula. Nor were the sacrifices made by the erstwhile ally in World War II of a one-time ally going to garner much sympathy from the American government. Much of the former Greek resistance group EAM/ELAS were forced either to flee the country or face the harsh consequences of surrender to the Greek government still headed by their worst enemies. To the Americans, this was of little concern. Their main worry was that if Greek communists gained power in Greece – even by legal means – it would open a friendly door to the Russians which would eventually lead to the loss of Greece, the Mediterranean, and eventually the whole Middle East. This was not an option for the U.S. and is evidenced by their willingness to tolerate the Greek right-wing, their reluctance to trust their sources on the ground, their creation of an inaccurate picture to sell their program to congress and the people, and their never-ending attempts to keep information from reaching the public.

There was no intelligence failure in Greece. American resources in the field had mostly given the administration a remarkably clear picture of developments in Greece up until mid-1946. But the administration did not manipulate the strain of information reaching them in order to fit it to their existing needs – they mostly ignored it and formed their own opinions. The Truman administration committed vast amounts of financial and military resources to the defense of Greece solely on the basis of circumstantial evidence and the assumption of Soviet intentions, largely based on how they perceived Soviet actions elsewhere. Certainly, they believed that the Soviets had designs on Greece even if they couldn't find the evidence to support their beliefs.

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