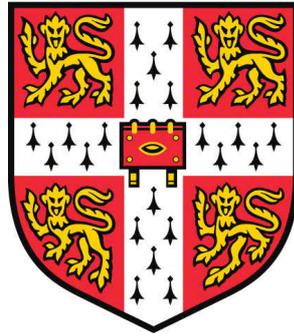


# British Intelligence Services in Greece, 1940 -1947



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January 2019

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy  
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This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

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# British Intelligence Services in Greece, 1940 - 1947

Constantine Capsaskis

## Abstract

This dissertation seeks to address two key themes, drawing on archives in Britain, the United States, and Greece. Firstly, it examines the impact of British Intelligence on the Greek war effort, resistance to Axis occupation, and the period after liberation, by examining the changing role of intelligence in each period. During the early part of the war, the Intelligence Services, and in particular the newly founded Special Operations Executive, sought to achieve their aim of stoking resistance in Greece to help the British war effort through a number of operations. The failure of these operations, however, would have a lasting impact on their future work in Greece. After the stunning success of SOE Operation 'Harling', British officials in Cairo and London increasingly fostered guerrilla warfare, making their mission in Greece extremely complex. This was particularly true of SOE, which now entered the hazardous world of guerrilla politics even as it was now serving an equally important political and diplomatic role. While relations between the British and EAM (the communist-led National Liberation Front) had initially been cordial, relations soured as the war progressed and post-war ambitions became more pressing. Eventually, the understanding between the two sides broke down completely and, only a few months after the liberation of Greece, the British government was in open conflict with the guerrillas of EAM. This leads on to the second key theme of the dissertation: the ramifications of the

involvement of British Intelligence on the Greek Civil War, and in particular the effect of the dual policy followed by the British in Greece, trying to achieve what proved to be mutually exclusive military and political aims. It will also seek to elucidate whether British involvement in Greece helped to exacerbate the conditions in Greece which led to Civil War, an ongoing topic of scholarly and public controversy.

## Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr Andrew Arsan. The faith he put into my subject and me was instrumental to the success of this PhD from the very beginning. Since then, he has guided me with patience, insight, and generosity of time. I am also indebted to Professor David Reynolds who, at the eleventh hour, read the final draft of this dissertation and helped shape its final form. I would also like to thank Dr David Burke for his guidance during my MPhil, which in many ways formed the conceptual nucleus of this thesis. I am also thankful to Professor Christopher Andrew whose advice on what avenues to pursue in the realm of Intelligence history was invaluable. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Kate Ferris who, during my formative academic years, encouraged my interest in European civil wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This PhD would not have been possible without the support of my family, both financial and emotional. Usually my first audience, my family provided me with invaluable feedback to make sure this dissertation would not be indecipherable. In particular my father, who has remained my number one reader, despite endless redrafts.

I would also like to thank the staff at the National Archives (Kew), the archives at King's College London, the archives of the Benaki Museum in Athens, the National Archives (College Park, MD) and the Truman and FDR Presidential Libraries. Without their assistance this PhD would most likely have taken at least another four years. Additionally, I am grateful to the University of Cambridge and the Faculty of History for their funding which provided me with the

opportunity to travel to destinations like Independence, Missouri and Hyde Park, New York for this dissertation.

This PhD also benefitted from the freely given time and assistance of a number of people. Tryphon Kedros shared his first hand experience of events and also provided me with a copy of his autobiography which features in this dissertation. Alekos Zannas helped guide me to the most valuable Greek archives. Professor Procopis Papastratis moved me away from some of my preconceptions on the era. Finally, Dr Kyriakos Nalmpantis provided valuable insight into the American intelligence services in Greece.

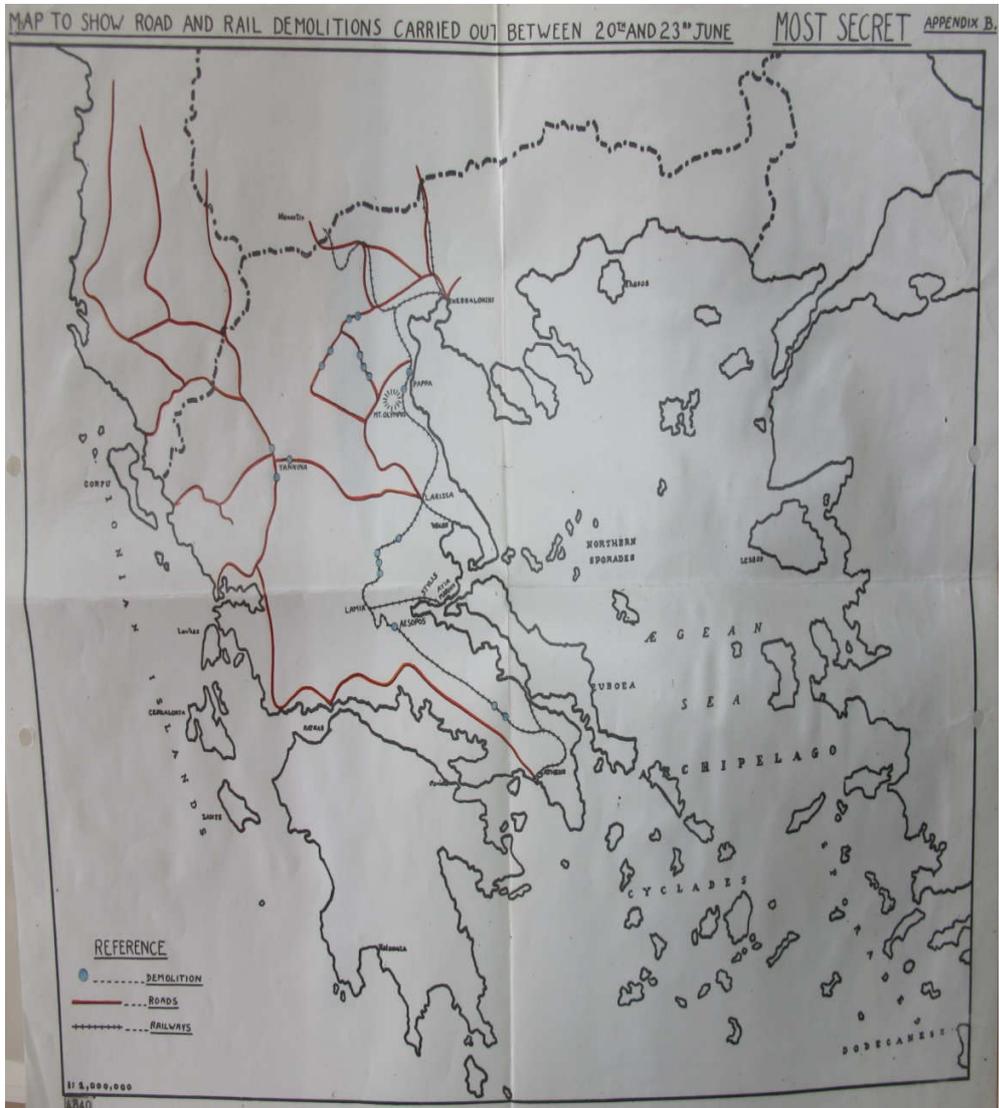
Finally, I would also like to thank my friends who made this PhD a far less taxing process. This is not a comprehensive list as such an endeavour would be far too long. I am grateful to Ana and Ioana who kept me centred when I needed it most. Felix, Francesco, José, Luca, Sam and Stefan who, from the very first few days in Wolfie all the way back in 2013, made Cambridge a significantly more enjoyable place to live in. The GRR group and the Pythons also form an important part of my time in Cambridge. These all helped me to emerge from this process (mostly) unscathed.

For my friend Giulio who never got the opportunity to  
submit his PhD.

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'Miscellaneous London SO File Part 1, August 1940 to July 1943',  
 HS5/748, TNA, London.

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### Notes on Transliteration

Until recently there was no uniform approach to transliterating Greek into English. Arguably, this still does not exist. This text consistently uses the same spelling of Greek names throughout the body of work. However, there is a great deal of inconsistency in the spelling of Greek names in the primary sources and secondary literature used.

In particular, this is true of Greek diphthongs. Sometimes, these are transliterated phonetically while others choose to adapt the letters into the alphabet. An example of this is the transliteration of the name Ευριπίδης Μπακιρτζής which can be found both as Euvripidis Bakirdzis and Euripides Bakirdzes, and potentially even Mpakirtzis.

There also exists some inconsistency when transliterating the Greek letter Kappa (K). The letters C and K are often used interchangeably, for example in Canellopoulos and Kanellopoulos. This is also true of the Greek letters Ypsilon (Y), Eta (H) and Iota (I) which can be written both using the letters I or E, as in Dimitrios and Demetrios. Another example is the Greek letter Gamma (Γ) which can be transliterated both with the letter Y or G, for example in Panayiotis or Panagiotis.

To avoid crowding the quotations used throughout the text, it was decided to only provide the spelling of the name used throughout the body of text if the transliteration used by the quotation is a radical departure from the norm.

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### Abbreviations

AMM	Allied Military Mission
BCIS	British Counter Intelligence Service
BLO	British Liaison Officer
BMM	British Military Mission
CD	SOE Chief
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DPA	Directorate of Policy and Agents
DSO	Directorate of Special Operations
EAM	Εθνικό Απελευθερωτικό Μέτωπο (National Liberation Front)
EDES	Εθνικός Δημοκρατικός Ελληνικός Σύνδεσμος (National Republican Greek League)
EKKA	Εθνική Και Κοινωνική Απελευθέρωση (National and Social Liberation)
ELAS	Ελληνικός Λαϊκός Απελευθερωτικός Στρατός (Greek Peoples Liberation Army)
EOA	Εθνική Οργάνωση Αντίστασης (National Resistance Organisation)
FO	Foreign Office
Force 133	SOE Cairo
GS(R)/MI(R)	General Staff (Research)/ Military Intelligence (Research)
HMG	His Majesty's Government

ISLD	Inter-Services Liaison Department
KKE	Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος (Communist Party of Greece)
MI3	Military Intelligence (Europe)
MI5	The Security Service
MI9	Military Intelligence (Escape)
NVKD	The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PAO	Πανελλήνια Απελευθερωτική Οργάνωση (Pan-Hellenic Liberating Organisation)
PEAN	Πανελλήνια Ένωση Αγονιζόμενων Νέων (Pan-Hellenic Union of Fighting Youths)
PEEA	Πολιτική Επιτροπή Εθνικής Απελευθέρωσης (Political Committee of National Liberation)
PWE	Political Warfare Executive
SIME	Security Intelligence Middle East
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SO	Minister of Economic Warfare
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SSU	Strategic Services Unit
YBE	Υπερασπιστές Βορείου Ελλάδος (Defenders of Northern Greece)

## Introduction

The intimate and savage nature of violence inherent in a civil war reverberates for generations. To compound this, the resolution of civil wars is rarely a straightforward affair, with animosity surviving long after the battles have stopped. Both victor and vanquished have to come to terms with the past in order to co-exist peacefully but this is never an easy process. Indicative of the compromises required is Spain's *Pacto Del Olvido*, an attempt to establish co-operation and lack of prosecutions as the foundation of its democracy after Franco.<sup>1</sup> However, it remains a contentious solution with many detractors.

In contrast to the Spanish approach, there has been very little effort and willingness in Greece to historicise the Greek Civil War and it is often bandied about, usually in the service of party politics. This has contributed to a regrettable historiographical state of affairs with work on this complex issue being susceptible to political bias and partisan arguments. This is particularly true of work on British involvement in Greece at the time. Its overt nature in December 1944, when British troops clashed with leftist guerrillas in Athens, has diverted some of the malice usually reserved for local belligerents onto the British government of the time. As the historiographical overview later in this introduction will illustrate, this has allowed British interference to become trapped in the Manichean narratives still propagated about the Greek Civil War, with the British being cast either as heroes liberating Greece from the menace of a communist coup or as villains imposing a right wing dictatorship on the people.<sup>2</sup> The dramatic imagery of December 1944 has often overshadowed and distorted a far longer and complex relationship between

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<sup>1</sup> Paloma Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy*, trans. Mark Oakley (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2002) p. 265-270.

<sup>2</sup> Thanasis Sfikas, 'Έγκλωβισμός στα αφηγήματα των ηρώων και του τρόμου' (Trapped in the narratives of heroes and terror), *Καθημερινή* (Athens) 17/06/2012.

Britain and the National Liberation Front (EAM), the communist led resistance organisation.

This dissertation seeks to redress this by examining the impact of the British Intelligence Services in Greece from 1940 to 1947. It seeks to show that the Services were used to ensure the implementation of Britain's political aspirations of stability and influence in Greece. But as fears of a communist regime in an EAM-dominated liberated Greece grew, they warped British priorities and inhibited the all-out pursuit of the war effort against the Axis. These fears were evident as early as 1942 and permeated to the very top of the British government. As a result, despite some internal objections, the Services quickly found themselves promoting this agenda, even at the cost of exacerbating the volatile Greek political situation. Primarily, this work seeks to examine British policy towards Greece and its domestic politics, as illustrated by the interactions between the various elements of the British government involved in Greece, particularly the Foreign Office and the Special Operations Executive, as well as their interactions with the Greek political world and the resistance organisations.

The importance of the Intelligence Services in implementing British policy in Greece during the Axis occupation cannot be overstated. The occupation meant that the British government could not rely on its usual diplomatic and political channels to influence events within Greece but instead had to turn to the Intelligence Services to work on its behalf. This is also true, to a lesser extent, after liberation, as the unpopularity of direct British military intervention, both in Britain and abroad, meant that certain activities continued to be carried out in secret. This meant that covert operations and work in this period also assumed an indivisible political nature, something the Foreign Office was painfully aware of in its many attempts to regulate and direct these affairs. This is most frequently evident in the many disputes

between the Foreign Office and the Special Operations Executive over the latter's activities. Yet, despite the crucial and lasting political impact of these activities in Greece, there has been very little academic work done to further our understanding of the relationship between the Intelligence Services and the Greek political scene.

This study, whose scope is by its very nature limited, is not meant to be a general evaluation of the Greek resistance<sup>3</sup>, SOE and its activities in Greece or the Civil War. Its focus lies squarely on enhancing our understanding of the effect that implementing British government policy had on the British intelligence officers and agents in Greece and the knock-on effect it had on the Greek resistance and Greek political life. Work on this topic has tended to focus on providing readers with general overviews of the period as well as narratives more focused on the successes and failures of the covert work itself. As an example of the focus of this study, the British sabotage of the Asopos viaduct in 1943, while remaining a fascinating story, does not figure here almost at all because it had no political dimension. Instead, an effort has been made to study events not commonly presented in the existing historiography and details which do not appear in more general histories. To this end, this work includes quotations from primary sources that have not appeared in any other scholarly work on the topic.

The two main academic works on British Intelligence in Greece, an article authored by Richard Clogg (1975) and a monograph by André Gerolymatos (1992), were both published decades ago and will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The continuing declassification of new archives means that the time is right for a new review of British intelligence.

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<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth study of the Greek resistance, Spyros Tsoutsoumpis, *A History of the Greek resistance in the Second World War: The People's Armies* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016).

The lack of an extended analysis of the effect of British policy, most prominently the interactions between the Foreign Office and SOE, considering the new wealth of information available, creates a need for this new perspective on the issue. Whereas the two aforementioned authors have primarily worked with the available Foreign Office and War Office papers to support their arguments, there has not been a correspondingly detailed investigation of events through the papers and notes of SOE's Greek section.

A full evaluation of the nature of EAM and its objectives also lies beyond the scope of this work. In general its activities will be analysed only when pertaining to British policies and actions rather than as a whole. Because of this, it should be stressed that this work does not seek to absolve EAM and the Greek Communist Party (KKE) from its role in the Civil War and its acts of violence and repression.<sup>4</sup> But it does seek to illustrate how the British government's consternation over EAM was a significantly more complex affair than simply an abhorrence of EAM's methods. It is hoped that a return to primary sources and a rigorous analysis of the documents pertaining to the activities of the Intelligence Services throughout these years will be able to provide an enhanced understanding of British policy towards Greece and its effects. To help achieve this goal, extensive archival work has been carried out primarily in Britain but also the United States and Greece.

By its very nature, any study of secret organisations necessarily focuses on individuals, as only a limited number of people were privy to their very existence. This was compounded by requirements of operational efficiency and security. Additionally, this narrow focus is exacerbated by the attempts of this

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<sup>4</sup> Indicatively, Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'Red Terror: Leftist Violence during the Occupation' in Mark Mazower (ed.) *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943-1960* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 142-184.

work to primarily study the creation and impact of policy, formulated in ministerial meetings and departmental papers. Thus, this dissertation seeks to illustrate the views held by British personnel working on Greece, both those working within the country as well as those located in Cairo and London, as well as other British officials, mainly from the Foreign Office and Ministry of Economic Warfare. To complement this, it attempts to provide an overview of the information that would have been available to these officers and officials during their work on Greece. Throughout the main body the opinions of individuals like Lord Glenconner, Orme Sargent, Reginald 'Rex' Leeper and Francis Noel-Baker are continually used to help render the creation, evolution, and implementation of policy. Some of these individuals are chosen because they occupied an influential position in this process. Indicatively, Sargent was Deputy Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office while Glenconner was the Director in charge of Middle Eastern affairs in SOE's London Headquarters before taking over SOE Cairo in August 1942.<sup>5</sup> Others, most prominently Francis Noel-Baker, are important because they represent important social networks in this process. Educated at Cambridge, like many of his peers, he was firmly a part of the establishment with important familial connections. When he provoked a reaction by dissenting from the prevailing policy set out by the Foreign Office on Greece, his social importance ensured that Winston Churchill personally took an interest in his views.<sup>6</sup>

This dissertation expands in a major way on my MPhil dissertation entitled 'The Special Operations Executive and the Greek Civil War'. Thus, some parts of the former lean on research carried out for the latter and feature some of the same archival material and quotes. Additionally, three small

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<sup>5</sup> W.J.M. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE: the Special Operations Executive, 1940-1945* (London, St. Ermin's, 2000) p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Clogg, *Anglo-Greek Attitudes: Studies in History* (New York, Palgrave, 2000) p. 66.

sections of the current dissertation (the history of Greece 1935-1940, some elements of SOE's origin, and the Cairo delegation) are derived from that work.

In its majority, the study concentrates on the first two rounds of what is known as the 'Three Round Theory' of the Greek Civil War. These are the infighting between rival guerrilla organisations in late 1943 and early 1944 and the fighting between the leftist Greek guerrillas on the one hand and government and British forces on the other in December 1944. It also examines the run-up to the general commencement of hostilities of the so-called third round in 1946 but the differences between the first two rounds and the third are sufficiently great that a study including all three would potentially have been erroneous. That is not to say that the dissertation agrees with the 'Three Round Theory' in its entirety. The theory, first put forward by the Greek state after the Civil War, suggests that all three rounds were successive premeditated bids by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) for power and it was mostly found in early works on the subject.<sup>7</sup> This theory is present in works by John O. Iatrides<sup>8</sup> and Colonel C.M. Woodhouse<sup>9</sup> and has faced intense scrutiny since, especially by Thanasis Sfikas.<sup>10</sup> In general, the precise dates and forms of the Civil War remain contentious to this day. But, as will be illustrated below, it is hard to argue that all 'Three Rounds' of the Civil War were premeditated assaults by the KKE. However, it is also hard to agree with the view that only the large-scale hostilities of 1946-1949 constituted the Civil War and that the earlier conflicts were merely skirmishes. The terminology of the

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Mazower, 'Historians at War: Greece, 1940-1950', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 38, no. 2 (1995) p. 504.

<sup>8</sup> John O. Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens: The Greek Communist 'Second Round', 1944-1945* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> C.M. Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece, 1941-1949*, new edn. (London, C. Hurst and Co., 2002) p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Thanasis D. Sfikas, *The British Labour Government and the Greek Civil War, 1945-1949: the Imperialism of 'Non-Intervention'* (Keele, Ryburn, 1994).

‘three rounds’ remains useful because it provides a tool to separate the conflict’s stages, with each round exhibiting unique features. But rather than each round inevitably following the other, each was an escalation as both sides consistently failed to resolve the political, social, and economic difficulties that were the root causes of the divide.

In the nine years between Greek entry into the Second World War, in October 1940, and the end of the third round of the Greek Civil War, in late 1949, the country underwent such dramatic political and social changes that a single study would miss many of the changing nuances of Greek society. Catalysed by the chaos of occupation and the resulting breakdown of existing social structures, new ideas and visions for society and its reconstruction after the war emerged to compete for superiority.<sup>11</sup> An example of this is the end of the *Εθνικός Διχασμός* (‘National Schism’). This struggle between the republican disciples of Eleftherios Venizelos, the charismatic Liberal politician who dominated Greek politics in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the royalists, mostly conservative supporters of the Greek royal family, was finally over having dominated political discourse in Greece for thirty years. Yet, in many ways, the first chapters of the Civil War are closer to being a conflict between these two camps than an early Cold War conflict between communists and anti-communists. Even though, at the end of armed hostilities in 1949, Greek political life was divided between communists and anti-communists, this neat division was not the sole cause of the Civil War; neither does it accurately portray the complexities of Greek society that perpetuated it. Indeed, the Civil War probably exacerbated this political divide in the country as is often the

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Mazower, ‘The Forms of Political Justice: Greece, 1944-1945’ in Mark Mazower (ed.) *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943-1960* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 24.

case in civil wars.<sup>12</sup> Other domestic differences between the ‘rounds’ include the change of the KKE leadership at the end of the war, with the return of the party’s doctrinaire Secretary Nikos Zachariadis from Dachau, and the far more conventional nature of warfare in the last round, fought far more on a geographic basis than a political one. It is for these reasons that this is mainly a study of relations between the British and EAM than its successor during the ‘third round’, the Democratic Army of Greece.

It is also important to stress that a long study encompassing the entirety of the Greek Civil War would necessarily underestimate the importance of the changing international scene and the onset of the Cold War. Greece was one of its earliest battlegrounds and the Cold War’s first direct military intervention by the United States. As will be illustrated later in the thesis, the rapid shift of official American attitudes towards international intervention in Greek affairs between the rounds is testament to how different these were. Early British intervention often aroused American suspicions of European colonialism, but by the end of the decade Americans contextualised it completely differently as their fear of Soviet communism outweighed their disdain of British imperialism.<sup>13</sup> The Second World War and its immediate aftermath accelerated Britain’s decline as one of the Great Powers.<sup>14</sup> The British Empire faced a potential descent into obscurity, hampered by a devastated economy and challenged by the proliferation of decolonisation. And while in the early part of the decade, under the premiership of Winston Churchill, the government had fought against what he called the “liquidation of the British Empire”, the sheer scale of the war and the ideological charge it

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<sup>12</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp. 74-75.

<sup>13</sup> Robert M. Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944-1947* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1981) p. 307.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

assumed ensured its demise.<sup>15</sup> Yet that does not mean that British war planners were not consumed with concerns over the 'lifelines' of the Eastern Mediterranean when considering their policy towards Greece in the early years of the war. By 1947, however, with the independence of the Indian subcontinent looming and the challenge of anti-colonial movements in countries like Malaysia and the future of Palestine, British priorities had shifted.

The most important conclusion of the dissertation is that British policy throughout this period remained far more constant than is often portrayed. The unwavering support provided by Britain to the Greek king and his government-in-exile sought to ensure that British influence in Greece after the war would be secure. At no point did the British government prioritise the war effort over its political efforts to maintain control over the political future of Greece. The activities of the Intelligence Services complemented the political efforts to this effect despite internal objections. Whether it was during the early months of the Second World War or the open conflict of December 1944, the policy handed down to the Intelligence Services was the same.

The timeline of the dissertation roughly corresponds to the seven years between Greek entry into the Second World War in 1940 and the military handoff by the British to the United States in 1947. While British Intelligence remained in Greece following the arrival of the American military, it soon found itself challenged by its American intelligence cousins in the brand new CIA.

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Clarke, *The Last Thousand Days of the British Empire* (London, Allen Lane, 2007) pp. 507-508.

### Archival Material

A large part of the archival material used for this dissertation is part of the British National Archives HS series, the Records of Special Operation Executive (SOE). Duncan Stuart, the last SOE adviser at the Foreign Office, wrote an article published in 2007 detailing the evolution of the SOE Archive.<sup>16</sup> In it, he details how the archives suffered not only from “institutional biases, common to most secret services, against more than minimal record keeping” but also a lack of diligence by some of the early archival staff as well as the catastrophic destruction of an unknown number of files during the notorious fire of the Baker Street SOE HQ.<sup>17</sup> Yet, despite these setbacks, the SOE Archive still presents the reader with a vital insight into the organisation. Some of the sources available in the archives are the in-house histories of SOE, some general and others specific to SOE activities in Greece. The main drawback of these in-house histories is that they occasionally present a sanitised version of events, often to justify the operations or methods of SOE. This is particularly true for Greece where the organisation was under fire in the later part of the Second World War for its choice in collaborators during the early years of the war and its perceived role in catalysing the Greek Civil War. But the Greek files also include a significant number of intelligence and operational reports, cables to and from occupied Greece as well as internal communications between SOE officers assigned to Greece. Apart from the official papers, informal letters as well as hasty scribbles in the margins of memos also provide a glimpse of the thoughts and feelings of these officers. However, that is not to say that all thoughts and ideas penned by individual SOE officers occasioned action or are weighted equally. Overall, it is unclear how many SOE papers and

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<sup>16</sup> Duncan Stuart, “Of Historical Interest only”: The origins and vicissitudes of the SOE Archive’ in Neville Wylie (ed.) *The Politics and Strategy of Clandestine Warfare, Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* (Oxford, Routledge, 2007), pp. 15-27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.

files were destroyed and the amount of selective editing that they went through. However, they are probably the most comprehensive primary source available.

This is in stark contrast to the documents originating with SOE's intelligence cousins, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Security Service (MI5). In addition to the aforementioned institutional bias of the intelligence community in record keeping, the Public Records Act 1958 s. 3(4) has allowed these services to retain numerous records or omit parts of published documents that could potentially have proven useful. This is particularly true of the records created after the end of the Second World War, as they are presumably considered of a more sensitive nature. This partly explains why this dissertation deals less extensively with these years as unclassified archives were substantially harder to discover.

The American intelligence archives share that characteristic. While the OSS archives are extensive and are generally declassified, those records pertaining to the post-war years are also much harder to discover. This is partly due to the upheaval in American intelligence, with the founding of the CIA in 1947, but perhaps also reflects a belief that the activities of these services in the Cold War are of a far more sensitive nature than their earlier activities.

Additionally, diplomatic and government records both in the UK (mainly the FO, the Foreign Office, and PREM, Prime Minister's Office, series) and the US (mainly RG 84, the Records of Foreign Service Posts of the State Department) have been re-examined. These archives have been available to the public for many decades and have often formed the basis of the existing historiography. However, it is hoped that a re-examination of these in conjunction with newly declassified material can provide a complementary

analysis from the ground up rather than a rehash of the existing literature and the popular quotes found in many of these books.

#### A review of the Historiography

Scholarly debate has been the main victim of the politicisation of research on the Greek Civil War. Too often, scholars attempt to convey absolute truths and answers on this complex subject while either belittling any views that do not conform to their own or ascribing them to blind partisanship. Examples of such academic denunciations are far too common on all sides but to illustrate this unfortunate reality one does not have to look beyond the work of perhaps the most popular contemporary academics on the Greek Civil War, Stathis Kalyvas and Nikos Marantzidis. In their co-authored book, *Εμφύλια Πάθη (Civil War Passions)*, the two assert that the majority of work which seeks to address the culpability of British intervention in Greece is often a product of the left-wing political bias of what will be called further down in this section the ‘Revisionist School’ of history.<sup>18</sup> Using a quote from *Reviewing the Cold War* edited by Odd Arne Westad, they characterise ‘revisionists’ as scholars whose “enthusiasm for radical thinking was sometimes greater than their research skills”.<sup>19</sup> It is ironic however that, when this quote is seen in its entirety, it opines that “although their enthusiasm for radical thinking was sometimes greater than their research skills these *revisionists* contributed immensely to

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<sup>18</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas and Nikos Marantzidis, *Εμφύλια Πάθη: 23 ερωτήσεις και απαντήσεις για τον Εμφύλιο (Civil War Passions: 23 Questions and Answers About the Civil War)* (Athens, Μεταίχμιο, 2015) pp. 347-348.

<sup>19</sup> Odd Arne Westad, ‘Introduction: Reviewing the Cold War’ in Odd Arne Westad (ed.) *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (New York, Routledge, 2000) p.4

the debate on the Cold War”.<sup>20</sup> It is this lack of debate and composite answers that is hurting our understanding of the Civil War.

Academic engagements on the Greek Civil War most commonly end up as bitter disputes, with fierce arguments as to who is the main culprit for the conflict.<sup>21</sup> Arguments continue to rage over whether the communists, the royalists, or the British and Soviets were at fault for causing the strife. Of these, the examination of the international factor of the Greek Civil War has become widely derided. It has been characterised as the “obvious error, so common in Greek historiography of the Left, of ascribing primary responsibility for the engagement and the defeat of the KKE in the ‘December Events’ and the civil war to the ‘imperialist designs’ of the British and Americans, or to the ‘indifference’ of the Soviets”.<sup>22</sup> John Iatrides, perhaps the pre-eminent historian on the topic of foreign intervention in the Greek Civil War, in his review of the English-language historiography makes a special note that focusing on British intervention as a cause of the Greek Civil War was not well received by the academic community.<sup>23</sup> What this means is that there has not been a focus on examining the international parameters of the Greek Civil War in recent years, with a great deal of work focusing on micro-history and the exploration of the social and ethnic diameters of the conflict.<sup>24</sup> This includes works about the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Polymeris Voglis and Ioannis Nioutsikos, ‘The Greek Historiography of the 1940s. A Reassessment’, *Südosteuropa*, vol. 65, no. 2 (2017) p. 327.

<sup>22</sup> Haris Vlavianos, *Greece, 1941-1949: From Resistance to Civil War, The Strategy of the Greek Communist Party* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1992) p. 248.

<sup>23</sup> John O. Iatrides, ‘Οι διεθνείς διαστάσεις του ελληνικού Εμφυλίου Πολέμου: μια επισκόπηση της αγγλόφωνης ιστοριογραφίας’ (The International Dimensions of the Greek Civil War: A review of the English language historiography) in Giorgos Antoniou and Nikos Marantzidis (eds.) *Η Εποχή της Σύγχυσης: Η Δεκαετία του ’40 και η ιστοριογραφία (The Age of Confusion: The 40s and Historiography)* (Athens, Εστία, 2008) p. 98.

<sup>24</sup> Antonis Liakos, ‘Αντάρτες και συμμορίτες στα ακαδημαϊκά αμφιθέατρα’ (Guerrillas and Bandits in the Academic Amphitheatres) in Hagen Fleischer (ed.) *Η Ελλάδα ’36-*

experience of the Civil War in specific Greek villages like Lakka Souliou<sup>25</sup> and Fourtzi<sup>26</sup> in the southern Peloponnese, as well as work on the ‘Slavophone’ Macedonians<sup>27</sup> or Turkish-speaking Pontic guerrillas.<sup>28</sup>

The historiography of the Civil War is most commonly divided into three distinct phases. The ‘Orthodox’ view was established soon after the end of hostilities and is typical of early Cold War historiography. This narrative of events, especially propagated by right-wing governments of Greece up to 1967 and the subsequent Greek Junta, minimised the role of left-wing resistance and ascribed sole responsibility for the Civil War to the KKE. An example of this minimisation of EAM in the resistance can be found in the work of George Kousoulas who argued that the general strategy of left-wing guerrillas was to

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<sup>25</sup> ‘49: Από τη Δικτατορία στον Εμφύλιο, Τομές και συνέχεις (Greece, ’36 to ’49: From the Dictatorship to the Civil War, Differences and Continuities), 5<sup>th</sup> edn. (Athens, Καστανιώτη, 2003) pp. 30-36.

<sup>25</sup> Vaggelis Tzoukas, ‘Απαρχές του Εμφυλίου στην Ήπειρο: Η Περίπτωση των Κολιοδημητριάων στη Λάκκα Σουλιού’ (The Beginnings of the Civil War in Epirus: The case of the Koliodimitraion in Lakka Souliou) in Kleomenis Koutsoukis and Ioannis Sakkas (eds.) *Πτυχές του Εμφυλίου Πολέμου, 1946-1949 (Facets of the Civil War, 1946-1949)* (Athens, Φιλίστωρ, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Nasi Mpalta, ‘«Τότε με τα “χίτικα” δεν κόταγες να πεις ούτε τ’ όνομα σου»: Μαρτυρίες για τον εμφύλιο σε ένα χωριό της Πυλίας’ (“Back then with the ‘X’ you didn’t even dare say your name”: Testimonies about the Civil War in a village of Pylia) in Ilias Nikolakopoulos, Alkis Rigos and Grigoris Psalidas (eds.) *Ο Εμφύλιος Πόλεμος: Από τη Βάρκιζα στο Γράμμο, Φεβρουάριος 1945- Αύγουστος 1949 (The Civil War: From Varkiza to Grammos, February 1945 to August 1949)* (Athens, Θεμέλιο, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Ιακωνός D. Michailidis, ‘«Μοναρχοφασίστες» και Σλαβομακεδόνες αγωνιστές: Ιδεολογικές και άλλες βεντένες στη Μακεδονία του Εμφυλίου Πολέμου’ (“Monarcho-fascists” and Slavomacedonian soldiers: Ideological and other Vendettas in Civil War Macedonia) in Ilias Nikolakopoulos, Alkis Rigos and Grigoris Psalidas (eds.) *Ο Εμφύλιος Πόλεμος: Από τη Βάρκιζα στο Γράμμο, Φεβρουάριος 1945- Αύγουστος 1949 (The Civil War: From Varkiza to Grammos, February 1945 to August 1949)* (Athens, Θεμέλιο, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Nikos Marantzidis, ‘Εθνοτικές διαστάσεις του Εμφυλίου Πολέμου: Η περίπτωση των Τουρκόφωνων Ποντίων Καπεταναίων της Μακεδονίας’ (Ethnic Dimensions of the Civil War: The Case of Turkish-Speaking Pontic Captains in Macedonia) in Ilias Nikolakopoulos, Alkis Rigos and Grigoris Psalidas (eds.) *Ο Εμφύλιος Πόλεμος: Από τη Βάρκιζα στο Γράμμο, Φεβρουάριος 1945- Αύγουστος 1949 (The Civil War: From Varkiza to Grammos, February 1945 to August 1949)* (Athens, Θεμέλιο, 2002).

avoid combat with the Axis forces in order to conserve men and supplies for the upcoming revolution.<sup>29</sup> This argument, and generally the ‘Orthodox’ view, is mostly disregarded as a product of its time.

After the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974 there was a significant shift in Greek academic opinion. Echoing the global trend of Cold War historiography and the international work done on the Civil War, exemplified by authors like Heinz Richter and Dominic Eudes, this ‘revisionist’ view re-established events by attempting to interpret them differently and more favourably to EAM.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, this school also falls into many pitfalls, including a tendency to romanticise the guerrillas. This is particularly true of Eudes and has allowed people to comment that that the ‘revisionists’ working on Greece turned its guerrilla leaders into early Che Guevaras.<sup>31</sup>

In the last fifteen years a new wave of writers has appeared promoting a new school of thought on the Greek Civil War. These writers, who refer to themselves as ‘post-revisionists’, and their work, particularly on the political violence of the left and the nature of collaboration, have been of vital importance in adding a far more nuanced interpretation of events into the debate. However, they are equally guilty of perpetuating the vicious cycle of academic recrimination and often are active participants in the bitter arguments plaguing the historiography. They are also guilty of consistently reverting to a stance of arguing with a sense of historical vindication arising

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<sup>29</sup> D. George Kousoulas, *Revolution and Defeat: The Story of the Greek Communist Party* (London, Oxford University Press, 1965).

<sup>30</sup> Dominique Eudes, *The Kapetanos: Partisans and Civil War in Greece, 1943-1949*, trans. John Howe (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1972) and Heinz Richter, *British Intervention in Greece: From Varkiza to Civil War*, trans. Marion Sarafis (London, The Merlin Press, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> Liakos, ‘Αντάρτες και συμμορίες στα ακαδημαϊκά αμφιθέατρα’, p. 29.

from the fall of the Soviet Union and its satellites.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the majority of their work includes reference to the fate of countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland and consistently creates an argument that Greece was better-off for having been saved from Soviet domination, almost implying that anyone questioning them wished for a Soviet government in Greece. An example of this post-revisionist Manichean view includes George Th. Mavrogordatos' implied argument that any historian adopting a more 'revisionist' view may be blinded by leftwing bias, calling 'revisionist' history the "revenge of the defeated."<sup>33</sup>

The bitter nature of the academic debate has led to numerous historiographical reviews.<sup>34</sup> It is perhaps telling that Mark Mazower chose "Historians at War" as the title of his review of the available historiography for this tumultuous decade.<sup>35</sup> However, it is for this very reason that this dissertation has chosen to steer as clear as possible of the historiography. Unfortunately, the standard of debate is significantly below what should be acceptable. This includes the post-revisionists being called 'monarcho-fascists'<sup>36</sup> by their opponents, while prominent post-revisionists like Kalyvas prefer to talk about the teaching qualifications of their intellectual adversaries

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<sup>32</sup> Indicatively in Kalyvas, Marantzidis, *Εμφύλια Πάθη*, p. 239-241 and George Th. Mavrogordatos, 'Η «ρεβάνς» των ηττημένων' (The revenge of the defeated), *Το Βήμα* (Athens) 10/09/1999.

<sup>33</sup> Mavrogordatos, 'Η «ρεβάνς» των ηττημένων'.

<sup>34</sup> Indicatively, the aforementioned compilations Mark Mazower, 'Historians At War', Iatrides, 'Οι διεθνείς διαστάσεις του ελληνικού Εμφυλίου Πολέμου', Voglis and Nioutsikos, 'The Greek Historiography of the 1940s', and Giorgos Antoniou and Nikos Marantzidis 'The Axis Occupation and Civil War: Changing Trends in Greek Historiography, 1941-2002', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (March, 2004) pp. 223-231.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Mazower, 'Historians at War'.

<sup>36</sup> Petros St. Makris-Staikos, «Ο Άγγλος Πρόξενος»: Ο υποπλοίαρχος Νοέλ C. Rees και οι Βρετανικές Μυστικές Υπηρεσίες, Ελλάδα-Μέση Ανατολή (1939-1944) (*"The English Consul": Commander Noël C. Rees and the British Secret Services, Greece- Middle East [1939-1944]*) (Athens, Ωκεανίδα, 2011) p. 20.

rather than their arguments.<sup>37</sup> This is why the dissertation deals primarily with archival material and some other primary sources, abundantly available as many of the protagonists of the Civil War produced memoirs (which remain disproportionately influential and useful despite the common drawbacks of autobiographies),<sup>38</sup> in an attempt to steer clear of this debate and to focus on the evidence available to establish its argument.

The historiography of the intelligence services is headlined by the official histories. These include the two general histories of MI5 and SIS written by Christopher Andrew<sup>39</sup> and Keith Jeffery<sup>40</sup> respectively. Their unparalleled access to records allowed them to provide detailed retrospectives into the history and activities of the two organisations. The common concern with official histories is the extent to which the access granted to the historians was curated to protect more sensitive information that may be in the archives.

The SOE official histories are organised differently. Rather than a single official history for the organisation, official histories have been published on a geographical basis. The first of these was M.R.D. Foot's seminal *SOE in France* first published in 1966<sup>41</sup> and was followed by others with the latest being Roderick Bailey's official history of the SOE in Italy.<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that the history of intelligence has always excited public opinion. This has led to a

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<sup>37</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'Περιγραφή σε τρεις χρονικές διαστάσεις' (Description in three temporal dimensions), *Καθημερινή* (Athens) 17/06/2012.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Mazower, 'Historians at War', pp. 499-500.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London, Allen Lane, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909-1949* (London, Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France: A account of the work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944*, new edn. (London, Routledge, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Roderick Bailey, *Target: Italy, The Secret War against Mussolini, 1940-1943: The Official History of SOE Operations in Fascist Italy* (London, Faber and Faber, 2014).

vast number of popular histories on the topic.<sup>43</sup> Important work has been done to highlight the activities of SOE's female members like Violette Szabo, Vera Atkins and Noor Inayat Khan.<sup>44</sup> However, academic research on intelligence activities in Greece has been significantly more limited. Duncan Stuart has told the author that Richard Clogg had been selected in the past to write to write an official history of SOE in Greece but this has yet to materialise.<sup>45</sup>

There are two primary writers on Intelligence activity in Greece. The first to examine the impact of SOE in Greece was Richard Clogg in his article published within a book resulting from a conference in 1975, attended by many prominent former members of SOE.<sup>46</sup> But this book, *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, while an invaluable resource, not only because of its well-researched material but also because it includes discussions between the former SOE members in attendance at the conference, was published over forty years ago, before many of the archives available today were opened. Additionally, Clogg would soon divert his attention to more general studies tracing Anglo-Greek relations. His book *Anglo-Greek Attitudes*, published in 2000, would include this article and expand on it with another two other chapters focusing on SOE in Greece. One acts as a general overview of the organisation's activities in Greece and the other traces the tumultuous relationship between SOE and its American

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<sup>43</sup> Indicatively, Max Hastings, *The Secret War: Spies, Codes and Guerrillas, 1939-1945* (London, William Collins, 2015) and Giles Milton, *Churchill's Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare: The Mavericks who Plotted Hitler's Defeat* (London, John Murray, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Indicatively, Rick Stroud, *Lonely Courage: The True Story of the SOE heroines who fought to free Nazi-occupied France* (London, Simon and Schuster, 2018) and Beryl E. Escott, *The Heroines of SOE: F Section: Britain's Secret Women in France* (Stroud, The History Press, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Personal Communication at RUSI Intelligence Study Group meeting.

<sup>46</sup> Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg (eds.), *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London, Macmillan Press, 1975).

cousins. However, they form only a part of his book. This means that there is scope for a work dedicated to the details of the British policy and its impact on the secret services and Greece.

The second academic is André Gerolymatos and his groundbreaking study of British Intelligence in Greece published in 1992, *Guerrilla Warfare and Espionage in Greece, 1940-1944*.<sup>47</sup> Despite significant engagement with primary sources and in-depth analysis, the book does not include material from any of the SOE archives available in London. This remains true of his latest work published in 2018, *The British and the Greek Resistance, 1936-1944: Spies Saboteurs, and Partisans*.<sup>48</sup> This means there is significant scope for work that includes an in-depth analysis of the SOE archives available in the National Archives at Kew.

A reference should also be made to the Greek writer Petros Makris-Staikos who has engaged extensively with the intelligence folders available to researchers. However, his books are very much an example of the vitriolic nature of historiography of the Civil War. In the introduction to his monograph he recounts how (trans.) “we were taught, or rather re-taught, the history of our land, the forties, from foreign historians, in their crushing majority leftists, with various levels of political bias [...] their work is *their* interpretation of our history, with a certainty if not arrogance that astounds”.<sup>49</sup> His books clearly seek to serve a political interpretation of events, something the author does not

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<sup>47</sup> André Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare and Espionage in Greece, 1940-1944* (New York, Pella, 1992).

<sup>48</sup> André Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek Resistance, 1936-1944: Spies, Saboteurs, and Partisans* (London, Lexington Books, 2018).

<sup>49</sup> Original text: Το να μάθουμε – ή να ξαναμάθουμε- την ιστορία του τόπου μας, της δεκατίας του '40, από αλλοδαπούς ιστορικούς, στη συντριπτική τους πλειονότητα αριστερούς, με ποικίλη διαβάθμιση της πολιτικής τους στράτευσης [...] το έργο τους αποτέλεσε τη δική τους εκδοχή για την ιστορία του τόπου μας, με μια βεβαιότητα ή και μια αλαζονεία που εντυπωσιάζουν, Makris-Staikos, ‘*Ο Άγγλος Πρόξενος*’, p. 16.

seem to shy away from admitting as he conflates the study of history with politics.<sup>50</sup> More importantly in his work there are also some very ethically questionable methodological approaches to the archives. Most egregious of these is misrepresenting the facts in his narrative, only to moderate these baseless accusations in the footnotes of his text.<sup>51</sup> It is for these reasons that the dissertation believes that his work, while comprehensive, reinforces the need for a more sober and detached analysis of Intelligence work in Greece in this period.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-22.

<sup>51</sup> An example of this can be found in footnote 8, Makris-Staikos, ‘«Ο Αγγλος Πρόξενος»’, p. 236.

## Chapter 1: Historical Context, Greece: 1821-1940.

This chapter seeks to introduce the historical context necessary to illustrate the pattern of British interference in Greek politics. For more than a century before the period examined, British governments had intervened in Greek politics. Sometimes this interference was beneficial to the fledgling Balkan state but this was not always the case. The relationship between the two states was not that of a mentor and a mentee. Instead, the aim of British intervention had always been the same. It sought to minimise the influence of the Russian Empire south of the Black Sea. This became a particularly pressing concern as British interests in the Mediterranean became more pronounced. Whether this was achieved by supplanting Russia as the main foreign patron of Greece following its liberation from the Ottoman Empire or by enforcing Greek neutrality when the Ottomans were in conflict with the Russian Empire, the aim remained a constant. The British Empire always sought to ensure that there was an adequate barrier to stop any southward Russian expansion.

At the same time, the chapter also establishes the importance of domestic Greek politics. Without a proper grasp of the developments that took place in the years before Greek entry into the Second World War it is impossible to understand the deep divisions of Greek society that eventually culminated in the Greek Civil War. The vitriolic hostility held by many Greeks for the king is a product of his behaviour during these years. His support of the Metaxas regime was particularly damning in the eyes of many Greeks. This period also marks the beginning of contact between the followers of the Liberal Party and Greek communists who both found themselves pursued by the repressive state of the Metaxas dictatorship.

It is unsurprising that, when the British attempted to establish contacts in Greece, many of the people they approached were extraordinarily critical

and wary of the British diplomatic establishment's support of the Greek monarchy. Even during the war, the cracks between the people and the regime were becoming apparent. Despite the Axis occupation, Greeks did not forget the quasi-fascist dictatorship George II had sponsored for four years. Neither did they trust that upon his return he would be the figurehead of a representative democracy as promised by the British government. The foundation of the coalition that fought against British troops in December 1944 was established in these crucial years.

### British policy towards Greece in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'

British intervention in Greek politics in the 1940s was not a new phenomenon. Indeed, the very creation of the Greek state in 1830 was achieved as a result of British, French, and Russian intervention in the Greek War of Independence at the Battle of Navarino in 1827. This naval intervention was particularly important as it marked a departure from the fiercely guarded *status quo* established in 1815 by the Congress of Vienna, which attempted to maintain peace by quelling any threat to the existing European political order.<sup>1</sup> But it was also a significant deviation from the prevalent British ideology of neutrality, best exemplified by the pre-eminent Tory politician George Canning stressing that Britain should be “essentially neutral: neutral not only between contending nations, but between contending principles”.<sup>2</sup> This deviation however, this “untoward event” as King George IV exclaimed,<sup>3</sup> is far less surprising than it may seem.

Philhellenism had become a dominant movement among the British intellectual elite by the 1820s, with notable figures including Jeremy Bentham and Lord Byron, agitating for British intervention. It is hard to believe however that British intervention in Greece was solely the result of pressure by a group of self-defined liberals and radicals, however prominent.<sup>4</sup> Neither can it be explained as just the first humanitarian intervention in history, seeking to end the brutal Egyptian campaign in the Morea.<sup>5</sup> Rather, this deviation is one of

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1994) p. 79-84.

<sup>2</sup> Muriel E. Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica? : British Foreign Policy 1789-1914*, new edn. (Oxford, Routledge, 2014) p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, House of Lords Debate, 29 January 1828, vol. 18 cc 1-4.

<sup>4</sup> William St. Clair, *That Greece Might Still be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence*, new edn. (Cambridge, OpenBook, 2008) p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> John Bew, “From an Umpire to a Competitor”: Castlereagh, Canning and the issue of international intervention in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars’ in Brendan Simms,

the first examples of British manoeuvring to establish primacy in the Mediterranean.

The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774 marked the end of the “virgin shut up in a harem”, the era of Ottoman dominance in the Black Sea.<sup>6</sup> The emergence of Russia as a Black Sea power following its annexation of the Crimean Khanate was the crowning achievement of Russian efforts to secure warm water ports which could sustain Russian trade and naval power throughout the year. The founding of Black Sea trading hubs and naval bases during the reign of Catherine the Great, such as Odessa and Sevastopol, re-established the Black Sea as part of the European trade network and created the need to secure the Dardanelles.<sup>7</sup> Russia seemed intent to gain direct access to the Mediterranean, not only to secure the exit from the Black Sea, but also because the occupation of Constantinople would be the culmination of burgeoning Russian nationalism.<sup>8</sup>

During the Greek War of Independence, British insecurity about Russian intentions in the Eastern Mediterranean grew when the British government became privy to the fact that arrangements were in place to anoint the Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire, a Greek named Ioannis Capodistrias, as the head of the new Greek state.<sup>9</sup> This led to Canning’s conviction that Russia was preparing to unilaterally pursue the liberation of Greece in 1827 and that Britain had to assume a more forceful role to restrain

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D.J.B. Trim (eds.) *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Holland, *Blue-Water Empire: The British in the Mediterranean since 1800* (London, Penguin, 2013) p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Lieven, *Towards the Flame: Empire, War and the End of Tsarist Russia* (London, Allen Lane, 2015) p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> St. Clair, *That Greece Might Still be Free*, p. 134.

Russian southward expansion.<sup>10</sup> However, this was not yet an imperial planning policy. Indeed, Britain had only turned its attention to the Mediterranean when it found itself in possession of many strategic locations, including Malta, due to its military successes in the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>11</sup> Intervention in Greece was a knee-jerk reaction meant to keep in check both the French in Egypt and the Russian Empire pushing down from the Black Sea.

This approach was soon to change. Britain, despite early attempts to extricate itself from the Mediterranean, had become heavily invested and involved in the region.<sup>12</sup> In order to safeguard its interests, it had to deny the Russian Empire access to the Mediterranean. This often took the form of protecting Ottoman territorial integrity as a counterweight, a trend that despite some deviations would feature prominently in British planning for just under half a century. It included countering threats to the Porte from without, most notably in the Crimean War, but also, stunningly, from within because of a widespread British belief that political and military instability in the Ottoman Empire could lead to the Russian Empire acting on its ambitions.<sup>13</sup> To this end Lord Palmerston was the architect of the 1840 Convention of London which helped ensure the territorial stability of the Ottoman Empire for almost four decades.<sup>14</sup>

The British pattern of defending Ottoman territorial integrity eventually brought the British Empire into conflict even with the irredentist newly born Greek state. With the outbreak of the Crimean War, King Otto of Greece

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<sup>10</sup> Harold W.V. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, Frank Cass, 1966) pp. 390-409.

<sup>11</sup> Holland, *Blue-Water Empire*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, new edn. (London, Penguin, 2012) pp. 99-100.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

mobilized his army as he did not fail to see that he had been presented with an unprecedented chance to press his claims on Ottoman lands. Otto had already been a victim of British 'gunboat diplomacy' only a few years earlier, when Britain had sought to re-establish its influence in Greece at a time when the latter had begun to re-orientate towards Russia.<sup>15</sup> In 1854, Otto ignored French and British diplomatic pressure to withdraw Greek irregulars from Ottoman territories. This culminated in a blatant military intervention as British and French troops disembarked in Piraeus and proceeded to occupy Athens in order to enforce Greek neutrality. This was not just an exercise in controlling Greek irredentist aspirations but was also meant to ensure that Greece would remain outside the Russian sphere of influence. It also signalled the death knell of Otto's reign, whose pro-Russian sympathies had made him *persona non grata*, and he was deposed less than a decade later.

Following the Crimean War British interest and influence in Greece waxed while Russian influence waned. Greek officials realized that they were not alone in claiming land from the crumbling Ottoman Empire and that they would have to compete with the Balkan Slavs, who now enjoyed the full support of the Russian Empire.<sup>16</sup> British officials were quick to identify this souring of relations, especially as it concerned Greek fears of Russian aims in Macedonia, and sought to capitalize on it with one British diplomat even writing that it was "not desirable that this uneasiness should entirely cease".<sup>17</sup> The coronation of Britain's choice, a junior Danish prince, as King George I of

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<sup>15</sup> Theodore A. Couloumbis, John A. Petropoulos and Harry J. Psomiades, *Foreign Interference in Greek Politics: An Historical Perspective* (New York, Pella, 1976) p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Holland and Diana Markides, *The British and the Hellenes: Struggles for Mastery in the Eastern Mediterranean 1850-1960* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 54.

the Hellenes and the transfer of the Ionian Islands to the Greek State helped reinforce the increasingly good relations between the two states.

This increased British interest in Greece was not a coincidence. Two major developments in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century cemented the Eastern Mediterranean as an area of crucial strategic importance for the British Empire. Firstly, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, along with developing steamship technology, radically shifted the routes of British ships bound for India, the rest of Asia, and the Antipodes.<sup>18</sup> The Canal almost halved the distance to the Indian subcontinent and within 15 years over 85% of the total value of trade between the two passed through it.<sup>19</sup> The Canal also proved a welcome strategic addition. Following the Delhi Mutiny in 1857, the creation of the British Raj meant that the government was in direct control of the Indian subcontinent. The Suez Canal, and by extension the Eastern Mediterranean, was soon perceived as the lifeline to British possessions in the East. Defending it became a priority not only for the Royal Navy, whose Mediterranean Fleet formed one of its largest squadrons, but also for the Foreign Office and Imperial planners.

The emerging importance of the Canal to British planning was first apparent during the last Ottoman-Russian War of 1875-1878. During the conflict the British warned both the Russian and Ottoman Empires that the neutrality of the Suez Canal would be vigorously defended.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, in the aftermath of the disastrous Ottoman defeat, the British Empire decided that the policy of maintaining Ottoman territorial integrity could no longer on its own guarantee the adequate protection of its significantly increased

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<sup>18</sup> Max E. Fletcher, 'The Suez Canal and World Shipping, 1869-1914', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Dec., 1958) pp. 557-559.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 568.

<sup>20</sup> Arnold Wilson, 'The Suez Canal', *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (May-June, 1939) p. 386.

interests in the region. The ‘Sick Man of Europe’ was clearly about to succumb and, rather than attempting to continue their support, the British sought to compete with the other Great Powers and stake their claim. This is most evident in the diplomatic scramble following the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878 to limit the concessions gained by the victorious Russian army.<sup>21</sup> Through the subsequent Congress of Berlin, the British managed not only to acquire Cyprus but also to redraw the proposed borders of Bulgaria which lost its putative access to the Aegean. This pleased both the Greeks and the Ottomans. In one stroke, the British not only managed to expand their presence and military capacity in the region but also successfully kept Bulgaria, and by extension Russia, away from the coveted Aegean ports.<sup>22</sup>

The policy of defending the Eastern Mediterranean would remain a constant for the British Empire for at least the next thirty years. The occupation of Egypt in 1882, partly driven by a desire to ensure the Canal would remain free from foreign interference, is further evidence of the high importance attached to the region.<sup>23</sup> British anxiety over Russian intentions in the Eastern Mediterranean was addressed by the drawing of naval plans for the defence of the Dardanelles from the Russian Fleet, in particular in 1895.<sup>24</sup>

It is ironic that, when tested by World War II, the value of Suez proved not to be as critical as previously thought. In the years after the War, American Intelligence concluded that the wartime resilience of British shipping to the East despite the closure of the western Mediterranean proved that the

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<sup>21</sup> John S. Koliopoulos and Thanos M. Veremis, *Modern Greece: A History since 1821* (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) pp. 54-55.

<sup>22</sup> Couloumbis, Petropoulos and Psomiades, *Foreign Interference in Greek Politics* p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’, *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1953) p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Nicholas Papastratigakis, ‘British Naval Strategy: The Russian Black Sea Fleet and the Turkish Straits, 1890-1904’, *The International History Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (December 2010) p. 645.

importance of Suez had been overstated. They would write that “although claims that the Mediterranean lifeline is an essential avenue of trade have been exaggerated, unquestionably maintenance of the Suez route is economically and militarily advantageous”.<sup>25</sup> It is probable that this reliance was made obsolete by advances in marine and aviation technology.

This strategic importance had kept British planners in the Mediterranean busy with plans to counter the French and Russian Dual Alliance well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> However, by that time, there emerged new competition for the traditional Great Powers in the form of a unified Germany and Imperial Japan. A more pressing challenge to Britain’s dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean would come from the rapidly developing unified German Empire. Nowhere was this clearer than in the competition for influence with the Porte and its successors in the Ottoman Empire. German military and diplomatic missions, economic ventures, and even the *Baghdadbahn*, a railway line linking Berlin to Baghdad promoted by Germany, all helped to shift the Ottoman Empire away from Britain.<sup>27</sup> As the divide between Britain and the Ottomans grew, that between Britain and the Russian Empire became smaller. Security in the Mediterranean allowed Britain the freedom to place greater importance on neutralizing the German threat. Starting in 1907, there were British attempts to come to terms with Russia on

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<sup>25</sup> Intelligence Review 19, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1946, ‘Papers of Harry S. Truman: SMOF: Naval Aide to the President Files, 1945-53, War Department Intelligence Review File, June 1946 to September 1946’, Box 18, Truman Presidential Library, Independence Missouri.

<sup>26</sup> Papastratigakis, ‘British Naval Strategy’, pp. 654-655.

<sup>27</sup> Marian Kent, ‘Constantinople and Asiatic Turkey, 1905-1914’ in F.H. Hinsley (ed.) *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp. 149-152.

contested territories like Afghanistan and Persia, even accepting difficult arrangements in order to create a strong front against Germany.<sup>28</sup>

The Balkan Wars, just five years later, would prove disastrous for the Ottoman Empire. It lost almost all of its remaining European possessions, including Macedonia and Thrace, among the most prosperous and developed regions of the Empire.<sup>29</sup> The Ottoman leadership, isolated during the Balkan Wars, was painfully aware that it had been left out of the system of European Alliances.<sup>30</sup> To make matters worse, while the British and Russian Empires had begun to solve their differences, the Russian Empire still had unfinished business with the Ottomans. In the first six months of 1914, Czar Nicholas II and his cabinet had drawn up and approved plans for occupying Constantinople and the Straits, on whose traversability the Russian economy crucially depended, as almost fifty percent of Russian exports passed through them.<sup>31</sup> The European balance of power had changed and the Ottomans faced the prospect of having to withstand the wrath of Russia alone. Ultimately for Britain, alienating the Russian Empire by supporting the Ottoman Empire was not worth the risk. Despite efforts by some in the Ottoman hierarchy to steer the Ottoman state towards the Entente, the implacable hostility between the Ottoman Empire and Russia further pushed the Ottomans towards the Central Powers in the upcoming Great War.<sup>32</sup>

The British shift away from the Ottoman Empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is also crucial in understanding the history of Greece. In the words of

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<sup>28</sup> D.W. Sweet and R.T.B. Langhorne, 'Great Britain and Russia, 1907-1914' in F.H. Hinsley (ed.) *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp. 238-242.

<sup>29</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East, 1914-1920* (London, Allen Lane, 2015) p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Mango, *Atatürk* (London, John Murray, 1999) p. 132.

<sup>31</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Mango, *Atatürk*, p. 132.

Lord Salisbury almost a decade earlier, when supporting the Ottoman Empire Britain seemed to have backed “the wrong horse”.<sup>33</sup> This is why, on the eve of the First World War, Britain turned to Greece. Harold Nicolson, of the Foreign Office, later stated that:

the idea which prompted our support of Greece was no emotional impulse but the natural expression of our historical policy; the protection of India and the Suez Canal. For a century we had supported Turkey as the first line of defence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey had proven a broken reed and we fell back on the second line, the line from Salamis to Smyrna.<sup>34</sup>

The Greek state, having annexed large parts of Macedonia, Thrace and a number of Aegean islands in the Balkan wars of 1912-13, had significantly expanded in size, population and legitimacy.

This era set the high-water mark for relations between Greece and Britain. They would be at their best during the First World War and its immediate aftermath. These excellent relations were also reflective of the relationship between the Greek and British Prime Ministers, Eleftherios Venizelos, the charismatic liberal who was also staunchly pro-Entente, and David Lloyd George, the energetic Liberal leading the British War effort.<sup>35</sup> This mutual admiration would prove a boon and a curse to Greece. Venizelos, convinced of the Entente’s military capabilities as well as sympathetic to its cause, sought to join the war effort against the Central Powers. However, Venizelos’s enthusiasm was tempered by the reluctance of George I’s newly installed successor, his son Constantine I, to join the war. Constantine was, both by family ties and military training, sympathetic to Germany and the

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<sup>33</sup> Hansard, House of Lords Debate, 19 January 1897, vol. 45 cc6-36.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor, 1919-1922*, new edn. (London, Hurst & Company, 1998) p. 170.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers: Six Months that Changed the World* (London, John Murray, 2001) pp. 364-365.

Kaiser. The two leading figures of Greek politics began a confrontation that would dominate Greek life for almost thirty years. Here began the *ethnikos dichasmos*, the ‘national schism’ that would divide Greece between Republicans, or Venizelists, and Royalists, or Anti-Venizelists. Venizelos, having been forced in 1915 to resign due to the king’s intransigence, set up an independent provisional government in the north of Greece to facilitate the Entente war effort. The ‘national schism’ would briefly be overcome with the help of allied troops when in June 1917, in an act reminiscent of ‘gunboat diplomacy’, Venizelos accompanied by Entente troops entered Athens and forced the king to abdicate.

In the years following the First World War, the British position in the Mediterranean became even stronger. Britain’s traditional enemy, the Russian Empire, ceased to be a factor as it was wracked by internal conflict and beset with turmoil. Torn apart by civil war and internationally shunned, the Soviet Union would take years to recover and to threaten again the balance of power in the Mediterranean. The turmoil affected Soviet shipping that used the Straits in this period. Indicatively, Soviet tonnage passing through the Straits in 1924 was only 172,103 as compared to the 1,428,000 of 1913.<sup>36</sup> Politically, Britain established its primacy when the Lausanne Convention of 1923 established the Straits as a demilitarised zone despite objections by both the Turkish and Soviet governments, with the latter complaining that the new Convention was a threat to the USSR’s “security and vital interests”.<sup>37</sup> Thus, for a few years British supremacy in the region went uncontested, with Britain entrenched in Cyprus, Malta, Gibraltar, Egypt and the territory acquired from

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<sup>36</sup> The Soviet Union and the Problem of the Turkish Straits, January 24<sup>th</sup> 1945 ‘RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1945:023 to 1945: 790’ Box 6, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

the Ottoman Empire in Palestine. It is conceivable that, until the re-emergence of the Soviet Union in the 1930s as an active participant on the international stage, British defensive planning was less concerned with the Russian Black Sea Fleet than it had been for almost a century. When dark clouds began to appear again on the horizon, it was the dangers presented by a Germany which was becoming more aggressive by the day and by an increasingly hostile Italian state, chafing under British dominance in the region (with Mussolini famously comparing British possessions in the Mediterranean to a chain that kept Italy bound in the Adriatic)<sup>38</sup> which threatened the Mediterranean shipping routes.

British manoeuvrings throughout this period confirm that British policy was dependent on having a proxy state in the region to guarantee its interests. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this had been the Ottoman Empire. However, with the rapidly crumbling Ottoman Empire joining the Central Powers, a new proxy in the region was needed. Lloyd George and Venizelos's special relationship led to a small moment in time when Greece became that proxy. In both their minds there existed a common vision for the future of Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean. In it, Greece had achieved its irredentist claims and would flourish under the tutelage of Britain and France while keeping the Eastern Mediterranean open and safe for their commerce.<sup>39</sup>

In fact the Greeks would pay a high price for taking these fantasies a shade too seriously, as this dream would die a bloody death in the brutal Greco-Turkish War of 1920-1922 and the disastrous Asia Minor campaign that would haunt Greek society for generations. In their vision there was no space for the resurgent nationalism of Kemal Ataturk. Turkey did not disappear to make way for Greece. The fallout of the war also ensured the survival of the

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<sup>38</sup> Reynolds M. Salerno, *Vital Crossroads: Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935-1940* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002) p. 106.

<sup>39</sup> Macmillan, *Peacemakers*, p. 365.

Greek schism and established it as the dominant factor in Greek politics for decades.<sup>40</sup> It also affected Greece's international standing as Turkey, rather than Greece, won the confidence of the British to provide a stabilizing force in the region and Greece once again was relegated to the status of a peripheral power in a strategically vital location part of the world.<sup>41</sup>

Overall, this interlude when Britain moved towards establishing Greece as a regional power was brief and based on a confluence of events and the emergence of two very strong personalities who almost managed to will their vision into reality. However, it was in no way a break from the traditional imperial planning policy of maintaining a strong partner and presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. This policy exhibited a pattern of direct intervention by the British Empire in both Greece and the Ottoman Empire in the 'long 19<sup>th</sup> century'. It would remain unchanged at least as late as 1936 and the signing of the Montreux Convention regarding the Straits, where Britain again was primarily involved in ensuring that the Russian Fleet stay behind the Dardanelles. In fact, this policy also determined British planning towards Greece in the period under examination.

#### Greek Politics Before the Second World War, 1935-1940<sup>42</sup>

The 'national schism', the bitter rivalry between the Venizelists, or Republicans, and Anti-Venizelists, or Royalists, which started in 1915, dominated Greek political life in the interwar years. The devastating defeat in the Greco-Turkish War in 1922 condemned the incumbent Royalist Greek government, allowing the Venizelists to regain the upper hand after having lost

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<sup>40</sup> Sotiris Rizas, *To Τέλος της Μεγάλης Ιδέας: Ο Βενιζέλος, ο αντιβενιζελισμός και η Μικρά Ασία (The End of the Great Idea: Venizelos, Anti-Venizelism and Asia Minor)* (Athens, Καστανιώτη, 2015) p. 349.

<sup>41</sup> André Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek Resistance*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Expanded from my MPhil paper.

the elections of 1920. A republican military coup proclaimed the Second Hellenic Republic in 1924, stripping the crown from George II who had inherited the throne from his father. In the following decade, despite periods of democratic rule, the Greek Republic also experienced a series of military *pronunciamentos*, most notably that by General Pangalos. By 1935 the Republic was threatened by the rising electoral popularity of the Royalists. In March, Venizelist military officers, in a misguided attempt to limit this increase of their opponents' power, staged an abortive coup against the majority Royalist parliamentary government. Their failure left both them and the Republic exposed. Thousands of republican officers, among them men like Stefanos Sarafis, Dimitrios Psarros, and Napoleon Zervas who would later dominate the Greek resistance, were cashiered from the army and persecuted. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1935, the United States ambassador to Greece, Lincoln MacVeagh, sent a dispatch stating that the failed revolt had "abolished the Opposition as a political factor".<sup>43</sup> He would soon write that the subsequent acts of reprisal against the cashiered officers, including two executions, were "a disquieting indication of the strength of the extreme reactionary faction in the Royalist ranks".<sup>44</sup> It was clear that, in the aftermath of the failed coup of March 1935, the Greek army and consequently political power was firmly in the hands of the Royalists.

It is perhaps with a sense of bitter irony that these cashiered men saw the subsequent return of George II and monarchy to Greece. Their failed uprising, which was meant to ensure the survival of the fragile Republic, had acted as its *coup de grace*. In the wake of the March coup, General Kondylis, the architect of the Republican Purge, had proclaimed himself Regent and

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<sup>43</sup> John O. Iatrides (ed.), *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece, 1933-1947* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 42.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Premier. In November 1935 his government conducted a plebiscite to determine whether the monarchy should return. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the government carried the vote amid great controversy and widespread claims of fraud. The pro-monarchy side gained over 97 percent of the votes cast, with TIME magazine writing that "As a voter one could drop into the ballot box a blue vote for George II and please General Kondylis, the Dictator who is bringing him back to Athens, or one could cast a red ballot for the Republic and get roughed up".<sup>45</sup> MacVeagh was also sceptical of the veracity of the result, suggesting that "the figure given for the Monarchist vote is actually higher than the total vote cast by all parties together in any previous election in Greece, and this by no small margin but by over 400,000 ballots!".<sup>46</sup> These international concerns were of little avail and King George II was returned to Greece by the semi-dictatorial regime of General Kondylis. MacVeagh, quoting the British ambassador Sir Sydney Waterlow, before the vote had taken place in a dispatch named 'The Restoration *ante facto*' reported that the "Restoration is already a *fait accompli*".<sup>47</sup> Despite these ominous signs for the democratic process in Greece, the newly restored king promised to rule as a constitutional monarch, even dismissing General Kondylis when the latter objected. His promise would not last long as in less than a year the king would endorse General Ioannes Metaxas's suspension of the Constitution on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1936.

The dictatorship of Metaxas was a departure from the pattern of the previous decade as it was more than just a temporary interference in politics by the military. Instead it sought to usher in the beginning of the 'Third Hellenic Civilization'. It tried to 'purify' Greeks, elevate them and anoint them

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<sup>45</sup> 'Greece: By the Grace of God', *Time Magazine*, 18/11/1935.

<sup>46</sup> Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 60.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

as a worthy successor to the perceived glorious past of Ancient Greece and Byzantium.<sup>48</sup> The Metaxas regime introduced widespread use of fascist rhetoric and symbolism, including the use of regenerative language and imagery. It emulated its counterparts in Italy and Germany with the use of the fascist salute as well as by the creation of a compulsory youth movement. However, unlike his counterparts in Italy and Germany, Metaxas was not the expression of a popular mass movement. There was no equivalent founding mythos of mass support similar to the March on Rome. Neither was this lack of popular support compensated by his regime being able to claim to be representative of the established political elite, as had commonly been the case with previous coups. Indeed, in the days leading up to the 4th of August there was even an attempt at a coalition between the Liberal (Venizelist) and Popular (Royalist) Parties to avert the political crisis that was rejected by the king.<sup>49</sup> Waterlow remarked:

how can authoritarian government succeed in Greece? It has nothing behind it, and it is merely the chance product of a local paralysis; whereas the genuine dictators have everything behind them and are the product of historical destiny. They are all firmly based on passionate 'ideologies', but the theories that General Metaxas has been proclaiming are not a basis of action, they are merely adventitious drapery and patchwork at that.<sup>50</sup>

This was a regime centred on the personalities of the dictator and the king.

The surrounding camarilla was particularly lambasted by its contemporaries, with the British ambassador calling its members “pushing arrivistes” and the Nobel-winning poet George Seferis describing them as men

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<sup>48</sup> Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 95.

<sup>50</sup> John S. Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977) p. 53.

left "by the sieve of Fate".<sup>51</sup> The importance of the king in maintaining Metaxas and his regime in power cannot be overstated, as the regime was supported neither by the population nor by the majority of the existing political structure. When Metaxas died a natural death during the Greek-Italian War in early 1941, perhaps it was only natural that the eventual backlash from the collapse of this loathed regime would in turn land on the king. Lincoln MacVeagh, ever frank in his dispatches to President Roosevelt, to an extent foresaw this when he wrote that "it seems to be generally thought here that if and when the Greeks turn Metaxas out the King will have to go too".<sup>52</sup> With the dictator dead, the onus of four years of hardship and oppression would be on the figurehead but also the main patron of the dictatorship.

Throughout these years, and for most of the interwar period, the Greek Communist Party (KKE) remained a small peripheral party vehemently persecuted by both Venizelists and Royalists. Indeed, there was little common ground between the Liberal Party and the KKE, as some of the strongest anti-communist legislation had been passed by the Venizelos government of 1928-1932. Despite its persecution, the fortunes of the KKE would change in 1935. The seventeen months between the failed coup of March 1935 and the imposition of the Metaxas dictatorship in August 1936 were crucial for the development of the KKE as it fundamentally shifted its political stance. In the Party's 5th Plenum in 1935 it was decided that the KKE should look to cooperate with the Liberal Party of Venizelos in order to successfully counter through the democratic process the growing power of the Royalists and other conservative forces. This decision by the KKE is reminiscent of the Popular Front strategy employed in Spain and France. The more conciliatory approach by the KKE immediately suffered a great setback when Venizelos, perhaps

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 93.

discouraged by the political situation in Greece, performed a *volte face* and virtually abandoned Republicanism.<sup>53</sup> But the death of Venizelos in 1936 combined with the electoral results of January 1936 thrust the KKE onto the main stage of Greek politics, giving credence to the Popular Front strategy.

The 1936 elections produced a hung parliament. The deadlock seemed unlikely to be resolved unless the Liberals agreed to co-operate with the fifteen deputies of the KKE. Upon the death of Venizelos, his successors finally signed a pact with the communists to form a Liberal cabinet.<sup>54</sup> This was tremendous legitimisation for the Greek communists but the king refused to swear in this government, having been told by General Papagos that the military would not accept a government that included the KKE.<sup>55</sup> As mentioned above, as the crisis worsened, the two main parties (the Liberal and Popular parties) even agreed to set aside their differences and form a coalition government but this was also refused by the king who instead installed Metaxas as dictator.

The negotiations between the Liberal Party and the KKE in this period shattered the barriers between the Venizelists and the Communists.<sup>56</sup> This new alliance was strengthened by the shared hostility towards the king and his supporters who had blocked their proposed Cabinet. This was particularly true of those military officers who had been cashiered after the 1935 abortive coup. The post-1935 persecution of the Venizelists by successive Royalist governments had led them into the embrace of the Communist party, which had long since become accustomed to being hunted by the police and gendarmerie.

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<sup>53</sup> George Th. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983) pp. 347-349.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346-348.

<sup>55</sup> Koliopoulos and Veremis, *Modern Greece*, p. 193.

<sup>56</sup> Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic*, p. 345-349.

The Metaxas regime wasted little time in neutralising its opponents. In particular, the KKE was hunted down with great zeal. The architect of this brutal repression was Konstantinos Maniadakis, Metaxas's Minister of Public Security, who emulated Himmler's 'scientific methods' in combating Communism.<sup>57</sup> The regime destroyed almost all opposition and forced the remainder underground. The KKE was declared to be illegal and hundreds of its members were arrested and detained in appalling conditions. Most of its leadership, including its parliamentary deputies as well as most of its politburo and its Secretary-General Nikos Zachariadis, were arrested. There was widespread use of torture, most notoriously the forced consumption of castor oil, and many detainees were sent into internal exile on remote islands. It was common practice for the government to force these imprisoned communists to sign declarations of repentance, renouncing their political beliefs. The Metaxas government claimed that before the war over 57,000 such declarations had been signed, a testament to the overzealousness and ruthlessness of the security services, considering that the official membership of the KKE before the dictatorship had been just 14,000.<sup>58</sup>

The ferocity of persecution of the KKE by the Metaxas regime left the Party reeling. However, there were members of the KKE who evaded the state security apparatus. Zachariadis decided to create self-contained cells hoping that, by decentralising, the KKE underground would be in a better position to survive.<sup>59</sup> To complement these cells, the government's internment camps had become revolutionary schools educating their members not only on Marxism but clandestine activities.<sup>60</sup> The incessant hunt by the Metaxists gave the Greek communists the advantage of an early start to learn and hone the skills

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<sup>57</sup> Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection*, p.56.

<sup>58</sup> Andre Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 33.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

necessary to create an effective underground organisation. Perhaps this helps explain why the left in Greece was better prepared than any other political force to assume the mantle of active resistance against the foreign occupation when British intelligence operatives in Greece were seeking out allies.

The Metaxas regime formed such a break with Greek politics that even traditional Royalist democrats found themselves allying with their political rivals against the dictator and the king. To a large extent this was the result of the severity of the regime's security apparatus which, in its zeal to destroy any opposition, persecuted not only prominent republican leaders such as George Kafandaris and George Papandreou but even moderates like Panagiotis Kanellopoulos and royalists like Ioannes Theotokis. In his report, MacVeagh informed Roosevelt that:

it may very well be that Venizelism and Anti-Venizelism are at last passing out of the picture, as new issues arise where they have been least expected. When an opposition crystallizes again, I think we may look to find it comprising members of both the old camps, united as anti-Metaxists, and (who knows?) perhaps as anti-King.<sup>61</sup>

This observation by MacVeagh was extremely prescient as the final chapters of the Schism also act as the opening of the constitutional question that would dominate Greek politics in the 40s. MacVeagh concludes that "the Pezmazoglous, the Theotokises, the Mavromichalises the Reppases, etc., of the Kingdom, strongest of the old Royalists, are now on the outside looking in, and almost rubbing shoulders with the Mavrocordatos, the Papanastasious and the Kafandarises".<sup>62</sup> MacVeagh's report may appear to be an exaggeration but it does illustrate that opposition to the Metaxas regime and the king was not confined to its 'natural' enemies, the communists and liberal republicans, but

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<sup>61</sup> Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 98.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

extended to a large number of people who had previously been moderates or even royalists.

The Metaxas regime was a time of great political turmoil in Greece. George II, having already raised the ire of republicans by returning to Greece following a fraudulent plebiscite, authorised and supported the quasi-fascist Metaxas dictatorship. The brutality of the regime in repressing any opposition alienated many prominent Greeks across the entire political spectrum as well as a large part of the populace. Finally, the zeal in which the ministry of Maniatakis hunted the two main targets of the regime, liberal republicans and communists, solidified the core of the political force which would become the main driving force of the Greek resistance to the Axis powers.

#### Greece and the outbreak of war

It is fair to say that any prestige the Greek army had established during the Balkan Wars and the Great War had been shattered by the disastrous Asia Minor campaign of 1920-1922. The British government, in the build-up to the Second World War, sought to keep Greece benevolently neutral, in a manner similar to the Salazar and Franco regimes in Portugal and Spain. It was hoped that ideological differences with the authoritarian regime of Metaxas would not endanger British interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, the close relationship between Britain and Greece and the latter's proximity to Italy had led to numerous Italian provocations at the expense of the Greeks. Despite these, the British military command promoted the idea of Greek neutrality. One of the main rationales for this appears in a recommendation made in September 1939 arguing for Greek neutrality as it was pointed out that in a prospective war against the Italians Greece "will undoubtedly prove to be a

liability and will tend to absorb allied resources”.<sup>63</sup> Instead, Britain sought to bolster Greek defences by supplying the country with coastal defence and anti-aircraft guns in an attempt to ward off the growing Italian menace.<sup>64</sup> However, even an earlier British guarantee in April 1939 did not dissuade the Italian government from declaring war on Greece.<sup>65</sup>

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1940, Metaxas received an Italian ultimatum demanding the surrender of Greece and accusing it of intensifying “its activity in support of the British armed forces”.<sup>66</sup> The Greek dictator rejected the ultimatum and Greek popular sentiment agreed. British reports from Greece indicated that “the Metaxists were compelled to resist Italy, as otherwise the government would have been overthrown by a popular upheaval”.<sup>67</sup>

However, the Chiefs of Staff mostly stood by their pre-war estimation of writing off the Greek army and their earlier appraisal of British capabilities in Greece that ruled that “we can spare no land or air forces to operate in Greece”.<sup>68</sup> Even as the Greek army mobilised to halt the Italian advance from Albania, RAF support was half-hearted. In December 1940, MacVeagh reported that the approximately thirty-two RAF aircraft that arrived were “antediluvian”.<sup>69</sup> The British army sought only to fortify the strategically valuable island of Crete. Having been assured by the British legation that “we

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<sup>63</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 48.

<sup>64</sup> Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection*, p. 122.

<sup>65</sup> Kostas Kostis, «*Τα Κακομαθημένα Παιδιά της Ιστορίας*» *Η Διαμόρφωση του Νεοελληνικού Κράτους, 18<sup>ος</sup> – 21<sup>ος</sup> Αιώνας* (“*History’s Spoilt Children*”: *The development of the Modern Greek State, 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Centuries*) (Athens, Πόλις, 2013) p. 643.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Ultimatum of the Italian Government to the Greek Government, Athens, 28 October 1940’ in Richard Clogg (ed., trans.) *Greece 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War. A Documentary History* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) pp. 34-35.

<sup>67</sup> Greek politics, 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1941, ‘Politics: General, London (SO) File - Part 1’, HS5/738, TNA, London.

<sup>68</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 50.

<sup>69</sup> Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p.256.

[Britain] will look after Crete”, the Greek government authorised British troops to land in Crete after the Italian invasion in order to enact Winston Churchill’s vision of turning the Cretan bay of Souda into a “second Scapa”, a fortified island that would shelter the Royal Navy as it kept control of the seas.<sup>70</sup> However, the Greek army defied British and Italian expectations and did not break. It soon had the Italian forces on the retreat, surprising the Italian command which had expected minimal resistance.

The success of the Greek army in the winter of 1940 sent a shockwave through Europe. This was the first major successful land operation of the Allies in the Second World War. It demonstrated that the fearsome Axis war machine could be bested and it helped to boost morale across the continent, nowhere more so than in a United Kingdom still nursing its wounds from Dunkirk and the Norway Campaign. The exploits of the Greek army captured the interest of the British public with numerous newspapers, including the *Herald* and the *Telegraph*, often featuring news and photos from the frontline. Elsie Carlisle, a star of British radio, even recorded a song mocking the Italian advance.

In view of this flush of enthusiasm for the Greek military effort, Churchill ignored the pessimistic view of the military command in Egypt and personally ordered that assistance should be rendered to the Greeks.<sup>71</sup> His telegram to Archibald Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East, stated that “our thoughts must be for our ally Greece, which is actually fighting so well”.<sup>72</sup> Apart from issues of loyalty, it is likely that Churchill also recognised that to allow Greece to capitulate unaided would have severely

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<sup>70</sup> Anthony Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and Resistance*, new edn. (London, John Murray, 2005) p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 257.

<sup>72</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 50.

damaged the international standing of Britain.<sup>73</sup> MacVeagh, slightly more cynically, after initially confirming that “we have been right in suspecting here that there was reluctance among the British even to try to implement their guarantee”, saw that increased British aid to the Greek army only following its success was an attempt to “cull some *kudos* out of the Greek victories which they haven’t earned”.<sup>74</sup>

The prospect of British troops in Greece made a German offensive to secure the southern flank all the more urgent for the German high command. MacVeagh, once again insightful, reported that “Greece is also aware, of course, that if England brings enough forces here to menace Germany as well as Italy, Germany will come down through the Balkans winter or no winter”.<sup>75</sup> Apart from not wanting to allow the British to re-establish a foothold on the Continent, Greece was also within striking distance of the Romanian oil fields which were crucial to the German war effort. More importantly, Germany was in the process of preparing for Operation Barbarossa. A British front in Southern Europe would be an enormous threat on the flank of the German push into the Soviet Union. The situation for the British military only deteriorated as in March 1941, Turkey had reinforced its neutrality and Bulgaria had joined the Axis. These developments not only removed the final glimmer of Allied hopes of a pan-Balkan and Turkish combined force to contain German aggression but also paved the way for the German invasion of Greece in April.

The German assault, Operation Marita, shattered Greek defences. A pro-Allied coup in Yugoslavia did little to help slow the German army. Indeed, the reliance of the Greek generals on the Yugoslav army to protect their eastern

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>74</sup> Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 257.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

flank while they focused on an offensive campaign in Albania would prove disastrous when Yugoslavia capitulated within days, leaving Greek forces exposed.<sup>76</sup> What had been envisioned was an organised tactical retreat to defensive positions along rivers, mountains and even the Corinth Canal where Allied forces could use the rugged Greek terrain to weather the blitzkrieg. However, in the face of the German attack, the Allied forces were routed. Within a matter of days from the appearance of German tanks, most resistance in Greece was quelled and, mere weeks after it had arrived in Greece, the British expeditionary force was scrambling to be evacuated. Following a costly evacuation, only 43,000 of the 58,000 British troops managed to escape the Greek mainland, mostly to Crete, and a significant quantity of material was left behind.<sup>77</sup> However, the ordeal of these men wasn't over as they would again have to fight in yet another desperate rearguard action.

In May 1941, while the Allied forces were recuperating and consolidating on Crete, German paratroopers led an airborne invasion of the island. The Battle of Crete, an iconic moment of the war, was a pyrrhic victory for the Axis which succeeded in capturing the island, despite the staunch resistance put up by the Cretan population and the Commonwealth troops garrisoned there. Indeed, German losses were so high that the German High Command would never utilise paratrooper assaults again during the war. For the second time in less than two months, the Mediterranean fleet of Admiral Cunningham scrambled to evacuate stranded Commonwealth forces. By the end of the evacuation almost 18,000 troops had been ferried across to North Africa, many going through this harrowing experience for the second time. But many men were left behind. However, even this partial evacuation came at a tremendous cost to the Royal Navy which lost three cruisers and six destroyers, such

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<sup>76</sup> Beevor, *Crete*, p. 33.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.

significant losses that it is even said that Cunningham himself was in tears when the fleet returned to Alexandria.<sup>78</sup>

Whereas the loss of the Greek mainland had been a distinct possibility from the outset of operations, the loss of Crete was an unequivocal disaster. It also marked the end of conventional warfare in Greece as the whole of Greece was now occupied by the Axis. Following the fall of Crete the king elected to join the evacuating British forces, for the second time, and formed in Egypt a Greek government-in-exile in the image of the Metaxas regime, under the aegis of the British.

Concurrently with the military campaign in the north, the Greek home front also saw rapid developments. The successes of the Greek army in the Albanian campaign did not translate into a populace unified under the authoritarian Metaxas regime. As early as January 1941, a mere two months after the Italian ultimatum, MacVeagh was highlighting that “the era of good feeling” was over as there was “dissatisfaction [...] over Mr Metaxas’s failure to form a coalition government and taking all the *kudos* of Greece’s resistance for himself”.<sup>79</sup> He was not alone in his assessment. An SOE report from Athens at around the same time, reports that “Metaxas is working himself into a state of almost religious exaltation in which he is being confirmed by his 4<sup>th</sup> of August jackals” and states that “he now considers himself so popular that he does not need the firm hand of Maniadakis to keep the regime in power [...] if the old man has this impression he is living in fool’s paradise”.<sup>80</sup> This was because even as the Greeks were earning the solidarity of the international community, political divisions in Greek society were deepening.

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<sup>78</sup> Holland, *Blue-Water Empire*, p. 251.

<sup>79</sup> Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 280.

<sup>80</sup> Telegram to Cairo from Pirie, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1941, ‘Greece: Greek Politics’, HS5/287, TNA, London.

Metaxas and his supporters did not seek any sort of rapprochement with their enemies despite the occasion. According to an SOE report, he “ascribed the spirit of the Army to the events of August 4<sup>th</sup> [the beginning of the regime]. This remark has bitterly resented by many people who sank legitimate grievances to back him. Many people are now openly saying that they are behind Metaxas of October 28<sup>th</sup>, not the Metaxas of August 4<sup>th</sup>”.<sup>81</sup> However, even the Metaxas of October 28<sup>th</sup> was increasingly out of favour with the Greek population. Among his disillusioned supporters were the KKE leadership. Early in the war the government had received a declaration of support for the war effort from the jailed Nikos Zachariadis, who urged his followers to “give all our strength without reservation to this war directed by the Metaxas government”.<sup>82</sup> But the KKE soon modified its stance on the war as within a few weeks, Zachariadis wrote in another letter that, having succeeded in “defending their independence and national freedom”, the Greek government should sue for peace as “Greece has no place in the imperialist war between England and Italy-Germany”.<sup>83</sup> But the proclamations of an incarcerated Zachariadis to a dwindling party membership were not the main reason why the Greek populace was turning on the Greek strongman.

Ideologically, the Metaxas regime was caught between a rock and a hard place. Having modelled its government and ideology on Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the Italian ultimatum had forced the regime to fight against its ideological allies. This seems to have been accepted by at least part of the

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<sup>81</sup> Telegram to Cairo from Pirie, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1941, HS5/287, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Nikos Zachariadis, ‘First Open Letter to the People of Greece on the Greek-Italian War, 31 October 1940’ letter in Richard Clogg (ed., trans.) *Greece 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War. A Documentary History* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p. 68.

<sup>83</sup> Nikos Zachariadis, ‘Third Open Letter on the Greek Italian War, 15 January 1941’ in Richard Clogg (ed., trans.) *Greece 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War. A Documentary History* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) pp. 67-71.

British staff working on Greek issues, such as Lord Glenconner of SOE, who believed that “Greece became our ally under Metaxas as a result of the Italian aggression, and not because either he or his supporters were particularly Anglophile”<sup>84</sup>. Glenconner more importantly remarked that “though Metaxas’ friends, as a result, found themselves in the same camp as the Venizelists on the war issue, there is no reason to suppose that they have buried all their differences”.<sup>85</sup> They had not. During the mobilisation of the Greek army in the days after the ultimatum, many Venizelist officers cashiered in 1935 reported to recruitment centres to re-enlist but were turned away. This act of political vindictiveness, at a time when national unity was needed, was a source of great anger for many of them who, like Zervas and Sarafis, would later become active members of the resistance. For the majority of these officers, their exclusion must have only further cemented their anti-royalist views and distrust of the Greek government. This exclusion however would also have serious repercussions on the men fighting in the front.

By January 1941, the Greek offensive had stalled and the enthusiasm of enlisted men was replaced by disillusionment. There was widespread discontent at the quality of serving Greek army officers, with SOE in Athens reporting that “the man at the front sees for himself that the much vaunted re-organisation of the Army after the 4<sup>th</sup> of August is not as successful as he had hoped”.<sup>86</sup> The SOE histories further talk about this discontent by stating that “it was the people of Greece who fought and did so splendidly against the enemy, in spite of the Regular Army. The Regular Army was shamed into fighting by the will of the people”, indicating the will of the Greek people to resist, and concludes that the Greeks also fought in spite of the army officers

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<sup>84</sup> Greek Politics, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1941, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Telegram to Cairo from Pirie, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1941, HS5/287, TNA.

“who directed largely by Metaxas himself rather than by the Greek Commander-in-Chief, were not only unwilling to fight and incompetent, but had not the spirit to lead the Greek Army”.<sup>87</sup> There also seems to have been disillusionment as to the regime’s ideology with an SOE report stating that “the British are trying to make it clear that they are fighting Fascism and not the Italians, the regime here is trying to point out that they are fighting Italians and not Fascism” but that ultimately, when a soldier from the front was in Athens on leave and found “himself being given the Fascist salute by a smirking member of the Neolaia [Fascist Youth], his chief inclination is to kick his backside”.<sup>88</sup> While the army got bogged down in a treacherous mountain war, its men must have been wondering whom they were fighting for and why so many capable officers had been turned away in this time of need.

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<sup>87</sup> Inside Greece, A Review 'Inside Greece, Review by Brigadier Myers, SOE Activities in Greece and Aegean Islands by Colonel Dolbey', HS7/152, TNA, London.

<sup>88</sup> Telegram to Cairo from Pirie, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1941, HS5/287, TNA.

## Chapter 2: The British Intelligence Services and their early involvement in Greece: 1909-1941.

The British Intelligence Services, and in particular the Special Operations Executive (SOE), were instrumental in shaping the Greek resistance. But this was no co-ordinated affair and there was no master-plan on the part of the British to achieve an agenda. Instead, it was a haphazard affair full of blunders and arguments. The chapter will first trace the creation and evolution of these organisations and their impact on Greek politics and the resistance. The activities of SIS and MI5 in the interwar period are particularly fascinating as they reflect the general apprehension in the British government over the expansion of communism which both were dedicated to opposing. Additionally, this chapter will focus on interdepartmental friction within the British intelligence community. This was exacerbated by the appearance of SOE after the fall of France. The foundation of SOE and its attempt to establish and legitimise itself are also crucial to understanding its operations in Greece. Most important of SOE's detractors was the Foreign Office which believed that SOE's attempts to participate in the political life of occupied countries were extremely dangerous. The intrinsically discordant relationship between the two was particularly prominent in Greece.

The chapter will then attempt an analysis of the early interactions between SOE and its precursors and the nucleus of what would form the Greek resistance. The contacts and relationships forged in the months leading up to the Axis occupation of Greece in April 1941 moulded the resistance that sprung from their collaboration. As the SOE officers in Greece set about to establish sabotage and stay-behind organisations, they came into contact with numerous republican Greeks. This gave the anti-Metaxas camp a distinct advantage in becoming the main vehicle of the Greek resistance. Two of these

early Greek republican collaborators, Prometheus II and Odysseus, proved particularly influential in shaping the Greek resistance.

Finally, the chapter seeks to evaluate the importance of the early years of SOE Cairo from where Balkan operations were run. Apart from the proximity, perhaps, this is also indicative of British officials considering the region to be important to the wider theatre of the Middle East. The quasi-independent Middle East HQ of SOE faced numerous difficulties in establishing itself in the region and most important of these that SOE Cairo was plagued by internal conflicts. The difficult start faced by the organisation in the region had a tremendous impact on its operational efficiency and capability. However, the chaos also damaged the standing of the fledgling organisation within the British government, giving its detractors an opening to intensify their criticism.

### British Intelligence before World War II<sup>1</sup>

The rise of German power in the run up to the First World War, apart from upsetting the European balance of power, also acted as a significant catalyst in the radical reshaping of British intelligence services. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the intelligence apparatus of the British Empire was particularly lacklustre. It comprised mainly of two underfunded departments, one of military and one of naval intelligence, and of Special Branch, attached to the Police and mainly tasked with tracking the activities of Irish Republicans.<sup>2</sup> The military and naval intelligence departments were a haphazard affair mainly tasked with channelling information through attachés at British embassies abroad.<sup>3</sup> Overall, this was a far cry from the perceived intelligence capabilities of the British Empire. The legacy of Walsingham, Elizabeth's spymaster, and fanciful tales of Edwardian authors like Rudyard Kipling cast a long shadow distorting the minimal intelligence capabilities of Britain. This perception was so widely held that in 1907 it seemed that "the only consolation is that every foreign government implicitly believes that we already have a thoroughly organised and efficient European Secret Service".<sup>4</sup> Even during the Second World War, a German report on British intelligence capabilities stated that the "British Service has behind itself a tradition of 300 years"<sup>5</sup>. The vulnerability felt by the British government in the run up to the First World War is testament to the fact that this was not the case. In fact, the popular and widespread fear that German spies were operating unchecked in the United Kingdom permeated to the highest echelons of power. In 1909, the

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<sup>1</sup> Elements of SOE history are from my MPhil dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Keith Jeffery, *MI6*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> German Intelligence Report, 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS Classified Sources and Methods Files 'Withdrawn Records'', Box 471, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

government of Herbert Asquith organised a committee to study the “nature and extent of foreign espionage that is at present taking place within the country and the danger to which it may expose us”.<sup>6</sup> The report of this sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence led to the foundation of the Secret Service Bureau in October 1909. Soon, this had split into the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), dedicated to foreign intelligence gathering, and the Security Service (MI5), dedicated to domestic counter-intelligence.

The outbreak of the First World War was a baptism of fire for the two new Intelligence services. One of the most crucial developments of this period was the change of ‘patron’ for SIS. It was originally envisioned that the SSB, and by extension its two successors, would be an interdepartmental service accountable to the War Office, the Admiralty, the Home Office and the Foreign Office.<sup>7</sup> During the war, the head of SIS asked to be “dissociated from personal connection with the Admiralty or War Office”.<sup>8</sup> This request was eventually granted and SIS was placed under the sole supervision of the Foreign Office. The legitimisation of SIS as a body independent of the military hierarchy was an important development for the organisation. The earlier mentioned German report traced this evolution of SIS by noting that “a change seemed to have taken place, favouring the politicians and their circles”.<sup>9</sup> The new relationship between SIS and the Foreign Office would be a critical factor in its development and direction for decades to come, including in its activities in Greece in the 1940s.

As the First World War was coming to a close, a new seismic shock would once again send British policy makers and intelligence officers

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> German Intelligence Report, Box 471, NARA.

scrambling. The October Revolution catapulted Russia and its new Bolshevik leadership to the forefront of any intelligence activity. SIS expanded its operations into the country, while MI5 looked assiduously for any kind of domestic industrial subversion. Even as calls in Whitehall for direct intervention in the Russian Civil War spread, SIS had begun working to prevent the total establishment of the Bolshevik forces.<sup>10</sup> This did not pass unnoticed by the Bolshevik counter intelligence apparatus which grew increasingly concerned by the activities and motives of British agents. The fears of the Soviets were not unfounded. Having failed to make a significant impact during military intervention in the Russian Civil War, the British government had turned to its intelligence apparatus to combat Communism.<sup>11</sup> These early antagonistic interactions between British and Soviet intelligence, even after the British government recognised the USSR, established the perception of Soviet Communism as the main enemy of the British services.<sup>12</sup>

The focus placed on the Communist threat perhaps even prejudiced the British intelligence services as they seem to have failed to grasp the imminent danger of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. MI5 was so engrossed with searching for subversion and sedition directed by Communist international bodies like the Comintern that in 1924 Ramsay MacDonald, the first Labour Prime Minister, commented that:

it might be made at once attractive and indeed entertaining if its survey were extended to cover not only communistic activities but also other political activities of an extreme tendency. For instance

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<sup>10</sup> Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 147.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Haslam, *Near and Distant Neighbours: A New History of Soviet Intelligence* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 138.

a little knowledge in regard to the Fascist movement in this country.<sup>13</sup>

No doubt MacDonald was aware that the intelligence community viewed the Labour government with extreme wariness, a situation later exacerbated by the fraudulent Zinoviev letter.<sup>14</sup> This pre-occupation with Communism, often to the exclusion of seeing the danger of rising extreme right-wing ideology, would last at least until 1934 when the Security Service finally decided that Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists were not misguided patriots but a security threat.<sup>15</sup>

The Soviet Union was also the chief target of SIS during the interwar period. The latter engaged in a wide range of activities to counter the threat emanating from the Comintern and to erode the grasp of the Bolshevik party on Russia. These not only included recruiting a network of White Russian exiles and operating agents in the Soviet Union, but also tackling communist front organisations in Britain, Europe, and across the world.<sup>16</sup> One of these arenas was the Near East. This was a particularly important theatre to the British as naval matters in the Mediterranean were deemed of special importance.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the head of SIS regarded its bureau in Constantinople as “one of the most important, if not the most important, of all my agencies”.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps it is due to the experience of combating Communism in the interwar period that many members of the two services in Greece were far more wary of EAM than their SOE counterparts.

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Phillips, *The Secret Twenties: British Intelligence, the Russians, and the Jazz Age* (London, Granta, 2017) p. 185.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 191.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 172.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, preface Xiii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

Despite some notable intelligence coups during the First World War, such as the interception of the Zimmerman Telegram, and in the flurry of activity following its end, the future of the two fledgling intelligence departments was anything but certain. There were significant rumblings in the corridors of power to merge the two intelligence desks back into one service in the interests of both “economy and of efficiency”.<sup>19</sup>

The Security Service found itself competing with Scotland Yard for primacy in domestic security. This would continue unabated until 1929 when MI5 managed to establish that Special Branch itself had been penetrated by Soviet Intelligence.<sup>20</sup> Following these revelations it was decided to merge the two counter-espionage departments under the auspices of MI5 which was then joined by prominent and capable members of the Special Branch counter-espionage section, including Guy Liddell, who would eventually rise to a prominent position within the Service.

Perhaps the most interesting challenge to the survival of MI5 came from SIS, which sought to unify all intelligence apparatus of the British state under one head and the oversight of the Foreign Office, arguing that it was “impossible to draw a line between espionage and counter-espionage”.<sup>21</sup> His view reflected an idea prevalent at the time. Even the committee which was created to examine his request stated that, had a British secret service been drawn from scratch, it “would not adopt the existing system as our model”.<sup>22</sup> But it was decided that this command could not be entrusted in perpetuity to a single person since there was danger in “the difficulty of ensuring a succession

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 116.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

of officers capable of filling such a post and in the harm which might be done in it by a man who, after appointment, turned out to be incompetent”.<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, the merger of MI5 and Special Branch put an end to this. The newly empowered MI5 would now be “responsible for counter espionage not only for the fighting services but for all government departments [...] There would thus be only two organisations dealing with secret service work, C [SIS] covering foreign countries and MI5 the Empire”.<sup>24</sup> SIS would confine itself to operations at least 3 miles away from British territory, and the Security Service would operate only within these boundaries.<sup>25</sup>

This state of affairs would be disrupted by the outbreak of World War II as the neat division of labour between SIS and MI5 ceased to function. With operational demands rapidly changing and overlapping intelligence operations being carried out, order was beginning to crumble. In March 1940 the Joint Intelligence Committee even highlighted the desire for irregular activities to be referred to a “permanent Board to co-ordinate such projects”.<sup>26</sup>

This situation was only exacerbated by the appearance of a brand new service. The Special Operations Executive was founded during a Cabinet meeting in July 1940, when British prospects in the war looked bleakest. It was a quiet affair and its founding charter was not widely circulated, reaching few people who were not in the room.<sup>27</sup> Officially, it was tasked with “the corrosion of Nazi and Fascist powers from within, to be achieved by careful

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes of the Thirteenth Meeting of the Sub-Committee, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1940, ‘Meetings: 1-18 (1939 Sept-Dec); Meetings: 1-70 (1940 Jan-Dec)’, CAB 81/87, TNA, London.

<sup>27</sup> Bickham Sweet-Escott with an introduction by Major General Sir Colin Gubbins, ‘SOE in the Balkans’ in Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg (eds.) *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London, Macmillan Press, 1975) p. 3.

recruitment and training of agents, and meticulous planning through a long preliminary period”.<sup>28</sup> To a large extent this measured language is forgotten and rarely quoted, because at the end of this Cabinet meeting Winston Churchill, mere months into his wartime premiership, uttered an iconic command that in many ways continues to define perceptions of this new organisation, the command to “set Europe ablaze”.<sup>29</sup> These words were spoken to Hugh Dalton, a firebrand Labour politician and Minister of Economic Warfare, who was given civilian oversight of this new secretive organisation dedicated to subversion and sabotage. Laced with the British premier’s flair for the dramatic, the command reflected the early enthusiasm surrounding the inception of SOE.

The importance of irregular warfare had been increasingly apparent both to British military command and SIS. The terrible human cost of trench warfare during the First World War had shaped subsequent British military planning. It was decided that costly large-scale land operations should be avoided and emphasis should instead be placed on economic warfare and the power of the blockade, taking advantage of the superiority of Britain’s vast navy and its aerial capabilities. The Chiefs of Staff dictated that British strategy was “to be directed to weakening Germany and Italy by the exercise of economic pressure and by intensive propaganda [...] command of the sea would then confer freedom of choice in striking at the enemy’s most vulnerable points”.<sup>30</sup> Only a few years before the Second World War, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had written to Liddell Hart that “I am quite sure we shall never

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<sup>28</sup> Part 1- Introduction, Special Operations 1938-1945, ‘History of SOE 1938-1945’, HS7/1, TNA, London.

<sup>29</sup> Indicatively see Giles Milton, *Churchill’s Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>30</sup> David Stafford, ‘The Detonator Concept: British Strategy, SOE, and European Resistance after the Fall of France’, *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 10 (April, 1975) p. 186.

send again send to the Continent an Army on the scale of that which we put into the field in the Great War”.<sup>31</sup> However, the rapid capitulation of France in the summer of 1940 and the loss of its large army had not been envisaged. No longer could Britain “fight to the last Frenchman” as the quip went.<sup>32</sup> The disastrous setbacks in Norway and France had set up a different war to what had been expected.

Despite the fall of France, the Chiefs of Staff decided that economic warfare could still bring about the defeat of Germany but, to compensate for the loss of the French army, they regarded “subversion as of the highest importance. A special organisation would be required [...] Preparations and training should be proceeded with as a matter of urgency”.<sup>33</sup> Fortunately for them, the organisation required to meet their demand did not have to be created from scratch as various precursors of SOE, which eventually formed its foundations, had already been established in the run up to 1939.

One such precursor was the War Office’s GS(R), and later MI(R), created to study irregular combat. GS(R) was an attempt to learn from the successes of guerrilla armies in China and Spain and to emulate their methods to train commando regiments to harry any potential German act of aggression. On its own it was not large enough to fulfil the requirements set out by the Chiefs of Staff but many of its staff would go on to be illustrious members of SOE, including Sir Colin Gubbins who eventually became its head (CD).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Memoirs of Captain Liddell Hart: Volume I* (London, Cassell, 1965) pp. 385-386.

<sup>32</sup> David Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance, 1940-1945: A Survey of the Special Operations Executive with Documents* (Marston Gate, Amazon, 2013) p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> Part 1, HS7/1, TNA, London.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Wilkinson and Joan Bright Astley, *Gubbins and SOE*, new edn. (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2010) p. 75.

Another of these smaller precursors was SIS's Section D, formed in the wake of the Anschluss when Colonel Laurence Grand was told by C, the head of SIS, to create a department dedicated to sabotage. Grand did not inspire confidence to many observers with one remarking that to pit him against the German intelligence apparatus was like "arranging an attack on a Panzer division by an actor mounted on a donkey".<sup>35</sup> One of the main difficulties faced by Section D in carrying out C's will, apart from dangers in the field, was that it was ill-regarded by the rest of SIS. This was primarily because the preponderance of its activities, sabotage and subversion, disrupted the inconspicuous profile required by SIS to protect its carefully cultivated intelligence networks. In the early years of the war, Section D was actively engaged in the Balkans, including a presence in Greece.

The capitulation of France acted as a catalyst for the amalgamation of Section D, GS(R) and Electra House, a propaganda organisation of the Foreign Office, to create SOE as an attempt to create a body large enough to meet the requirements set out by the Chiefs of Staff. Bickham Sweet-Escott, one of the most important figures in SOE, claimed this moment was making D "an honest woman".<sup>36</sup> This portrayal of SOE as merely the legitimisation of Grand and his staff falls wide of the mark as it ignores the many difficulties created by the marriage of three different, yet complementary, bodies. Additionally, the independence of the new organisation from military control, essentially keeping 'D' away from the War Office, was only achieved after much political wrangling. This was spearheaded by Hugh Dalton who believed that "regular soldiers are not meant to stir up revolution, to create social chaos or to use all those ungentlemanly means of winning the war".<sup>37</sup> Early SOE papers conform to this

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<sup>35</sup> Hastings, *The Secret War*, p. 264.

<sup>36</sup> Bickham Sweet-Escott, 'SOE in the Balkans', p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance*, p. 18.

idea. One paper on SOE activities in the Balkans claims that “the revolutionary sphere is the only one in which Great Britain can now operate, and these operations must be entrusted to an organisation which has revolutionary experience”.<sup>38</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the creation of SOE created much consternation within the Foreign Office. Dalton’s vision of ‘revolution’ and ‘social chaos’ must have done little to reduce this anxiety. More importantly perhaps, Dalton implicitly contested the dominance of the Foreign Office. To achieve his vision of resistance, Dalton believed that SOE should work with the European Left and the organised industrial working class in occupied countries to create underground armies to “strike hard later, when we give the signal”.<sup>39</sup> In effect, this would have reoriented British foreign policy away from that laid out by the Foreign Office, the restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*. The Foreign Office ardently believed that its duty was the restoration of what it perceived to be the legitimate governments of European countries sheltered by Britain and not the support of the more revolutionary resistance movements that were developing to the detriment of the exiled governments.<sup>40</sup> This policy was echoed in the lukewarm reaction of Lord Halifax to Attlee’s suggestion that conservative elements in the various governments-in-exile under the protection of the British should make way for new left-wing politicians more committed to democratic ideals.<sup>41</sup> One can only imagine how the Foreign Office viewed Dalton’s more radical views on the issue. He believed that the exiled

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<sup>38</sup> D/H Organisation, Balkans, ‘Top Level Planning – Istanbul H.Q. - Policy Planning & Organisation of SOE Activities – General, 1940-1941’, HS5/146, TNA, London.

<sup>39</sup> Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance*, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> F. W. Deakin, ‘Great Britain and European Resistance’ in *European Resistance Movements, 1939-1945: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of the Resistance Movements held at Milan 26-29 March 1961* (Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1964) pp. 101-102.

<sup>41</sup> Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance*, p. 30.

governments "may be found not to have too much following when the storm breaks in their home lands. New men who have stayed and faced out the German occupation, and have bolder and more revolutionary ideas, may be preferred to those who have lived, not very dangerously, abroad".<sup>42</sup> His adamant rejection of Foreign Office policy was a clear slap in the face of the Foreign Office, which had always been the instrument guiding the international relations of the British government. The idea that a new organisation outside its control would impact the future planning of diplomacy must have been intolerable. A Foreign Office letter was particularly scathing on this remark, stressing that the Foreign Secretary "could not consent to renounce control of Foreign Policy in any particular. It is monstrous to suggest that 'where the interests of Allied and neutral countries are affected direct Foreign Office control is undesirable'".<sup>43</sup> The intrinsic discord between the two organisations, between restoration and radical resistance, had consequences in many countries, prominently among them Greece.

The enthusiasm behind the founding of SOE was always unlikely to have given it enough impetus to successfully take on the Foreign Office. After all, this was a fledgling organisation created almost as an act of desperation while its adversary was one of the most established and powerful government bureaus. Gradually, its more radical nature, perhaps a reflection of the more anti-establishment views of Dalton himself, was institutionally suppressed as the Foreign Office sought to rein SOE in. Originally, SOE's charter stated that the organization had to consult with the Foreign Office on areas where the interests of the two bodies overlapped and in circumstances in which the Foreign Office would be affected. These consultations initially took the form of

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>43</sup> Letter 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1942, 'SOE Organisation: Relations between SOE & C', FO 1093/155, TNA, London.

weekly meetings chaired by Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office.<sup>44</sup> Bickham Sweet-Escott, who often acted as the SOE representative at these meetings in 1941, wrote that most of the time he had to explain to the Foreign Office "what had gone wrong and why".<sup>45</sup> However, neither side was content with this arrangement so in 1942 a new arrangement, unofficially known as the 'Foreign Office-SOE treaty', was devised. It stipulated, among other decrees, that:

SOE would have to obtain the Secretary of State's prior agreement to any of their operations likely to affect foreign policy. For their part the Foreign Office would make available to SOE all information affecting, or likely to have a bearing upon, SOE operations and plans.

It also declared that:

The degree of interest taken by the Foreign Office in SOE's activities varies in different areas. Thus in enemy and enemy-occupied territories SOE will work under the directives of the chiefs of staff or the responsible commander-in-chief. All acts of sabotage and the creation of disaffection against the enemy can, and in general, be undertaken on the initiative of SOE though they will have to keep the FO informed by periodical reports of any developments of political significance. If, however, any organization in touch with SOE is found to be in a position to exercise political influence in the country SOE will at once consult the FO and chiefs of staff as to the line to be adopted by SOE in its dealings with any such organization<sup>46</sup>

This 'treaty' was not a panacea for the strained relationship between SOE and the Foreign Office. It also did not rapidly or effectively resolve the dissonance between their views. This *modus vivendi* proved particularly ineffective in Greek affairs. The politically charged nature of the Greek resistance meant that SOE's

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<sup>44</sup> Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance*, p. 36.

<sup>45</sup> Bickham Sweet-Escott, *Baker Street Irregular* (London, Methuen, 1965) p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 161.

activities and Foreign Office interests were always at odds. The ‘treaty’ did little to prevent the two from clashing over differing priorities.

Overall, the founding of SOE was fraught with difficulties. Its creation alienated many people who viewed the new organization with mistrust. In the words of Gubbins:

at the best SOE was looked upon as an organization of harmless backroom lunatics which, it was hoped, would not develop into an active nuisance. At the worst, it was regarded as another confusing excrescence [...] as a whole it was left severely alone as a somewhat disreputable child.<sup>47</sup>

One of SOE’s many detractors was SIS. The hostility originally felt by many members of SIS towards Section D had only increased when the latter was subsumed into SOE. Gladwyn Jebb, the Chief Executive Officer of SOE, attributes this partly to the condescending attitude of SIS, as he remarks that “the suggestion that we are ‘amateurs’ has, of course, been freely made”.<sup>48</sup> Their relations deteriorated even further as bitter feuds developed over the control of communications from occupied countries as well as the intrinsic incompatibility of secret intelligence and special operations. Frank Nelson, SOE’s first CD, would point out that friction was caused because “they [SIS] naturally desire quiet waters in which to fish for Intelligence, the activities of SOE in the same regions or districts inevitably stir up trouble”.<sup>49</sup>

It is also conceivable that there existed a political divide between the two secret organisations. For the better part of two decades the established intelligence services had focused on the communist threat. In comparison,

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<sup>47</sup> Colin Gubbins, ‘SOE and the Co-ordination of Regular and Irregular Warfare’ in M. Elliot-Bateman (ed.) *The Fourth Dimension of Warfare* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1970) p. 85.

<sup>48</sup> Minute, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1942, FO 1093/155, TNA, London.

<sup>49</sup> SOE’s Relationship with SIS, FO 1093/155, TNA, London.

from its very inception SOE was a far more radical body which considered European Popular Front movements as potential allies rather than enemies. In any case, by 1944, Churchill concluded that "the warfare between SOE and SIS [...] is a lamentable but perhaps inevitable feature of our affairs".<sup>50</sup> The interdepartmental strife that dominated the early years of the British intelligence services had once again become an acceptable facet of British activities.

#### SOE and its precursors in Greece, 1939-1941

Section D and MI(R) had moved quickly to establish a presence in Greece with both making inroads in the early days of the Phoney War. Before the Italian ultimatum they had been tasked with stiffening Greek and Balkan resistance to the Axis, including the dissemination of anti-Axis propaganda and "gun running to Jugo-Slavia".<sup>51</sup> But these activities had to be pursued while keeping the Metaxas regime in the dark. The Greek government was still clinging on to the hope of neutrality and was loath to provoke the Axis. Nicholas Hammond of MI(R) and later a prominent member of SOE, recalls how his mission to Albania was refused entry into Greece as the local authorities "suspected we were up to no good, that we were going to cause trouble in Albania and might involve Greece".<sup>52</sup> However, the British officers were also keen to avoid collaborating with the Greek authorities to ensure their own safety as the fate of British and French agents in Romania weighed heavily on them. Because of their close relationship with the pro-Allied Romanian authorities, they had been easily betrayed when Romania joined the Axis.<sup>53</sup> Ian

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<sup>50</sup> Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance*, p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> Chapter 1, 'SOE Activities in Greece', HS7/158, TNA, London.

<sup>52</sup> Roderick Bailey, *Forgotten Voices of the Secret War: An Inside History of Special Operations during the Second World War* (St. Ives, Ebury, 2009) p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Chapter 1, 'SOE Activities in Greece, 1940-1942 by Major Ian Pirie, Chapters 1-6', HS7/150, TNA, London.

Pirie, one of the most prominent representatives of Section D in Athens, raises the point that the men of Section D in Athens were very hesitant to work even with their Secret Intelligence cousins in SIS active in Greece, because of the close relationship the latter maintained with the security apparatus of Maniatakis.<sup>54</sup>

As a result, when Section D was seeking out collaborators in Greece, it had to look for people who would not betray them to the Metaxas regime. Naturally, they turned towards the regime's opponents. These were "men who could be trusted not to betray SOE's plans to Metaxas, but whose opposition was not so marked as to attract police surveillance".<sup>55</sup> After Greece joined the war there was another important and practical reason that strengthened the connection between the Greek republican camp and the British officers, now working for SOE. Once the Greek army was mobilised, the best people available to British agents for training in covert operations and wireless communications were the officers cashiered after the 1935 abortive coup who had been condemned to stay away from the front. An SOE report argued that:

The groups considered most likely to persevere [...] were found amongst elements hostile to the Metaxas regime. Indeed, after the start of the Greco-Italian war only those elements proved to be accessible to SOE whose hostility to the administration was so great that the government did not recall them to Colours.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, another important reason why the SOE officers in Greece cultivated their relationship with the republican camp was that they were convinced that it was the one that could be depended upon to offer maximum resistance to an Axis invasion.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Chapter 1, HS7/158, TNA, London.

<sup>56</sup> SOE Activities in Greece, 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1942, 'Miscellaneous London SO File Part 1, August 1940 to July 1943', HS5/748, TNA, London.

Throughout this period, some of these British officers in Greece seriously contemplated the possibility of organising a Venizelist coup against the Metaxas regime. The suspect ideology of the regime, including many of its Germanophile officers, meant that there was still some concern as to the willingness of the Greek government to resist any Axis incursion. This persisted even after Metaxas rejected the Italian ultimatum, as there were fears that he would be more amenable to negotiating with the Germans if they intervened to support Mussolini.<sup>57</sup> In many ways, the Allies faced in Greece a situation similar to the one in Yugoslavia where there was a politically suspect government but a populace with strong pro-Allied sentiments. In Yugoslavia a coup, seemingly reflecting the popular will, toppled the government when it signed the Tripartite pact, almost certainly with SOE involvement as a 1942 ministerial report mentions that the organisation took part in the “the *coup d’état* in Yugoslavia”.<sup>58</sup> It is very probable that, if that was the case in Yugoslavia, the groundwork for a similar action may have been prepared in Greece.

As late as December 1940, a telegram to Pirie states that “if fears expressed shows [sic] signs of materialising, Greek support could be secured for us by institution military dictatorship by Pangalos backed by Venizelists”.<sup>59</sup> British intentions to fight on in Greece with or without the Metaxas regime are particularly apparent in Crete, where George Taylor, Deputy Chief of Special Operations for SOE, reported that “a man has been sent out by M.I.R London, who was supposed to be able to raise the Cretans either against an Italian invasion or against the Athens Government if the latter should by any chance

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<sup>57</sup> Chapter 2, HS7/158, TNA, London.

<sup>58</sup> Special Operations Executive, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1942, FO 1093/155, TNA, London.

<sup>59</sup> D/H2 to D/HA, 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1940, HS5/287, TNA.

throw in its lot with the Axis”.<sup>60</sup> Pirie confirms that “we seriously considered whether we could if necessary make any attempt at a coup d’état [...] this was earnestly discussed during the early days of the Italian attack”.<sup>61</sup> Pirie also states that this preparation was leaked to the Greek authorities by someone whose name has been redacted and little documentary evidence remains.<sup>62</sup> Despite this setback, it is apparent that to SOE officers in Greece the best way to ensure that the popular demand of resisting the Axis invaders would be carried out was to look to the republican camp.

Politics was not the only thing keeping the British officers in Greece busy in this period. Apart from the aforementioned work in propaganda and arms smuggling, they were particularly involved in training saboteur groups for work both before and after an Axis occupation of Greece. An early plan called for the training of Greeks in the ‘Freedom Centre’ in Haifa, a sabotage boot camp.<sup>63</sup> A plan that gained significantly more traction, dated from early December 1940 and approved by CD himself, called for the “enrolment and training of two bands of local saboteurs at Salonika and Athens to operate against selected targets after evacuation”.<sup>64</sup> These became the groups organised by ‘Sussex’, Major B. Menzies, who was the Imperial War Graves Commissioner in Salonika, and ‘Mark’, H. Sinclair, who worked for the Athens tram company. The formation of these groups was assisted by George Taylor

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<sup>60</sup> Greece, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1940, ‘Greece: Reports, Various, General and Individual Reports, G.F. Taylor (D/H)’, HS5/497, TNA, London.

<sup>61</sup> Chapter 3, HS7/150, TNA.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Establishment of Balkan Freedom Centre Palestine, ‘Greece: Organization and Administration. Greek organization, evacuation and re-organization of the Balkans Section in Istanbul: Correspondence, telegrams and memoranda’, HS5/509, TNA, London.

<sup>64</sup> CEO No. 434, ‘Greece: GEO, Plans against a possible enemy occupation of Greece, Training of two bands of saboteurs. Costs etc., December, 1940’, HS5/214, TNA, London.

while visiting the Balkans who signalled London that “I hope to have got all plans for Mark and Sussex’s organisation fully worked out (covering both pre-occupational demolitions and post-occupational sabotage)”.<sup>65</sup>

The Salonika organisation grew to be much larger than its counterpart in Athens as it was built on Menzies’s close association with the Liberal politician Alexander Zannas, an ex-minister of Venizelos and head of the Greek Red Cross. Pirie recounts that “The latter [Zannas] put at our disposal the underground framework of the Venizelist Party in Macedonia and Thrace, where it had always been particularly strong. His associates were, therefore, men of calibre such as the bishop of Kavalla”.<sup>66</sup> The Salonika sabotage group played a critical role in the destruction of the naval defences of the city’s port in April 1941, perhaps the main ‘scorched earth’ success during the retreat of the Allied forces. Yet again, SOE must have felt vindicated by finding willing and capable collaborators within the opponents of the Greek regime. The impact of the Athens organisation was minimised when it was prohibited by British command from engaging in large scale ‘scorched earth’ operations.

Despite their promise, especially that of the Salonika organisation, both of these groups were a far cry from the underground patriot army envisioned. The rapid collapse of the Allied forces in Greece also exacerbated the unpreparedness of these groups. They were both in an embryonic state, nowhere near the calibre of organisation that could tie down German resources and wage a costly guerrilla war. The SOE histories capture the gloom that was felt after the fall of Greece and the collapse of all operational plans. One of these states that “the future was full of uncertainty. There was nothing worthy of the name of organisation which could go underground and re-emerge as a

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<sup>65</sup> Telegram from A/D, ‘Revolt in the Balkans, Major Taylor’s Mission’, HS5/166, TNA, London.

<sup>66</sup> Chapter 5, HS7/150, TNA.

solid nucleus of resistance; only a few groups of well-wishers”.<sup>67</sup> It does soften the blow a bit though by mentioning that “there was, however, some comfort in the thought that two W/T [wireless transmitter] sets, which had been delivered in Athens only four days before their [SOE] departure, had been left [...] in the hands of some Naval officers”.<sup>68</sup> These officers were led by Charalambos Koutsogiannopoulos, a republican naval officer cashiered in 1935, who would become known as Prometheus II. The symbolism of the use of the name Prometheus, the Titan who gave the secret of fire to humanity and, with the help of Hercules, shattered his chains, was lost neither on the Greeks nor on the British.

The importance of Prometheus II cannot be overstated. The W/T operated by his group was the only source of contact British intelligence had with Greece following its occupation by the Axis. As late as August 1942 a telegram to Cairo stressed that “Prometheus II’s safety is of paramount importance because our W/T link with 41-land [Greece] depends on him”.<sup>69</sup> The critical importance of Prometheus II had been compounded by the loss of Crete. This was because during the battle, SOE “lost in Crete the men specially chosen to return to Greece and contact the leaders of the various organisations”.<sup>70</sup> Prometheus II gave the British access not only to information on developments within Greece but also the capability to coordinate the sabotage organisations left behind.

The man who was in charge of re-establishing contact with the Greek mainland was David Pawson. Following the occupation, he moved to Smyrna

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<sup>67</sup> Chapter 2, HS7/158, TNA, London.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> D/H62 to SOE Cairo, August 5<sup>th</sup> 1942, ‘General: Collaborators. Movements, activities and reports’, HS5/665, TNA, London.

<sup>70</sup> Memorandum by D/H62 Concerning Communications with Greece, HS5/509, TNA, London.

and was heavily involved with coordinating communications with Greece. Partly, this was because Pawson, who had been recruited by SOE while working in Athens, had been particularly successful in establishing connections with a number of important individuals in Athens. Indeed, Pawson had been so capable at his job that he was described, along with his collaborator Pamela Lovibond, as having “all strings in their hands at Istanbul and Smyrna, It is not exaggeration to say if they were replaced that our contacts with friendly elements through our existing channels would come to a dead stop”.<sup>71</sup> Among these friendly elements was a prominent and influential Venizelist officer, Colonel Euripides Bakirdzis popularly known as the ‘Red Colonel’. According to Pirie, Pawson and Bakirdzis “got on famously” and Pawson gave him a wireless transmitter (W/T) to form a group during the German occupation “when they could appreciate the German security measures and when they would have a better change of distinguishing quislings from patriots”.<sup>72</sup> Bakirdzis, the original Prometheus, pulled out of the operation handing the radio over to Prometheus II. But Bakirdzis would remain an important contact for SOE during the occupation.

Apart from Prometheus II and his wireless, SOE also relied for communication with occupied Greece on a network of caiques, traditional small fishing boats, and their crews to act as couriers. It did not take SOE very long to realise the utility provided by these small boats. Attempts had been made even before Greece joined the war to create a network of caiques, including one manned by Dodecanesian Greeks, Italian subjects, who had fled

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<sup>71</sup> Telegram Cairo to CD, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1942, ‘Pamela Pawson, née Lovibond – Born 12.02.1907’, HS9/1156/8, TNA, London.

<sup>72</sup> Chapter 5, HS7/150, TNA.

to Cyprus.<sup>73</sup> By 1941 the most important and able of these networks was led by another of Pawson's contacts, Odysseus. Odysseus, a caique captain whom the British knew as Gerasimos Alexatos (a name that may have been another alias)<sup>74</sup>, was a drug and tobacco smuggler of republican leanings. It was the networks of these two men, Odysseus and Prometheus II, which formed the basis on which SOE hoped for the re-entry of British intelligence into occupied Greece. But these were men who were so wary of the Greek Royalist government that they had asked to stay hidden from them because "they were afraid lest Royalists both inside and outside the country should betray them to the Germans".<sup>75</sup> The war had done little to heal the divide between republicans and royalists.

Not everyone in SOE had time to delve into the details of Greek politics. In October 1941, a Statement of Policy paper was circulated within the organisation. It announced that "the policy of SOE with regard to South Eastern Europe is the preparation of a revolt of the Balkan peoples".<sup>76</sup> The populations of Greece and Yugoslavia, the Balkan members of the Allies, had already begun to form inchoate cells of resistance mere months after their occupation and it was time for the organisation to realise its mandate. Another SOE policy paper excitedly exclaimed that "the widespread occurrences of sabotage and in certain areas of organised guerrilla warfare is evidence that

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<sup>73</sup> Report on the Dodecanese and Cyprus by Hammond, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1940, 'Greece: Reports and Various. NGL Hammond, Report on his visit to the Dodecanese and Cyprus', HS5/499, TNA, London.

<sup>74</sup> Makris-Staikos, *Ο Άγγλος Πρόξευος*, p. 89.

<sup>75</sup> Chapter 2, HS7/158, TNA, London.

<sup>76</sup> Statement of Policy, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1941, 'Balkans: Top Level Planning, Planning of Activities (Cairo HQ) – Policy Planning and Organisation of SOE Activities, 1941-1944', HS5/145, TNA, London.

the German 'New Order' has not been well received [...] and indicates that the spirit of revolt is already abroad".<sup>77</sup>

### SOE Cairo

The fall of Greece had left SOE facing many daunting difficulties in establishing and organising its resistance. These were made worse by the terrible condition of the organisation in Cairo. The common jest of referring to the Middle East section of SOE as the 'Muddle East' was well earned.<sup>78</sup> From the very early days of the war, the Cairo headquarters of SOE had acquired a reputation of being notoriously difficult to manage. It operated in a semi-independent capacity from SOE headquarters in Baker Street and was unflatteringly referred to as "the second brain that diplodocus kept near the base of its spine to manage its back legs".<sup>79</sup> Even this pointed remark does not fully capture its shambolic nature.

Despite the fact that SOE in London had incorporated Section D of SIS and the military's guerrilla experts MI(R), in Cairo this integration had not fully taken place and the local branches of both Section D and MI(R) maintained a semblance of independence from each other.<sup>80</sup> As a result, the Middle East section of MI(R), known as G(R), remained under the direct control of the military in the form of GHQ Middle East.<sup>81</sup> There was even significant tension between the propaganda section of SOE Cairo, known as SO1, and its operational core, known as SO2. Bickham Sweet-Escott stressed that there was an atmosphere of:

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<sup>77</sup> SOE Policy for South Eastern Europe, DPA Paper 2, 'Balkans: Top Level Planning-Policy and Planning of SOE Activities, General', HS5/148, TNA, London.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Clogg, *Anglo-Greek Attitudes*, p. 71.

<sup>79</sup> MRD Foot, *SOE: An Outline History of the Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946*, new edn. (London, Bodley Head, 2014) p. 43

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek Resistance*, p. 76.

jealousy, suspicion and intrigue which embittered the relations between the various secret and semi-secret Departments in Cairo [...] It was not quite Hobbes' war of every man against every man. But certainly every secret organisation seemed to be set against every other secret organisation.<sup>82</sup>

Complaints about the state of the offices of SOE could not be contained to just the insiders. The British ambassador to Egypt, Sir Miles Lampson, wrote a letter of complaint to the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, about the activities of "rival British secret and propaganda organisations in Greece".<sup>83</sup>

Additionally, SOE Cairo had failed to convince the Commander-in-Chief, General Wavell, of its value. Apart from forcing it to seek his approval for acts of sabotage, Wavell had tried to divide the operations of SOE into two different subcommands under military control. This plan met with fierce opposition from Hugh Dalton who, in an attempt to protect the integrity of SOE, wrote to Wavell that

I have always recognised that the Middle East has its own special and complicated problems and that, in consequence, SOE would have, so to speak, to be grafted on to an existing machine [...] but this is surely a very different thing from placing my whole organisation under the direct orders of your general staff.<sup>84</sup>

The attempt by the military to take over SOE by having G(R) fully absorb the rest of SOE Cairo under the military hierarchy was averted by the appointment of George Pollock as head of SOE Cairo. But the legitimacy that SOE craved throughout the Second World War was never going to be earned by an organisation hobbled by internal rivalries.

The stopgap appointment of George Pollock did not achieve the desired results. To avert a disaster in Cairo, in August of 1941 Frank Nelson, the SOE

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<sup>82</sup> Clogg, *Anglo-Greek Attitudes*, p. 127.

<sup>83</sup> Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek Resistance*, p. 71.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

chief, travelled to Cairo in person. Assisted by Bickham Sweet-Escott, regional director for the Balkans and his close assistant, Nelson attempted to sort out the mess. The remedy for the “bloodthirsty internecine warfare [...] between two parts of the same entity, viz. between SO1 and SO2” which had been exacerbated by “intrigues on all sides, facilitated by parallel communications, by clashing of personalities, by slinging of mud and by orgy of gossip” was the purge of a number of senior members of both sub-divisions of SOE.<sup>85</sup> The most notable casualty was Pollock as he was considered one of the main instigators of the intra-departmental rivalry.<sup>86</sup>

In his stead, Nelson appointed Terence Maxwell as SOE Cairo chief. In turn, Maxwell decided to restructure the organisation on radically different lines. Against the advice of his staff, he decided to dissolve the existing country structure of SOE Cairo, under which each country’s section was responsible for the briefing, organisation and execution of operations within its jurisdiction. Maxwell replaced it with four directorates dedicated to specific roles. The two most important were the ‘Special Operations’ directorate (DSO, mostly staffed by the G(R) guerrilla war experts) and the ‘Policy and Agents’ directorate (mainly comprised of the former Section D members like Pirie and Pawson).<sup>87</sup> The other two directorates were ‘Special Propaganda’ and ‘Finance and Administration’. What Maxwell hoped to achieve was an increase in efficiency as the specialized departments would be able to handle their work with more consistency and skill. Essentially, Maxwell hoped to achieve a production line of covert operations.

All this shuffling produced, in actual terms, was the division of SOE into two completely separate parts which rarely communicated with each other and

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<sup>85</sup> Clogg, *Anglo-Greek Attitudes*, p. 71.

<sup>86</sup> Makris-Staikos, «Ο Άγγλος Πρόξενος», p. 209.

<sup>87</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 144.

had little knowledge of each other's activities. This divide was also greatly exacerbated by operational failures in the early part of the war. The 'Policy' directorate often felt that its agents and collaborators had been exposed by calamitous failures of DSO. Relations between the two subdivisions in Cairo deteriorated to the point where the 'Policy' directorate made a point of withholding from DSO information about organisations and agents it was in touch with.<sup>88</sup> This was evidently a disastrous state of affairs. The division between the two also meant that operatives of DSO became significantly less specialised in the regions they were expected to act in. Pirie wrote that "an officer in DSO might be working on a Greek operation one moment and on a Yugoslav one the next".<sup>89</sup> In a politically sensitive area and in a line of work where the tradecraft required the cultivation of trust and connections as well as local knowledge, this choice is particularly baffling. This was stressed by SOE's Lord Glenconner who wrote that:

the success of SOE operations depends on their secrecy, the most laborious and closest attention to detail and on the most intimate knowledge of the countries concerned [...] each country constitutes a different problem requiring its own treatment and solution. We should look therefore to what I may call the 'handicraft principle' as opposed to that of mass production.<sup>90</sup>

Sweet-Escott was particularly damning of Maxwell's system, writing that "the whole history of SOE elsewhere showed that the functional system of August

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>89</sup> Chapter 8, 'SOE Activities in Greece, 1940-1942 by Major Ian Pirie, Chapters 7-18', HS7/151, TNA, London.

<sup>90</sup> Saul Kelly, 'A Succession of crises? SOE in the Middle East, 1940-1945' in Neville Wylie (ed.) *The Politics and Strategy of Clandestine War: Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* (Oxford, Routledge, 2007) p. 137.

1941 was a fundamental mistake”.<sup>91</sup> The many failures of SOE in this period must to a certain extent be attributed to the situation in Cairo.

An unintended consequence of the purges of 1941 for SOE was to make an enemy of Reginald ‘Rex’ Leeper, a prominent diplomat and civil servant. Leeper was the head of SO1, the body responsible for propaganda and operations which essentially was the continuation of Electra House (one of the three constituent organisations that had been amalgamated to create SOE). The purging of senior staff members of SO1 Cairo by Nelson and Sweet-Escott had the effect of infuriating Leeper who left SOE the very same month. After his departure, Leeper and colleagues of his from SO1 helped found the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) which would become the main vehicle for British propaganda efforts throughout the war. However, Leeper was soon back in Cairo and working very closely with SOE as ambassador to the Greek government-in-exile. Throughout his tenure as ambassador he was one of SOE’s fiercest opponents. Nigel Clive, an SIS operative in Greece in these years, was told that “Rex Leeper was an enemy to SOE”.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps the purges that resulted from the conflict between SO1 and SO2 were a driving motivator for Leeper to zealously pursue what he himself called “the Great War against SOE”.<sup>93</sup> Whether or not Leeper held a personal grudge, or at least to what extent he allowed it to affect his decision making, is unclear. However, it stands to reason that the already strained relationship between the Foreign Office and the Special Operations Executive over policy issues in Greece was not helped by the fact that the main conduit of this relationship had no reason to be charitable or understanding towards the fledgling organisation.

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<sup>91</sup> Sweet-Escott, ‘SOE in the Balkans’, p. 19.

<sup>92</sup> Nigel Clive, *A Greek Experience, 1943-1948* (Salisbury, Michael Russell, 1985) p. 29.

<sup>93</sup> Clogg, *Anglo-Greek Attitudes*, p. 71.

Finally, the purges of 1941 and Maxwell's system reinforced for the time being the primacy of G(R) in Cairo. This process began when G(R) was incorporated in SO2. The guerrilla war experts were viewed with a great deal of scepticism by the existing members of SOE. Sweet-Escott even viewed this as an attempt by the military to seize control of SOE Cairo.<sup>94</sup> After this amalgamation, Wavell wrote to General Slim that "SOE think they have taken over G(R), and G(R) think they have taken over SOE so I suppose everybody is happy".<sup>95</sup> However, G(R) seems to have been the ultimate beneficiary during Maxwell's reign. Pirie wrote that "throughout Maxwell's tenure of office to increase the influence of MI(R) within SOE at the expense of that of [Section] D, the more so because his re-organisation was on a functional rather than a geographical basis".<sup>96</sup> Regardless of the internal power shifts in Cairo, the final absorption of G(R) into SOE Cairo had a profound effect on its activities. The 'Operations' desk was now staffed by professional officers, accountable to the desires of the military command in Egypt, which tended to view SOE's subversive operations almost solely in relation to strategic considerations, often overlooking the political ramifications, much to the chagrin of the Foreign Office.<sup>97</sup> This would be a particularly thorny issue in Greece where strategic and political considerations were indelibly linked.

Maxwell's system did not last long as the situation proved untenable. For almost a year DSO was planning subversive operations oblivious to the political implications of its activities and often drew the ire of the Foreign Office which protested loudly, while the 'Policy' directorate, whose staff were well versed in the current political situation of the occupied countries, did not participate in the planning and was condemned to look on from the sideline. In

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<sup>94</sup> Sweet-Escott, *Baker Street Irregular*, p. 78.

<sup>95</sup> Foot, *SOE*, p. 43.

<sup>96</sup> Chapter 8, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>97</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 144.

August 1942, SOE Cairo was purged again. Eventually, the August purges of SOE Cairo would become an annual event until the end of the war. However, the purges of 1942 were particularly important. Maxwell was relieved of command and replaced as head of SOE Cairo by Lord Glenconner. Glenconner, arguably the most able man to hold the position, oversaw a period of rapid expansion in SOE Cairo's responsibilities and authority. Trusted by the chain of command of SOE, he oversaw a widespread reworking of the organisation. Pearson, manning the Cairo desk in London, wrote to Glenconner that he had met with Lord Selborne, the Minister who had replaced Hugh Dalton, and had informed him that the "troubles we had were the result of the bad old days of A/DH [Maxwell] and implored him to give you time to get your new organisation working and not to interfere in a lot of administrative and staff details".<sup>98</sup> These details included forcibly integrating the warring factions of SOE Cairo and reverting back to a country system. Along with Glenconner, SOE Cairo was now also home to his energetic and forceful Chief of Staff, Brigadier C.M. Keble. These two men would be instrumental in leading SOE out of the bleak years of 1940-1942 and towards its zenith.

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<sup>98</sup> D/HV to A/D3, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1942 'General: Planning and Political, Lord Glenconner's private correspondence, September 42 to April 43', HS5/655, TNA, London.

### Chapter 3: The birth of the Greek Resistance and early British operations in Greece: 1941-1942.

The birth of the Greek resistance seems to have been a spontaneous reaction by the populace against the Axis occupation. However, the British services, and SOE in particular, were quick to seize the opportunity to promote and foster this agitation into widespread resistance. Relying on Prometheus II and Odysseus, SOE reached out to potential collaborators but was soon rebuked by many in the traditional Athenian political class. While looking elsewhere, SOE was put into communication with the leftwing National Liberation Front (EAM), a resistance front led by the KKE. At the same time, SOE was instrumental in the creation of the National Republican Greek League (EDES). These two organisations would soon grow to become the most important organisations in Greece and dominate the Resistance. This chapter will trace their evolution, but more importantly the early interactions of these organisations with SOE in an attempt to illustrate their impact going forward.

Simultaneously, SOE was trying to create a resistance organisation that would be more amenable to co-operating with the Greek government-in-exile. This was largely pursued at the behest of the Foreign Office which was wary of SOE's collaborators in Greece most of whom were committed republicans. To this end, SOE tried to approach the Greek politician Panagiotis Kanellopoulos. However, one of the missions sent to establish communications with him, Operation 'Isinglass', went horribly awry. The dissertation seeks to fully evaluate the impact of Operation 'Isinglass' on the Greek resistance and discuss its long term effects. Additionally, this section will also seek to scrutinise Kanellopoulos and his importance to British efforts to unify the resistance in a centrist organisation loyal to the Greek government-in-exile.

Finally, the chapter will highlight a number of SOE operations that took place in 1942, namely Sphinx's mission to Greece and Operation 'Thurgoland',

'Locksmith' and 'Brevity'. It is hoped that by examining their operational failures, a clear picture of SOE's shortcomings in this period will emerge. These operations play an important role in shaping the Greek resistance and are a necessary piece of the puzzle to understand how the resistance came to be dominated by EAM and EDES. To this end, it is particularly important to analyse why British attempts to unite the resistance organisations under a more moderate aegis failed miserably.

### The development of Greek resistance

SOE's conviction that the 'spirit of revolt' had manifested itself in Greece was due to the appearance of resistance organisations mere months after the Axis occupation. Among these early groups were the Defenders of Northern Greece (YBE), founded in July 1941 in Greek Macedonia, and the Pan-Hellenic Union of Fighting Youths (PEAN). The latter, founded by Kostas Perrikos in October 1941, stands out for its successful bombing of the offices of the National-Socialist Patriotic Organisation, a Greek Nazi party, in September 1942. But resistance took many forms and not all were as conspicuous, with many Greeks participating in forms of passive resistance.

This was often in organised groups like the one founded by John Karavidas in October 1941 which resisted by "organising strikes, proclamations, writing on walls, 'go-slow' policy in Banks, public offices etc".<sup>1</sup> Examples of passive resistance also included a general strike organised by EAM in April 1942, which was "the first General Strike to be carried through successfully in any occupied country in Europe"<sup>2</sup> as well as the sheltering of Commonwealth troops who had been stranded in Greece after the evacuations. Many of these men had managed to join armed guerrilla bands, most notably in Crete and Mani, but there were reportedly up to 3,000 soldiers hiding in Athens.<sup>3</sup> Taking these soldiers in was not only very risky for the Greek families who did so but was also costly at a time when Athens was suffering during the Great Famine that devastated Greece in the winter of 1941. Odysseus, in his report to SOE, wrote that these families tended to be poor and that "the British

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<sup>1</sup> Interrogation Report, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1943, 'Greece: Reports – Various, Interrogations, ISLD, Greek Submarine "Katsonis", December 1942- November 1943', HS5/493, TNA, London.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 16, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>3</sup> Directorate of Special Operations Paper 1: Outline Plan for Balkans and Dodecanese, HS5/145, TNA.

have naturally no ration ticket and therefore bread for them is obtained through the Black Market [...] the risks of the British are increased because the head of the Greek family goes out to try and solicit the assistance of others: from mouth to mouth the fact reaches the Gestapo".<sup>4</sup> But even these early small acts of resistance signalled the popular will to resist.

One explanation for this is that the successes of the Greek army against the Italian invasion had left a stamp on the psyche of the Greeks.<sup>5</sup> Pride over the successes of the 'Albanian Epic', as it became known, was coupled with seething resentment towards the occupying forces and in particular the Italians, who had been bested in battle and ridiculed widely both in Greece and abroad. Perhaps this helped inspire the Greeks not to submit to the Axis occupation. But SOE's 'spirit of revolt' came at a cost. Greece, similarly to its Yugoslav neighbours, would suffer a brutal occupation with loss of life and violent reprisals on a scale incomparable to anything outside the Eastern Front.

Many within SOE were eager to take advantage of this simmering Greek unrest. Some planners within the organisation, who seem not to have been greatly tempered by the war, still believed in the enthusiastic vision of widespread sabotage and guerrilla armies. They still authored reports arguing that a policy of widespread revolt was achievable by supporting the Agrarian and Left-wing parties since "the peasantry constitute some 80% of the population of the Balkan peninsula", even declaring that it was worth the risk of alienating "potential allies among the bourgeoisie [sic]".<sup>6</sup> But these plans for widespread revolution, echoing the founding vision of SOE, were not reflective

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<sup>4</sup> Ger. Alexatos' Report, 'Greece: Reports- General and Individual, Alexatos, Gerasaius @ Odysseus, Parts 1-10', HS5/526, TNA, London.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995) pp. 123-125.

<sup>6</sup> DPA Paper No. 2, HS5/148, TNA.

of conditions on the ground. A report written in 1943 depicts a very different image. It suggests that “Our [SOE’s] policy in the Balkans before, during, and for long after their occupation by the enemy was simply to save what we could from the wreck [...] we worked to a hand-to-mouth prescription; and it is very difficult to see how we could have done otherwise”.<sup>7</sup> This seems to be a more sober reflection on the circumstances faced by the Greek section of SOE considering the manner in which the British evacuated Greece. This was despite the fact that, with Pirie headquartered at SOE Cairo and Pawson working out of Smyrna, SOE was best situated to return to Greece. Pirie recounts that “all 6’s [SIS] agents had been rounded up on the German occupation, MI9 had none prior to the occupation. We were therefore the only organisation with contacts at work immediately after the British evacuation”.<sup>8</sup> Yet SOE’s return proved a gradual and haphazard affair even as it found itself largely in a position of strength in Greece vis-à-vis its intelligence colleagues.

The unpleasant conditions prevailing in Cairo in the summer of 1941 did not augur well for the Greek section of SOE. Pirie confirms that “in Cairo an invaluable month was wasted in unedifying wrangles”.<sup>9</sup> By the autumn of 1941, with the administrative troubles temporarily put aside and with Prometheus II and Odysseus both resurfacing, SOE was in a position to begin its work in earnest. But it found its work hampered by British support of the Greek government-in-exile. Many of SOE’s early efforts in Greece primarily involved utilising its two primary networks to contact potential collaborators, with Odysseus and Prometheus II both having orders to reach out to a wide range of Greek personalities, both political and military. These included

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<sup>7</sup> General Plan, 22th February 1943, HS5/145, TNA.

<sup>8</sup> Chapter 12, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>9</sup> Chapter 7, HS7/151, TNA.

Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, a moderate republican, and Stylianos Gonatas, an elder republican statesman.

This was part of a wider push to improve the image and standing of the Greek government-in-exile by making it more representative. To this end, Pawson cabled Prometheus II in November 1941 that “we wish democratic politicians Kanellopoulos and Melanos [sic Mylonas] come to Egypt to join Greek government”.<sup>10</sup> The same mission was simultaneously given to Odysseus with a report from Frank Nelson, the SOE CD, to Gladwyn Jebb, the SOE Chief Executive Officer, mentioning that “it is true also that he [Kanellopoulos] was contacted by Odysseus with an invitation to join the Tsouderos Government”.<sup>11</sup> But Odysseus’s meeting with Kanellopoulos was a disaster, with the politician not only declining the offer but also earning the intense disdain of the smuggler. Within British circles it was suggested that this failure was because “Odysseus II [sic], good as he may be at his subversive activities, was certainly not of a class or a calibre to contact Greek politicians on equal terms and they would probably not play with him”.<sup>12</sup>

Attempts to reach an agreement with Gonatas did not fare much better. After their meeting, Prometheus II reported to Pawson that “Gonatas rejected my proposal for armed action with the justification that he pities the population”.<sup>13</sup> Apart from his hesitation to engage in sabotage and guerrilla warfare for fear of Axis reprisals, the elder statesman’s stance on the Greek monarchy and the support afforded it to by the British government was a

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<sup>10</sup> Telegram No. 4, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1941, ‘Reports Various, Individual Reports. Smyrna Office: Signals exchanged with Prometheus II and EAM Central Committee (Appendix C to Captain Harris’s Report)’, HS5/711, TNA, London.

<sup>11</sup> SOE Policy Towards Greece & Effects of Antiparos Disaster, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>12</sup> Notes on Conversation had with Tiberius, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1942, ‘SOE Relations with the Greek Government, March 1942 to January 1943’, HS5/296, TNA, London.

<sup>13</sup> Chapter 16, HS7/151, TNA.

particular sticking point and it was widely believed within SOE that this formed part of the reason Prometheus II found him loath to commit to any plan of action in concert with the British.<sup>14</sup> Gonatas's refusal to be part of any British endeavour was disastrous as it led to republican military circles being unwilling to work with the Greek agents of SOE to form organised resistance bodies. The problem was that the Greek government-in-exile was still seen as a continuation of the Metaxas regime and very few people in Greece were willing to work with it.

The Foreign Office maintained its support for the king and the government of Emmanuel Tsouderos despite warnings about its political character from SOE and its associates in the former staff of the British consulate in Athens. Such warnings included suggestions in September 1941 that, to avert a constitutional and political crisis in Greece, the government-in-exile had to take steps including a declaration "reinstating the articles of the constitution which were abolished by the Metaxas government".<sup>15</sup> Glenconner echoed this as he wrote in October 1941 that:

two things are now necessary: the King and the government [...] should declare the Fourth of August regime is ended [...]. Secondly, the Royal Family and the extreme royalists must be made to realise the danger to the dynasty involved in their hostility (for this is what is believed) to the Venizelists [...] some means must be found to bring the King together with those who dislike his friends<sup>16</sup>

The inability of reining in Metaxist intrigues even led to the British government acquiescing to the exile from Cairo of six Greeks who had been complaining about the political character of the Greek government.

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<sup>14</sup> Chapter 16, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 10, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>16</sup> Greek Politics, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1941, HS5/738, TNA.

In fact, Metaxist ministers remained in the Greek cabinet until April 1942. Yet even the Foreign Office believed that the Greek government was:

not representative of Greece as a whole. However, it was equally clear that there was no alternative [...] it was, however, self-evident that the [Greek] Government ought to be strengthened [...] M. Tsouderos shared this latter view and was most anxious to get certain prominent Venizelist leaders out of Greece to join his government.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps it was this unwillingness of the Foreign Office to take a firm stance with the king and his associates that worried SOE when it became privy to the fact that the Minister of State was returning to Egypt with a “firm intention of pursuing a policy of strictest collaboration with and exclusive support of King George”.<sup>18</sup> On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1942, a message reached Cairo from General Gonatas stating that “the Greek people would not accept back the King or the Tsouderos Government even if the former gave assurances of becoming a constitutional monarch”.<sup>19</sup> The Foreign Office replied in February 1942 that “His Majesty’s Government have given, and are giving, their full support to His Majesty and the present Greek government [...] all speech and action should be avoided which might undermine the unity of the nation”.<sup>20</sup> This reply was so unequivocal it had to be toned down in translation by SOE which was afraid it would “so infuriate General Gonatas and his Liberal colleagues as to drive them into a firm alliance with the extreme Left”.<sup>21</sup>

These conditions were clearly not conducive to the creation of resistance organisations through SOE’s republican connections. Nonetheless Odysseus

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<sup>17</sup> The Greek Constitutional Question, April 1941-February 1942, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> Chapter 10, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>19</sup> The Greek Constitutional Question, April 1941-February 1942, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>20</sup> Chapter 14, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

was successful in establishing contact with a different organisation. He first mentions in October 1941 that “the communists who returned from exile formed a new organisation [...] they are full of determination and have made considerable progress so far as the organising part is concerned. In my opinion it is good human material for sabotage work”.<sup>22</sup> He was subsequently given instructions by Pawson to “get in touch with them, bring back information regarding their activities also copies of their literature. Possibility of financing them afterwards”.<sup>23</sup>

Odysseus’s new contact was the National Liberation Front (EAM) which by the time of liberation in 1944 would dwarf all other resistance organisations and become the dominant force of the Greek resistance. It was founded in September 1941 on the initiative of the KKE to form a Popular Front type movement as a vehicle of resistance to the Axis occupation. Apart from the KKE, EAM included the Greek Socialist Party, the Agrarian Party and the party of Ilias Tsirimokos, a former Liberal deputy.<sup>24</sup> The establishment of EAM allowed the KKE to seize the initiative of the resistance from the traditional Athenian parties. When many prominent Greeks initially refused to take part in the resistance, they conceded the field to EAM. As mentioned above, republican military circles in particular were hesitant to accept British assurances of support and initiate action after the refusal of Gonatas to work with Prometheus II.

Prometheus II, in a report written in 1943, stresses that he had began “sounding those officers who were considered as the most dynamic. My disappointment was great. They all considered then the andartes’ [guerrilla]

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<sup>22</sup> Ger. Alexatos’ Report, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>23</sup> Translation of Notes Carried by Odysseus, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>24</sup> Report on EAM, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1942, ‘Resistance Groups and Partisan Forces, Secret Armies (mainly EAM/ELAS), Military activities and political intentions: reports, memoranda, signals, etc, Part 1’, HS5/618, TNA, London.

movement either much too premature or dangerous, and some even threatened to react against it. Their opinion was that of idiots”.<sup>25</sup> An SOE report on EAM in December 1942 highlights that:

the reason for the popularity of EAM, and therefore the Communist Party, was the fact that they were the only people who did anything against the invaders [...] it is fair to say that the Royalists, Venizelists, Democrats and everybody else, call themselves what they will, failed completely.<sup>26</sup>

Their inertia allowed the KKE to become far more important than it ever had been in Greek politics. This was despite years of oppression under the Metaxas regime and the decapitation of its leadership in the early days of the war when, rumoured to have been with the complicity of the Greek government, many prominent communists were arrested or even handed over to the Axis invaders.<sup>27</sup>

Not long after introducing EAM to SOE, Odysseus indicated that, despite his general praise of it and re-assurance as to its democratic credentials, he was on occasion wary of its communist elements. In two separate reports he warned the British that some of them sought to dominate the Greek political landscape. In January 1942 he mentioned that he had warned the EAM leadership against such an action as if “they should attempt such a thing, they will be compelled to come to fighting with the troops of liberation and they would achieve nothing but the hatred of the people”.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, when reporting on the progress of EAM, he warned Pawson that “Communists had also entered its ranks and these last were working only for

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> DSO to AD3, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> Ger. Alexatos' Report, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> Report of Odysseus, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1942, HS5/526, TNA.

their own Communistic ideals”.<sup>29</sup> This warning is important because it disproves a narrative which persists to this day, according to which Odysseus misrepresented EAM to the British and tricked them into supporting an organisation which, unknown to them, included committed communists.<sup>30</sup>

If this were not enough to disprove that narrative, it should be stressed that Odysseus’s reports to SOE seem to have been received with some scepticism by the British. Odysseus did little to help his reputation when in a more extended report he roguishly tried to claim he was the driving force behind the creation of EAM.<sup>31</sup> In London this claim was quickly discredited as people were aware that as “an elderly smuggler, he was apt to overstate his importance, and his remarks should, therefore, be taken with a pinch of salt”.<sup>32</sup> SOE further believed that “the Odysseus Group is below the Prometheus II Group being mainly smugglers and bandits, as opposed to revolutionary officers. Politically the former are further to the Left than the latter”.<sup>33</sup> It seems unlikely that the British were taken in by any misrepresentations in Odysseus’s reports. In fact, Pawson’s reliance on Odysseus raised the ire of the Foreign Office, with Pawson defending the smuggler against accusations by stating that “of course it is true that he [Odysseus] is disreputable but he is not unreliable”, focusing on his smuggling successes if not necessarily his claims.<sup>34</sup>

Instead, the political complexion of EAM was the source of much consternation in British circles as many were very wary of this new organisation. Within SOE there were differing opinions as to the nature of

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<sup>29</sup> Report made out on Mr. Payton’s request, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>30</sup> Indicatively, Makris-Staikos, «Ο Άγγλος Πρόξενος», pp. 236-239.

<sup>31</sup> Report of Odysseus, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1942, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> Notes on Conversation had with Tiberius, HS5/296, TNA.

<sup>33</sup> Notes on SOE Contacts in Greece, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>34</sup> Letter to Dixon, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

EAM, a debate that rages to this day.<sup>35</sup> It seems that many members of SOE believed that the majority of the EAM membership were not communists but exasperated liberal republicans, frustrated at the lack of action by the Athenian political establishment and unwilling to co-operate with the Greek royalist government. According to Glenconner, certain colleagues of his agreed that “EAM is only body which has given an effective lead and that it is Nationalistic rather than Communistic although it is Republican”.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, an SOE report on conditions in Greece suggested that “they call themselves, for want of a better name ‘Communists’, but so far as the writer has been able to trace, their programme appears to be approximately that of Sir Stafford Cripps, and they have little doctrinal affinity, and, I believe, no direct contact, with the Comintern”.<sup>37</sup> It is most likely the author was trying to convey that, despite EAM’s radical left stance, it was within the acceptable spectrum of British politics rather than a Stalinist organisation.

It should be stressed that some within SOE did not hesitate to work with declared communists, as they seemed willing in instances to use any potential international relations of the KKE. One such instance was the bungled Kissavos affair, in which a Greek officer attempted to establish contact with Moscow. Instead of being wary of such a connection, Glenconner received a telegram stating that “Cairo feels that much good might come out of such contact as he was extremely friendly disposed towards us and suggests this should be permitted and that being convinced of his reliability they were financing him in the meantime”.<sup>38</sup> This willingness of SOE to work through the

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<sup>35</sup> Indicatively, Kalyvas and Marantzidis, *Εμφύλια Πάθη*, pp. 135-140.

<sup>36</sup> Telegram from AD3, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>37</sup> A Short History of SOE Contacts in Greece, ‘General: Planning and Political, Lord Glenconner’s private correspondence, March 42 to August 42’, HS5/654, TNA, London.

<sup>38</sup> D/H109 to A/D3, HS5/654, TNA.

international contacts of communists was also true for EAM as some in SOE believed that “the international contacts which our collaborators have must not be overlooked. We asked the Communist element of the Popular Front to get in touch with the Bulgarian Communist Party”.<sup>39</sup> This indicates that it may be besides the point to ascertain the extent to which SOE’s perception of EAM was accurate, as it seems that SOE was more than willing to cooperate with communist organisations. This is certainly the case in other regions of Europe, with SOE showing no qualms in working with the prominent German communist Willi Barth. It was decided that SOE:

tell Barth that he was putting forward his name as an anti-fascist and that he would be wise to conceal the fact that he was an important communist. SOE should then interview Barth without disclosing that they were aware of the high position which he held in the Communist Party. In this way we should be able to make use of Barth’s contacts without allowing Barth and his associates later to represent that we had consciously set out to make use of the Communist machine.<sup>40</sup>

That is not to say that this was a uniform policy of SOE. As early as December 1942, plans appear on how the best method to “combat EAM is to form some non-Communist organisation which will give the enthusiasts action [...] at least 75% of the membership of EAM will leave it and join the new organisation”.<sup>41</sup> This could be interpreted as significant dissonance within SOE on how to deal with communist allies. Alternatively, it could also indicate that it was not EAM’s later attempt to monopolise the resistance in March 1943 that created the dual policy of Britain towards the Greek communists.

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<sup>39</sup> A Short History of SOE Contacts in Greece, HS5/654.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from ADF, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1942, ‘Policy re Employment of Communists by SIS and SOE for use as Agents’, KV4/244, TNA, London.

<sup>41</sup> DSO to AD3, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

The position of the Foreign Office on EAM was much clearer. Its hard stance in support of the king, despite reports of widespread republican sentiment in Greece, had meant that it was willing to alienate moderate republicans, such as Gonatas, and even more so the communists. SOE's support of EAM was an early source of friction between the two organisations. As early as May 1942, a Foreign Office telegram to Cairo remarks that SOE should not be funding EAM as the author believed it "more likely to have the effect of increasing their war chest and thus opposition to the Greek Government, nor do I relish the prospect of existence after the war of a strong Communist element in Greece".<sup>42</sup> When SOE managed to bypass these restrictions, the Foreign Office again slashed the funds given by SOE to EAM by 80%, stating that "not more than £5000 a month will be spent on EAM".<sup>43</sup> But this was only after SOE persuaded the Foreign Office that the "subsidy is desirable in order to keep this organisation from turning to the USSR for funds and to maintain some control over its activities".<sup>44</sup> Moreover, divergence between the two was exacerbated by the fact that the Foreign Office still thought it was possible to halt the rise of EAM while SOE believed that EAM was "too permanent and important a factor for us to hope that they will crumble or disappear if they do not receive assistance from outside".<sup>45</sup>

The political composition of EAM troubled Prometheus II as well as he was wary of the ambitions of the KKE.<sup>46</sup> Partly as a result of this mistrust, he sought to galvanise the republican camp into action at around the same time that EAM was beginning to establish itself in the first half of 1942. Prometheus

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<sup>42</sup> Foreign Office to Minister of State, Cairo, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>43</sup> Foreign Office to Glenconner, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1942, 'Greece: SOE's relations with Greek Political Personalities, Canellopoulos, Panagiotis, June 1942 to March 1943', HS5/328, TNA, London.

<sup>44</sup> Minister of State Cairo to Foreign Office, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>45</sup> A/D3 to CD, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>46</sup> Chapter 16 and 19, HS7/151, TNA.

II, undeterred by the refusal of republican senior officers to assist him, persevered in his attempts to approach lower rank republican military officers in the hope that some would be more amenable to forming guerrilla groups. These were men like the cashiered republican colonels Stefanos Sarafis, Euripides Bakirdzes, and Dimitrios Psarros who, despite their later prominence in the guerrilla armies of Greece, refused any offers of support from Prometheus II. His frustration with the republican officers is clear when he recounted of these early negotiations that “the military circles should therefore have been ignored then, and they were ignored”.<sup>47</sup> There was, however, one prominent republican officer who seemed willing to become a guerrilla leader. Napoleon Zervas had been a leading military figure of the Pangalos dictatorship and his activities at that time had earned him a certain level of notoriety. The organisation which he eventually founded, the National Republican Greek League (EDES), would go on to become the second largest of the Greek resistance groups and EAM’s main opponent.

Zervas’s reputation seems to have concerned Prometheus II and it rather looks like the choice of Zervas was presented to him as a *fait accompli*. In his report to Cairo he notes that “my first assistant had already made contact with Zervas, without my approval, as also with other doubtful persons [...] I had to use a special policy towards him”.<sup>48</sup> He was soon vindicated in his attitude towards Zervas as the latter would present him with many difficulties. It is interesting to note that the hesitancy of Prometheus II to work with Zervas seems to have been a common perception of the man, as it was shared by almost everyone else in touch with SOE at the time, including the politician

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<sup>47</sup> Prometheus II’s Report, ‘Greece: Reports, Various D. Pawson. Prometheus I and II, June 1942 to July 1943’, HS5/501, TNA, London.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Kanellopoulos.<sup>49</sup> Odysseus was particularly scathing, remarking that Zervas “takes advantage of his capacity and tries to make out of it as much money as possible”.<sup>50</sup> True to form, Zervas did not take long after establishing a working arrangement with the British to seemingly use this as a means of enriching himself.

Following assurances from Zervas that he would organise armed bands, Prometheus II provided him with over 1,500 gold sovereigns. But, after receiving this sum, Zervas showed no intention of following this through and remained in Athens for over two months after the original agreement with Prometheus II, despite the latter’s constant encouragement for action.<sup>51</sup> Information soon reached SOE that this might not have been the first time Zervas had done something similar. Odysseus warned SOE that “he [Zervas] did the same thing under Pangalos, when he managed to draw from Drossopoulos 17 million drachmae intended to be distributed among his comrades with a view to the overthrow of Pangalos. The money was not distributed however, but he kept it for himself” and mentioned that Zervas had also done the same once again during the Metaxas regime.<sup>52</sup>

As the months progressed and Zervas showed little intention of moving, Prometheus II became increasingly agitated. This culminated in what seems to be an attempt by Zervas to rob Prometheus II at gunpoint, as the latter describes how “I was drawn into a trap in a house by him through my first assistant. He asked me to hand over to him all the money received [...] after that, the question was simple. He would be forced to work whether he wanted

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<sup>49</sup> D/H109 to AD/3, July 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>50</sup> Report of Odysseus, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1942, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>51</sup> D/H62 to D/HV, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/501, TNA.

<sup>52</sup> Report of Odysseus, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1942, HS5/526, TNA.

to or not. His threats by pistol helped to nothing [sic].<sup>53</sup> Clearly Zervas's conduct hardened the resolve of Prometheus II leading him to take an incredible gamble in order to force Zervas to live up to his side of the deal. This was despite telegrams from Pawson urging Prometheus II not to risk any more contact with Zervas, asking that his "invaluable collaborator should not repeat not take any unnecessary risks by trying to force fair weather friends to work during foul weather" and not to fret about the wasted money.<sup>54</sup>

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1942, four months after the first agreement with Zervas, Prometheus contacted Pawson stating that "To Zervas [I] sent a note that if he will not start till 26<sup>th</sup> July I will inform Gestapo and that you will reveal the names of list I sent you. I hope that he will choose the open country to do his duty according his promise".<sup>55</sup> It is perhaps not a coincidence that the founding of EDES is celebrated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, with Zervas's published memoirs beginning on that very night in which he laconically states (trans.) "Departure from Aristotelous 24, 21 hour. Spent the night in Bohori without troubles, thanks to the skill of my driver".<sup>56</sup> It seems, therefore, that the beginning of guerrilla activity by EDES was largely a result of Prometheus II reverting to blackmail to force Zervas to carry out his "obligations".<sup>57</sup> Pawson and Pirie, who were more intimately aware of the details of his recruitment, maintained their misgivings about Zervas. Pirie even wrote that "it is one of the tragedies of the Greek resistance that, of the three Colonels Bakirdzis, Psarros, and Zervas, whom Prometheus II and Odysseus approached, it was by far the

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<sup>53</sup> Prometheus II's Report, HS5/501, TNA.

<sup>54</sup> Cypher Telegram, 3<sup>rd</sup> Augsut 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>55</sup> Telegram No. 64, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1942, HS5/711, TNA.

<sup>56</sup> Original text: 'Αναχώρησις από Αριστοτέλους 24. 21<sup>η</sup> ώρα. Διανυκτέρευσις εις Μποχώρι άνευ ουδενός επεισοδίου, χάρις εις την ικανότητα του σωφέρ' in Dimitris Thanas (ed.) *Ημερολόγιο στρατηγού Ναπολέοντα Ζέρβα, 1942-1945 (Diaries of General Napoleon Zervas, 1942-1945)* (Athens, Ωκεανίδα, 2013) p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Prometheus II's Report, HS5/501, TNA.

least satisfactory, Zervas, that came into the lead at this crucial time”.<sup>58</sup> But the British diplomatic establishment soon forgave Zervas for his inauspicious start. Despite an early disownment by the British, who had severed connections after he first seemed to appropriate £24,000, Zervas soon found himself once again in favour with them following a caveat by SOE that he would not originally handle the finances of EDES.<sup>59</sup>

This rapid British endorsement of Zervas proved very important in the context of the following years and perhaps even earns consideration as one of the root causes of the Greek Civil War. Following the proliferation of guerrilla warfare in Greece, the main interactions of British Intelligence, and SOE in particular, inside Greece would be with EAM and EDES, the two main organisations which successfully pursued it. EDES soon became the main vehicle for promoting British interests in Greece and a counterweight to EAM by virtue of having a charismatic leader in the field (Zervas) who could form around him a nucleus of non-communist guerrillas which in turn could attract Greeks who wanted to participate in the struggle against the Axis. However, the fact that, soon after his unhappy interactions with Prometheus II, the British seemed to regard Zervas as a “first-class leader for major guerrilla warfare were it not for his financial reputation”<sup>60</sup> must have struck the leaders of EAM as at best inexplicable and at worst as a British attempt to sideline EAM and ensure that the British government would be able to control the political future of Greece.

It is more than likely that Odysseus, who as mentioned above had very close relations with the leaders of EAM, might have been particularly flummoxed by British insistence to supply Zervas with large sums of money.

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<sup>58</sup> Chapter 16, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>59</sup> Notes on SOE contacts in Greece, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

Odysseus's dislike of Zervas was so intense that he even quarrelled with Prometheus II over the latter's insistence in trying to persuade Zervas to follow through on his agreement. In a memo attached to a report on the 'Greek Muddle', Pawson highlights that "Prometheus II took longer to learn that Zervas was playing a double game than did Odysseus. During the period after Odysseus's discovery but before Prometheus II's, relations between them naturally became strained".<sup>61</sup> This frustration with the lopsided distribution of British funds was probably shared by the leadership of EAM (whether it was aware of the exact details of these early transactions or not) which saw the British supplying a man widely considered to be untrustworthy with far more funds than themselves. This trend only intensified as guerrilla war became more widespread, with Zervas receiving vastly disproportionate British aid, much to the chagrin of EAM, and helped lay the seeds of mistrust between the two sides.

Prometheus II and Odysseus were not the only SOE contacts with the Greek resistance. Pirie established that "any group inside the country which gave prima facie evidence of its organising abilities by succeeding in getting a courier to the Middle East and contacting the British authorities there, found that its claims to Allied support received the most sympathetic consideration".<sup>62</sup> A history of SOE activities in Greece mentions of this period that "In this way, considerable sums were delivered to the Right-Wing groups, rather smaller sums to the Left-Wing. Nevertheless, it was difficult to detect any concrete results from these disbursements".<sup>63</sup> The right-wing groups mentioned included attempts to establish royalist resistance organisations, led by the Kyrou family, conservative Greek newspaper magnates. These efforts

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<sup>61</sup> D/H62 to D/HV, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/501, TNA.

<sup>62</sup> Chapter 12, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>63</sup> Chapter 3, HS7/158, TNA.

ultimately led nowhere, with an SOE officer claiming that he did “not look upon them as a serious organisation”.<sup>64</sup> The inability of the royalist camp to organise any significant form of resistance had left the resistance solely to the republicans and communists.

#### Kanellopoulos and ‘Isinglass’

The British government continued to be eager to establish a reliable presence in Greece to reduce its dependency on EAM and EDES. In January 1942 Tsouderos, the Greek Premier in Cairo, requested the assistance of SOE in contacting Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, a moderate republican politician and academic, in Athens and transmitting an offer to join his cabinet. This was a second attempt to recruit Kanellopoulos into the Greek government-in-exile as it was widely felt that his presence in Cairo would help moderate the image of the government and unify the Greek populace and resistance behind it. Glenconner, outlining to Jebb how he had shared Tsouderos’s request with the FO in order to avoid any friction between it and SOE, argued that “we are vitally interested in supporting those elements in occupied countries who are friendly to the Allies and in assisting them to achieve political unity on a policy of resistance to the Axis”.<sup>65</sup> Glenconner was aware however that such attempts to recruit Kanellopoulos into the Greek government risked not only alienating their republican collaborators in Greece but also making a pariah of the Greek politician since, if he was to accept the offer, “it would necessarily mean a split with Gonatas group and the Popular Front”.<sup>66</sup>

The two attempts to co-opt Kanellopoulos are different. The above mentioned targeted attempt by Tsouderos to recruit Kanellopoulos into his

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<sup>64</sup> Chapter 12, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>65</sup> A/D3 to CEO, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1942, HS5/738.

<sup>66</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1942, HS5/738.

government took place months after a first general attempt to widen its political composition. The time gap between the two is also crucial because, simultaneously with the second attempt, republican politicians inside Greece had formulated a reply to the Foreign Office letter sent to Gonatas by signing in their vast majority a declaration that the king should not be allowed to return, even though Kanellopoulos was not one of the signatories. Pirie wrote that “we were unable to establish via 333 [Prometheus II’s wireless set] whether Kanellopoulos had refused, or, being a fugitive, had been unable to sign”.<sup>67</sup> In a report by Odysseus, however, the smuggler accused Kanellopoulos of bad faith, marked by the SOE as “evidently a biased opinion but there may be some truth to it”.<sup>68</sup> The report highlights how Kanellopoulos “played a leading part in setting up the Committee which signed the declaration for the non-return of the King to Greece, but after all the others had signed this declaration, he himself, under various pretexts, avoided to sign it”.<sup>69</sup>

SOE was unsure of the wisdom of inviting Kanellopoulos to leave Greece.<sup>70</sup> A large part of SOE’s consternation at the recruitment of Kanellopoulos was due to it having no misconceptions about what his ‘defection’ to the royalist camp hoped to achieve. In an internal memo, SOE adopts a moderate stance and makes it clear that no pressure should be placed on Kanellopoulos and “that he has a completely free choice in making up his mind. In this way, if he accepts it will tend to show that the importance of Gonatas and the strength of republican feeling is exaggerated”.<sup>71</sup> The belief that his acceptance would be a blow to republicanism was echoed by the Foreign Office which believed that “this will materially strengthen the position

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<sup>67</sup> Chapter 14, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>68</sup> Report of Odysseus received in Istanbul on 19.V.42, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Chapter 14, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>71</sup> Cipher Telegram to Cairo, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

of leaders inside Greece, and in particular Kanellopoulos, who are prepared to recognise and work with the King and Tsouderos government” and that it hoped that “anti-King and Tsouderos feeling inside Greece will be considerably allayed and that position of Gonatas and other Republicans correspondingly weakened”.<sup>72</sup> The Foreign Office adopted a firmer stance than SOE and was keen to stress that Kanellopoulos had to be pressured into joining the government-in-exile. Glenconner reports to Nelson that:

I sounded him, however on the idea of letting Kanellopoulos know that he had a free hand in making up his mind. Dixon [FO] rejected this idea [...] He also went on to say that, apart from the extent to which HMG is committed to the King and Tsouderos Government, even the Venizelists believe that Monarchy is in the best interests of Greece.<sup>73</sup>

This was obviously an underestimation of the commitment of Greek republicans to opposing the king.

SOE decided that negotiations with Kanellopoulos could not be achieved through their only working wireless transmitter set in Greece. As this was operated by the strongly republican Prometheus II, SOE was possibly afraid of how he would react if he became aware of these negotiations. Indeed in an internal memo it was decided that “I do not know by what method it is proposed that the above message should be sent but it obviously cannot be sent by 333 [the W/T set] as this would be intercepted in first instance by Prometheus II and Popular Front thus exposing whole project”.<sup>74</sup> It is telling that SOE’s trusted links in Greece were not used for this second attempt to recruit Kanellopoulos, despite SOE having entrusted Odysseus and

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<sup>72</sup> Cipher Telegram to Cairo, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>73</sup> From A/D3 to CD, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1942, ‘Greece: Greece and the Aegean, Foreign Office Policy for SOE regarding resistance, January 1942 to June 1944’, HS5/306, TNA, London.

<sup>74</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1942, HS5/738.

Prometheus II with earlier attempts. Communication with Kanellopoulos had to be achieved independently, through operations like 'Fleshpots' and 'Isinglass'.

While none of SOE's operations in this period were particularly successful, 'Isinglass' stands out as disastrous and has often been viewed as a catalyst for the tragic events of the Greek Civil War. 'Isinglass' took place in early January 1942, before Tsouderos's offer to Kanellopoulos, and was a combined MI9 (the organisation in charge of evacuating stranded personnel) and SOE mission, which was common practice at the time. While its MI9 objective was to help evacuate men who had been left on the small Greek island of Antiparos, the commander of the mission Lt. John Atkinson, a recent evacuee himself, had also been given a mission by SOE. This was that "Atkinson and Diamond [Diamantis Arvanitopoulos] were to land together and W/T sets cash and political message for Cuthbert [Kanellopoulos] would be delivered to Sugar [Tsellos, Kanellopoulos's right hand man] or to Cuthbert himself as soon as possible".<sup>75</sup>

The men of 'Isinglass' faced many difficulties from the moment they landed on Antiparos. HMS Triumph, the submarine that was to evacuate the 'Isinglass' party, was lost at sea leaving them stranded. The party was soon arrested by Italian forces. Their arrest is often narrated with elements of the sensational, including details of Italian accomplices and scorned women.<sup>76</sup> The arrest of the 'Isinglass' party was particularly damaging to the work of British Intelligence because it seems that Atkinson had not destroyed the intelligence papers he had been given on his way to Greece. Nelson, writing to Jebb, summarises the situation by saying that "the MI9 officer [Atkinson] had the task of briefing a Greek [Diamond] [...] and to do so this Officer was given a

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<sup>75</sup> Cypher Telegram, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1942, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>76</sup> Platon Alexiades, *Target Corinth Canal, 1940-1944: Mike Cumberlege and the Attempts to Block the Corinth Canal* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2015) pp. 76-78.

certain amount of facts in writing. Inconceivably to us [...] instead of destroying his brief [...] he apparently kept the paper.”<sup>77</sup> It also seems that Atkinson had on his person notes he had taken during a meeting with Alexander Zannas, the SOE agent in Macedonia, on the clandestine activities of his group and connections, despite Zannas’s objections.<sup>78</sup> Within weeks of Atkinson’s capture, the networks of Kanellopoulos and Zannas had both been hunted down and effectively dismantled.

It should also be noted on this point that some in British circles refused to acknowledge that such a failure could have been the result of a lapse in a British officer’s judgement. A meeting of some SOE members in London considered that Atkinson was “much too experienced a man as to carry such compromising documents around with him” and that it was probably the loose talk of Greeks which was to blame.<sup>79</sup> The rather callous conclusion of this meeting was that, to keep operations involving Greeks secret, the “only solution would appear to be to lock all Greeks, about to be employed, into a house and keep them segregated until the hour of departure arrives. This is contemplated but not yet put into operation”.<sup>80</sup> While very much out of the scope of this dissertation, it is interesting to note the mentality of some British officials in London towards the Greeks who were volunteering to participate in these dangerous missions.

Overall, the events on Antiparos would have significant consequences. Despite his fugitive status, Kanellopoulos managed to escape to Cairo and join the Greek Government-in-exile. There was some scepticism about whether his flight to Egypt was truly a result of the Antiparos debacle, with the former

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<sup>77</sup> From CD to CEO, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1942, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 227.

<sup>79</sup> Notes on Conversation with Tiberius on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1942, HS5/296, TNA.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

British Consul General in Athens exclaiming that, because Kanellopoulos “had succeeded not only to come out himself, but even to bring his wife, it could be assumed that the so-called ‘Cuthbert organisation’ cannot have been broken up as completely as one was at first led to believe”.<sup>81</sup> However, while some of those implicated by Atkinson’s papers, such as Kanellopoulos himself and his right hand man Tsellos, managed to avoid capture, with Tsellos remaining in Greece, many others did not. The occupation forces carried out over fifty arrests as a result of ‘Isinglass’, which clearly contradicts the assertions of the Consul General.<sup>82</sup> Nelson’s report on the situation summarises the situation within Greece bleakly by stating that “Arrests due to the papers found on Atkinson appear to be confined to the Kanellopoulos organisation which is completely broken up”.<sup>83</sup>

What followed was a scramble by SOE to minimize the damage that the Antiparos disaster might inflict upon its operations. This was mostly achieved through a ‘quarantine’ on members of Kanellopoulos’s organisation, who were instructed to stay away from other resistance groups. Prometheus II urged the British to take this course of action by sending a telegram “Italians are on the way to discover whole secret action and intelligence service in Greece. Details found on caught agents [...] implicate many people [...] among them Kanellopoulos; please keep us far from any person belonging to Greek royalist party”.<sup>84</sup> This meant that even associates of Kanellopoulos who had evaded arrest were isolated in order to protect the survivors of the disaster. When sharing his conclusions of the effects of Antiparos, Nelson admitted that “our chief hopes must now, therefore, be centred on the Popular Front which [...]

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<sup>81</sup> Notes on Conversation with Tiberius on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1942, HS5/296, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> André Gerolymatos, *An International Civil War: Greece, 1943-1949* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2016) pp. 69-70.

<sup>83</sup> SOE Policy Towards Greece & Effects of Antiparos Disaster, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 1942, HS5/748, TNA.

appears so far to have escaped".<sup>85</sup> Glenconner bleakly surmised that the success of the occupation forces in dismantling the two organisations "now leaves the field very much to the Extreme Left".<sup>86</sup>

This is the attitude adopted by the summary of SOE activities in Greece which argued that centrist resistance was finished following the capture of Atkinson and the dismantling of these organisations, which "appeared to be sound and democratic and to be the most promising rallying-point for the vast body of Greeks who were not extremists, to Right or Left".<sup>87</sup> The report continues that:

it is impossible to overestimate the importance of this calamitous blunder [...] at one blow the political bloc around which SOE was planning to build a resistance movement was rendered suspect, leaderless and ineffective [...] it was inevitable that SOE should turn to Colonel Bakirdzes and the left-wing, which had survived the Antiparos disaster uncompromised and was rapidly assuming the character of a Popular Front<sup>88</sup>

Pirie, perhaps more soberly, wrote that "this affair had pretty effectively knocked on the head the only party, that of Kanellopoulos, whose programme in the least degree met the wishes of the Foreign Office or which had any chance of acting as a bridge between the King and exiled government and the resistance".<sup>89</sup>

The debacle at Antiparos had a significant impact on political developments in Greece. It neutralised moderate republicans, like Zannas and Kanellopoulos, who had been willing to organize resistance in conjunction with the Greek government-in-exile. It can be argued that the void left by their

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<sup>85</sup> SOE Policy Towards Greece & Effects of Antiparos Disaster, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>86</sup> From A/D3 to CD, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>87</sup> Chapter 3, HS7/158, TNA.

<sup>88</sup> Chapters 3 and 4, HS7/158, TNA.

<sup>89</sup> Chapter 14, HS7/151, TNA.

elimination was filled by more extreme liberal republicans and left-wing elements, a situation which ultimately led to an even more ideologically extreme conflict during the Greek Civil War. However, it is important not to get carried away with this narrative, which has become widely accepted.<sup>90</sup> Pawson remained particularly sceptical of Kanellopoulos throughout, writing in December 1941 that:

you are attributing to a movement, about which we still have few concrete facts [...] a popular appeal and far-reaching influence which our present knowledge of what is happening in Greece can hardly support. I cannot bring myself to believe that Kanellopoulos is 'capable of bringing the bulk of the Greek people behind the King and Government'.<sup>91</sup>

By that time the popular front of EAM was already the most powerful resistance organisation in Greece, with some British support, and Kanellopoulos was already being actively courted by the Greek government-in-exile.

On Kanellopoulos's arrival in Egypt and his entry into the Greek government, he faced a tremendous backlash from republican forces within Greece and lost much of his support and credibility. SOE was aware that this outcome was likely as Glenconner wrote to the Foreign Office that "it was always obvious, however, that if Kanellopoulos came out and joined the Tsouderos government without persuading them to accept certain conditions, his own influence with his supporters would suffer and his value for the purpose we have all had at heart would be correspondingly diminished".<sup>92</sup> It is likely that the reason the SOE histories focus extensively on the fallout of Antiparos as a reason for SOE supporting EAM in these years is because it

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<sup>90</sup> Indicatively, see Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 228 and Alexiades, *Target Corinth Canal*, p. 79.

<sup>91</sup> Chapter 13, HS7/151, TNA

<sup>92</sup> Glenconner to Dixon, May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

serves as an exonerating narrative for the organisation. By showing that SOE had wished to work with more moderate forces than EAM, which were dismantled, it absolves the Baker Street organisation from accusations, levied especially during the immediate post-war period in which the histories were mostly compiled, that its support for EAM was to blame for the Civil War.

The ineffectiveness of Kanellopoulos in providing a unifying presence behind which the extended republican camp, including the Venizelist military cadre targeted by SOE, and the royalist camp could rally, quickly became apparent to the British in Cairo. From the first few weeks after his arrival in Cairo, signs that Kanellopoulos's appointment would not work out as originally envisioned began to proliferate. Early signs included reports from Odysseus that Kanellopoulos "has lost all prestige and has fallen low in the eyes of the few followers and collaborators he had" and that "all politicians suspect him and many are those who have no respect for his person".<sup>93</sup> But while Odysseus was an outspoken proponent of EAM and his views were often scrutinised by SOE, he was not alone in seeing the failure of this venture.

Prometheus II refused to work with Kanellopoulos, reporting that "the Greek people, the military leaders and organisations, believe Cuthbert [Kanellopoulos] and all people surrounding the traitor King to be traitors too".<sup>94</sup> The fact that his flight to Egypt was part of the fallout from a botched special operation did not exonerate Kanellopoulos in the eyes of SOE's republican agents, suggesting that this was not enough to mitigate the perceived opportunism of his choice to join the Tsouderos cabinet. The unwillingness of SOE's agents to cooperate with Kanellopoulos was a source of anxiety within British circles. SOE Cairo received a telegram that "we are somewhat disturbed

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<sup>93</sup> Report of Odysseus received in Istanbul on 19.V.42, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>94</sup> Telegram from Istanbul, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1942, 'Politics, Personalities. Mission to Greece by Papadoconstantakis @ Sphinx, May to October 1942', HS5/329, TNA, London.

to see that Prometheus II and Odysseus now repudiate Cuthbert and call him a traitor".<sup>95</sup> If his flight from Greece following the Antiparos disaster was not sufficient for Kanellopoulos to get any sympathy from republicans, it is likely that reaction in Greece would only have been worse had he left Greece for Cairo willingly to accept his appointment as Deputy Premier.

Perceiving this sentiment to be even more widespread than just simply the outlook of the ever blunt Prometheus II, Glenconner, in a letter to SOE CD, writes that now that the 'extreme left' sought to "denounce Kanellopoulos as a traitor for having joined the Tsouderos government, and I cannot help thinking therefore that it will be difficult- to say the least- for his followers inside the country to bring about a reconciliation".<sup>96</sup> Even Kanellopoulos himself was aware that leaving for Cairo had left him in a tight spot. Glenconner writes that "Kanellopoulos seems to be himself aware of the somewhat precarious nature of his position".<sup>97</sup> Of course, this precarious position did not stop the British from furnishing this recent arrival to Cairo with £150,000 to set up an organisation, the 'Central Action Committee', as compared to the £20,000 (eventually cut to £5,000 as noted above) sent to EAM in the wake of Antiparos. The funds to EAM however were also hesitantly given out of fear that if they "cut off supplies [it] would confirm them in their hostility to Kanellopoulos and perhaps fatally injure our own relations".<sup>98</sup>

The SOE side of 'Isinglass' was essentially meant to circumvent the republican organisations that SOE had successfully worked with up to that point, in order to achieve a political victory for the king. Even though Kanellopoulos had gone undercover before the message from Tsouderos

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<sup>95</sup> Cypher Telegram to Cairo, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>96</sup> From A/D3 to CD, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

reached him, the build up to the operation indicates that SOE was aware of the implications of trying to recruit Kanellopoulos into the Greek government. Odysseus's reaction to the news of Kanellopoulos joining the Greek government in the spring of 1942 vindicated SOE fears of how its republican collaborators would react. He reported that Kanellopoulos "is accused of having played a double game" and stated that associates of Kanellopoulos could not depend on the smuggler's caiques.<sup>99</sup> To compound British difficulties in achieving Greek political unity, their original analysis of the political impact of Kanellopoulos's induction into the government was wrong.

#### Early Operations in Greece

Kanellopoulos's first step after joining the cabinet was to contact his former associates in Greece to persuade them of his motives and reasoning for leaving Greece and joining the royalist government-in-exile. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1942, it was communicated through the ranks of SOE officers that the man chosen by Kanellopoulos to be his messenger was Sifis Papadokonstantakis, codenamed Sphinx, who was "particularly chosen, being a follower of Plastiras not repeat not of Cuthbert".<sup>100</sup> This was a precaution taken as a result of widespread belief in Cairo that Kanellopoulos had lost his credibility with the republican camp. With Sphinx being a follower of Plastiras, the messenger could still claim to be representing the republican camp rather than the perceived traitor, Kanellopoulos. However, what should have been a straightforward courier operation into Greece, through which Kanellopoulos would "explain his position and programme to political leaders there" and attempt to restore his standing with the republicans, devolved rapidly into a

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<sup>99</sup> Report of Odysseus received in Istanbul on 19.V.42, HS5/526, TNA.

<sup>100</sup> Private Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

quagmire.<sup>101</sup> If SOE had any doubts of reports arriving from Greece condemning Kanellopoulos and stating that his reputation had been severely tarnished, Sphinx's mission to Greece laid these to rest.

The mission got off to a bad start when Prometheus II and Odysseus refused to facilitate the entry of Sphinx into Greece. This meant that SOE had to turn to Noel C. Rees, an SIS officer working out of Smyrna. There already existed tension between the two services in Smyrna, since Rees had effectively established it as his personal fiefdom and was less than cooperative. Rees would continue to cause friction between SIS and SOE but also to complicate relations between the Americans and the British later in the war. Indeed, following Rees's refusal to put Sphinx on the first caique into Greece, Pawson lodged a complaint that "this is another example of the present unsatisfactory standing of our representative in Smyrna. If we had been free to make our own contacts and arrangements it is practically certain that Sphinx would have left before now".<sup>102</sup> Pawson continued in a separate report, calling Rees "a great hindrance to us in the past and he is not to be trusted".<sup>103</sup> This feeling is echoed by Ian Pirie who asked that Pawson should keep SOE "regularly posted on any obstruction or double crossing" and that Pawson should compile a "dossier on the badness of 18,904 [Rees]".<sup>104</sup> SOE must have been particularly frustrated since every delay in smuggling Sphinx into Greece meant that the viability of Kanellopoulos as a focal point of unifying all the resistance in Greece diminished daily.

As delays in Smyrna mounted, the operation began to crack. The interdepartmental friction lasted long enough for Sphinx to get cold feet when

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<sup>101</sup> Cypher Telegram from Cairo, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>102</sup> From D/H62 to D/HV, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>103</sup> From D/H62 to SOE Cairo, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>104</sup> From D/HA to D/HV, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

the time finally came to set out. Pawson found himself having to persuade Sphinx to finally be smuggled into Greece but, while talking to the Greek, he made a shocking discovery. During their talks, Sphinx had asked Pawson if there were new orders as by now it was early July and two months had elapsed since he had first agreed to go into Greece. Pawson reported that when:

I told him that Cuthbert had no new instructions but was only anxious that he should to 41-land [Greece] and contact Sugar [Tsellos] as soon as possible he [Sphinx] was shocked that I should have been under the impression that it was from Cuthbert that he wanted new instructions. He said that he was not Cuthbert's agent and he was at a loss to understand why I should think he was<sup>105</sup>

Sphinx had either been misinformed when he was recruited or had chosen to ignore what had been originally expected of him, believing he was going to Greece to get in touch with the republican resistance.

The agent chosen to promote the cause of Kanellopoulos in Greece and to salvage his reputation, both causes vital to British plans, had not been properly prepared to do so. But after having already wasted critical months in getting a messenger from Kanellopoulos into Greece, it was decided that Sphinx should proceed with the operation regardless. Pawson reported that:

because of the extremely important political issues involved it was necessary that Sphinx, having come so far, should be made to proceed, but I fear there can be little doubt that he will do more harm than good in 41-land. He will certainly do nothing to build up Cuthbert's reputation with the people there.<sup>106</sup>

Pawson's bleak prognosis for Sphinx's mission must have prepared the British organisation to brace itself for the difficulties in establishing Kanellopoulos as a viable force to unify the Greek resistance. Even Sphinx, the man chosen by

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<sup>105</sup> From D/H62 to SOE Cairo, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1942, HS5/501, TNA.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

SOE and Kanellopoulos and sent into Greece to establish Kanellopoulos's 'Central Action Committee' as the hub from which all resistance in Greece would be financed and orchestrated, did not seem to be prepared to accept the Greek politician and academic as his leader.

On his return to Turkey from Greece, Sphinx submitted a full report of his activities in Greece. In it he described his week in Athens and the various meetings he had with prominent Greeks, including Kanellopoulos's right hand man, Tsellos. But the operational difficulties of Sphinx's mission to Greece were not over and even what should have been a simple affair, getting Sphinx back from Smyrna to Cairo for a proper debrief, was beset by difficulties. This was largely because Rees, once again, proved less than helpful. Rees had told Pawson and Sphinx that all the paperwork required by the Turkish government for the Greek's stay in Smyrna and his transit to Istanbul was in order when it was not. Eventually, over two days were lost in getting Sphinx out of Turkey as SOE were forbidden by SIS from contacting the Turkish authorities directly. This infuriated Pawson who wrote that:

Sphinx himself is extremely angry about his treatment by 18,904 [Rees] [...] this is one more example of 18,904's incompetence and unhelpfulness. Until our own representative has complete freedom of action, or 18,904 is replaced by someone who will give the same attention to our affairs as to 'C's we shall continue to experience these troubles.<sup>107</sup>

Clearly, the interdepartmental strife between the British intelligence organisations hampered operational efficiency.

This delay was perhaps deliberate, since as a result of it SIS was in a position to compete with SOE on who would publish a report on Sphinx's travels into Greece first. The fascinating thing about these competing reports is

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<sup>107</sup> From D/H62 to SOE Cairo, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

that they were very different. The first difference is the inclusion of a paragraph in the SIS report in which Sphinx met in Athens with Greeks who were “very critical of the work of the British organisation, (i.e. SOE) which they say has been ineffective and expensive in the cost of Greek lives”.<sup>108</sup> This claim is discounted in the SOE report which claims that “Sphinx denies that he ever made any such statement” and that, being aware of the “state of our relations with 18,904, it is quite unthinkable that he would have attacked us to the latter”.<sup>109</sup> But the biggest difference between the two reports concerns the reported difference in Greek attitudes towards Kanellopoulos. The SOE report stated that “they all agree not to oppose Kanellopoulos, but are all convinced that he will turn out royalist, and they do not believe in him” while the SIS report writes that “Kanellopoulos is generally recorded as a sound man and a patriot”.<sup>110</sup>

It is unclear if the divergences between the two reports were a deliberate attempt to paint a different picture of the realities in Greece and the prospects of Kanellopoulos’s ‘Action Committee’ or whether it was simply human error. In any case, the extended SOE report painted a particularly bleak picture for the future of any such endeavour. Indeed, in his report on ‘Greek Prospects after Sphinx’s Mission’ Francis Noel-Baker, an SOE member with important familial ties to Greece and son of Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker, wrote that he found the report “depressing” and concluded that “Cuthbert’s ‘Central Action Committee’ is as much a dream as ever”.<sup>111</sup> The report by Sphinx was largely the nail in the coffin of SOE’s hopes of unifying the resistance under Kanellopoulos.

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<sup>108</sup> From D/H131 to D/H109, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>109</sup> From D/HA to D/HV, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>110</sup> The Sphinx Report From D/H131 to D/H109, 9<sup>th</sup> September, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>111</sup> Greek Prospects after Sphinx’s Mission, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

It seems the best thing the British could find about Sphinx's report on conditions in Greece was the ambiguity of language in one sentence of his official report. A telegram from the Director of the 'Policy and Agents' in Cairo argued that "the most encouraging thing about it all is that the people inside do not consider Cuthbert to be hopelessly bad at present, but only fear that 'he may turn out Royalist in the future'".<sup>112</sup> This is indicative of how disheartening the rest of the information must have been for Kanellopoulos and his British supporters.

Most importantly, Sphinx confirmed that the Greek political world had decided to demand a plebiscite on the return of the monarch to Greece. He wrote that "everybody said, however, and this they emphasised to me, that neither the King of the Hellenes nor the Tsouderos Government will be permitted to return to Greece until the question of the future form of Government is settled".<sup>113</sup> He mentions only Tsellos, Kanellopoulos's personal representative, as a dissenting voice, which was only to be expected. He also stressed that:

the Britishers [sic] should also realise that they are doing great harm to the Greek cause by sending in agents to make propaganda for the King and to say that his is a matter that Great Britain considers already settled. In doing this they throw many people right into the arms of the Russians and of Communism.<sup>114</sup>

The constitutional question remained one of the primary concerns of Greek politicians. The report by Sphinx was simply another piece of evidence pointing to the fact that, unlike the British government, Greeks were not willing to sweep the issue under the carpet until the end of the war. Sphinx even warned

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<sup>112</sup> From DPA, 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>113</sup> Sphinx Mission to 41-land as reported to D/HG16, August 4<sup>th</sup> 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

that British attempts to promote the king were having negative effects in the composition of the resistance.

This composition was addressed by Sphinx who reported that, according to the people he spoke to, “the biggest and most important of the organisations [...] is EAM”.<sup>115</sup> He also provided information on a royalist organisation but was quick to point out that, according to all of his sources, “this organisation collaborates with the Tsolakoglou front”.<sup>116</sup> Finally, perhaps the worst news for Kanellopoulos was that Tsellos had refused to carry out his leader’s orders. Sphinx writes that “Sugar [Tsellos] would not consider idea of Cuthbert’s financial committee, but wants all money to be controlled by himself with the intention of building up Cuthbert’s Government”.<sup>117</sup> This must have been particularly troubling to SOE who not only did not generally have the best of relations with Tsellos, but also believed that he represented “no political or military leader except Cuthbert”.<sup>118</sup> However, it should be noted that, even if Tsellos had been willing to follow Kanellopoulos’s orders, it might have proven futile, as Sphinx believed that Tsellos would be unable to set up an organisation that could come close to rivalling EAM, partly because “the political views which he represents [were not] sufficiently palatable inside Greece”.<sup>119</sup> Noel-Baker summarised the situation in an analysis of Sphinx’s report, following the disclaimer that “the movements whose members he contacted were all of the left [...] we are as far as ever from rallying other groups in a united movement [...] whole report emphasises the hopelessness of achieving political unity behind Cuthbert or King George’s Government”.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> From D/H131 to D/H109, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>119</sup> Notes on the Interrogation of Sphinx, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

<sup>120</sup> Greek Prospects after Sphinx’s Mission, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/329, TNA.

One individual within SOE who fully adopted the idea that a unified resistance under the Greek government-in-exile was hopeless was David Pawson, who began to argue for a system under which SOE would fund all the groups individually, naming EAM as a prime beneficiary. He argued for this on the ground of operational security, since keeping the various resistance cells separate meant that they would be safer from the counter-intelligence work of the Axis, as well as due to the fact that support for the king was a lost cause. Noel-Baker highlights the intrinsic dissonance of British attitudes to Greece when he writes that “How D/H62 [Pawson] reconciles all this with SOE’s policy- since it now is our policy- of full support for the Greek Government, is not clear. Nor is it clear how ME [Middle East HQ] expect to continue subversive work on a useful scale after attempts at cooperation with Kanellopoulos have failed”.<sup>121</sup>

To further compound the misery of Kanellopoulos and SOE in setting up a centrist pole of resistance, another failed operation took place almost simultaneously as Sphinx. Operation ‘Thurgoland’ was an attempt by a Greek officer named Ioannis Tsigantes to create an organisation capable of carrying out special operations in Greece. Tsigantes was another Greek republican military officer cashiered in 1935 following the failed Venizelist coup. A friend of Kanellopoulos, he arrived in Greece in early August 1942, before the Sphinx report had reached Cairo, with two objectives “a) to investigate and report on the political situation and b) to organize the blocking of the Corinth Canal”.<sup>122</sup> The first objective was given at the request of Kanellopoulos who wanted Tsigantes to transform the Committee of Six Colonels, an organisation in occupied Greece, into a hub that would focus on direct subversive work and

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> D/HV to ADS, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1943, HS5/748, TNA.

guerrilla warfare and answer to the Greek government-in-exile.<sup>123</sup> However, Tsigantes soon faced the difficulties that Sphinx had warned of in his report and was rebuked by the people he approached.

The reason behind his isolation was that the political divisions of Greek society remained deeply entrenched, with many people not trusting Tsigantes's newfound allegiance to the king while others did not trust his republican past.<sup>124</sup> Tsigantes soon set about to create his own committee to coordinate the resistance and attempted to recruit prominent Greeks including the Archbishop of Athens.<sup>125</sup> Prometheus II, consistent with his previous conduct, requested that he remain independent of Tsigantes so as to be "looked upon by guerrilla groups as a non-party patriot and an impartial line of communication with British" despite the pressure from Tsigantes for him to join his committee.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, Pirie reported to Cairo that "Prometheus II is not anxious to collaborate with AH/92 [Tsigantes] who is pressing him to do so".<sup>127</sup> Pawson and Pearson, high ranking members of SOE, even believed that Bakirdzes, another prominent SOE collaborator, "should not be asked to join any centre of co-ordination".<sup>128</sup> That latest telegram, written in November 1942, is perhaps indicative of SOE having given up on Tsigantes's attempt to coordinate the resistance.

If British lack of faith was not problematic enough for Tsigantes, his organisation also suffered from a distinct lack of security. This was partly because Tsigantes himself was "indiscreet in general".<sup>129</sup> Pearson, who manned

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<sup>123</sup> Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek resistance*, p. 172.

<sup>124</sup> Makris-Staikos, *Ο Άγγελος Πρόξενος*, p. 341.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>126</sup> Cypher Telegram, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>127</sup> CIPHER Telegram for D/HV from D/HA, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>128</sup> Cypher Telegram, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>129</sup> CIPHER Telegram for D/HV from D/HA, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1942, HS5/665, TNA.

the Cairo desk in SOE London, later wrote in a report that “his security was not all that could be desired, as we received complaints from various other Greek sources that his presence was universally known in Athens”.<sup>130</sup> This led to a vicious cycle where Tsigantes, potentially desperate at the frosty reception he received when meeting most people, increasingly sought out new people to participate in his ‘committee’ who in turn were even frostier as they were reluctant to collaborate with someone whose notoriety would risk their lives. Overall, Tsigantes got in touch with over 300 people, including many politicians and military officers. Early contacts included Tsellos, with whom he had a quarrel over who would lead this new committee coordinating the Greek resistance, forcing Tsellos to flee to Cairo fearing Tsigantes would denounce him, further weakening Kanellopoulos’s position in Athens.<sup>131</sup> Eventually, Tsigantes even alienated Kanellopoulos as he exceeded his directives by seeking to create a wide political council rather than a strictly military one.<sup>132</sup>

As for his second mandate, specifically for SOE, Tsigantes was to help lay the ground for Operation ‘Locksmith’, which aimed to block the Corinth Canal, while simultaneously planning for the destruction of a bridge to disrupt the flow of supplies from Salonika to Athens and then on to Africa. The original target was Karyon Bridge but, following reconnaissance, Tsigantes decided that the best target would be the Gorgopotamos Bridge,<sup>133</sup> which would eventually be blown up in late November 1942 in Operation ‘Harling’. However, Tsigantes never received any shipments of explosives and was soon killed in a firefight with the Italian security service in Athens in January 1943. It has been speculated that Tsigantes was betrayed by SOE for his reports critical of

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<sup>130</sup> D/HV to ADS, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1943, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>131</sup> Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek resistance*, p. 172.

<sup>132</sup> Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek resistance*, p. 173.

<sup>133</sup> Gerolymatos, *An International Civil War*, p. 73.

EAM<sup>134</sup> but the evidence for this is circumstantial and it seems significantly more likely that his indiscretions tipped the occupation authorities off. Regardless, it is ironic that the man sent by Kanellopoulos to solidify the military elements of the resistance into one organization, having alienating even the last people who would consider working with him, did identify for SOE the target for 'Harling' which would eventually consolidate EAM and EDES as the two dominant forces of the Greek resistance, finally marginalizing Kanellopoulos for good.

Operation 'Locksmith' was put into action by SOE almost simultaneously with Tsigantes's death. This was an attempt by SOE to capitalize on the foundations set by Operation 'Thurgoland' to block the Corinth Canal in order to reduce the flow of Axis supplies to North Africa. It was reported that "Tzigantes [Tsigantes] had apparently made an exceedingly useful arrangement with the Canal authorities preliminarily to the commencement of this all important operation".<sup>135</sup> 'Locksmith' was a far more traditional and surprisingly apolitical operation. A small team consisting of four saboteurs, three British and one Czech, was infiltrated into Greece by the Greek submarine Papanikolis. Mike Cumberland, the leader of the operation, originally reported that limpet mines had successfully been placed in the canal but these failed to go off, most likely because they were defective.<sup>136</sup> However, the German counter intelligence apparatus was rapidly closing in on the men of 'Locksmith' and within weeks they were arrested. By June 1943, an SOE memo states that "it has been obvious for some time that the 'Locksmith' W/T

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<sup>134</sup> Makris-Staikos, *Ο Άγγλος Πρόξενος*, p. 344.

<sup>135</sup> D/HV to ADS, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1943, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>136</sup> Alexiades, *Target Corinth Canal*, pp. 121-122.

set had fallen into enemy hands”<sup>137</sup> but the fate of the ‘Locksmith’ party would remain unknown for years.

To complete the litany of less than successful SOE operations prior to ‘Harling’, Operation ‘Brevity’ was an attempt by Cairo in the winter of 1942 to rein in Tsigantes. Kanellopoulos and SOE, irate with the Greek major, decided to “relieve” him and replace him with Major Kiphonides in an attempt to re-establish Kanellopoulos’s organisation in Greece.<sup>138</sup> However, by the time of Kiphonides’s arrival, Tsigantes was dead. Kiphonides took over ‘Thurgoland’ and started to reach out to other organisations in Athens including the royalist organisation of Six Colonels and an intelligence organisation led by a Greek republican officer named Levides who was a friend of Sphinx.

Originally, there were many difficulties, as early negotiations regarding collaboration between the various groups encountered stumbling blocks when the group led by Levides “had doubts and some reserves in [sic] what regards the authorization of the Centre of Coordination for the direction of the struggle.”<sup>139</sup> These would eventually be overcome, ‘Brevity’ would be renamed into ‘Drunkard’ and the amalgamated operations would become “an intelligence group in Athens. They sent detailed and interesting reports and maps from time to time, much of which is of great use”.<sup>140</sup> This endorsement is undoubtedly a testament to the quality of the people attached to these operations, especially considering the dire straits in which ‘Thurgoland’ had been in under Major Tsigantes. However, this is a far cry from the original aim

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<sup>137</sup> From D/H109 to D/Navy, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1943, ‘Greece. Missions: Locksmith/Thurgoland (London Greece Section file)’, HS5/533, TNA, London.

<sup>138</sup> From D/H109 to D/HV, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1943, ‘Greece. Missions Brevity/Drunkard to establish W/T communications between Athens and Cairo for transmission of Intelligence’, HS5/536, TNA, London.

<sup>139</sup> From Liaison between Anglo-Greek Committee and Coordination Centre of Struggle, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1943, HS5/536, TNA.

<sup>140</sup> From E. Med. GP. To G. OPS., 26<sup>th</sup> May 1944, HS5/536, TNA.

of the mission which was to set up a central committee to coordinate all resistance efforts in Greece. This is perhaps the most obvious indicator that following the failure of Tsigantes and the commencement of guerrilla warfare, SOE turned its sights firmly to the mountains.

#### Legacy of 1941-1942

Understanding this often overlooked period is critical as the linkage between the development of the Greek resistance and the mostly failed early British operations in Greece affected not only the course of the war there but also set the foundations of what would become the Greek Civil War. Scrambling after the loss of Crete, SOE sought to harness the will of the Greek people to resist but only found capable collaborators within the 'left wing', republicans and communists. While this may have been because SOE's only surviving links into Greece, Prometheus II and Odysseus, were fervently anti-monarchical in their views, it does not seem to be the case as efforts were made to reach elements in Greek society that would be more amenable to the Greek government-in-exile. With little response from these circles, SOE found itself increasingly entwined with strange bed-fellows in the form of EAM, despite significant wariness on both sides. These early interactions between the two serve in many ways as the blueprint that would be followed for the duration of the war. This constituted providing EAM with the bare minimum in funds and supplies, in an attempt to keep EAM capable of mounting a credible resistance and grateful to the British while trying to keep it contained until alternatives were sought out. Indicatively, whereas organisations led by Kanellopoulos received over £67,000, in the same period EAM only received £14,300.<sup>141</sup> Out of these other organisations created, only Zervas and his

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<sup>141</sup> Notes on SOE Contacts in Greece, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/655, TNA.

EDES, created by Prometheus II with threats and lavish spending survived this period as a viable alternative.

Even as early as these first operations into Greece, the linkage between politics and the intelligence organisations in Greece is readily apparent. The officers of SOE had reached a dead end in trying to create a viable alternative to EAM, which was expanding rapidly with little aid from them. However, to blame the Antiparos disaster for the dissolution of meaningful republican resistance in Greece and for the failure of Kanellopoulos to provide a unified centrist resistance is a mistake. Rather, by examining Sphinx's mission into Greece, it becomes clear that it was not the Antiparos events but Kanellopoulos's decision to leave Greece and join the government-in-exile that doomed his organisation to irrelevance. With the benefit of hindsight, British attempts to centralise all resistance organisations under one paymaster look like overreach. These were perhaps attempts to rein in elements in the resistance the British did not like, such as EAM or those republicans harbouring an intense hatred for the monarchy. However, this choice backfired. Most of the groups refused to co-operate with the 'Action Committee', essentially calling the bluff of SOE. In turn SOE found itself forced to continue funding these organisations or face a situation with not only less resistance but EAM-dominated resistance. The idea of a unified centrist resistance was over.

It is likely that, as a result of these developments, many moderate elements gravitated towards EAM, which not only offered them the opportunity to express their disdain for the royalist government but also seemed to be the most effective body in fighting the Axis invaders. The real reason why there was no 'third pole' between the royalists and EAM was not Antiparos. The real reason was that Kanellopoulos, perhaps showing that streak of ambition which has often been ascribed to him, allowed himself to be used by the British in an

attempt to curb the more anti-monarchical elements dominating the Greek resistance, effectively killing off any credibility this third way would have had. Attempts by the British to create a centrist resistance, through the failed 'Isinglass' and 'Thurgoland' operations, only led to its own elimination. This was either the result of an increased Axis crackdown, as in the case of Zannas, or because this closer association with the British and the Greek monarchy meant that this position became thoroughly discredited within Greece. The main victim of this was Kanellopoulos, the man who had been touted as being capable of unifying all resistance behind him and ensuring it would look past the issue of the Greek monarchy.

## Chapter 4: SOE and the Foreign Office: February 1942 to November 1942

The second half of 1942 proved to be one of the most important periods for SOE's involvement in Greece. The arrival of Kanellopoulos in Cairo and his willingness to work with SOE to support the Greek resistance helped the organisation bypass many of the measures established by the Foreign Office to temper SOE's enthusiasm for working with radical elements. The close association of the Greek politician and SOE enabled the latter to continue its support of EAM and EDES despite the consternation of the Foreign Office which perceived these organisations as hostile to the Greek government-in-exile. British support during these early months, especially in the case of EDES, was important in allowing these organisations to establish a presence in the Greek mountains. But the arrangement with Kanellopoulos could not last forever.

While criticism of SOE's priorities and results in Greece proliferated, the organisation achieved its greatest success in Greece with the success of Operation 'Harling'. Its objective was to sabotage the railway that traversed the rugged Greek landscape from north to south and was used by the German army to supply the Afrika Korps. SOE officers were dropped into Greece and linked up with guerrillas from both ELAS, EAM's military wing, and EDES. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, the Greek guerrillas and British commandos successfully assaulted the garrison of the Gorgopotamos railway viaduct and managed to blow it up. The timing for SOE could not have been better. Just as it found itself under a lot of pressure, 'Harling' allowed the organisation to transform its fortune. It pounced on the opportunity and manoeuvred itself into a position from which it hoped that it could control the Greek resistance. But SOE underestimated the difficulties of focusing on large-scale guerrilla warfare. The

co-operation of ELAS and EDES at Gorgopotamos was the high water mark of their relations. Guerrilla politics were a far more hazardous affair.

### SOE and Kanellopoulos in Cairo

The arrival of Kanellopoulos in Cairo further exacerbated the tense situation there. SOE Cairo, still run by Terrence Maxwell, was desperate to improve its dismal standing. It had few supporters in Cairo itself with the Minister of State in Cairo, Oliver Lyttelton, writing in his memoirs that he “found chaos in the field of subversive activities and propaganda. I was disturbed, in particular, by the lack of security, waste of public funds and ineffectiveness of SOE”.<sup>1</sup> The Foreign Office still viewed the upstart organisation antagonistically and with great scepticism. In its attacks on SOE, the Foreign Office found an ally in the Greek government-in-exile which was also very unhappy with SOE. Capturing this hostility towards SOE, Pirie indicatively named a chapter of his official history of SOE activities in these years “The Greek Government and the Foreign Office attack SOE while SOE attack the enemy”.<sup>2</sup> The key issue dividing them was the issue of the Greek monarchy and the British diplomatic support afforded to it, the same question that divided Greek politics and the resistance and would continue to be the most divisive issue of this whole period.

The men of SOE, especially those who were in the ‘Policy’ Directorate like Pirie and Pawson, were keenly aware of how fervent anti-monarchical feeling in Greece truly was. Pirie had even warned of how catastrophic luring Kanellopoulos away from Greece would be for the Greek politician. He had the foresight to write to George Taylor that it was essential not to “detach from it [the Republican movement] leaders like Cuthbert, and to induce them to come

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver Lyttelton, Viscount Chandos, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos* (London, Bodley Head, 1962) p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 18, HS7/151, TNA.

out of the country and join a Government which is a complete write-off".<sup>3</sup> His advice was duly ignored. This divergence between the Foreign Office and the officers of SOE working on Greece, which had begun during 1940 and 1941 while Greece was still fighting in the war, had not dissipated.

Early in the war, the Foreign Office had failed to fully grasp the intensity of resentment of the Greek people towards the Metaxas regime, a regime that it had viewed favourably for some time. The dictator's death from natural causes in late January 1941 had done nothing to reduce popular animosity towards the regime, since the king had kept it substantially in place. If anything, Metaxas's death had removed any shred of authority which the late dictator had added to it. The Foreign Office remained steadfast in its position despite reports of proclamations from Greek soldiers at the front demanding a reshuffle of the government following the death of Metaxas. Pirie reported that while soldiers "were prepared to accept as part of price they had to pay for the leadership of Metaxas, the fact that the other Ministers were second rate men, they were not now prepared to acquiesce in a cabinet of incompetents".<sup>4</sup> In the same report, Pirie also highlights that the "King, has for the second time, missed the boat. It is perhaps unfair to blame him for not having insisted, on the outbreak of war, on portfolios being given to former opponents of Metaxas. But now when the portfolios are vacant it is very strongly felt that the King should have taken a firmer line".<sup>5</sup> Even Ambassador MacVeagh noted that "the King is now the dictator, or rather, all the dictator that there is" but warned that "the King's character is hardly the kind to keep a volatile people united".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to George, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1942, 'Greece: Assessment of the situation in Greece, February 1942-June 1944', HS5/339, TNA, London.

<sup>4</sup> From D/HA to D/H1, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1942, HS5/287, TNA.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Iatrides (ed.), *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 301.

Despite this, the king maintained the goodwill of the British diplomatic establishment long after the fall of Greece. This included supporting a government-in-exile that included Metaxist ministers. It was only as late as February 1942 that Tsouderos could tell Kanellopoulos that “the government under my presidency is clear of the last remnant of the dictatorship”.<sup>7</sup> While the Foreign Office was briefly hesitant about the Tsouderos government-in-exile, this never extended to the king himself.<sup>8</sup> Despite reports reaching the Foreign Office from Lyttelton and others warning of the unpopularity of the king, these were dismissed as products of intrigue by the Greeks of Alexandria.<sup>9</sup> Even Gonatas’s letter and the strong stance of the Greek political class against the king were dismissed, as the Foreign Office did not think they fully represented the Greek people.<sup>10</sup> Despite late manoeuvres instigated by the Foreign Office to make the government more palatable to the Greek populace, MacVeagh was correct and the king was unable to unite the Greek people. In addition to British goodwill, the king had also inherited the populace’s resentment towards the Metaxas regime.

This was widely accepted within SOE. As early as January 1942, Glenconner was discussing these difficulties with Gladwyn Jebb writing that while “the official policy of HMG is in favour of uniting Greece behind the King and Tsouderos Government [...] SOE have already accepted the fact that Greek opinion is now strongly Republican”.<sup>11</sup> This fundamental difference was a constant source of tension between the two organisations and would only get worse as the war dragged on.

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<sup>7</sup> Cipher Telegram Tsouderos to Kanellopoulos, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>8</sup> Procopis Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece during the Second World War, 1941-1944* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> From A/D3 to CEO, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1942, HS5/306, TNA.

During the spring and summer of 1942 the constitutional question was a particularly thorny issue. One of the opening salvos on the issue was in March 1942, when George Taylor sent a telegram to Glenconner asking him to persuade Jebb of “the advisability of convincing the Foreign Office that, in the long run, their present policy of endeavouring to unite resistance elements in Greece with the Royalist Hellenic Government abroad is bound to fail”.<sup>12</sup> Glenconner’s effort to get the Foreign Office to agree that SOE could inform its republican collaborators that the British government would not impose the monarchy at the end of the war was quickly dismissed by it. Pierson Dixon, Principal Private Secretary to Eden, replied:

the assurance which you propose to give suggests and is intended to suggest that His Majesty’s Government do not in their heart of hearts approve M. Tsouderos’ plans and in particular are not committed to restoring a monarchical regime in Greece [...] we have gone so far as to express the hope that the Greeks will have the King back and we therefore feel that HMG are absolutely precluded from giving any assurance which would detract from that expression of hope<sup>13</sup>

Glenconner was not impressed with this reply and wrote to Taylor:

though they will not impose the King on the Greeks, yet they will not give the Greek people an opportunity of saying whether they want him back. Surely this is splitting the proverbial hair. The fact is they are backing the King and will not allow us to give any assurances to the contrary, the prospect of which fills them with horror.<sup>14</sup>

Glenconner was undeterred by Dixon’s reply and did not give up on his pursuit of permission to give assurances to Greek republicans.

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<sup>12</sup> From A/D to A/D3, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>13</sup> From Dixon to Glenconner, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>14</sup> From A/D3 to A/D, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

He stubbornly pursued this to the extent that Lord Selborne, Dalton's replacement as Minister for Economic Warfare, intervened to warn him to observe the policy set out by the Foreign Office as per the FO-SOE Treaty, to which Glenconner replied that "SO [Selborne] should be assured there is no question of SOE pursuing a policy at variance with the Foreign Office. We have, however, always hitherto maintained that we are entitled to try and persuade the Foreign Office to change their policy."<sup>15</sup> Glenconner's attempts to persuade the Foreign Office seemed to have irritated it enough that it in return got Selborne to reprimand him. Selborne, a Conservative politician, was more amenable to heeding the policies set out by the Foreign Office. Unsurprisingly, Glenconner was "mildly irritated at being told by the Minister that I have been exceeding my duty and that I will be advised not to be over-zealous in the future".<sup>16</sup> This early interaction between SOE and the Foreign Office regarding policy towards Greece is a foreshadowing of what was yet to come. It was also not the last time Glenconner would attempt to make his views clear to the Foreign Office. It does nonetheless indicate that the Foreign Office did not appreciate SOE trying to have even the smallest input into British official policy towards Greece.

It is very likely that Glenconner and SOE continued to approach the Foreign Office with input on the constitutional question because they held the belief that, once it became clear to the FO that the policy of supporting the king would fail, it would relent. Glenconner wrote to the SOE CD in 1942 that "it is not my impression that ZP [FO] would continue to try and force the King upon a people who will not have him, as soon as they are convinced that this is indeed the case".<sup>17</sup> SOE was sure that the majority of the populace in Greece

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<sup>15</sup> From A/D3 to A/D, 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>16</sup> From A/D3 to A/D, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>17</sup> From A/D3 to CD, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1942, HS5/306, TNA.

was republican and that in the face of overriding tactical considerations, with the vast majority of the resistance being republican, as well as growing public sentiment, the Foreign Office would relent in its support of the Greek monarchy.

In early March, even the Foreign Office had become aware that, according to Sir Orme Sargent:

the time is rapidly passing when the gulf which is growing between the King and the people can be bridged [...] both Monckton [Director of the Ministry of Information] and Hopkinson [FO] agreed that if it was possible to get the King to make a declaration stating that after the war he would abide by the decision of the Greek people and in the meantime act as a trustee of their interests, it would go a long way towards regaining the support of the new political leaders and the masses.<sup>18</sup>

Yet despite the declaration by Greek politicians on the future of the Greek monarchy, mentioned in the previous chapter, and despite the advice of the Foreign Office and Eden, the king in late March 1942 refused to commit to not returning to Greece without a plebiscite. Instead of persisting however, the Foreign Office maintained its policy of unequivocally supporting him.

Pirie wrote that it was made clear to SOE that “the Foreign Office telegram of 2<sup>nd</sup> February (their reply to the letter of General Gonatas) still held the field as the directive on Greek affairs”.<sup>19</sup> SOE, emboldened by the fact that the king had rejected a personal request by the Foreign Secretary, again sought to grant itself some leeway in its choice of collaborators. Glenconner once again wrote to Taylor that he would broach the subject with Dixon but was advised to “let the situation ‘ripen’”.<sup>20</sup> Glenconner had written a five page

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<sup>18</sup> Sir Orme Sargent, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 15, HS7/151, TNA.

<sup>20</sup> From A/D3 to A/D, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

report on the importance of allowing SOE a freer hand in working with the resistance in Greece. He wrote that:

though the aim of HM Government is to unite the Greek people against the Axis and behind the King and his present Government, if they continue to pursue their present course they are likely to split the country, and, if Republicans are in the majority, to oblige them to look towards Russia instead of towards us.<sup>21</sup>

Again however, Selborne intervened and scolded Glenconner for attempting to dictate policy by reminding him “we cannot all be Foreign Secretary”.<sup>22</sup>

In May, Glenconner received a telegram from Dixon dressing him down as there was “fear that SOE Middle East are fundamentally hostile to the King and the present Greek government [...] they are expected to support the official policy of His Majesty’s Government”.<sup>23</sup> This was because SOE, and Glenconner in particular, was accused of influencing Kanellopoulos in his negotiations with the Greek government during which the Greek politician had insisted that he would not “unduly sacrifice the principles which he is convinced”.<sup>24</sup> Kanellopoulos’s arrival was viewed as a tremendous boon by members of SOE. Glenconner writes that:

it seems a pity that we should have to be so dependent on him [Kanellopoulos] but he is our chief hope for bringing the Greek Government to heel, and our chief argument opposite ZP [FO], for what he (and the Greek Government) approve is difficult for ZP to oppose. We have, therefore, to persuade him a) to allocate part of the budget to EAM b) to allow us to continue support to EAM through our own channels until the Action Committee is set up c) while we must agree to the plan of bringing pressure to bear on EAM to join the Action Committee, to agree to our continuing to

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<sup>21</sup> SOE Policy towards Greece, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Dixon to Glenconner, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>24</sup> Cipher Telegram, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

support them through our own channels should they refuse to do so. If he agrees to all these things, however much ZP dislikes them, we can always claim they are the policy of the Greek government.<sup>25</sup>

Soon thereafter Kanellopoulos and SOE set up the Anglo-Greek Committee to co-ordinate the resistance efforts of the British intelligence services with the Greek government-in-exile.

This is crucial because it allowed SOE essentially to bypass the FO-SOE Treaty. By July 1942, Glenconner was finally in a position to send a telegram to Dixon stating that SOE could work with EAM because of the Anglo-Greek Committee. With a faint sense of glibness he writes:

We are therefore happy to know that Canellopoulos, who is perhaps the best judge of this delicate question, is in favour of continuing support to these parties who do not recognise him or the Greek government [...] This plan of action also conform to the Treaty [...] [as it conforms] to the rulings of the Foreign Office as to the political line to be adopted [...] It comes therefore to this: the organisations with whom we are in touch have certainly acquired a political significance inside Greece. You have ruled that our future dealings with such parties shall be subject to the control of the Anglo-Greek Committee and that we shall take the Greek Government into partnership by inviting Canellopoulos to become a member of the Committee<sup>26</sup>

The effects of this were immediately felt by the Foreign Office which, months before this, had warned that the new organisation of the resistance:

appears to amount to a private scheme run by SOE and Canellopoulos [...] I must be assured that President of the Council is fully aware of the details of the scheme and approve it[...] the result may be to strengthen opposition elements in Greece and

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<sup>25</sup> From A/D3 to A/D, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> Glenconner to Dixon, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

render more difficult the return of the Greek Government and the King.<sup>27</sup>

In response to this telegram, the Minister of State in Cairo consulted the king and Tsouderos as to their agreement and confirmed to the Foreign Office that Kanellopoulos “thought that use should be made of all these bodies to fight the enemy [...] [and he] therefore satisfied that in subsidising the EAM we shall not be running counter to the wishes of the King and Greek Government”.<sup>28</sup> This state of affairs during which SOE still considered Kanellopoulos “a most important asset and his presence in the Middle East essential to our work and efforts [...] He constitutes at present our sole instrument for reconciling our operations with the policies of ZP [FO] and the Greek government” lasted at least until September 1942.<sup>29</sup> However, SOE’s gloating would not last for very much longer.

Almost simultaneously with Glenconner’s arrival in Egypt in August 1942 to take over SOE Cairo, Tsouderos released a long memo attacking SOE for supporting anti-monarchical elements in Greece. He wrote that his government was faced with the “unfriendly conduct of certain branches of the Intelligence Service”.<sup>30</sup> It did not take long for the Foreign Office to seize this opportunity. After exchanging letters with Eden, Selborne wrote to Glenconner that “I must ask you to bear in mind that Tsouderos is an even more important member of the Government than Kanellopoulos. In other words, I think you would be making a very serious mistake if you accepted everything from

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<sup>27</sup> From Foreign Office to Minister of State, Cairo, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> From Minister of State, Cairo to Foreign Office, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>29</sup> Following for A/D3, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1942, ‘Greece. Policy Part 1 – August 1942 to March 1943. SOE’s efforts to coordinate its activities in Greece with policy of HMG. FO interference and attempts at control of SOE’ HS5/213, TNA, London.

<sup>30</sup> Aide-Memoire by E.J. Tsouderos, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1942, HS5/296, TNA.

Kanellopoulos without visualising what Tsouderos's reaction was likely to be".<sup>31</sup>

The relationship between SOE and Kanellopoulos is particularly fascinating. It has been suggested that they were competing to see who would dominate the Greek resistance.<sup>32</sup> The temporal proximity of Kanellopoulos's failed attempt to unify the resistance in Athens and SOE's successful promotion of guerrilla warfare in the winter of 1942 does not serve as enough of a divergence between them to call it a struggle. Instead this was a marriage of convenience. Glenconner was clear that SOE used Kanellopoulos to get *carte blanche* for its activities in Greece. This view was confirmed by Noel-Baker who wrote that:

the collapse of Cuthbert's [Kanellopoulos'] Action Committee makes it even more essential that our Greek activities should continue to receive the approval of the Anglo-Greek Committee [...] it is in our interest to keep Cuthbert in Cairo, where, as Greek Government representative on the Anglo-Greek Committee, he can approve SOE activities which might otherwise arouse ZP [FO] opposition while not necessarily keeping Tsouderos fully informed<sup>33</sup>

Kanellopoulos also gained an advantage from the relationship as he could rely on SOE support. This included an arrangement affording him British protection from royalist and Metaxist intrigues. Guy Tamplin, director of Special Operations in Cairo, forwarded a SIME (MI5 in the Middle East) report that stated that "there has been ample evidence of the subterranean activities of this group aimed at one thing- the upset of Canellopoulos [...] No half measures are possible. If we want to continue as at present we must make it

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<sup>31</sup> Letter to Glenconner, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/296, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 263 and p. 281.

<sup>33</sup> From D/H131 to D/H109, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1942, HS5/328, TNA.

quite clear now that we will not brook any interference”.<sup>34</sup> SOE support even extended to an occasion where Kanellopoulos raised the ire of the Foreign Office by demanding territorial gains for Greece following the end of the war. In response to growing Foreign Office resentment, Glenconner sent a telegram arguing that “he is the sole hope for the King and Tsouderos [...] I am however rather surprised that ZP should fail to realise his importance for the realization of their own aims”.<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that this defence by Glenconner of Kanellopoulos was in November 1942, after the supposed struggle between the two had begun.

That is not to say relations were perfect. SOE was distrustful of Kanellopoulos’s right hand man, Tsellos. Glenconner was particularly sceptical of him and his reports and was “nervous as to whether 8 [sic] colonels are all that Sugar [Tsellos] claims”.<sup>36</sup> Despite this, the relationship between Kanellopoulos and SOE would be crucial for it and the development of the Greek resistance, as the British organisation was able to use Kanellopoulos to sustain the growth of EAM and EDES notwithstanding the substantial misgivings of the Greek government-in-exile and the Foreign Office.

Kanellopoulos’s downfall was his failure to organise a successful moderate body of resistance. A memo written by Pearson suggests that SOE did not take a long time to figure out that:

unity behind Cuthbert (Kanellopoulos) is becoming a forlorn hope as it appears that he has no real followers inside the country. Unity behind the king no well informed person can still believe in[...] whether we find ourselves forced to try and work with the royalist resistance groups (of whose existence we still have to be

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<sup>34</sup> Appendix to Memorandum, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/655, TNA.

<sup>35</sup> Telegram from A/D3, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>36</sup> Telegram from A/D3, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1942, ‘Greece. Political Personalities’ HS5/259, TNA, London.

convinced) or whether we are left with our old associations our real difficulty will remain unresolved<sup>37</sup>

Kanellopoulos's failure also left him exposed to increasing criticism from the British diplomatic and political establishment. Indeed, by January 1943 Kanellopoulos was so discredited that Eden would cable that:

it seems to me dangerous that he (Kanellopoulos) should be the only representative of the Greek Government in the Middle East, and that all these delicate plans and projects for future military operations in Greece of which he speaks, of which neither I nor the Foreign Office know anything, should be in his hands.<sup>38</sup>

By March, even Churchill intervened to stress that "Kanellopoulos and Tsellos must be watched, and if they are found to be intriguing steps will have to be taken to put them under control".<sup>39</sup> Clearly, British scepticism of Kanellopoulos for providing a cover for SOE lasted long after he had ceased to be in a position to do so.

The main victim of this conflict between the Foreign Office, the Greek Government, and SOE was Ian Pirie, who had recently been reinstated by Glenconner as SOE country head for Greece. It was decided shortly after Tsouderos's complaint that "DHA [Pirie] is out of sympathy with the Greek Government and as they consider him almost persona non grata, he should be sent home to work in London".<sup>40</sup> Selborne wrote to Glenconner that "the King of Greece and his Government are our Allies, and it is intolerable that any British organisation should assist in endangering his throne by the use of British influence and British gold. Any of our agents who can be held guilty of

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<sup>37</sup> From D/HV to A/D3, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>38</sup> From Selborne to Eden, F/7279/61/5, HS5/655, TNA.

<sup>39</sup> From Prime Minister to Minister of State, Cairo, March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>40</sup> For A/D3, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/748, TNA.

such conduct must be dispensed with".<sup>41</sup> There were many objections to this, including a telegram from Tamplin to Charles Hambro, who had replaced Nelson as SOE CD, arguing that "I consider DHA to be one of the most useful officers in our organisation".<sup>42</sup> More strikingly, Pirie's supporters included Kanellopoulos who "was distressed at prospect DHA no longer being concerned with Greek affairs".<sup>43</sup> However, these complaints did not change Selborne's mind. Instead, when told that the handover would be difficult, Selborne retorted that "it is ridiculous to say that it would take a competent SOE official more than a month to pick up the threads".<sup>44</sup> Hambro even warned Glenconner that "SO [Selborne] was very angered at suggestions that D/HA could not return until the end of November".<sup>45</sup> A compromise was reached and Pirie remained in Cairo until crucial operations in the autumn were under way and was then transferred back to London. This episode is important because in many ways it represents the Foreign Office and the Greek government-in-exile re-asserting their authority vis-a-vis SOE and Kanellopoulos.

In a retrospective on operations in Greece written by Noel-Baker in 1942, it was clear that "the national peril has not made the majority of his subjects forget their antipathy for King George, and we have never overcome the absence of political unity caused by an acute constitutional problem".<sup>46</sup> However, in October 1942, the Foreign Office officially circulated a memorandum on the 'Policy of His Majesty's Government towards Greece' which concludes that as "His Majesty's Government are giving their full

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<sup>41</sup> Copy of Letter from SO to Lord Glenconner, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>42</sup> Cypher Telegram from Cairo, 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1942, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>43</sup> CIPHER Telegram from A/D3, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1942, 'Greece. Policy and Relations with Greek Government. Exchange of Signals with Middle East. Arrangements with Kanellopoulos. Memo on Anglo-Greek Committee', HS5/589, TNA, London.

<sup>44</sup> SO to CD, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/748.

<sup>45</sup> CD to A/D3, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/748.

<sup>46</sup> Operations- Greece, Retrospective, HS5/213, TNA.

support to the King and the present Greek government, which they officially recognise as the legal government of Greece [...] Our aim must be to 'sell' the King and Tsouderos government".<sup>47</sup> The divergence between the Foreign Office and SOE persisted. Members of SOE, most prominently Noel-Baker, chafed under the restrictions. In response to this Foreign Office memo, he wrote a letter complaining that "it is impossible to reconcile the fulfilment of our task with the policy laid down by ZP [FO] because we cannot at the same time stimulate resistance and attempt to 'sell' highly unpopular political ideas".<sup>48</sup>

Of course, this sent shockwaves through the ranks. Indeed, Pearson had to write to CD Hambro, defending Noel-Baker from accusations levelled at him by Selborne. Pearson wrote that "I feel certain that D/H131 [Noel-Baker] would be of enormous assistance to the Greek Section" despite Selborne's accusations that he was a "reactionary".<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in a supplementary letter to the British ambassador in Cairo, the Foreign Office accused SOE of bypassing the FO-SOE Treaty and propagating "a dangerous doctrine [stimulating resistance without political considerations] which must be applied sparingly and which in the case of Greece has led to a great deal of trouble".<sup>50</sup>

An early effort to solve the constitutional question using Kanellopoulos as a unifying figure had failed. Instead what was achieved was that SOE had briefly been given some breathing space by the Greek politician. It used this time to support EAM and EDES just as these organisations expanded into guerrilla warfare in the spring and summer of 1942. But the diminishing power of Kanellopoulos combined with the re-assertion of Foreign Office supremacy in

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<sup>47</sup> Policy of His Majesty's Government Towards Greece, 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1942, 'Balkans. HMG's relations with Balkan governing authorities', HS5/162, TNA, London.

<sup>48</sup> From D/H131 to D/H109, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>49</sup> D/HV to CD, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>50</sup> From Foreign Office to Minister of State, Cairo, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

the summer of 1942 meant that, as autumn was getting under way, SOE seemed once again not to be master of its own destiny.

#### Operation 'Harling' <sup>51</sup>

In late September 1942, in the shadow of the Second Battle of El Alamein, three Liberator aircraft took off from Cairo. Aboard were the men of Operation 'Harling' led by Brigadier E.C.W. 'Eddie' Myers, who had been tasked with halting the flow of German supplies to Athens and Piraeus from where these supplies continued their voyage by sea to Axis-controlled North Africa. Upon landing in Greece, they joined up with ELAS, the military wing of EAM, and EDES and proceeded to successfully destroy the Gorgopotamos railway viaduct in central Greece on November 25<sup>th</sup> 1942. There has been controversy as to how much this act of sabotage affected the supplies of the Afrika Korps, which was already in retreat from the beginning of November.<sup>52</sup> What is undeniable though is that this success was a victory for SOE and an exceptional piece of internal propaganda. It was a temporary allayment of SOE's concern over the diminishing power of Kanellopoulos and it allowed SOE to fend off its opponents alone. The under-fire section of SOE Cairo was so empowered by this success that it transformed a one-off sabotage operation into a permanent British Military Mission in Greece to consolidate on its success and promote guerrilla warfare.

Brigadier Myers and the rest of the men of 'Harling' left behind them lavishly detailed accounts which provide insight into the operational details of

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<sup>51</sup> Basis of this section was from my MPhil thesis.

<sup>52</sup> Christina Goulter-Zervoudakis, 'The politicization of intelligence: The British experience in Greece, 1941-1944' in Martin S. Alexander (ed.) *Knowing your Friends: Intelligence inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War*, new edn. (Oxford, Routledge, 2006) p 173.

the mission. These include the deeply comprehensive reports<sup>53</sup> compiled by Myers for SOE as well as numerous autobiographical books by many of the protagonists, including Myers<sup>54</sup>, Colonel C.M. ‘Chris’ Woodhouse<sup>55</sup> (Myers’s second-in-command) and Themis Marinos<sup>56</sup>, published after the war. Based on the earlier memoirs, there has been extensive work detailing the sensational story of how the operation took place. Myers’s book in particular goes into great detail, describing the ebb and flow of battle as well as providing the reader with a cinematic feel of the operation. But, rather than retreading this ground, it is important to focus on the lack of information the men of ‘Harling’ had received about the political situation. Considering the role of these men after the success at Gorgopotamos and the complexity of Greek politics, this lapse was particularly regrettable.

Myers had been chosen to lead the mission because he was the only sapper officer available in Cairo with sufficient parachute training. In his memoirs he stressed that, when offered the job, he had remarked that he did not “speak any Balkan language, and my knowledge of that part of the world is limited to a few hours in Athens and Dubrovnik”.<sup>57</sup> This did not discourage his recruiter, who exclaimed that Myers would be invaluable to the operation because he was “a regular soldier! That’s just why you are so suitable for this particular job”.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Inside Greece, A Review, ‘Inside Greece: Review by Brigadier Myers’, HS7/152, TNA, London.

<sup>54</sup> E.C.W. Myers, *Greek Entanglement* (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955).

<sup>55</sup> C.M. Woodhouse, *Something Ventured* (London, Granada, 1982).

<sup>56</sup> Themis Marinos, *Ο Εφιάλης της Εθνικής Αντίστασης: Προσωπικές Μαρτυρίες, 1941-1944 (The Nightmare of the Greek Resistance: Personal Testimonies, 1941-1944)* (Athens, Παπαζήση, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 14.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

The operation had been planned and prepared with a purely military objective in mind and Myers and his team were sent into Greece with very limited knowledge of the sensitive political conditions there. Woodhouse wrote in his memoirs that the mission briefing for 'Harling' had not included any references to EAM, ELAS or the KKE. He stressed that:

many years later I learned that there were experts in SOE who were well-informed about the left-wing resistance in Greece: the KKE, EAM, ELAS and other names and initials were all familiar to them. But I never met those experts, and learned nothing about EAM, ELAS or the KKE until I encountered them myself a few weeks later.<sup>59</sup>

In a conference held at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London in 1973, which was attended by pre-eminent members of SOE including Gubbins, Sir Fitzroy Maclean, Myers, Woodhouse, Sweet-Escott and Taylor, the lack of information provided to the men of 'Harling' was an important topic of discussion.

During this conference Woodhouse again insisted that "we were not told anything about the situation before we went in".<sup>60</sup> This seems to be confirmed by the majority of the people in attendance, with George Taylor, prominent in the early organisation of SOE in the region, giving three explanations. He argued that:

the Gorgopotamos operation was originally intended as a single military operation and you were almost all coming out again. So there was some pretext or excuse for not giving the sort of full political briefing which would have been possible. The second explanation [...] is that the Greek side of the political section in Cairo, as a result of the attitudes and pressures of the Greek

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<sup>59</sup> C.M. Woodhouse, *Something Ventured*, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> 'Following Woodhouse, Myers and Clogg' in Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg (eds.), *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London, Macmillan, 1975) p. 263.

government and Foreign Office, was kept in a sort of quarantine [...] The third explanation of course is to be found in the very unfortunate organisation set up by Terrence Maxwell by which the operational side was completely divorced from the political side.<sup>61</sup>

The first of these explanations was challenged by Woodhouse who replied that “it is perfectly true as far as Myers is concerned, but it was not true as far as I was concerned because from the beginning the intention was that I should stay there”.<sup>62</sup> Instead, it is clear that the chaotic and tense atmosphere in Cairo meant that what became the most important mission into Greece went in blind.

At the same time, the striking success of ‘Harling’ not only gave a new lease of life to the Greek section of SOE Cairo but once again shifted the balance of power away from the Foreign Office and the Greek government. This is particularly evident in an attempt by SOE to break free from the FO in March 1943. A paper suggested that:

experience has shown that the Foreign Office are more interested in political consequences and post-war issues than in Middle East strategy [...] In Greece we have been obliged to work in partnership with the Greek government in conducting subversive operations, though this endangers [sic] security and is a handicap to our work. Again, the reasons of the Foreign Office were purely political [...] The Foreign Office already have a representative on the PWE/SOE Sub-Committee who can keep them informed of what SOE is doing, so giving them an opportunity of taking the matter up [...] It follows, of course, that the Treaty between SOE and the Foreign Office referred to above, would be unnecessary and should be suspended.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>63</sup> SOE Mid-East, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1943, ‘Balkans: Cairo HQ, FO Policy and Directives to SOE – Conflicting views on backing of Resistance or Partisan movements. PWE/Mideast mission control’, HS5/163, TNA, London.

Having put the FO on the back foot, SOE was now also less dependent on Kanellopoulos to pursue policy. Kanellopoulos, out of favour with both SOE and the Foreign Office, was now fully marginalised and, as his use to SOE had significantly diminished, the Greek politician found his position very tenuous.

While SOE was growing and expanding, Kanellopoulos was left behind. His last attempts at organising a resistance that would work with the Greek government were failing. Tsigantes of 'Thurgoland' would be dead within a few months and the Six Colonels, a committee set up by right-wing former regular army officers, were not seen as credible by the British establishment. Woodhouse, who infiltrated Athens soon after the completion of 'Harling' to meet with them, quickly dismissed them as a group "that plotted global strategy from Athens in 1942-1943".<sup>64</sup> He wrote that "no guerrilla unit ever owed anything to it, its value was confined to the initial gesture and the collection of intelligence".<sup>65</sup> Seemingly, the committee was going to suffer a fate similar to Operation 'Brevity' with which the Colonels collaborated. In memoirs published long after the war, Woodhouse elaborated that "all they wanted to do was make staff plans for the rapid mobilization of a new army at the end of the occupation [...] they bore no relation to what we were trying to do. The most that I could hope from the Colonels was they should send junior officers to the mountains. I pointed this out to them, but they remained non-committal".<sup>66</sup> In this they clearly echoed the majority of the Greek military establishment which was wary of engaging in guerrilla warfare.

It also seems that the Six Colonels alienated Woodhouse with their ideology, something which as mentioned in the previous chapter had

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<sup>64</sup> C. M. Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord: A Survey of recent Greek Politics in their International Setting* (London, Hutchinson, 1948), p. 37.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>66</sup> Woodhouse, *Something Ventured*, p. 58.

concerned Glenconner from the very beginning.<sup>67</sup> Following reports from various sources, including Woodhouse, Myers, and Tsigantes, SOE distanced itself from the Six Colonels, having accepted that they seemed to represent the extreme right rather than moderate royalists as had been suggested by the Greek government and Kanellopoulos. It is apparent that Glenconner, emboldened by the successes of his department, was now in a position to fully take advantage of the directive sent to him by Hambro, the SOE CD, just before 'Harling' in September 1942. The directive read that Glenconner should do his "best to build up royalist groups from names supplied to you from time to time. But naturally, with full liberty to refuse to contact or employ any person whom you consider unsatisfactory or unsuitable".<sup>68</sup> Based on SOE reports, the Six Colonels, while favoured by the Greek government, were considered unsatisfactory or unsuitable and that was enough. By 1943, the new Minister of State in Cairo, Lord Moyne, wrote that if "this committee was the only Greek body through which British views are transmitted and British officers are directly associated with it, we run serious risk of His Majesty's Government being accused by other Greek parties of backing the extreme right wing elements to the exclusions of all others".<sup>69</sup> The political establishment in Cairo was finally heeding the advice offered by SOE.

This created a complicated and unprecedented state of affairs. SOE was as powerful as it had ever been in Cairo but the men representing it in Greece were completely oblivious to the political ramifications their actions would have. To compound this danger, 'Harling' signalled a tremendous pivot in the Greek resistance. Before it, guerrilla bands were small and had only been active in a very limited capacity. The centre of resistance had been urban areas

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<sup>67</sup> Telegram from A/D3, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1942, HS5/259, TNA.

<sup>68</sup> Following for A/D3 from CD, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 284.

like Athens, with sabotage groups attacking Axis shipping and communications and escape organisations dedicated to protecting and evacuating British soldiers. Suddenly, SOE's insistence in creating guerrilla bands in Greece, most notably the artificial creation of EDES, was vindicated. But arguably, this insistence on guerrilla warfare was not necessarily because it represented the best course of action.

Guerrilla warfare was one of the *raison d'être* of SOE, a way to differentiate itself from its intelligence cousins and mark out a territory of sole jurisdiction.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, guerrilla warfare would justify the existence of the organisation against the many accusations levelled against it. These came as late as September 1942 when Orme Sargent "questioned the fact that we had obtained any dividend for our work in Greece".<sup>71</sup> Finally, guerrilla warfare was the specialty of the men of G(R). It is not surprising that they would heavily advocate for it within the organisation. 'Harling', and the newfound British appreciation for the guerrilla bands, meant that SOE was justified in its belief that the centre of resistance against the Axis should be in the mountains rather than in Athens. This meant that power would shift irreversibly away from the existing political world in Athens and to these new organisations in the mountains.

This exponential increase in SOE's prestige and operating capacity would not have been possible without two very important factors. Most important of these was the emergence of the Chetniks in Yugoslavia. In a report, Pirie stresses the importance of this development writing that:

with the emergence of Mihailovich as a large-scale leader of guerrilla warfare, the whole scale of activities in this part of the

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286-289.

<sup>71</sup> To AD/S for SO from CD, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/748, TNA.

world changed. From the control of a few groups of saboteurs (work which could be done by four people round a bridge table) we were transformed overnight into an enormous office, staffed by nearly two hundred people, charged with the task of fostering, but not provided with the technical means for supplying the necessities of, widespread guerrilla warfare.<sup>72</sup>

The second factor was the initiative by Brigadier Keble, chief of staff to Glenconner, to seize the opportunity after 'Harling' and harness its success. Keble, irrespective of subsequent accusations that he created a personal empire, was instrumental in consolidating the primacy of SOE in leading the resistance movement in Greece by claiming the "lion's share of the credit".<sup>73</sup> According to Taylor, Keble singlehandedly persuaded the Chiefs of Staff to establish the members of 'Harling' as a British Military Mission with significant authority.<sup>74</sup> Glenconner, perhaps motivated by his chief of staff, argued that that the only way to control successfully the situation in Greece was by "using SOE personnel only in Greece as representatives of the Anglo-Greek Committee".<sup>75</sup> Within months, SOE had managed not only to fend off the threats from without but to manoeuvre itself into a position where it was almost in exclusive control of the resistance in Greece.

'Harling' was an unparalleled success for SOE Cairo. Woodhouse argued that "it showed for the first time in occupied Europe that guerrillas with the support of allied officers could carry out a major tactical operation co-ordinated with allied strategic plans".<sup>76</sup> It helped legitimise not only SOE itself but also the guerrilla forces it had been instrumental in creating. By proving

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<sup>72</sup> 1/Greece/1/DHA112, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>73</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 277.

<sup>74</sup> 'Following Sweet-Escott' in Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg (eds.), *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London, Macmillan, 1975) p. 219.

<sup>75</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 285.

<sup>76</sup> Woodhouse, *Something Ventured*, p. 54.

the importance of irregular warfare, SOE eagerly carved out for itself not only a field of operations but almost a whole country. The guerrillas undeniably became the most prominent members of the Greek resistance, often at the expense of the old Athenian parties and politicians. By extension, they would also become, by a significant margin, the main beneficiaries of allied support. A report entitled 'Report on SOE activities in Greece and the islands of the Aegean Sea' written by SOE's Colonel Dolbey shortly after the war suggests that the British authorities gave such precedence to the guerrillas "even to the extent of prejudicing the activities of the secret groups [meaning the smaller sabotage groups rather than guerrilla armies] [...] in view of the results achieved by the secret groups despite such lack of support and help, can it be considered that a different policy would have yielded higher dividends".<sup>77</sup> He even remarks that only 6% of the total sum of £2,460,097 SOE spent in Greece between 1941 and 1944 was spent on these groups, as compared to 90% on the guerrillas and civil relief, and that it "appears to be out of all proportion to the results achieved".<sup>78</sup>

In its eagerness to establish itself, SOE enmeshed itself in the hazardous realm of guerrilla politics with less caution and wariness than were warranted. Additionally, from its new position of power and in an attempt to ensure its independence and supremacy, SOE expanded its support to the guerrilla organisations which were at the time fundamentally opposed to the return of the king (as EDES was still nominally republican at this time). Within less than a year, in the autumn of 1943, the two guerrilla bands of EDES and ELAS would be in open conflict.

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<sup>77</sup> Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1945, HS7/152, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

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## Chapter 5: SOE 'Supremacy': February to August 1943.

The period between the success of Operation 'Harling' in late November 1942 and the 'First Round' of the Civil War in the autumn of 1943 is crucial to our understanding of the relationship established between British Intelligence and the Greek Resistance. These months are often portrayed as the era of SOE supremacy in Greece in which SOE, emboldened by its successes and the burgeoning requirements of the Armed Forces, stimulated the growth of EAM without properly considering the political ramifications this would have. To an extent, this is accurate as the previous chapter demonstrated how in the autumn of 1942 SOE had been allowed some freedom of movement. This is the period in which the military requirements set out by the Chiefs of Staff mostly affected SOE and its activities. With the end of hostilities in northern Africa looming, military planners began concentrating on the Southern European theatre. This meant that SOE in this period, and in particular during Operation 'Animals', an intensification of guerrilla activity to misdirect German attention to Greece, was far more involved and subservient to wider military considerations of the Mediterranean theatre. But even so, many of the British Liaison Officers attached to the Greek guerrillas found they more often had to deal with politics than with any subversive activity, a situation that would only get worse after the end of 'Animals' in the late summer of 1943. In his Cabinet Office History, WJM Mackenzie wrote that the British officers in Greece in this period "functioned, if at all, as a relief organisation and not a military force".<sup>1</sup> Thus, the narrative of SOE being concerned primarily with the war at any cost represents a very simplistic view of the period and does not properly take into account the many attempts of SOE to temper the expansion of EAM.

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<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE*, p. 471.

In fact, this chapter will illustrate how SOE actively sought to disrupt EAM throughout this period, sometimes at the cost of operational efficiency. This includes numerous attempts by the British to detach the rank and file of EAM from the leadership of the KKE. To this end, the British government created and supported numerous organisations in an attempt to provide a counterattraction to EAM by forming more amenable guerrilla bands, most notably EDES. Even when EAM approached the British to create a common General Headquarters, the mutual distrust between the two hobbled this new body before it had even begun.

Additionally, throughout this period there were significant developments in Cairo that once again swung against SOE. A mutiny in the Greek Armed Forces in March 1943 was the catalyst for a sequence of events that would swiftly mark the end of any SOE independence. The prime motivator of the Foreign Office resurgence in Greek affairs was the newly appointed British ambassador to the Greek government-in-exile, Rex Leeper. Even before his arrival in Cairo, Leeper seems to have been considering how to minimise the influence of SOE in Greece. Leeper's handling of an attempt by SOE to bring out delegates from the Greek guerrillas to liaise with the Greek government-in-exile in August 1943 is one of the most important events in the build-up to the Greek Civil War. The meeting failed and acted as the death knell for any kind of SOE independence. However, this failure had far more devastating consequences than simply shifting the balance of power between the two organisations as it was also one of the main causes of the 'First Round' of the Greek Civil War.

### The British Military Mission

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1943, a general paper was circulated within SOE. Its opening paragraphs read that “we have now reached a stage in the war when we should reconsider SOE’s object. The past 3 ½ years might be considered one phase of the war- a period of defence in all areas”.<sup>2</sup> The Allied victories in the battles of El Alamein and Stalingrad signalled a new phase of the war. The SOE paper identified a number of problems that SOE had to deal with, including that “we risk falling between the two stools of short-term sabotage and long-term co-ordinated action” and that earlier “we could pretend with some success that we were not interested in politics, that political issues must be subordinated to the winning of the war; today we can no longer do this. The war is being won and people are taking sides again”.<sup>3</sup> The paper landed heavily on the ‘stool’ of long term co-ordination, emphasising that the era of sabotage was over. It argued that while “it is probable that SOE will be called on to carry out sabotage [...] it is suggested it is our duty strenuously to oppose all such demands”.<sup>4</sup>

SOE saw at that point an opportunity to establish itself as an organisation that would be integral to the war effort in more ways than just special operations. Essential to the long-term co-ordinated actions envisioned by the paper were the guerrillas. To this end of long-term co-ordinated actions, Keble wrote that “Myers is already now about to become a ‘Mihailovic’ of Greece [...] to form a force adequate either to take over security of the country should Italy withdraw from the war, or to act as efficient 5<sup>th</sup> column or harassing troops”.<sup>5</sup> However, the paper did not have an equally firm answer to the

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<sup>2</sup> General Paper, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1943, HS5/145, TNA.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> To: D.M.O., G.H.Q., M.E.F., 5<sup>th</sup> December 1942, HS5/655, TNA.

political issue raised. With the threat of the Foreign Office temporarily pushed aside, SOE was free to do as it willed in Greece. To become a Mihailovic, Myers turned to EAM and EDES. The lack of clarity on the political issues that faced Myers and the British Military Mission in Greece was disastrous.

Initially, it seemed that SOE operational policy in Greece was successful. It had successfully pivoted away from short term sabotage to the long term objective of successfully pursuing strategic goals. SOE's objective in this period was to "contain as many enemy divisions as possible in Greece by harassing attacks and guerrilla operations. From SOE records it appears that 6 German and 12 Italian divisions were contained in Greece".<sup>6</sup> The growth of the guerrilla movement to the extent where it could achieve this was reported in a paper on Balkan guerrilla activities from July 1943 which stated that "by January [1943], the guerrillas had succeeded in obtaining control of most of the mountaneous [sic] districts of Central and Northern Greece [...] since that time their power has regularly increased, until now they constitute a very serious menace to Axis forces in the country".<sup>7</sup> But SOE also had to concern itself with the political aspect of such a massive guerrilla war against the Axis, especially since the two Greek forces waging it were initially opposed to the British official policy of support to the king.

In its early activities the British Military Mission to Greece (BMM), apart from operational successes, achieved an important political coup. In March 1943, Zervas recanted his life-long republicanism and embraced the Greek

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<sup>6</sup> Appendix VI, Results achieved: Special Operations in support of the Strategic Outlook, 'SOE Activities in Greece and Aegean Islands: Appendices V- XIII, by Colonel Dolbey', HS7/153, TNA, London.

<sup>7</sup> Guerrilla Activities in the Balkans 1943, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1943, 'Greece: Policy- SOE corres. With FO and Leeper about policy towards Greece and guerrillas. Supplies to Guerrillas. SOE activities in Greece. PAO and their collaboration with the Germans. Noah's Ark Plan. 13<sup>th</sup> July 1943 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1943', HS5/220, TNA, London.

monarchy. Zervas wrote a letter to George II in which he undertook that “if king returns here result free opinion our people we will be first to welcome and consider Greece constitutional quarrels ended. If England for wider reasons and even without people’s wishes wants return of king we fighting for liberation will not oppose at all”.<sup>8</sup> This rejection of republicanism and Zervas’s newfound adherence to the British policy of supporting the Greek monarchy was a mark of particular pride for Hambro, who used it to reply to a letter of complaint from Orme Sargent. Sargent had questioned why Myers had not been supporting the king but instead was “more occupied in unifying the anti-Monarchical elements and thus rendering them stronger than they need be”.<sup>9</sup> Hambro defended Myers by stating that Zervas’s letter was “obviously inspired by the influence of Brigadier Myers”.<sup>10</sup> This era of good feelings between the BMM and the Greek guerrillas did not last long.

The relationship of the BMM with EAM was a significantly more complicated affair than its relationship with EDES. The influence of the KKE in EAM continued to trouble the British government and it was believed that SOE had “to take immediate action to prevent resistance to the Axis from being used for post war political ends”.<sup>11</sup> SOE’s solution was to try to create a new British-led organisation to unify all the guerrillas under its command. Calls for this had been made since at least August 1942 on multiple occasions by Noel Baker, who had tried to promote his vision of non-political guerrilla groups.<sup>12</sup> The decision to proceed with this scheme seems to have finally been taken in early January 1943, with a British report in Cairo stating that all guerrilla

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<sup>8</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> From Sir Orme Sargent to CD, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>10</sup> From CD to Sir Orme Sargent, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>11</sup> Cipher Telegram received from Cairo, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>12</sup> Independent Guerrilla Bands in Greece, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1942, and Unity for Action in Greece, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

groups “should join and support and encourage others to join the new organisation because the liberation of Greece cannot be achieved by un-coordinated separate groups”.<sup>13</sup> The creation of this new organisation was clearly not meant just to serve operational efficiency, but also had a very specific political aim. The previous paragraph of the above report suggested that “the first essential condition to combat the communist leadership of EAM is to offer the people an alternative organisation”.<sup>14</sup> The eventual creation of this organisation was an early source of tension between the BMM and EAM.

The idea of splitting the communists from the rest of the EAM membership was a recurring one. The feasibility of this idea was reinforced by the arrival in Cairo of reports by the British liaison officers (BLOs) attached to ELAS guerrillas in the field. These included reports from Major Rufus Sheppard, who had been parachuted into Greece in January 1943. In one such report, he reported that “the EAM is a genuine body whose aim is to liberate Greece. Its adherents include Royalists”.<sup>15</sup> However, he was not alone in presenting a more moderate image of the EAM membership. J.M. Stevens, Pirie’s successor as head of SOE Cairo’s Greek section, also wrote that “personally fear little from EAM as large majority oppose to communism exists provided HMG do not drive Greek people into their hands”.<sup>16</sup> Rex Leeper also agreed that the optimum way to weaken EAM was to split its membership and wrote that the guerrillas were “relatively non-political, whereas EAM’s undesirable tendencies are ingrained”.<sup>17</sup> On numerous occasions, British ideas on how to combat EAM, including an aforementioned example in December 1942, focused on detaching non-communists from EAM.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> The EAM, A Report from a British Officer, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>16</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>17</sup> From H.M. Ambassador to Greece to Foreign Office, 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1943, HS5/655, TNA.

Sheppard's reports are an interesting example of the lack of political briefing of the first wave of BLOs to be sent into Greece. It remains an open question whether the fact that Major Sheppard had not been briefed had allowed him to have a better relationship with EAM, as he had approached them with an open mind. Unfortunately, Sheppard was one of the few SOE casualties of the Greek Civil War as he trod on a friendly mine and his account of events was never told.

Throughout the occupation Sheppard's reports consistently advocated on behalf of EAM. Whether or not this contradictory reporting had any impact in Cairo is debatable. His example has often been used to illustrate the effects of sending into Greece officers with a poor grasp of the local political reality as, in his unwavering support of EAM, he has been accused of being unable to correctly assess EAM and of misrepresenting its abilities to Cairo with disastrous effects.<sup>18</sup> However, using Sheppard as a scapegoat for SOE support of EAM is unfair. The fact that ELAS was by a significant margin the largest and most effective guerrilla group in the Greek mountains was widely and commonly accepted by most observers on Greek affairs. One such observer was Brigadier Myers, who wrote that the ELAS guerrillas in Thessaly "are the largest and best organised of all".<sup>19</sup> In another telegram Glenconner wrote that the British should regard EAM "not only the most important political factor but as much the most powerful military organisation in Greece".<sup>20</sup> In the spring of 1943 even the Foreign Office was aware that "ELAS guerrilla bands number about 15,000 mobilised fighting men, who are closely controlled by EAM and

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<sup>18</sup> Goulter-Zervoudakis, 'The politicization of intelligence', pp. 174-175.

<sup>19</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 289.

<sup>20</sup> Following from A/D3, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1943, 'Greece: Policy- April- June, 1943. Views on execution of HMGs policy towards Greece. Formation of National Bands. Raising of General Revolt. The Constitution Question etc.', HS5/215, TNA, London.

(there are also) some 2,000 mobilised fighting men under Zervas”.<sup>21</sup> That EAM was many times larger than EDES was not a product of any naiveté on the part of Sheppard but a fact on the ground.

It is also highly unlikely that Sheppard’s endorsements of EAM led to any material increase in supplies for the organisation. As shown in the previous chapter, the British were wary of supplying EAM with arms and ammunition and this trend did not change. In a report from May 1943, Pirie stated that :

the reasons are not quite clear why during the last year the ELAS should have expanded so much more quickly than the EDES, and thus have become predominant in Greece. It cannot be due to the receipt of greater support from SOE, as in fact considerably greater quantities of cash and of arms have been sent by us to EDES than to ELAS.<sup>22</sup>

A different SOE report acknowledged that Zervas “had in fact in those days [early months of guerrilla warfare] received from us five times as much cash as did the EAM”.<sup>23</sup> This view was also adopted by Woodhouse later on, when he described the proportion of British-supplied material used by EAM as a “drop in the ocean”.<sup>24</sup> In many ways EAM/ELAS grew into a successful guerrilla force in spite of the BMM, rather than because of any foreign intervention or of Major Sheppard’s reports. A report compiled in March 1943, a few months before Pirie’s quote above, reveals that since June 1942 “in addition to supplies of explosives, clothing, rations etc., the following arms and ammunition have

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<sup>21</sup> From His Majesty’s Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to the Foreign Office, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>22</sup> The Present Crisis in Greek Affairs, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1943, ‘Greece: Political Intelligence by BLOs, March 1943 to September 1944’, HS5/338, TNA, London.

<sup>23</sup> From D/H109 to D/HV, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1943, ‘Greece: Policy. Fight with Foreign Office against policy towards Greece, Reports, Cabinet Papers, Myers and Wallace reports etc. October 1943’, HS5/218, TNA, London.

<sup>24</sup> Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 43.

been dropped into Greece: Machine guns 72, Sub-Machine guns 228, Rifles 236, Pistols 172, Mortars 31 [a separate contemporary report mentions 310<sup>25</sup>, it is unclear which one is a mistake], SA ammunition 333.500, Grenades 2.036, Sovereigns (gold) 70.163”.<sup>26</sup> Considering that the same report highlights how the guerrilla organisations had thousands of members and stresses the importance of weapons captured from the enemy, it is clear that the British supplies to the guerrillas was not their main source of materiel. The British working in Greece always overestimated their own importance as paymasters. Nowhere is this attitude better encapsulated than in a report on Greece which claimed that “we have the whip hand in the supply of money and material which we should use as ruthlessly as may be necessary”.<sup>27</sup>

Pirie claimed that the growth of EAM, despite its lack of funding, was mostly because of the “effect on the Liberal Republicans of the British policy of support for the King, tactlessly handled”.<sup>28</sup> However, it should be remembered that by this point Pirie had been transferred to London due to his strained relationship with the Greek government

Unlike Major Sheppard, the majority of the British intelligence and diplomatic apparatus had a very specific aim with regard to EAM. This was to limit its power and to ensure that, following the war, it would not be in a position to challenge the British for political power. This was a consistent British policy, unchanged from the days before ‘Harling’. Its existence is further highlighted in a telegram from Brigadier Keble to Myers in May of 1943 stating that “it is essential however for post war balance that EAM and

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<sup>25</sup> Guerrilla Activities in Greece, ‘Balkans: Cairo HQ- Top Level Planning of Activities – Policy Planning – Reports and Appreciations of SOE Activities – Successful Sorties, January 1943 to March 1944’, HS5/149, TNA, London.

<sup>26</sup> Guerrilla Activities in Greece, HS5/748, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> Appendix “A”, Application of the Foregoing Paragraphs to Greece, HS5/145, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> The Present Crisis in Greek Affairs, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/338, TNA.

communists alias Russia are not in power in Greece” and reminding Myers to bear “in mind the absolute necessity to break up EAM and communists”.<sup>29</sup> Glenconner sought the same result but was far more moderate in his tone. He argued that “we have no alternative but to break the power of EAM, not because they are communists but because they have clearly shown they are out to seize power [...] in this connection it should be emphasised that we have not tried to set up a rival movement to EAM but allow freedom to all elements”.<sup>30</sup> Clearly SOE was aware that, regardless of whether or not it had intended to minimise the role of EAM in the resistance by setting up an independent guerrilla movement, it had created a backlash. The struggle for leadership of the Greek resistance was not between EAM and EDES but between EAM and the British Military Mission. This is unequivocally stated in a telegram from Cairo into Greece that “both we and ELAS want control of the Andartes [guerrilla] fighting forces. Neither will allow other to obtain control”.<sup>31</sup>

It is unclear which side first harboured suspicions of the other. An anonymous report on the composition of EAM in December 1942 had stated that, due to “the tactics of the leading Communist party, to the stubborn effort of monopolising the struggle and of the neutralisation of all forces which were not subordinated to it, etc., those who had in the beginning attached themselves to the EAM began losing courage and withdrawing”.<sup>32</sup> The report focuses on the internal politics of EAM, describing the KKE taking control of EAM rather than EAM taking control of the Greek resistance. It concludes that “the EAM cannot do more to help in the war than it has done. On the contrary, owing to the nature of the organisation, to its conspiratory tactics, and especially owing to the predominant thought of its monopolising, it causes

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<sup>29</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>30</sup> Following from A/D3, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>31</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> Bulletin Number 169/125: EAM, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1942, HS5/618, TNA.

considerable harm to it”.<sup>33</sup> This report must have been taken with a grain of salt by its audience, as it makes some heavy accusations, but is evidence that the idea that EAM would seek to monopolise the resistance existed in British circles long before March 1943.

British mistrust of EAM’s intentions was seemingly confirmed in March 1943 when a group of ELAS soldiers forcibly disarmed and disbanded a guerrilla band led by the republican officer Stefanos Sarafis. A history of SOE activities in Greece indicates this may partly have been because “certain people in Athens [...] made it their business to spread rumours that Sarafis had taken the field with the political motive of suppressing ELAS”.<sup>34</sup> Sarafis had been one of the original republican commanders approached by SOE to form guerrilla bands but had refused. By 1943 however, having recognised that the pendulum had swung in favour of guerrilla warfare, he had become a vocal proponent of forming apolitical national guerrilla bands, or ‘Natbands’, as a means of unifying the resistance. Perhaps, it was EAM’s suspicion that Sarafis was hoping to attract guerrillas from its own military wing that forced its hand. This same process was soon repeated with various other non-EAM partisan groups, including that organised by Colonel Psarros, another liberal Republican. The British viewed Psarros as a “genuine soldier although represents social democratic group and does not wish to be entangled in politics [...] would unite with ELAS against return King”.<sup>35</sup> Myers later would argue that this forcible dissolution of rival guerrilla groups was the beginning of a clear attempt by EAM/ELAS to monopolise the resistance and to establish itself as the only legitimate opposition to the Axis.<sup>36</sup> The British were afraid that if EAM was successful in these attempts to dissolve all other resistance

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Chapter 8, HS7/158, TNA.

<sup>35</sup> Cipher Telegram received from Cairo, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>36</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, pp. 126-130.

groups, it would be in a position to seize political control of the country following its liberation.

SOE's solution to the increasingly apparent political divisions within the guerrilla armies was to return to the idea of 'National Bands' or 'Natbands'. Keble wrote that:

to check this [liquidation of rival bands] and harness the 'will to fight' to one common effort directed solely against the Axis, SOE advertised the formation of 'National Bands' which were to be bands of any political persuasion, but Bands which had decided to sink their political differences.<sup>37</sup>

However, he was premature in declaring that "adoption of this policy has definitely averted the breaking out of civil war in Central Greece, and membership of these Bands is rapidly extending to such an extent that the EAM (Communist led bands) has already lost many of its members".<sup>38</sup> Perhaps this indicates that EAM's fears that the 'Natbands' were a vehicle to lure its members away from it were not completely unfounded. This is further suggested in a report on SOE activities in Greece which stated that "the Mission has been trying to form National Bands (non-political) which would absorb units of the ELAS and so detach them from the EAM".<sup>39</sup> Overall, there is enough evidence pointing to the fact that the 'Natbands' were partly seen by the British as a vehicle to detach ELAS from EAM.

Other related proposals included the BBC only crediting the 'Natbands' for guerrilla successes. This seems to have been accepted, as a telegram stated that "Ref BBC broadcasting EAM operations as Natband work. Eddie [Myers]

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<sup>37</sup> SOE Activities in Greece, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1943, HS5/655, TNA.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Summary of Guerrilla activity in Greece September 1942 to February 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

considers this may help bring ELAS into military agreement Mideast and separate them from politicians EAM”.<sup>40</sup>

There was a more thorough survey of the possibilities of following through with this policy, in a paper entitled “Possibilities of Splitting the ELAS and the EAM”, which concluded that:

it would be possible [...] to detach ELAS from EAM by using one or more of the following methods: a) Declaring war, so to speak on the EAM, showing up its true intentions, and destroying it as a political movement. B) Withholding all supplies from ELAS until they join the National Bands. C) persuading the EAM Central Committee to allow- or better still to instruct- ELAS units to join the National Bands [...] The best course would appear to be a combination of (A) and (C).<sup>41</sup>

The conclusion of the report is again a sign of the dual policy followed by Britain towards EAM. This involved limited British support for EAM, in order to maintain a semblance of input in its activities, while simultaneously actively looking for a way to remove EAM as an active participant in the Greek resistance.

A significant spanner was thrown in the SOE’s works when, by May 1943, Sarafis, who had been a prisoner of EAM following his group’s disbanding, reappeared as ELAS Commander-in-Chief. Myers, surprised, wrote to Cairo that “incomprehensible though it is Sarafis is military commander all ELAS”.<sup>42</sup> Sarafis’s proffered reasoning was that he now recognised that unification under ELAS was the best route to a unified resistance, as the many divisions of the guerrillas would only lead to civil war.<sup>43</sup> Myers, and others

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<sup>40</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>41</sup> Possibilities of Splitting the ELAS and the EAM, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>42</sup> Cypher Telegram from Cairo, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>43</sup> Stefanos Sarafis, *ELAS: Greek Resistance Army*, trans. Sylvia Moody (London, Merlin, 1980) pp. 83-84.

since then, have suggested that the whole affair of the disarming of his band was a cover for Sarafis to join ELAS without losing his standing among other republican officers. He wrote that “charges were false [...] to excuse dissolving his bands”.<sup>44</sup> Regardless, there was little relief in British circles that ELAS had not kept Sarafis a prisoner. Instead, there was unease and even fear that Sarafis would be successful in recruiting Psarros, and presumably other ‘moderates’ as well, to ELAS.<sup>45</sup> It was likely that the ELAS leadership, especially under Sarafis who had been advocating for unification since the beginning, could now argue that there was little or no difference between unifying the resistance under the ‘Natbands’ or under ELAS, discounting the political reality of Greece.

This is something with which the British officers within Greece in principle and on a practical level seemed to agree with. However, political considerations would never have allowed such a course of action. Woodhouse, writing to Cairo in May 1943 informing them of Zervas’s ability to defend himself, states that:

Zervas will fight. If Zervas disarmed ELAS will have ostensibly united Greece. This will make our task simpler though less pleasant because Keelrow [Myers HQ] has backed Zervas solely in British interests. This was due to belief, now dispelled by Major Stevens and your messages, that HMG did not fully realise need to counter balance EAM.<sup>46</sup>

Sarafis’s appearance at the head of ELAS had robbed the British of the ability to claim that only the ‘Natbands’ existed as a unified resistance. ELAS’s claim to the same title was given extra credence by the quashing of Sarafis’s previous differences with EAM, while also ensuring that the ‘Natbands’ could no longer

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Cipher Telegram received from Cairo, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>46</sup> Untitled Paper in HS5/338, TNA.

claim that they were the only body where politics were secondary to the resistance. Instead, the 'Natbands' were exposed as a means of postponing the solution of the constitutional question.

British political directives to SOE did not help the efforts of the BLOs to persuade EAM of British intentions towards Greece. In March 1943, Winston Churchill sent a letter that reached SOE stating that "in view of operational importance attached to subversive activities in Greece, there can be no question of SOE refusing to have dealings with a given group merely on the grounds that political sentiments of the group are opposed to the King and government".<sup>47</sup> But this was heavily qualified by Churchill's stressing that Royalist organisations should be given preferential treatment. Indeed, he continued to write that:

SOE agents need not carry on propaganda on behalf of the King and Government nor should they indulge in political discussions but they must not on the other hand allow their silence on political issues to be misinterpreted by leaders with whom they co-operate as meaning that HMG are indifferent to future of the King and Government and are prepared to acquiesce in a change of regime. Wherever it is necessary for SOE agents to give support or money to leaders of doubtful loyalty it will be convenient that they should stress the fact that this support and money is being given at the instance and in the interests of the King and Government. It may be that certain monarchical groups are unwilling to take any immediate part in resistance operations. This fact should not prevent our maintaining contact with them and giving them encouragement on the understanding that they will be of use to us as moment of liberation approaches.<sup>48</sup>

Firstly, it is interesting to note here Churchill's forgiving attitude towards the royalist groups. More important perhaps is his stated view that all assistance provided by the British should be given with reminders that it was done on

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<sup>47</sup> Following from Prime Minister, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

behalf of the king. This guidance provoked a number of reactions. Woodhouse later remarked that in the mountains of Greece in 1943 this was like telling the British ambassador to Moscow to remind Stalin of HMG's devotion to the Romanovs.<sup>49</sup> A telegram to Cairo from Keble clearly stated that this policy was not going to achieve the desired results. He wrote that:

to ask British Liaison Officers to state that support given to various guerrilla leaders was thanks to the King and present Greek government would be impossible repeat impossible as it would not only be received with the ridicule it deserved but it would in any case be detectable lie resulting in yet further discredit to the present Greek government (if that were possible) but worst of all it would probably even discredit the King himself for apparently lending himself to such childish and obviously dishonest propaganda. ZP [FO] must have had a pretty poor estimation of Chiefs of Staff intellect to suggest such a course if such was the case even the Greeks in Greece are not the Neolithic children ZP appear to believe them.<sup>50</sup>

Myers, who had been envisioned as a Greek Mihailovic and as powerbroker of the Greek mountains, was trapped between the ambitions of EAM, fuelled by mistrust of the British, and the desires of the British government, which did nothing to reassure EAM that it had nothing to be afraid of.

In May 1943, worried by the assertiveness of EAM in disbanding its rivals, Glenconner wrote to Hambro. He indicated that SOE was aware that the existing dual policy of supporting the republican opposition until support for the king could be made effective had been dangerous, stating that:

it was also recognised that when the time came for bringing this opposition element into the fold by threatening to cut off our support, a crisis would be reached. We are now face to face with

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<sup>49</sup> Heinz Richter, *1936-1946: Δύο Επανάστασεις και Αντεπανάστασεις στην Ελλάδα (1936-1946: Two Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions in Greece)* (Athens, Εξάντας, 1975) p. 243.

<sup>50</sup> Cipher Telegram Received from Cairo, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

this crisis and everything that SOE has worked for in Greece and the military contribution we can make is at stake. We cannot however turn back for, apart from political consequences, which would ensue if we were to yield to EAM, extending beyond Greece, as well as for the Greek people themselves, we would suffer a severe loss of authority of prestige.<sup>51</sup>

But the crisis did not break out in May 1943. EAM agreed to participate in the 'Natband' agreement, while the British remained wary of this rapprochement by EAM. One of the main reasons for this according to Myers, and most likely Cairo, was that it was "becoming clear that England not Russia would be the liberating and subsequently dominating power".<sup>52</sup> While Myers's views are not official policy, it is interesting nonetheless to note his use of the phrase 'dominating power'. More importantly though, it shows that the relationship between the two parties had grown so strained that even potential attempts at reconciliation (assuming EAM's offer was genuine) were viewed with extreme scepticism by the other side. Indeed one of the main British motives to negotiate with EAM on the formation of the 'Natbands' seems to be that it was believed that "if we [SOE] find ourselves obliged break with them we shall be stronger position morally and from propaganda viewpoint as ELAS leaders will have to justify to own troops cessation of British material aid".<sup>53</sup>

Glenconner was particularly aware of the implications of negotiating with EAM at this point. He realised that, if the British agreed to endorse EAM, it could have been suggested that "HMG have swallowed their words, are supporting a party who are opposed to the King and recognising their post-war aims".<sup>54</sup> Perhaps, unlike many of his colleagues, he realised that what EAM

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<sup>51</sup> Following for CD from A/D3, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>52</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1943, HS5/338, TNA.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Comments by SOE, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1943, 'General: Planning and Political, Lord Glenconner's private correspondence, May 1943 to September 1943', HS5/656, TNA, London.

truly craved was not British weaponry or money but the legitimacy afforded to it by association with the British. He also realised that perhaps the British had been outmanoeuvred since, if they rejected EAM's offer of reconciliation:

we would be discredited and lose such control as we now have. EAM would point out to the people that they had put themselves at our disposal for the prosecution of the war [...] yet we were not satisfied because they dominated the Bands and we object to them as Communists. Clearly, therefore, we are out to destroy them so as to impose our own political views<sup>55</sup>

His analysis points to a narrative in which SOE did not choose to officially endorse EAM but found itself without any other options.

EAM's offer to join the 'Natbands' led to further jostling for supremacy between it and the British. This had begun when EAM had introduced the question of leadership of the 'Natbands' and the role of BLOs into the negotiations. EAM wished for a joint General HQ instead of a leadership system based on "BLOs whom we wish to have power to act as arbitrators in disputes".<sup>56</sup> A later report defined EAM's proposal as one in which "British officers would merely perform liaison duties and not have any executive control".<sup>57</sup> Lord Selborne was horrified, writing that "the EAM proposal is radically different from Myers'. He rather seems to have overplayed his hand. If we are forced to accept the EAM version it will be a desperate blow to our prestige. It reduces BLO from status of master to servant".<sup>58</sup> Selborne received a reply that "the real effect of the EAM text was to reduce the status of the BLOs from masters to that of liaison officers, which is what they are supposed

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> SOE Activities in Greece, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1843, HS5/656, TNA.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes of the Second Meeting of a Committee held at the British Embassy to Greece, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1943, HS5/656, TNA.

<sup>58</sup> From AD/S to CD, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

to be”.<sup>59</sup> This exchange between the minister and his staff strongly suggests that British political authorities implicitly wanted British officers in Greece to dominate the resistance movement. Selborne’s abhorrence of EAM’s proposals, which seemed rather acceptable to SOE, indicates not only the gap in practical knowledge between the policy makers and the officers in the field but also may hint at their diverging aims.

Overall, the negotiations were particularly trying for the British who were attempting to restrain the power of EAM in this new ‘unified’ organisation. A telegram from Cairo to the British negotiators stated that:

as we cannot get command for ourselves we must ensure ELAS does not have unfettered command which would enable them to control non ELAS Natbands [...] [worst case scenario] the Committee should consist of four executive members only, that is two ELAS, Zervas and yourself. In effect if we cannot have a majority of committee we want to balance it up so as to make it as ineffective as possible [...] we realise this may lead to deadlock in the committee on political issues but subject to your continued control of planning and timing we prefer an impotent joint GHQ to one under EAM control.<sup>60</sup>

Overall, negotiations for the entry of ELAS into the ‘Natbands’ were once again a continuation of British attempts to limit the control of EAM over the resistance movement by any means. These even included hobbling the new ‘apolitical’ organisation unifying the guerrillas.

It is interesting to note Zervas’s position in these negotiations. Possibly aware that, with EAM joining the ‘Natbands’, he would lose his privileged position, Zervas began denouncing EAM to the BLOs. A BLO attached to Zervas sent a telegram to Cairo informing them that Zervas “requests permission to dissolve it [EAM] by force. [...] Zervas attitude becomes more

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

hostile daily to EAM and shows he has no wish to cooperate with EAM".<sup>61</sup> Yet despite this behaviour, the British continued to furnish EDES with substantially greater quantities of supplies and funds than EAM/ELAS. When EAM challenged this, it received a reply stating that "ELAS have no grounds for assuming Zervas is favoured in preference other bands. He is merely a member of federation".<sup>62</sup> Whoever authored the reply to EAM was clearly either ignorant of the realities in the discrepancies of supplies to the guerrillas or was actively trying to deceive EAM.

Zervas and the British had a very clear understanding of their relationship. It is unclear whether this was because of the man's nature of, in Woodhouse's words, "unscrupulous opportunism".<sup>63</sup> Whether it was to pursue his ambitions of military command or because of the effect of British gold sovereigns, Zervas was the representative of British interests in the mountains of Greece. This is stated numerous times, including during the negotiations of the 'Natband' Committee where the British and Zervas are clearly placed on one side of a divide opposed to ELAS, but nowhere more so than in the reports of Major D.J. Wallace, written in July 1943. He states that:

however spontaneous the movement may have been in the beginning and however much support it may now enjoy from the majority of the Greek people, Zervas is a British creation in the sense that we are responsible for his continued existence today and for all the consequences that may follow therefrom. We presumably did this advisedly and it behooves us to consider exactly what we want out of Zervas. Ever since March 1943, when he signed the first agreement with the Middle East, he has been a completely loyal ally and he will still do absolutely and exactly

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<sup>61</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>62</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>63</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 74.

what we tell him. He is therefore not only our creation but remains an instrument in our hands.<sup>64</sup>

Obviously, when referring to the spontaneity of Zervas's movement, Major Wallace must have been unaware that Zervas in the past had had to be threatened with public denunciation by Prometheus II after Zervas had failed to live up to his agreement of initiating guerrilla warfare.

As early as these first six months of 1943, Zervas was used as a counterweight to the growing influence of EAM. This view was widely held, including by the British who believed that:

the first attempt at building up a rival organisation was made when the British sent Zervas into the field to found his EDES guerrillas in Epirus. It was at first thought that if the rank and file of ELAS could be shown that their leaders were communist they would automatically and in great number transfer their allegiance to Zervas. It was a long time before this peculiar misunderstanding of the situation was dropped and meanwhile Zervas had received very considerable boosting from the British.<sup>65</sup>

But this was also the view held by American observers. Moses Hadas wrote that:

British conduct with reference to resistance groups in Greece seems cynically opportunist, for on the surface they have consistently supported a weaker party against one whose strength

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<sup>64</sup> D.J. Wallace, 'Conditions in Zervas-held Territory in Greece' in Lars Baerentzen (ed.) *British Reports on Greece, 1943-1944* (Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum, 1982) p. 120.

<sup>65</sup> Examples of British Encouragement and Building up of rival groups against ELAS, 'Greece: Policy. Fight with Foreign Office against policy towards Greece, Reports, Cabinet Papers, Myers and Wallace reports etc. October 1943. Volume 2', HS5/219, TNA, London.

was becoming too dangerous, and have thus sought to maintain an equilibrium by setting Greeks against each other.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, the British believed that, had it not been for the disproportionate level of supplies to EDES, it most likely would have suffered the same fate that befell the bands of Sarafis and Psarros.<sup>67</sup> The archives did not provide an insight into the exact figures of the distribution of the approximately 3,000 tons of supplies and 600 tons of arms and ammunition SOE dropped into Greece.<sup>68</sup> But the favour bestowed on Zervas is apparent through most of the internal communications of SOE. Zervas was merely an extension of the British during their wrestle with EAM for control of the guerrilla movement.

Throughout this period the Foreign Office was still extraordinarily wary of SOE's interactions with the leftist guerrilla group. On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1943 the London Office of SOE received a telegram "which states that the Foreign Secretary has urged the Chiefs of Staff that 'in the interests of relations with the Greek Government it may be necessary to curtail our operational activities in Greece because they involve supporting elements hostile to the Greek government'".<sup>69</sup> This was another effort by the Foreign Office to curtail the primacy of SOE in Greece, most likely using the dissolution of bands by ELAS as a springboard. But the FO was in no position to stop SOE from expanding and pursuing guerrilla warfare. This was because SOE, having proven its worth to the military establishment, finally had the latter's full support.

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<sup>66</sup> Moses Hadas, 'American critiques of British Policy, July and September 1944' in Richard Clogg (ed., trans.) *Greece 1940-1949- Occupation, Resistance, Civil, A Documentary History* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p. 182.

<sup>67</sup> British Policy to Greece, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1944, 'Greece: Policy- SOE corres. With FO and Leeper about policy towards Greece and guerrillas. Supplies to Guerrillas. SOE activities in Greece. PAO and their collaboration with the Germans. Noah's Ark Plan. January 1944, HS5/221, TNA, London.

<sup>68</sup> Report on SOE Activities in Greece and the Islands of the Aegean Sea, HS7/152, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> To J.O.S., 15<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/655, TNA.

Pearson met with the Chiefs of Staff in March 1943 and, when writing to Glenconner in Cairo, reported their unequivocal support as “they attach considerable importance to continuance and indeed intensification of sabotage activities which have already yielded substantial results. Consequently, they hope political considerations will not be allowed to hamper or reduce this good work”.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, he added that the reply from the Chiefs of Staff to the enquiries of Orme Sargent also stressed that “the Chiefs of Staff consider that it is fundamentally wrong to charge Officers who are responsible for Military or quasi-Military operations with the conduct of business relating to the internal politics of the country in which they are operating”.<sup>71</sup>

There is another explanation as to why the Foreign Office acquiesced and allowed SOE to intensify its operations in Greece during the summer of 1943. In June 1943, the Foreign Office cabled Cairo that:

we further agree with SOE that their policy should be to increase the number of British Liaison Officers [...] our aim must be so to increase our influence on guerrilla bands that, by the time the King returns to Greece, British influence will so far have swamped political aspirations of EAM that they will be unable to organise an effective opposition to the King.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps this explains the discrepancy in the relative number of military missions to Greece compared to the rest of the Balkans, even in 1943. Whereas there were 8 BLOs with Tito, 11 with Mihailovic, and 8 in Albania, at the same time Greece hosted 53 British officers. Over and above the difference in numbers of BLOs on the basis of size of area covered, it should be noted that the report containing the above figures also presents a striking discrepancy in the ratio of BLOs to guerrillas. The report estimates roughly 200,000 guerrillas

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<sup>70</sup> Following for A/D3 from D/HV 18<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> From Foreign Office to H.M. Ambassador to Greece, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/656, TNA.

in Yugoslavia (with a total of 19 BLOs) while Greek guerrillas are reported at 25,000 accompanied by 53 British officers.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps, by their very presence, British planners were hoping that the BLOs would help steer Greek politics in accordance with their policy.

The dependence of the military on the Greek guerrillas would only be reinforced in the summer of 1943. This was due to Operation 'Animals', whose aim was to create a ruse to draw German attention to Greece. This was to be achieved through the intensification of guerrilla warfare in an attempt to persuade the German military command that it was in preparation of an impending Allied military invasion of Greece. Operation 'Animals' was a success and successfully diverted Axis forces to Greece, creating ideal conditions for the impending Allied invasion of Sicily.

It has been suggested that the Greek Civil War could have been averted had the British disowned EAM at this early stage of guerrilla warfare and had fully supported EDES.<sup>74</sup> This seems highly unlikely. Despite Sheppard's positive reports about EAM to Cairo, there is no indication that "it would still have been possible to keep EAM-ELAS on a tight rein"<sup>75</sup>, much less so considering that Myers had already warned Cairo that Sheppard was a "yes man".<sup>76</sup> British intelligence and diplomatic circles were under no illusion about what was at stake in Greece. They tried their hardest to combat every EAM attempt to consolidate power. Indeed, a few months later, it was stated in a report that "it has been, in fact, British policy to leave nothing undone which

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<sup>73</sup> Annex. Support of Guerrilla Forces in Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece, HS5/149, TNA.

<sup>74</sup> Goulter-Zervoudakis, 'The politicization of intelligence', p. 184.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 185

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* p. 184.

would weaken the political power of EAM/ELAS".<sup>77</sup> But the British were also aware that they could not afford to officially declare EAM as an enemy. A Foreign Office telegram to Cairo in May 1943 stated that:

I entirely agree that attempt should be made to break the authority of EAM [...] in view however of their overwhelmingly strong position vis-a-vis the other bands there seems a danger that EAM will snap their fingers at us [...] If EAM refuse our terms is there not a danger that we shall have turned a group which has never been accused of lack of friendliness to Great Britain into an enemy as well as a danger of provoking civil war between EAM and bands we are supporting.<sup>78</sup>

This danger of civil war was becoming readily apparent to those involved in Greek affairs. It had also been raised by the Middle East Defence Committee who believed that:

B) Control of volatile and subversive elements by British officers for anti-Axis operations is now directing into a common non-political channel energy which would otherwise be free to wage civil war. C) To curtail British support and guidance at this stage, when considerable fighting organisations have already been built up, would of itself invite internal disorders which would waste a substantial (word omitted) and would play into the hands of the communists. [...] E) After re-occupation, continued control of mutually destructive political elements under British leadership, to which they will by then be fully accustomed, will give the most favourable conditions for early establishment of a stable Greek government whatever its political colour.<sup>79</sup>

By the summer of 1943 this view was significantly bleaker. A cable sent into Greece suggested that "whatever we do we cannot prevent ELAS from continuing to work for their own ends towards the eventful [sic] control of Greece. It is equally + [sic] that Zervas will do likewise and that eventual civil

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<sup>77</sup> Examples of British Encouragement and Building up of rival groups against ELAS, HS5/219, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> From Foreign Office to Minister of State, Cairo, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/656, TNA.

<sup>79</sup> From Mideast to Air Ministry, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

war in Greece is almost certain”.<sup>80</sup> The BLOs often sent reports backs to Cairo suggesting that, unless the constitutional question is solved, there would be fighting between the guerrillas. It is not possible to know whether this would have been avoided had the constitutional question been addressed by the British government. What is certain is that, by continuing to support the Greek monarchy, the British government did nothing to assuage EAM’s fears, or at least to remove one of its propaganda weapons.

The months between Operation ‘Harling’ in November 1942 and Operation ‘Animals’ in July 1943 are crucial to our understanding of SOE and its role in the development of the guerrilla bands. Supported by the military establishment, SOE had finally curtailed the input of the Foreign Office. For these months, SOE was free to pursue its own policy. These months are characterised by the continuation, and intensification, of the dual British policy of concurrently helping and attacking EAM. The British officers working in Greece realised that they were unable to achieve an open break with EAM. Its position as the dominant force in the Greek mountains ensured that any break with it would have been disastrous for the British. Glenconner stated that if the British accepted EAM’s open challenge and “cut off support to ELAS bands, all our [British] plans in Greece will be imperilled”.<sup>81</sup> This was exacerbated by the continuing misapprehension by British planners on Greece that “control could be effected through the giving and withholding of supplies”.<sup>82</sup> The eventual solution, indicated in an SOE-PWE Policy Committee meeting in late May 1943, was summarised as “EAM domination must be resisted, but in such a way that it would not be necessary for the British to

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<sup>80</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/618, TNA.

<sup>81</sup> Following from A/D3, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Minutes of the Second Meeting of a Committee held at the British Embassy to Greece, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1943, HS5/656, TNA.

abandon their assistance to all guerrilla bands”.<sup>83</sup> The threat of civil war was present but for many this was a secondary consideration. Keble wrote that “should the war end without Allied troops occupying Greece, civil war is a certainty [...] SOE should not have to be concerned with what happens afterwards, we must obviously first win the war, and then from a military point of view we will probably be content to let the Greeks seek out their own salvation”.<sup>84</sup> It is clear that the British in Cairo and Whitehall were acutely aware that this policy of having one’s cake and eating it would almost undoubtedly lead to civil war.

#### Political turmoil in Cairo <sup>85</sup>

March 1943 proved to be a crucial month for the future of the country and SOE, in Cairo as well as mainland Greece. The first signs that something was amiss occurred early in the month when Greek military forces in Syria mutinied against the Greek government. Pirie, with justified resentment towards the diplomatic establishment, wrote that the Greek soldiers “are predominantly republican. As the Minister of State had forbidden British Intelligence Officers even to ‘listen to Republicans’, it is perhaps not surprising that this incident came as a bolt from the blue”.<sup>86</sup>

The mutiny took place because, as Pirie reported having earlier met with the eventual leader of the mutiny, “the Greek forces in Syria and Palestine were disappointed with Kanellopoulos, as he was not taking a strong enough line over clearing the army of Metaxists, and that the army had no intention of

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<sup>83</sup> SOE-PWE Policy Committee, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> To J.O.S., 15<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/665, TNA.

<sup>85</sup> Elements of my MPhil dissertation have been used for the section on the delegation of August 1943.

<sup>86</sup> From D/HA to D/H109, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1943, ‘Greece: The Royal Greek Services, Army Crisis – Mutinies’, HS5/464, TNA, London.

stomaching the imposition of any Fascist officers”.<sup>87</sup> The Greek soldiers were anxious of becoming “a Praetorian guard for the return to Greece of the King”.<sup>88</sup> Their fears were exacerbated when Kanellopoulos went on a trip to London leaving Tsellos in his stead in Cairo. Tsellos, as the Greek representative on the Anglo-Greek Committee there, was significantly less receptive to SOE guidance and sought to establish the Six Colonels as the pre-eminent force in the Greek resistance. British Intelligence circles were aware that “the clique of Colonels which Tsellos [promoted] [...] constitutes not merely a dead liability to our work in Greece but it is a most dangerous menace”.<sup>89</sup> It was even suggested that Kanellopoulos himself realised this in the end, as a paper suggests that “it is unfortunate that this crisis should have taken place just when Cuthbert [Kanellopoulos] appears to have realised the shortcomings of the Six Colonels”.<sup>90</sup> These included that:

not only are the members of the centre [Six Colonels] not ‘non-political’ – they were all formerly extreme Royalists, held important posts under Metaxas, and favour the forcible reimposition of King George [...] On its own written admission the ‘centre’ is not primarily interested in resistance to the enemy, but in achieving its own post war political aims.<sup>91</sup>

SOE’s report on Tsellos and the Six Colonels is particularly damning, accusing Tsellos of having “bent his efforts to making ‘his’ group the exclusive recipient of all the Anglo- Greek Committee’s resources”.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Greek Army Crisis, From D/HA to D/H109, 9<sup>th</sup> March, HS5/464, TNA.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Tsellos and the ‘Centre of Co-Ordination’, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1943, ‘Greece: HMG’s relations with Greek Government Authorities. Anglo-Greek Committee’, HS5/283, TNA, London.

<sup>90</sup> Greek Army Crisis, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/283, TNA.

<sup>91</sup> Tsellos and the ‘Centre of Co-Ordination’, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1943, HS5/283, TNA.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

It became known to the Greek armed forces, according to Pirie, that Tsellos was working with these extremely reactionary forces within Greece. He wrote that “it seems quite clear from the Spiliotopoulos report [one of the Six Colonels] that Tsellos was in fact trying to arrange the escape of ‘Fascist’ officers from Greece, and the fears of the troops were therefore sound”.<sup>93</sup> This is confirmed by Glenconner who states that most of the army’s animosity was “towards the machinations of Sugar [Tsellos] in which Cuthbert [Kanellopoulos] appears to have blindly acquiesced”.<sup>94</sup> As a corollary explanation for the mutinies, it was also mentioned that many of the troops were upset over the cold shoulder received by republican officers escaping to the Middle East. Pirie wrote that “the Second Brigade were indignant over the fact that for political reasons no employment had been offered to Colonel Bakerdzis [Bakirdzes], the finest artillery officer in the Greek Army”.<sup>95</sup>

The immediate result of the mutiny was that Kanellopoulos and Tsellos resigned from the Greek government. While SOE, and Pirie in particular, were “glad to note the elimination of M. Tsellos” the same cannot be said for Kanellopoulos’s resignation.<sup>96</sup> SOE had been robbed of “a good friend (the only good friend among the Greek Ministers)”.<sup>97</sup> Still, one of the first decisions following his departure from the Greek cabinet was the dissolution of his organisation in Athens as it was decided that it “did not work”.<sup>98</sup> These two intelligence failures that occurred in Cairo in March 1943, both Tsellos’s abortive attempts to wrest control of the resistance from SOE as well as the

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<sup>93</sup> Greek Army Crisis, From D/HA to D/H109, 9<sup>th</sup> March, HS5/464, TNA.

<sup>94</sup> For D/HV from A/D3, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/464, TNA.

<sup>95</sup> Greek Army Crisis, From D/HA to D/H109, 9<sup>th</sup> March, HS5/464, TNA.

<sup>96</sup> Greek Crisis, From D/HA to D/HV, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/464, TNA.

<sup>97</sup> Tsellos and the ‘Centre of Co-Ordination’, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1943, HS5/283, TNA.

<sup>98</sup> Minutes of the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Anglo-Greek Committee, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1943, ‘Greece: HMG’s relations with the Greek Government Authorities, February 1943 to June 1943’, HS5/286, TNA, London.

failure of British and Greek intelligence to pre-empt the mutiny, initiated a chain of events with widespread consequences.

Firstly, the mutiny seems to have slightly cooled the early flurry of SOE activity that began after 'Harling'. It was suggested that "we [SOE] sit back while the political crisis in the M.E. is resolved, carrying out only routine supply operations to British-controlled guerrillas".<sup>99</sup> This was also agreed to by Hambro. At the same time the issue of Greece and its monarch shot up the agenda. Winston Churchill's missive on British policy towards Greece and the Greek resistance mentioned earlier in this chapter was undeniably the result of the March mutiny.

Secondly, in late March 1943, Reginald 'Rex' Leeper was appointed ambassador to the Greek government-in-exile. Churchill sent a letter instructing the new ambassador that:

On arrival in Cairo, you should investigate and report to me on the desirability of maintaining the existing machinery for controlling our contacts with Greece [...] In general you should make it your task to co-ordinate the activities in connection with Greece of all British organisations in the Middle East, and should impress on the Greek Government that it is you to whom they should look as the channel for their dealings with such organisations.<sup>100</sup>

These new far reaching powers given to Leeper marked the beginning of the end for the ability of SOE to dictate its own policy. Unsurprisingly, the hierarchy of SOE was livid. Pearson wrote to Hambro that "the whole despatch reads as if Leeper's main task is to supervise SOE's activities and ensure that we stick to the spirit and letter of the Prime Minister's policy as if we cannot be

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<sup>99</sup> Greek Army Crisis, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/283, TNA.

<sup>100</sup> Most Secret: No. 46, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1943, 'Greece: Foreign Office Policy and Directives to SOE. Conflicting views on backing of resistance and partisan movements. Formation of National Bands. March 1943 to June 1943, HS5/309, TNA, London.

trusted to do this ourselves”.<sup>101</sup> Hambro was equally incensed and, in a letter to Selborne, wrote that having Leeper as a conduit was “an entirely new procedure, since SOE have always had direct contact with the foreign Governments with whom they work”.<sup>102</sup> He continues that “as this matter contravenes questions of principle in the FO/SOE Treaty, he [Pearson] is passing it to me to take up with Sir Alexander Cadogan”.<sup>103</sup> Finally, Hambro concluded his letter to Selborne writing that “if this is the Prime Minister’s intention then I think it is time that you and I and all the responsible directors of SOE put our resignations at his disposal”.<sup>104</sup>

Selborne attempted to calm the fury of the organisation he headed, replying to Hambro that “it is quite intolerable that this [Churchill’s letter to Leeper] should have been sent off without our knowing anything [...] I think it is legitimate for the Foreign Office to say that the situation in Greece is so exceptional that they must have an exceptional arrangement”.<sup>105</sup> Despite his attempts to placate his organisation, Selborne did lodge an objection with the Prime Minister through a letter informing him that:

I have been surprised to find that instructions have been sent in your name to HM ambassador to Greece dealing almost wholly with SOE organisation [...] These, in effect introduce entirely new machinery under which SOE shall operate in Greece and unlike that existing anywhere else.<sup>106</sup>

Greece was the spearhead of the Foreign Office attempts to tame SOE. The interest taken by Churchill and the Foreign Office in establishing Leeper’s

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<sup>101</sup> D/HV to CD, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>102</sup> From CD to SO, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/309, TNA.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> 57A, SO to CD, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>106</sup> 57B, SO to Prime Minister, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

primacy confirms that the British diplomatic establishment went to great lengths to ensure control of Greece.

Perhaps Selborne had been optimistic when he wrote that “I think we are lucky to have Leeper instead of many of his colleagues”.<sup>107</sup> Leeper, as mentioned in chapter two, was no stranger to SOE and the two had not parted on the best of terms. On the news of Leeper’s appointment, Boxshall, an SOE officer in London, sent a telegram to Cairo to warn Glenconner. He wrote:

Rex Leeper, the old chief of Woburn [propaganda section] has become Ambassador to Greece. To mark this event Bruce Lockhart gave a dinner last night [...] as dinner progressed and the wine flowed Rex became more and more royalist and very outspoken as to what he was going to do when he arrived in Cairo with the king and government. As the evening progressed it became evident that his present intention was to change all the set-up we have got in Cairo, get rid of Kanellopoulos or neutralise his power, and see generally that SOE policy was made to conform to the long terms of HMG irrespective of whether it was helping the war effort by so doing or not. In any event it was quite clear that Rex intended to run the Greek government, the guerrilla bands, SOE and the Minister of State in Cairo. He intended to make himself Chairman of the Anglo-Greek Committee, he would call the leaders of the guerrilla bands back from Greece to meet him and unless they agreed to conform to the policy of HMG and back the King and the present government they would be sent home like bad boys and we should be debarred from giving them any more assistance whatsoever.<sup>108</sup>

Boxshall added the disclaimer that “although the idea of taking over the Anglo-Greek Committee and controlling our guerrilla activities only came at the end of the evening and therefore need not be taken very seriously, I thought I would write you this most personal letter to put you on your guard”.<sup>109</sup> Leeper soon

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<sup>107</sup> 57A, SO to CD, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>108</sup> D/H109 to A/D3, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

proved that the views he expressed had not been made under the influence of wine as he slowly achieved each of the goals mentioned.

Following Leeper's arrival in Cairo, the FO steadily increased its grip on SOE. By the end of March 1943, Keble would be complaining that Orme Sargent had told the king that "British Secret Services were under ZP [FO] and would be".<sup>110</sup> He continued that "it appears to me yet further evidence that ZP have always regretted SOE was not directly under them and that they intended in the future by one means or another to ensure that they had complete control over SOE".<sup>111</sup> With Kanellopoulos already sidelined by the mutiny, Leeper essentially dissolved the Anglo-Greek Committee and took the role of liaising with British intelligence unto him.<sup>112</sup> Keble, writing in April 1943, was fully aware that "SOE have not the confidence of the Foreign Office, and the reason for this is not difficult to find. On its formation, SOE consisted of a number of pseudo and dug-out soldiers and several young, hot-headed and irresponsible politically minded men".<sup>113</sup> He continues to defend his organisation in its current form before concluding that "Mr Leeper may agree with the manner in which SOE have so far conducted resistance in Greece, and may therefore recommend to the Foreign Office that their directives to him are unwise, but it is these constant attempts to impose Foreign Office control on SOE activities which dismays SOE".<sup>114</sup> Clearly, Leeper's arrival in Cairo combined with political developments in Greece ended the short spell of SOE supremacy.

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<sup>110</sup> From D/H366, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1943, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Papastratis. *British policy towards Greece*, p. 133.

<sup>113</sup> SOE Relations with Foreign Office, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1943, 'Greece: Foreign Office Policy and Directives to SOE. National Bands re-instatement. Joint GHQ Composition of June 1943. Merokovo Conference, February 1943 etc. February 1943 to May 1944', HS5/310, TNA, London.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

Concurrently, there was an increase in hostility towards EAM from the British diplomatic establishment. Leeper reported that Myers was told that “it was not the policy of His Majesty’s Government in any way to encourage EAM or the Communists, and that he should on the contrary energetically pursue the policy of disrupting them [EAM] by attracting their adherents into national bands”.<sup>115</sup> It is unclear why the diplomatic establishment was surprised when EAM prevaricated in signing the ‘Natband’ agreement which was specifically designed to weaken it. Yet, Lord Moyne wrote that “it is at present uncertain whether EAM’s intransigence is due to: a) genuine misunderstanding of our intentions for the future of Greece, b) fanatical communism or, c) is the result of Axis penetration into EAM”.<sup>116</sup> On May 31<sup>st</sup> a letter from London to Leeper, reflecting the general hardening of official British attitudes towards EAM, stressed that “I accordingly agree that successful showdown with EAM would now be desirable [...] if they reject the ultimatum, there is a real risk of provoking civil war in Greece, since we should be committed to the support of EDES”.<sup>117</sup>

This shift in mentality is clear in telegrams from and to Greece. In July 1943, SOE telegrams clearly state that “from political viewpoint it is important to preserve PAO [Pan-Hellenic Liberating Organisation, a guerrilla group] both in Salonika as here as administrative side of some value as off set to EAM”.<sup>118</sup> This concern over EAM seems to have reached Selborne who, in a letter to Eden, wrote that:

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<sup>115</sup> From HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to Foreign Office, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>116</sup> From minister of State, Cairo to Foreign Office, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/656, TNA.

<sup>117</sup> From Foreign Office to HM’s Ambassador to Greek Government, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>118</sup> Following from Boodle Number 67, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1943, ‘Resistance Groups and Partisan Forces, Secret Armies (mainly EAM/ELAS), Military activities and political intentions: reports, memoranda, signals, etc, Part 3, November 1943 to December 1943’, HS5/620, TNA, London.

it appears to me to be one thing for SOE to have a surreptitious contact with a ruffian somewhere, who will put a bomb under Hitler's chair, and quite another for British officers in uniform to be attached to organisations who make no disguise of their intention to cut their King's throat as soon as they get a chance [...] When we have done so [driven the Germans out of Greece] we should either have to let down the King or EAM, but in the circumstances I should be prepared to double-cross EAM in this manner.<sup>119</sup>

Of course, Hambro was less than thrilled with this letter which not only discredited the work of his organisation but did so to the Foreign Office. His response to Selborne's letter to Eden closed with "I do not want to worry you over the weekend but I do want to talk to you on Monday so that we can be quite clear as to the attitude we should adopt with the Foreign Office".<sup>120</sup>

In August 1943 an opportunity presented itself to bring delegates from the guerrilla groups to Cairo to discuss future policy. On 9 August, arranged by SOE, a plane landed in Cairo with six representatives of the Greek resistance: four from EAM and one each from EKKKA (Psarros's organisation) and EDES. All the members of this Andarte (guerrilla) delegation stated that the king should not return to Greece after liberation, until a plebiscite had been held deciding his future. Even members of the government-in-exile itself came round to this opinion, while the king remained adamant that he would not agree to any restrictions on his return to Greece. Leeper told one of the members of the Greek government "how would it appear to the United Nations

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<sup>119</sup> From SO to Anthony Eden, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/148, TNA.

<sup>120</sup> From CD to SO, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/148, TNA.

as a whole if the members of the Government chose this moment for forcing on their King a purely domestic issue".<sup>121</sup> Myers recalls that:

from then onwards Leeper's attitude to SOE Cairo and to me personally changed completely from one of cordial cooperation to one of suspicion and unjust accusations. He accused me of bringing out the delegation without any warning and of meddling in political affairs beyond my terms of reference. He accused SOE of following a policy of its own towards Greece which was not in accordance with that of the Foreign Office.<sup>122</sup>

Ultimately, and in the face of an upcoming political crisis, Leeper decided to hastily send back the Greek delegates. He wrote that:

we should send them back now on the ground of having myself the responsibility for these very delicate negotiations with the King and Tsouderos [...] I maintained that a settlement of the crisis here which if not found might lead to the disappearance of any Greek government, was more important to His Majesty's Government than adverse effects in Greece anticipated by SOE.<sup>123</sup>

Sargent condemned Leeper's decision, writing in a minute that "I am afraid this is a bad business and that it was an error of judgement on the part of Mr Leeper to try and send them back to Greece straight away",<sup>124</sup> Leeper had the support of Churchill who, in a telegram to Eden, wrote that "I hold strongly

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<sup>121</sup> From HM's Ambassador to the Greek Government, Cairo to Foreign Office, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1943, 'Politics – General: Foreign Office Communications with Cairo, London (SO) File – Part 1, 1943-1944', HS5/744, TNA, London.

<sup>122</sup> E.C.W. Myers, 'The Andarte Delegation to Cairo: August 1943' in Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg (eds.), *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London, Macmillan, 1975) p. 152.

<sup>123</sup> Richard Clogg, 'Pearls from Swine': The Foreign Office Papers, SOE and the Greek Resistance' in Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg (eds.), *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London, Macmillan, 1975) p. 187.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

that these six men should be sent back to Greece [...] strict control should be kept on SOE".<sup>125</sup>

Within two months of the delegates' return to Greece, civil war broke out. This was not a surprise to Myers, who had written ahead of the visit on July 28 that the authorities in Cairo should "consider whole future of Greece may be bound up with forthcoming visit, but we have it in our power to prevent civil war".<sup>126</sup> EAM accused the British of ill-treating its delegates and of planning to restore the king by force. While Leeper's conduct towards the resistance delegation does not fully conform to the telegram of warning sent by Boxshall to Glenconner five months earlier, the disastrous expulsion of the Greeks does bear an eerie resemblance to its prediction that Leeper would send the Greek delegation home for acting 'like bad boys'.

Glenconner wrote of the meeting that:

it may be it was not fully realised that they would raise the constitutional issue. Here again, I would only say that I am not surprised they did. For they came to discuss the promotion and co-ordination of resistance inside Greece, and the question of the King's return affects this and has been to the forefront ever since he left. You know also my reasons for urging that they should not be sent back against their will. I thought that it would seem to them like they were being turned away because HMG rejected their proposals for the solution of the constitutional issue, the more so as their own government were largely in agreement with them. I thought this would enable them to say that the policy of the British was to re-impose the King.<sup>127</sup>

Apart from further fuelling divisions in Greece, the unsuccessful visit led to sweeping changes within SOE. The failure became the climax of a long

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>126</sup> Myers, 'The Andarte Delegation to Cairo', p. 149.

<sup>127</sup> Greek Constitutional Crisis, 30<sup>th</sup> August 1943, HS5/656, TNA.

campaign that had been launched against Brigadier Myers by the Foreign Office. It had begun as early as March 1943, when Dixon wrote that:

it is intolerable that Colonel Myers, who is specifically stated to have no special knowledge of Greek politics, should have been entering into negotiations destined to bring the various groups together on the basis of a political programme apparently of his own devising. The salient feature of this programme is the holding of a plebiscite at the end of the war. Here then we have the genesis of the plebiscite idea which has been launched at us by SOE and the Minister of State's Office as the sovereign remedy for the internal Greek situation.<sup>128</sup>

Just before the Andarte delegation's trip to Cairo, Myers had indeed strongly voiced his opinion in favour of a plebiscite. He had sent a letter to Cairo that "King prepared make any sacrifices except anything concerning himself. Although not my business as soldier once again strongly recommend sooner King states he will set foot in Greece until asked for by common vote people the better".<sup>129</sup> This was already immediately picked up by the Foreign Office which said that "Myers' statement that the King is not prepared to make any sacrifices concerning himself should obviously be challenged, but more important in our view is his assumption that any action by the King could influence the policy of EAM".<sup>130</sup>

Of course, the plebiscite had not been Myers's idea. While most SOE operatives did adhere to the idea that this was the best solution to the Greek crisis, the idea of the plebiscite had originated with the politicians in Athens,

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<sup>128</sup> C.M Woodhouse, 'Summer 1943: The Critical Months', in Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg (eds.), *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London, Macmillan, 1975) p. 136.

<sup>129</sup> Cypher Telegram from Cairo, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1943, 'Resistance Groups and Partisan Forces, Secret Armies (mainly EAM/ELAS), Military activities and political intentions: reports, memoranda, signals, etc, Part 2, July 1943 to October 1943', HS5/619, TNA, London.

<sup>130</sup> From Foreign Office to HM's Ambassador to Greek Government Cairo, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1943, HS5/744, TNA.

something which had been confirmed by Sphinx during his mission to Athens in the summer of 1942. Furthermore, Pawson later also said that he himself had suggested a plebiscite as far back as 1941.<sup>131</sup>

On 12 May, Leeper wrote to Sargent that Myers "has no political acumen and does not see beyond his nose or, should I say the noses of his guerrillas. He is not astute enough in dealing with EAM and I am sure he exaggerates their political importance".<sup>132</sup> Indeed, in the aftermath of August, Leeper described Myers as:

a complete disaster. He is a man of most upright and obstinate character, which I find very boring as it is quite impossible to penetrate his skull. My blows seem to ricochet off his skull and disappear to somewhere in thin air. [...] he is a very dangerous fool, and being a fanatic for his own ideas, thinking that they provide the only means of winning the war in Greece, he runs around exposing them to all and sundry, British as well as Greeks<sup>133</sup>

Myers responded with a telegram in which he stated that "I am profoundly distressed by the continuous attempts of the British ambassador to Greece to undermine my integrity and finally to use me a scapegoat [...] I shall fight till the end. I shall fight on even if I have to fight alone".<sup>134</sup>

Leeper's view of Myers permeated all the way to the top. In February 1944, Churchill called Myers "the chief man who reared the cockatrice brute of EAM/ELAS".<sup>135</sup> Myers was eventually forbidden from returning to Greece and was replaced as chief of the newly renamed Allied Military Mission by Woodhouse. A report to Hambro stated that "Greek policy has now reached

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<sup>131</sup> Following Woodhouse, Myers and Clogg', p. 265.

<sup>132</sup> Clogg, 'Pearls from Swine', p. 180.

<sup>133</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 310.

<sup>134</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/219, TNA.

<sup>135</sup> Clogg, 'Pearls from Swine', p. 180.

stage where it is quite obvious Myers cannot be employed in Greece again within foreseeable period. Leeper agrees".<sup>136</sup> Selborne defended Myers by sending a letter to the War Office to dispel "the reflections made on him by the Minister of State's memorandum just circulated to the Cabinet by Eden".<sup>137</sup> This did not stop Selborne from referring to Myers a "plaything of the gods' in the fierce struggle between conflicting interests".<sup>138</sup>

Selborne's statement confirms that the clash between Myers and Leeper was more than a personal conflict. It was the result of the systemic hostility between the Foreign Office and SOE, and of the attempts by the former to control the latter. Indeed, there is ample evidence that the Foreign Office was fully aware of Myers's scepticism towards EAM's intentions before the Andarte delegation debacle of August 1943.<sup>139</sup> The interdepartmental nature of this conflict is most clearly illustrated in Sargent's response to Churchill's comments on the "cockatrice brute of EAM/ELAS". He wrote that "the hand that reared the cockatrice was that of SOE who fed it sedulously for two years in spite of our repeated warnings and protests".<sup>140</sup>

In many ways this was the final chapter of the conflict between the Foreign Office and SOE. After the Andarte delegation, the Foreign Office was in a position to re-establish its dominant position, with SOE the clear loser. Within months of the debacle in Cairo, Lord Glenconner, Brigadier Keble, Sir Charles Hambro and Brigadier Myers were all gone from the positions they held. However, the most important consequence of the power struggle between the two was that the Andarte delegation debacle was also one of the leading

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<sup>136</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1944, 'Miscellaneous: London SO File, Part II. August 1943 to September 1945', HS5/749, TNA, London.

<sup>137</sup> SO to AD/S1, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/749, TNA.

<sup>138</sup> SO to Sir James Grigg, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/749, TNA.

<sup>139</sup> Clogg, 'Pearls from Swine', p. 181.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

factors that led to the first serious outbreak of hostilities of the Greek Civil War. Perhaps Woodhouse was not aware of the whole situation when he later said that:

in March 1943 British policy was friendly towards Zervas and hostile towards ELAS; by the end of June it had reached a point of careful balance between being pro-Zervas and pro-ELAS; but by the end the of September it had reverted to the position held in March, of friendliness towards Zervas and hostility towards ELAS, in an even more extreme degree.<sup>141</sup>

Clearly, at no point was there a balance as to the Foreign Office's intentions regarding EAM and Zervas. But Woodhouse was not wrong in that by the end of September the glass had cracked.

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<sup>141</sup> Woodhouse, 'Summer 1943', p. 117.

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## Chapter 6: The Hardening of Attitudes: October 1943 to October 1944.

The autumn of 1943 heralded a new phase in the relationship between the leadership of EAM and the British government. The outbreak of major conflict between the guerrillas of ELAS and EDES led to an almost complete break between the two. However, the British government was aware that a full denunciation of EAM would have disastrous results. Instead, throughout this period, the British dual policy towards EAM was drastically accelerated. Throughout these hostilities, the 'First Round' of the Greek Civil War, the British government assumed a position of implacable institutional hostility towards EAM, even if it could not openly declare it, while unreserved support was given to any organisation that opposed the Greek resistance organisation. This included organisations with suspect relationships to the occupation authorities as well as extremely reactionary politics.

The end of the 'First Round' in February 1944 did not substantially bridge the divide between EAM and the British government. Instead, with the liberation of Greece looming, both found themselves occupied with frenetic planning for the long-awaited day. EAM sought to consolidate its political power in Greece by founding a provisional government in the territories it controlled and neutralising its opponents. ELAS engaged in a particularly brutal campaign against the Security Battalions, Greek armed forces collaborating with the German authorities. At the same time, the British government was trying to ensure the co-operation of the Greek government-in-exile. This tense situation erupted when the Greek Armed Forces in the Middle East, under British command, mutinied against their own government. The suppression of the mutiny, followed by a number of political manoeuvres by Rex Leeper and the Foreign Office, ensured that the Greek government-in-exile and the forces at its command were solidly behind the official British policy. At the same time, British officials and Churchill in particular, went to great

lengths to come to an understanding with the Soviet Union over the future of Greece. This culminated in the Tolstoy Conference in Moscow in October 1944 at which Churchill and Stalin came to terms over the future of Eastern Europe.

Finally, the chapter will examine the case study of Apollo, one of SOE's most successful agents in occupied Greece. His organisation, 'Yvonne', was very active in subversive work in Athens throughout this period and provided SOE Cairo with a wealth of intelligence. Apollo's organisation was also responsible for warning SOE that one of its officers in Greece was attempting to negotiate with the German authorities, which was a disastrous piece of propaganda. However, Apollo never earned the trust of the Foreign Office and the Greek government-in-exile who believed that, because of his republican leanings, Apollo was secretly working with EAM. Eventually, there was a Court of Inquiry into Apollo's conduct during the war which exonerated him but it was too late as lack of British support had accelerated the destruction of 'Yvonne'.

### The 'First Round'

In early October 1943, ELAS began a widespread offensive against rival guerrilla organisations. This was the escalation of a process that had begun a few months earlier when ELAS began to disarm other bands yet again. To this end, it was emboldened by its recent capture of an entire Italian division and all its weapons. Nowhere is this confidence clearer than when Ares Velouchiotes, the most prominent ELAS guerrilla captain, responded to British threats to cut off supplies that “he needs no help from [the] British”.<sup>1</sup> No longer did British threats of excommunication act as enough of a deterrent for EAM. Within British intelligence circles, it was clear that this offensive was not solely an act of aggression by EAM to dominate the resistance. In a MI3b report, the Near East intelligence service of the War Office headed by David Talbot-Rice, it is made clear that:

At the beginning of October, the Germans made approaches to friends of Zervas in Athens, and Rallis (Quisling Premier) alleged that HMG and EDES were ready to co-operate with him against EAM. The EAM leaders, after their experience in Cairo, genuinely, though mistakenly, came to believe this, because the broadcast denial which they had requested was not made. They determined to anticipate hostile action.<sup>2</sup>

SOE forwarded this report, agreeing with it, to the Chiefs of Staff in Cairo with a memo from Pearson stating that “you will note from the attached minute circulated by MI3b that other competent departments are equally sceptical about Mr. Leeper’s appreciation of the position in Greece”.<sup>3</sup> Leeper’s appreciation was supported by the Foreign Office and the objections of the intelligence departments did not deter the diplomatic establishment from deciding that “we should also like to prepare the way for the new policy by

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<sup>1</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1943, HS5/620, TNA.

<sup>2</sup> Int.645/43/M.I.3.b, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/219, TNA.

<sup>3</sup> From D/HV to COS Cairo, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/219, TNA.

shifting responsibility for the civil war from German propaganda to which it has hitherto been attributed and putting it squarely on EAM-ELAS leaders”.<sup>4</sup>

The narrative of choice was clearly that “EAM is communist organisation determined to seize power [...] they also believed Germans were about to evacuate Greece and decided moment was opportune to seize control. When Zervas refused to agree to resist return of King by force they decided to liquidate him”.<sup>5</sup> This policy was pursued as it was believed that it would aid efforts to weaken EAM, whose “rank and file will not be won over unless we launch a powerful campaign to discredit its leaders”.<sup>6</sup> Noel-Baker condemned these attempts and stated that:

there was so little attempt at impartiality that we went so far as to broadcast an open denunciation of the commander of the largest guerrilla organisation in an attempt to seduce the members of that organisation from its leader. This was at a time when no denunciation had yet been made of the Quisling Government.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, there was little willingness on the part of the British government to compromise and negotiate with EAM.

At the same time, the British government was aware that it could not follow through with a full break with EAM. Winston Churchill, in November 1943, stated that:

I do not think it is possible either to take up an openly anti-ELAS attitude or to temporise with ELAS because: a) there are now some eighty British personnel with ELAS units. They are in effect hostages. b) Whatever threats against ELAS we may utter there is

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<sup>4</sup> From Foreign Office to HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government, Cairo, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/219, TNA.

<sup>5</sup> From Mideast to Air Ministry, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/749, TNA.

<sup>6</sup> From Foreign Office to HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government, Cairo, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/219, TNA.

<sup>7</sup> British Policy to Greece, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/221, TNA.

no action which we can take to force them into submission except to bomb them; this we could never do during the war and ELAS know it. c) Temporisation and restriction of supplies to food, medical stores and cloth only will not achieve objective. ELAS are not wholly dependent upon British supplied equipment and will not therefore be either deceived or deterred. They are no more willing to submit to us than they were to the Germans. If we try to oppose them without breaking with them they will break with us. It must also be recognised that EDES could be no substitute for ELAS as a national resistance movement. A declaration of war upon ELAS would therefore lead us into the humiliating position of uttering threats which we, ELAS, and the Germans know cannot be backed by force, and of standing helplessly by while our British Liaison Officers were murdered.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that EDES was no substitute for ELAS as a fighting force was widely accepted within SOE. A report that went through Pearson's desk in London concluded that "it is unlikely if EDES survive we should be able to build them up in time to be equal if not predominant in present ELAS areas".<sup>9</sup> A different report from early October 1943 also stated that:

recent SOE telegrams from Peloponnesus emphasise that only ELAS bands are capable of carrying out military tasks, that they must therefore be supported, though this will mean that other bands are extinguished or absorbed. The Chief British Liaison Officer in this area estimates that it would take three months for other bands such as EDES and EKKA to become effective alternative to ELAS.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, instead of a full break, the British government under a veneer of neutrality immediately stopped sending supplies to ELAS while continuing to unreservedly support EDES. This double standard is apparent in Leeper's telegram to London where he states that:

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<sup>8</sup> Greece, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/219, TNA.

<sup>9</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/219, TNA.

<sup>10</sup> From HM's Ambassador to the Greek Government, Cairo to Foreign Office, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1943, HS5/218, TNA.

our continued support of Zervas seems to me essential as a moral obligation [...] we can always justify support of Zervas as intended for use against the Germans when the time comes to strike. By following tactics proposed you can avoid accusation of taking sides in the civil war in Greece, while neglect of ELAS can be justified on operational grounds.<sup>11</sup>

This unreserved British support for EDES was not without its detractors within SOE. The mildest of SOE criticisms was that Zervas had grown complacent with British support. A BLO reported that “Zervas complacent attitude at ELAS gains disappointing. Believe this due his confidence continue his monopoly supply arms and gold from British”.<sup>12</sup> A different BLO in Macedonia reported back that “I am still seriously worried by the present policy of supporting Zervas at ELAS expense [...] if we are neutral in politics and supporting all Greeks”.<sup>13</sup> Another wrote to Selborne in January 1944 that:

Zervas has, as you know, launched an attack against ELAS [...] Leeper purports to find this a satisfactory development in that it has had a salutary effect on ELAS GHQ ‘thereby improving prospects of the latter coming to terms’. It is difficult to see how Leeper reconciles this view with his expressed desire to stop the civil war. It seems to me that we are merely asking to be accused by ELAS of rank duplicity.<sup>14</sup>

Most other criticisms focused on the collaboration of EDES groups in Athens with the German occupation forces. In November 1943, SOE Cairo received reports that “Rallis government and the EDES are one and the same thing”.<sup>15</sup> This was also known to EAM which sent a telegram to Cairo stating that “we wish to make clear that General Zervas has proved frivolous, unworthy of confidence and harmful to the Allied struggle. EDES organisation

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<sup>11</sup> From HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government, Cairo to Foreign Office, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1943, HS5/220, TNA.

<sup>12</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1943, HS5/620, TNA.

<sup>13</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1943, HS5/620, TNA.

<sup>14</sup> From AD/S1 to SO, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/744, TNA.

<sup>15</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1943, HS5/619, TNA.

has as a leader Voulpiotis, long known as a German spy”.<sup>16</sup> There was little EDES could do to disprove these claims apart from purging members of its Athens groups including men like “the politician Gonatas and the solicitor Stamatopoulos [who] have been removed from our organisation on account of their conduct”.<sup>17</sup> An SOE report stated that “the EDES organisation maintains its contact, through its Athens Committee, with the Quisling Government and with the enemy. The similarity between the Zervas-Rallis-German tie-up in Greece and the Mihailovic-Nedic-German tie-up in Yugoslavia is striking”.<sup>18</sup> Zervas himself seems to have wanted to reach an understanding with the German forces, with a report to Cairo stating that “today they informed us that Zervas has received instructions presumably from you not (repeat not) to proceed with his proposed armistice with the Germans”.<sup>19</sup> This is not to suggest that Zervas himself collaborated with the Axis. But it is hard to understand how, in the face of widely accepted and confirmed EDES collaboration in Athens, the rest of the organisation avoided the stigma of collaboration. Yet even as the evidence mounted, British policy still maintained that Zervas, PAO and other bodies with at best a suspect relationship with the Germans should be supported in the face of EAM.

It should be noted that the motives of Greeks who collaborated with the Axis are outside the scope of this thesis. Whether individuals collaborated with the Germans out of fear of reprisals by EAM or because they genuinely saw in the Germans an ally against communism, remains a complex question that requires a nuanced answer. However, collaboration is important to the study of British attitudes towards EAM because it clearly shows that in the eyes of

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<sup>16</sup> Recent Developments in Athens, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1943, HS5/749, TNA.

<sup>17</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1943, HS5/620, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> Appendix VII, Relations between Zervas, EDES and the Enemy, HS5/619, TNA.

<sup>19</sup> Cipher Telegram to Cairo, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1943, HS5/619, TNA.

Leeper and at least some other Foreign Office officials, collaboration was seen as the lesser of two evils.

A report suggested that SOE should have continued “buttressing up our tottering allies EDES PAO EKKA EOA and risking EAM ELAS hostility. Loyalty and justice demand this”.<sup>20</sup> But PAO and EOA in particular were openly collaborating with the quisling government. On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, a BLO reported to Cairo that EAM claimed that Vretakos, a nationalist guerrilla leader, was “collaborating with Germans”.<sup>21</sup> Within two months, the same BLO writes that “Germans given Vretakos [...] arms to clean up EAM in Laconia area”.<sup>22</sup> Collaboration was also present in Athens and the remnants of the old Brevity Mission in January 1944 cabled Cairo that:

since the end of October a relentless war started against EAM by the police, other organisations, security units and occupation forces. Also through the instigation of my collaborators, three EAM warehouses, containing war material, were confiscated by the police [...] In addition, the police confiscated documents which led to the arrest of numerous communists. It only needs some assistance from here and we shall soon see the end of EAM.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, by the end of the war, the British knew that “our man [from Brevity’s successor organisation] collaborated with the Germans in activities directed against the Communistic element and ingratiated himself into their confidence”.<sup>24</sup> The main enemy in Greece for many people was no longer the Axis.

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<sup>20</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1943, HS5/620, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> Telegrams received from the Field, October 23<sup>rd</sup> from a BLO in Northern Peloponnese, HS5/619, TNA.

<sup>22</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1943, HS5/620, TNA.

<sup>23</sup> From the Leader of the Midas Organisation, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/536, TNA.

<sup>24</sup> German Espionage Service, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1944, HS5/536, TNA.

This was true of the British diplomatic establishment as well. Collaboration with the German occupier seemed to bother Leeper less than association with EAM. Leeper's main objective was that "every effort must be made to prevent EAM becoming paramount in Greece and to assist Zervas to maintain his own position, as he forms part of wider policy envisaged by HM govt".<sup>25</sup> Leeper's view on supporting Zervas prevailed despite objections within SOE. A report by SOE on policy in Greece was critical of this position as it stated that "it cannot be doubted that only unilateral British support has made it possible for the civil war to last so long, and that there is no reason of military expediency to justify according that support to the bands of Colonel Zervas".<sup>26</sup>

Noel-Baker, always critical of Leeper's approach to Greece, scathingly wrote that:

Mr Leeper's letter concludes 'It is clearly desirable that all possible steps should be taken to see that the area does not pass over to the undisputed control of EAM'. If that is in fact the paramount consideration, then of course support must be accorded to PAO on purely political grounds. But in this case there can be no question that the 'Security Battalions' of Colonel Poulos [Greek armed forces working for the quisling government] or indeed the German occupation forces are clearly valuable bulwarks against the EAM.<sup>27</sup>

The enmity between the two men is not surprising. Fully flexing his authority over SOE following the Cairo debacle, Leeper had dismissed Noel-Baker from Cairo for supporting the old SOE policy in Greece. This is confirmed in a letter by David Talbot-Rice to George Taylor stating that Noel-Baker was being

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<sup>25</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1943, HS5/619, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> British Policy to Greece, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/221, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> From D/HT to A/DH, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/221, TNA.

transferred to London because "Mr. Leeper did not approve of his views".<sup>28</sup> By this point the Foreign Office was clearly in control of policy towards Greece and it had decided that the main enemy was EAM and not the Germans.

Perhaps the all-out hostility of British officials towards EAM in this period was only the logical conclusion of Winston Churchill's decision that "EAM and ELAS should be starved and struck at by every means in our power. But I fear these means are small".<sup>29</sup> The means may have been small but they were consistently used. Zervas survived the onslaught of EAM, almost certainly because of the disproportionate amount of British support, and eventually the two sides agreed to an armistice in February 1944 that came to be known as the Plaka Agreement.

The 'First Round' of the Civil War was over. It was a bloody affair that lasted just under four months. The fighting was particularly pronounced in the north west of Greece, Zervas's traditional stronghold, where EDES successfully managed to fend off numerous ELAS offensives. The motives of each side are impossible to determine. What is clear is that the British government, in its pursuit of the policy of supporting the king, undeniably picked a side and ensured that its intelligence and diplomatic apparatus worked in EDES's favour despite its many political and military shortcomings.

#### Political developments after the 'First Round'

The eight months between the Plaka agreement in February of 1944 and the liberation of Greece in October 1944 were particularly tense as a showdown between EAM and the British loomed large. Tensions were reignited when, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1944, EAM established the Political

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<sup>28</sup> From D/H131 to D/HA, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/221, TNA.

<sup>29</sup> Copy of Minute by the Prime Minister, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1943, HS5/219, TNA.

Committee of National Liberation (PEEA) as a new provisional government in the rural Greek areas it controlled. PEEA introduced itself to Cairo with a telegram stating “We have to announce formation in Free Greece of Political Committee of National Liberation with its objects union of national forces for coordination of national liberation struggle by the side of the Allies, administration of areas in Greece already free or being freed”.<sup>30</sup> The idea, according to a memo sent to Selborne, was “to be in a position, if and when the representative comes to Cairo, to bargain with Tsouderos on the basis that the provisional government committee should form part of the Greek government left in the mountains of Greece”.<sup>31</sup> This triggered a crisis in Cairo which culminated in the April Mutiny of 1944.

The Greek government-in-exile had yet again made attempts to bring out politicians from Athens in December 1943 to broaden its political character but had been thwarted when the king refused to appoint a regent until the constitutional question was settled, as politicians in Athens had urged. It is likely that PEEA was founded as a reaction to these attempts at negotiations between the Greek government and the Athenian political parties. This is definitely suggested by a Foreign Office telegram to Leeper on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March, eight days before the founding of PEEA, which warned that “if EAM were to hear that politicians were on their way to Cairo, or had arrived there, would not their first reaction be to set up a Preparatory Governmental Committee with executive powers?”.<sup>32</sup> In any case, soon after its foundation, PEEA reached out to form a government of national unity.

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<sup>30</sup> From HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to Foreign Office, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1944, ‘Politics – General: Foreign Office Communications, London (SO) File – Part II, March 1944 to April 1944’, HS5/745, TNA, London.

<sup>31</sup> From AD/S1 to SO, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1944, HS5/745, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> From Foreign Office to HM’s Ambassador with the Greek Government in Cairo, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1944, HS5/745, TNA.

The king was even less inclined to comply with these suggestions than with those of the Athenian political establishment. In his conversations with Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, it became clear that the king's intransigence was difficult to overcome. The Foreign Office reported these conversations to Leeper, highlighting that the "King complained that he was being pressed to include Communists in his Government. He was not inclined to do so at present [...] above all he deprecated further discussion of his own position and of the Monarchy. The King said he had decided to refuse to sign the Constitutional Act".<sup>33</sup> Leeper replied that "the King of Greece is playing with fire".<sup>34</sup> Churchill supported the king and, as he wrote to Eden, he thought that "the Greek position has got to get worse before it gets better. I do not see how the King can worsen his own position by refusing to sign new documents".<sup>35</sup>

The Greek position did get worse. What had begun on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March as a demand by a small group of officers that the government-in-exile should, in response to PEEA's overtures, form a government of national unity, soon exploded into open revolt.<sup>36</sup> Despite widespread arrests in Cairo, the unrest spread to almost all units of the Greek armed forces in the Middle East, including the Navy, which mutinied and declared in favour of PEEA, but was eventually put down, occasionally with extreme force, by the British and royalist Greek soldiers.

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<sup>33</sup> From Foreign Office to HM's Ambassador with the Greek Government in Cairo, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1944, HS5/745, TNA.

<sup>34</sup> From HM's Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to Foreign Office, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1944, HS5/745, TNA.

<sup>35</sup> From WSC to Foreign Secretary, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1944, PREM 3/211/11, TNA.

<sup>36</sup> L.S. Stavrianos, 'The Mutiny in the Greek Armed Forces, April 1944', *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (December 1950) pp. 307-309.

The Greek army crisis of April 1944 was very important for three reasons. Firstly, it was a catalyst for significant Greek political developments. It resulted in the resignation of Tsouderos as Greek premier and the eventual appointment of George Papandreou in his stead by Rex Leeper. It also set the stage for the Lebanon conference of April 1944 in which, despite the castigation of EAM and ELAS orchestrated by Leeper and the Greek premier, a tentative understanding was reached to form a government of national unity.<sup>37</sup> These orchestrations included requests by Leeper that “the BBC should maintain complete silence on all guerrilla activities until after the conference”.<sup>38</sup> It is also likely that the mutiny, and events surrounding it, further reinforced the widespread impression that the British government meddled substantially in Greek politics while unconditionally supporting the Greek monarchy. This support even included eliminating political opponents of Papandreou such as the Greek magnate Bodossakis Athanassiades who was detained by British authorities after Leeper denounced him to the Foreign Office and Churchill of being the “the evil genius here behind the scenes”.<sup>39</sup>

British involvement in Greek politics continued and in August 1944 the Greek government-in-exile was moved to Salerno. Three Liberal ministers, including Sophocles Venizelos (Eleftherios Venizelos’s son), resigned from the government as the cabinet had not been consulted on the move and were replaced by right-wing populists.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the move seems to have been suggested by Churchill to Papandreou in order to distance the government

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<sup>37</sup> Papastratis, *British policy towards Greece*, pp. 181-186.

<sup>38</sup> From HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to Foreign Office, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1944, ‘Directive concerning BBC references to EAM-ELAS’, PREM 3 213/14, TNA, London.

<sup>39</sup> From HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to Foreign Office, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1944, ‘Appointment of M. Papandreou as Prime Minister’, PREM 3 211/13, TNA, London.

<sup>40</sup> John O. Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, p. 112.

from the intrigues of Cairo.<sup>41</sup> Harold Shantz, American Charge d’Affaires, wrote that:

Mr. Churchill was not unmindful at least of the political desirability from the British standpoint of isolating the Government from political currents in the Middle East and that the move to Italy where the cabinet would be directly under the military aegis might facilitate the execution of some not clearly defined plan he may have to restore King George with the Government at the time of liberation. [...]The present prospect of a government including representatives of neither the Liberal party nor of EAM entering Greece under British auspices and behind British troops cannot be expected to augur well for a peaceful Greek return to normalcy.<sup>42</sup>

The second consequence of the mutiny was that the composition of the Greek army changed radically. British authorities made an example of the mutineers, with many of them being detained long after the liberation of Greece. A year later, on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1945, Eden stated that “there are about 4,000 men still detained as a result of the mutinies”.<sup>43</sup> The treatment of the Greek troops was particularly punitive, including forced marches in the desert heat, and a report on the conditions written by British sources detailed “cages placed in worst part of the ‘cauldron of hell’ [...] Stoppage of food and water [...] denial of access to the Red Cross”.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, as a result of the mutiny, the two existing Greek brigades in the Middle East were disbanded, and only royalists were assigned to their successors, the Greek ‘Mountain Brigade’ and

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Clogg, ‘The Greek Government in Exile, 1941-1944’, *The International History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July, 1979) pp. 377-379.

<sup>42</sup> Harold Shantz to Department, ‘RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1944:800 to 1944: 820’ Box 3, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>43</sup> House of Commons, Detainees (Africa and India), 7<sup>th</sup> March 1945, ‘League for Democracy in Greece (Modern Greek Archive)’, Info Box 1, Kings College London Archives, London.

<sup>44</sup> Analysis of Document Dealing with the Conditions in Concentration Camps in the Middle East and Eritrea where Greek Anti-Fascists are detained, Info Box 1, Kings.

the 'Sacred Band'. These purges meant that, by the end of the war, the Greek army in the Middle East had lost any claim to being an apolitical organisation and was solidly behind the Greek monarchy.

The final consequence of the army mutiny was rising British fear of increased Soviet attention to Greece. This attention included Russian radio broadcasts stating that "the government of Tsouderos, which recently resigned was supported by Fascist elements".<sup>45</sup> Separately, a "Soviet Counsellor spoke in favour of EAM/ELAS and said that Zervas had wrongly provoked civil war and had prevented agreement at recent negotiations on the question of a united command and the appointment of a Political Committee".<sup>46</sup> Novikov, the Soviet ambassador to the Greek government-in-exile, approached Leeper and asked:

why we are arresting so many Greeks [...] he said that there [sic] has been civilian as well as military arrests [...] I pulled him up rather sharply [...] The defence of the Middle East was a British military task and we intended to carry out our responsibility there. I suggested that he should [...] [presumably leave] us to do it.<sup>47</sup>

Soviet interest in Greek political instability clearly worried the British as early as January 1944 when Leeper wrote that "provided they [USSR] are satisfied that our interests there [Greece] are based on strategic grounds and do not conflict with their own and that we are not interfering in Greek affairs on ideological grounds, it is reasonable to suppose that they will not obstruct

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<sup>45</sup> From HM's Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to Foreign Office, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1944, HS5/745, TNA.

<sup>46</sup> From HM's Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to Foreign Office, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1944, HS5/745, TNA.

<sup>47</sup> From HM's Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to Foreign Office, 11<sup>th</sup> April, HS5/745, TNA.

us”.<sup>48</sup> Within SOE there was less certainty that the interference in Greece was not ideological, with a member writing in pencil that this was “exactly what Leeper has not been doing”.<sup>49</sup>

An internal SOE memo in May 1944 is witness to the general unease as it was felt:

that the chances are that the Lebanon Conference will fail. It should therefore be an essential part of our immediate plans for the Foreign Office to secure an agreement from the Russians that they will abstain from interference in Greek affairs [...] I suggest that there may still be time to make a deal with the Russians about Greece in exchange for our gesture concerning Rumania.<sup>50</sup>

A deal was eventually struck on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May by Anthony Eden, much to the chagrin of US Foreign Secretary Cordell Hull.<sup>51</sup> The proposal to the Soviet Union was that “if they wished us to allow them to take the lead in Romania that they should be prepared to reciprocate by allowing His Majesty’s Government to do likewise in Greece”.<sup>52</sup> Roosevelt eventually proposed the establishment of “consultative machinery to dispel misunderstandings and restrain the tendency towards the development of exclusive spheres”.<sup>53</sup> But Roosevelt’s advice was soon forgotten when a Soviet military mission to PEEA, led by Col. Popov, landed in Greece in late July of 1944. A telegram from Talbot-Rice states “Russians gave no notice of proposed mission to HMG which they clearly should have done by terms of alliance – especially in view of

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<sup>48</sup> From HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government, Cairo to Foreign Office, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/221, TNA.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> From A/DH1 to V/CD, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1944, ‘Balkans: SOE/Soviet NKVD Relations in the Balkans. Part 2’, HS5/155, TNA, London.

<sup>51</sup> Papastratis, *British policy towards Greece*, p. 199.

<sup>52</sup> Clogg, ‘Greek Government-in-exile’, p. 397.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph M. Siracusa, ‘The Night Stalin and Churchill Divided Europe: The View from Washington’, *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (July, 1981) pp. 390-391.

unofficial understanding by which we take principal role in Greece and Russians take principal role in Roumania".<sup>54</sup>

British ambitions of keeping the Soviet Union out of Greece were evident to anyone involved with the country, particularly the Americans. The American diplomatic and intelligence missions were painfully aware of British attempts to forge an exclusive zone. They often highlighted these in reports, including smaller acts such as British reports to the Soviets being, according to MacVeagh, "mindful of the destination".<sup>55</sup> Rodney Young of OSS was less diplomatic when referring to the arrival of Popov's mission as he stated that "The British Embassy, Force 133 Cairo [SOE] and the nearest BLO's are flabbergasted and in process of having rows of kittens".<sup>56</sup> Attempts to control Soviet influence in Greece also included keeping the NKVD (Soviet Intelligence) in the dark about Greece because, as stated in an SOE memo on cooperation with their Soviet counterparts, it became clear that "any arrangement with NKVD for a general plan would probably lead to a request for the utilisation of EAM [...] DH/109 [Boxshall] could see no possible way of enlisting the whole-hearted cooperation of NKVD without having to expose our political reservations".<sup>57</sup>

In October 1944, Soviet expansion into the Balkans, including the occupation of Bulgaria by the Red Army, was of great concern to the British

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<sup>54</sup> Cypher Telegram to Force 133, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1944, 'Balkans: SOE/Soviet NKVD relations in the Balkans, January 1944 to June 1945. Part 1' HS5/154, TNA, London.

<sup>55</sup> A Memorandum on the Guerrilla Movement in Greece, January 18<sup>th</sup> 1944, 'RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1944:103.9 to 1944: 715' Box 2, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>56</sup> Letter No. 46, R.S.Y. to Jack Caskey, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1944, 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Field Station Files, Athens OSS', Box 1, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>57</sup> Possibilities of Closer SOE co-operation with NVKD in Middle East, HS5/154, TNA.

government. Just weeks earlier Churchill had informed Stalin that, as a British invasion of Greece was being prepared, the Red Army need not advance any further south.<sup>58</sup> This was accepted by the Soviets who confirmed the arrangement reached by Eden in May 1944 and declared that the Soviets “have no objections to the despatch of a British force to Greece and have no intention of sending Soviet forces into that country”.<sup>59</sup> This despatch of British forces, codenamed ‘Manna’, started on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September with paratroopers and Lord Jellicoe’s Special Boat Service gaining control of the Peloponnese, followed by further paratrooper sorties around Athens with the aim of establishing “public order”.<sup>60</sup>

The British government was still very anxious about Soviet intentions despite their adherence to the May agreement. Churchill decided to travel to Moscow and forge an agreement with Stalin in person. Greece might not have been the only reason for the ‘Tolstoy’ Conference, as it became known, but it definitely was very high on the British agenda. On a stopover in Italy on the way to Moscow, “Colonel Kent [Churchill], accompanied by Mr. Eden and CIGS expect to arrive Pormigliano [sic] Airfield [...] he wishes to discuss with you [General Wilson] the whole situation, and particularly Manna, etc [...] thereafter Colonel Kent would like to see Papandreou for half an hour”.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> P.G.H. Holdich, ‘A Policy of Percentages? British Policy and the Balkans after Moscow Conference of October 1944’, *The International History Review* Vol. 9 (February, 1987) p. 30.

<sup>59</sup> Papastratis, *British policy towards Greece*, p. 200.

<sup>60</sup> Gus Myles, *Επιχείρηση «Μαννα», Η Βρετανική Συμβολή στην απελευθέρωση της Ελλάδας, Σεπτέμβριος- Δεκέμβριος 1944 (Operation Manna: The British Contribution to the Liberation of Greece, September-December 1944)*, trans. (into Greek) Dimitris Mpotsis (Athens, ΑΩ, 2014) p. 59.

<sup>61</sup> From War Cabinet Offices, London to General Wilson, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1944, ‘Special Unnumbered Signals: Operation Tolstoy (Moscow Conference), Visit of the Prime Minister to Moscow and Cairo, October 1944’ CAB 120/864, TNA, London.

The result of the October meeting between the two wartime allies became known as the 'Percentages Agreement' under which Britain would have 90% influence in Greece. During the meeting, Churchill hoped "that Marshal Stalin would let him have the first say in Greece".<sup>62</sup> It seems that the British were willing to sacrifice Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria to achieve this.<sup>63</sup> Eden believed that "we must stake our claim to a predominant position in Greece, but we cannot do this without selling out over Bulgaria".<sup>64</sup> The Soviet Union was fully aware of the importance attributed to Greece by the British and exacted the maximum in its negotiations. A memorandum sent to Molotov by Ivan Maiskii, the Soviet ambassador in London, highlighted that "the USSR is interested in Greece much less than in other Balkan countries, whereas England in contrast, is seriously interested in Greece".<sup>65</sup> It is tragically ironic that the mutiny in April 1944, which was meant to pre-empt any imposition of the Greek monarchy by the British, was one of the sparks that led to Britain establishing absolute diplomatic control over the fate of Greece and the monarchy.

Within Greece itself, the period between the Plaka Agreement and liberation was dominated by preparations made for liberation. The only real SOE activity in this period was Operation 'Noah's Ark' which sought to harass German troops as they attempted to evacuate. This was only a very limited success because British pursuit of guerrilla warfare had mostly come to a close. The Greek Civil War had been a leading factor in this decision, as shown by a report to Churchill in October 1943 which stated that:

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<sup>62</sup> Albert Resis, 'The Churchill-Stalin Secret 'Percentages' Agreement on the Balkans, October 1944', *The American Historical Review* Vol. 83 (April, 1978) p. 372.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.

<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, 'Moscow's Cold War on the Periphery: Soviet Policy in Greece, Iran and Turkey, 1943-8', *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 46 (2011) p. 60.

to stimulate and increase guerrilla effort in Greece and/or Yugoslavia we would have to arm and supply these Left Wing guerrilla forces to an extent that would enable them to dominate their respective countries [...] we should not let up our pressure on the enemy in the Balkans, but we should not increase it in the coming months to any substantial extent by formidable building up of the left wing guerrillas. In the meantime, we should endeavour to build up right wing elements by all means in our power. This policy will contain at least the present German strength.<sup>66</sup>

However, this policy proposal of supporting new right wing groups was flawed in its very inception as was soon argued by members of SOE. A telegram from a BLO to Cairo indicated that “must expect non ELAS org[anisation] concentrate conserving strength and preparing certainty fresh outbreak civil war rather than fighting Huns. Cannot therefore guarantee non ELAS org[anisation] carry out military tasks”.<sup>67</sup> This line of thought was also adopted by Winston Churchill when replying to requests by the Greek government-in-exile for supplies for new guerrilla bands in March 1944. He replied that it was not prudent to create:

new guerrilla bands which in the political field would be opposed to ELAS and EAM. There is first a practical objection. The amount of supplies that can be sent to Greece is limited and barely sufficient to maintain those bands already in the field. In these circumstances the creation of new bands even if possible would not increase the guerrilla effort against the Germans but merely provide idle hands and mischievous minds with opportunities for stirring up fresh civil strife.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> For Prime Minister from Minister of State, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1943, HS5/148, TNA.

<sup>67</sup> Cipher Telegram from Cairo, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1943, ‘Greece: Political including, Civil War – Mr. Leeper’s tel. of 2.11.43, Extract (28.10.43) from “The Washington Post” on the Greek Civil War’, HS5/423, TNA, London.

<sup>68</sup> To the Greek President of the Council from the Prime Minister, March 1944, ‘Policy Towards EAM-ELAS’, PREM 3/211/10, TNA, London.

British planners had decided that waiting and maintaining the *status quo* was the best solution.

This policy of waiting was also very evident in the policy of the Greek government-in-exile and of British authorities towards the Security Battalions of the Rallis collaborationist government. The Battalions had been founded in the summer of 1943 and, according to an SOE report:

have been armed by the Germans with rifles, revolvers, hand-grenades and a small proportion of light automatics [...] they are being used to make arrests, to undertake interrogations, to carry out mass executions of hostages and otherwise to terrorise the population.<sup>69</sup>

Throughout 1944 and especially as liberation loomed nearer, EAM and the Battalions had a number of brutal skirmishes and battles, such as the one at Meligalas in the Peloponnese in September 1944. But the Greek government-in-exile only officially publicly denounced the Battalions in September 1944,<sup>70</sup> i.e. more than a year after their foundation and merely a month before liberation. This is partly because within British circles the opinion was held that the Battalions were a lesser evil than EAM. Tom Barnes, the BLO stationed with Zervas, reported that “although they [Battalions] are admittedly doing the work of the Germans, I think we should avoid publicly denouncing them in such terms that the way to later reconciliation is irrevocably closed”.<sup>71</sup> A different report stated that, in the case of future hostilities with ELAS, the “Security Battalions cannot be used as such but they contain a large pro-British (but anti-ELAS) element which could possibly be taken into the locally

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<sup>69</sup> The Problem of the Security Battalions, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1944, ‘Resistance Groups and Partisan Forces, Secret Armies (mainly EAM/ELAS), Military activities and political intentions: reports, memoranda, signals, etc, Part 4, 1944, HS5/621, TNA, London.

<sup>70</sup> Stathis Kalyvas, ‘Armed Collaboration in Greece, 1941-1944’, *European Review of History* Vol. 15, No. 2 (April, 2008) p. 135.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

recruited Gendarmerie".<sup>72</sup> However, this is not to say that this view was endorsed by everyone. A report to Colin Gubbins, the new SOE chief, disparaged these views and mocked them by saying:

EAM are so horrible that all the nice Greeks and Royalists have to join the Security Battalions, which receive plenty of arms from the Germans. Here lie the seeds of civil war after the liberation. As we don't send many arms to EAM the Security Battalions will be much stronger and will easily win the civil war, which would put all the nice, right-minded Greeks on top and cause all the horrid Communists to fade out and disappear.<sup>73</sup>

Again, the motives of the men enlisting in the Battalions and their justification for doing so, are outside the scope of this dissertation. What is important is that, during the German occupation, British intelligence and diplomatic officials saw soldiers who actively collaborated with the Germans as the lesser of two evils and even saw them as a counterweight to a resistance organisation.

The main two crises of this period within occupied Greece were the dissolution of EKKA and the attempts by PEEA to negotiate a new settlement with the Greek government-in-exile in July 1944. In April 1944, a few days before the Lebanon Conference, Ares Velouchiotes, the guerrilla captain of ELAS, attacked and brutally disbanded the small guerrilla band of EKKA under the command of Colonel Dimitrios Psarros. The subsequent execution of Psarros formed the basis of many verbal attacks against EAM/ELAS at the Lebanon conference and was often used as evidence of EAM's intention to monopolise the resistance. Ares's attack on EKKA is particularly inexplicable. EKKA, and Psarros, were very much on the left wing of the Venizelists and were committed opponents of the return of the king. Indeed, British fears had

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<sup>72</sup> Suggested Plan for the Prevention of the Seizure of Power by EAM/ELAS in Greece at the termination of the Axis Occupation, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1944, HS5/621, TNA.

<sup>73</sup> From V/CD to CD, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1944, HS5/621, TNA.

always been that Psarros, like Sarafis earlier, would willingly collaborate with ELAS. This violation of the Plaka agreement cost EAM significant political capital just as it was about to embark on negotiations in Lebanon.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, Psarros and Sarafis had been close friends for many decades and Psarros's murder had infuriated the ELAS commander-in-chief. He requested a full inquiry into the murder but was soon sidetracked by his responsibilities as a delegate to the Lebanon conference.<sup>75</sup> In any case, the dissolution of the EKKA guerrillas became a particular black mark on EAM.

In July 1944, PEEA cabled Cairo seeking renegotiation on a number of issues including a reshuffle of the Greek cabinet, public denunciation of the Security Battalions by the government-in-exile and the British, cessation of an offensive initiated by Zervas against ELAS troops and the commutation of death penalties for the April 1944 mutiny ringleaders.<sup>76</sup> In response, the Greek government-in-exile and the British deliberated once again a full break with EAM. Woodhouse was instrumental in preventing this, as he spoke with Churchill and "argued that our Missions had a valuable restraining effect on EAM. He also saw danger and difficulties in their withdrawal [...] I agree with much regret that the Missions should stay for the present, but I trust they will be gradually allowed to fall in numbers".<sup>77</sup> Selborne also wrote that:

I do not think the Foreign Secretary realises how much the ELAS rank and file dare doing to damage the Germans in Greece. I attach a list of what has recently been accomplished which is not inconsiderable [...] it must not be thought that those who control EAM/ELAS like having the Allied Missions in the country. The

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<sup>74</sup> David H. Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War*, new edn. (Oxford, Routledge, 2013) pp. 109-113.

<sup>75</sup> Sarafis, *ELAS*, p. 280.

<sup>76</sup> Papastratis, *British policy towards Greece*, p. 189.

<sup>77</sup> WSC to Foreign Secretary, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1944, 'Policy towards Greek Government and EAM', PREM 3/212/1, TNA, London.

withdrawal of the Missions would not be punishment for EAM/ELAS but a cause for them to rejoice.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, Eden was also aware of the difficulties of a complete break with EAM, warning Churchill that “we shall have to convince the Chiefs of Staff of the necessity, and our socialist colleagues in the War Cabinet also”.<sup>79</sup> Ultimately, the decision was made to restrict supplies further to EAM but not to force a complete break.

Finally, as preparation for the liberation of Greece, there was a flurry of activity within SOE. Most important was the development of a plan by J.M. Stevens, Pirie’s replacement as head of the Greek Section of Cairo SOE, detailing how “to prevent EAM/ELAS seizing power at the termination the Axis occupation”.<sup>80</sup> It surmised that the time factor “is all important. Unless action can be taken at once, so that EAM/ELAS are forestalled, the problem will become one of dislodging them by force, i.e. British troops will be taking part in a civil war of a friendly power with all its inherent complications”.<sup>81</sup> Eden concurred, writing to Churchill that:

speed is essential. I think we should aim at getting the first units in within 48 hours of the Germans leaving. Colonel Woodhouse, as you know, shares my view that the prompt despatch of a British force to Greece is an essential part of our policy [...] I also think it is most important that troops should be earmarked in advance.<sup>82</sup>

Some of the plans suggested or considered by SOE were significantly less concerned with being ready to enter Greece and more with limiting the

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<sup>78</sup> From Selborne to Prime Minister, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1944, PREM 3/212/1, TNA.

<sup>79</sup> Anthony Eden to Prime Minister, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1944, PREM 3/212/1, TNA.

<sup>80</sup> Suggested Plan for the Prevention of the Seizure of Power by EAM/ELAS in Greece at the termination of the Axis Occupation, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1944, HS5/621, TNA.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Eden to Prime Minister, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1944, PREM 3/212/1, TNA.

ability of their opponents to stop them. Indicatively, a memo from Talbot-Rice suggested that:

all are agreed on the character of Ares. It would almost seem that the most drastic SOE methods should be undertaken to remove him from the scene of action. If this could be done I am sure that the Greek question would be considerably simplified. Would you perhaps agree to take this up with CD.<sup>83</sup>

Apart from presumably mooted the assassination of Ares, elements within SOE submitted a plan for the “subversion of ELAS”.<sup>84</sup> Subverting ELAS was presented as an “attempt to avoid civil strife and facilitate the return of the legal government [and] would at the best facilitate the task of the British forces and at the worst attempt to maintain order in Greece without it”.<sup>85</sup> The plan was strongly rejected by SOE. Indeed, Talbot-Rice would write that “Dolbey [the author of the plan] is getting too subversive minded! He will be a menace after the war, when there are no German forces against which his efforts can be concentrated”.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, this perhaps indicates that, as liberation approached, even members of SOE began to consider EAM as not merely a nuisance but an active enemy.

In the run up to liberation in October 1944, the situation became particularly tense, especially as events in the Middle East seemed like ill omens of what was to come. Nonetheless this was a period in which both sides were preparing for the anticipated liberation in an attempt to be able to consolidate as much power as possible. In the end, all of the preparations proved to have been superfluous as EAM did nothing to prevent the arrival of the British

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<sup>83</sup> From D/HT to AD/H, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1944, HS5/621, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> Subversion of ELAS Units, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1944, ‘Greece: Suggested Scheme for the Subversion of ELAS Units, May/June 1944’, HS5/476, TNA, London.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> From G (SO) to AD/H, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1944, HS5/621, TNA.

forces and the Greek government-in-exile. However, this was to prove only the calm before the storm.

These years, between the establishment of the men of operation 'Harling' as the British Military Mission to Greece and the liberation of the country in October 1944, are defined by British attempts to monopolise control. Most importantly, the British clashed with EAM for control of the resistance movement. In this, they failed. They failed because, as was put by an OSS report, "it soon became apparent that the Allies were more dependent upon the EAM (for access to Greece and Greek intelligence) than the EAM, strengthened by the seizure of Italian military stores, was upon the Allies".<sup>87</sup> The British government and SOE were both well aware that they were unable to fully tame the Greek organisation. Instead, they began a dual policy of maintaining contact with EAM while disproportionately supporting its rivals. This policy exacerbated the enmity between the two, as EAM became suspicious of British intentions, and created hostile conditions in Greece. The resistance was now trapped between two powerful poles which stifled those who sought to remain outside of their conflict.

The British government, spearheaded by the recently arrived Rex Leeper and taking advantage of the fall of Kanellopoulos, did manage to take control of the Greek government-in-exile. This involved supporting the royalist Greek government, despite calls from the politicians in Athens, EAM, the armed forces and the Greek diaspora to broaden its political character. Perhaps, this was because the Foreign Office was wary of allowing non-royalists into the Greek government. A letter from Cadogan to the State Department said that such a government "on returning to Greece would be more than human if they

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<sup>87</sup> Allied Policy and the Greek Resistance, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1944, 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Field Station Files, Athens OSS', Box 5, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

did not attempt to influence opinion in favour of a Republic".<sup>88</sup> What followed was the eventual sidelining of the Venizelist Liberal Party, which was achieved not only by eliminating Papandreou's political rivals during the Lebanon Conference, an event heavily orchestrated by Leeper, but also by alienating Sophocles Venizelos during the sudden move to Salerno. This involvement, coupled with British involvement in the reorganisation of the Greek army in the Middle East following the April mutiny, meant that upon liberation the Greek government and army had become vehicles for British interests and the Greek monarchy.

Finally, the British also sought to exclude Russia from Greece. Eventually, Churchill and Stalin did reach a political agreement over Greece in October 1944 but this did not fully assuage British worry over the fate of the Eastern Mediterranean. Overall, the British fought for control of Greece with EAM, the more liberal elements of the Greek government-in-exile, and the Soviets. They succeeded in two of those fronts. However, their failure in the first of these would have disastrous consequences for all concerned.

### Apollo

Apollo was the codename of the Greek lawyer and army officer Ioannis Peltekis. Apollo and his organisation, Yvonne, began operating out of Athens in early 1943. He had been recruited by David Pawson, the SOE handler of Prometheus II and Odysseus, in Turkey while Peltekis was making his way to join the Greek army in the Middle East. His first mission was to return to Athens and rescue Prometheus II who had been captured there in February 1943. The latter's arrest, and the earlier death of Colonel Tsigantes of the

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<sup>88</sup> Handed by Sir Alexander Cadogan, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1943, 'RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1943:103.9 to 1943: 863.6', Box 1, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

Thurgoland mission in January 1943, meant that, according to SOE officer Dolbey, "SOE work in the Athens area was practically at a standstill".<sup>89</sup> Apollo succeeded in his mission and Prometheus II was sprung from prison. Once out, Prometheus II vouched for the continued service of Apollo. Pawson let Pirie in Cairo know that "Prometheus two absolutely confident Apollo is a free agent".<sup>90</sup> This was the beginning of a very fruitful relationship between SOE and Apollo. His network is a great case study of an urban resistance organisation. As mentioned above, these organisations were, and often still are, overshadowed by EAM and EDES.

Apollo is also important for another reason. By the end of the war, he was stuck in the middle of two conflicts, that between the British and EAM and that between the Foreign Office and SOE. Apollo had begun his association with SOE at a time when the war effort was more important than politics. While he maintained this attitude throughout, his British collaborators did not.

After orchestrating the escape of Prometheus II, Apollo stayed in Athens and began organising his network. According to Dolbey:

by the middle of June he appeared to have developed a good intelligence network and a sabotage organisation [...] Apollo sent in a steady stream of extremely useful intelligence, including movements of shipping in the Piraeus, the number and types of aircraft identified at aerodromes on Attica, military intelligence on the movement of troops, information with regard to fortifications and information of importance to British counter-espionage.<sup>91</sup>

His sabotage record is no less impressive. In a report commending his services during the war to the Greek Ministry of War in 1945, SOE reported that

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<sup>89</sup> Statement by Lt. Colonel J.A. Dolbey, October 1944, 'Apollo: Court of Enquiry Proceedings', HS7/156, TNA, London.

<sup>90</sup> Cipher Telegram from Izmir, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1943, HS5/533, TNA.

<sup>91</sup> Statement by Lt. Colonel J.A. Dolbey, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

between June 1943 and September 1944 Apollo orchestrated an impressive number of operations. These included:

A) 58 ships sabotaged (approx. 56,000 tons) of which 16, (approx. 16,000 tons) completely destroyed, with over 100 German casualties. B) Ammunition dumps blown up at Leros island and Hasani (840 cases of explosives earmarked for the demolitions in Athens-Piraeus area). C) At least 27 locomotives destroyed and one complete train carrying oil and ammunition blown up in a tunnel.<sup>92</sup>

Additionally, Dolbey stated that “Apollo engineered the escape to the ME of numerous persons by a successful escape route. The list of such persons includes over 100 names”.<sup>93</sup> In the vacuum left by the dismantling of the networks of Prometheus II and ‘Thurgoland’, Apollo managed to establish Yvonne as the pre-eminent intelligence network in Athens.

The intelligence acquired by Apollo and his network on German activities was particularly impressive and not restricted solely to matters concerning Greece. Cairo, and Pawson in particular, recognised the quality of Apollo’s work with Pawson writing to Apollo that “in particular your information regarding enemy agents and their activity is very accurate. Information about conditions and events outside Greece is not so accurate but is obviously of immense value as it represents what Axis personnel in Greece are thinking”.<sup>94</sup> With Pawson’s disclaimer in mind, it is interesting to note that Apollo did manage to report on the development of Germany’s V-class weapons. In December 1943, he reported to SOE in Smyrna that (translated from Greek) “all Germans truly expect a new weapon with a clearly anti-English operation [...] Rumours of this new weapon include a torpedo [archaic,

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<sup>92</sup> Confidential Report to Greek War Ministry, 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1945, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum, Athens.

<sup>93</sup> Statement by Lt. Colonel J.A. Dolbey, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>94</sup> Message No. 35 from Smyrna, 1943, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

likely means rocket] of 12 tons [...] Third [rumour], splitting the atom”.<sup>95</sup> Of course, British intelligence services had been aware of German attempts to develop nuclear weapons before this, as the Telemark raids had taken place months before this telegram, but the reported specifications of the ‘torpedo’ most likely indicate oblique knowledge of the V1 and V2 rocket systems. Further evidence of Apollo’s knowledge of the V2 appeared in July 1944 when Apollo wrote to SOE that “second weapon is like first but stronger explosives stp. These will have effect on population like gas as [sic] phosphorus though they will not be gas”.<sup>96</sup>

Intelligence provided by Yvonne during the run up to liberation was particularly concerned with German efforts to build a rapprochement with the British by creating a division between the Soviet Union and Britain. As early as January 1944, Apollo reported on the split inside Greece between Walter Blume of the German Security apparatus and Hermann Neubacher of the German Foreign Ministry. Blume was a proponent of the ‘Chaos Thesis’, according to which every pro-British member of the political elite would have been executed, while Neubacher, who eventually prevailed, thought that these were the people who should be used to fight EAM. Neubacher’s victory over Blume meant that the political elite of Athens, vehemently anti-EAM and pro-British, would survive the Axis occupation.<sup>97</sup> Apollo reported that (trans.) “message of Greek unification, our 38 sent to Smyrna, is from Neubacher Werhmacht [sic] [...] so that the Reich will be recognised by the people as a

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<sup>95</sup> Original text: άπαντες γερμανοί αναμένουν τα πάντα μέ πιστιν από νέον όπλον καθαρώς αντιαγγλικής δράσεως [...] θρύλοι περι νέον όπλον πρώτον τορπίλλη δώδκα τόνων[...] τρίτον διάσπασις μορίου, Message No 37 to Cairo, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1943, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>96</sup> Message No. 184 to Smyrna, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>97</sup> Mark Mazower, ‘The Cold War and the Appropriation of Memory: Greece after Liberation’ in István Deák, Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt (eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 213.

‘champion’ of order and interests”.<sup>98</sup> After the end of the war Neubacher told the American Harry N. Howard of the State Department, that in this period:

German forces were attempting to get into touch with General Scobie, in command of British forces. The purpose of this move was to make an arrangement for the disposition of German troops both in Greece and Albania. According to Neubacher, he was the only German in the Balkan region with whom Scobie would deal, and Scobie hoped that the German army would preserve order until the British arrived to ship the Germans off as prisoners of war. In this way, according to German thinking, order would be preserved in Greece, and the danger of ‘anarchy’ and the establishment of ‘soviet republics’ in Greece and Albania might be avoided.<sup>99</sup>

There were consistent overtures of friendship from the Germans to the British throughout this period, on the basis of a supposed common anti-communist attitude.

In August 1944, messages to Apollo from his handler indicate that the Germans once again attempted to negotiate but “only grounds for meeting Arthur Seits would be to discuss detail surrender German troops Greece stp. German reaction may be genuine effort extricate themselves stp. More probable however this effort find out future intentions or drive wedge between ourselves – allies or discredit us in eyes Greeks”.<sup>100</sup> Apollo responded that “Seits was of opinion we will get no answer from you [...] [trans.] other English service intimately involved stp Yvonne keeping contact third person avoiding being

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<sup>98</sup> Original text: Σύνθημα ενώσεως Ελλήνων our 38 εις Σμύρνη οφειλεται Neubacher Wehrmacht [...] ώστε αναγνωριστή Ραϊχ από λαούς ως champion τάξεως και συμφερόντων, Message No. 18 to Cairo, 28<sup>th</sup> January, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>99</sup> Greece and the Axis During World War II, ‘Papers of Harry N. Howard: General File Eu-Gr’, Box No. 2, Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>100</sup> Message No. 92 from Smyrna, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

involved”.<sup>101</sup> In September 1944, Yvonne reported that “From German source [...] They intend provoke attack of Russian troop from Bulgaria stop With expected invasion British forces Greece they still hope complications might arrive between allies through interference of one in supposed influence zone of the other”.<sup>102</sup> This telegram may also indicate that the Germans were not so naïve as to consider that ideology alone would create a rift between the two allies.

A later telegram stated that “Germans still hope war British versus Russias [sic] stop. They cannot explain why allowed evacuate islands and south Greece”<sup>103</sup> In his statement to Howard after the war, Neubacher had an explanation for this, telling Howard that “the ‘German withdrawal’ from Greece was carried through ‘without irritation’ and with all appropriate ceremony. The Greeks were glad to see the Germans go and happy to welcome the British forces. At best, Neubacher felt that the Germans ‘had ended their occupation much better than they had begun it’”.<sup>104</sup> Of course, it is not surprising that Neubacher, talking here after the war, sought to portray himself primarily as an anti-communist. This was a common tactic, also used (often successfully) by many of the Greek collaborationists to shirk off responsibility for the atrocities committed in Greece in the last months of the German occupation.<sup>105</sup> However, Apollo’s intelligence on German activities also had the result of landing him square in the middle of the political turmoil wracking Greece.

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<sup>101</sup> Original Text: *ετέρα Αγγλική υπηρεσία αναμειγνύεται ενεργώς*, Message No. 212, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>102</sup> Message No. 286 to Smyrna, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>103</sup> Message No. 298 to Smyrna, September 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>104</sup> Greece and the Axis During World War II, ‘Papers of Harry N. Howard’, Truman Library.

<sup>105</sup> Mazower ‘The Cold War and the Appropriation of Memory’, p. 213-214.

One of the Yvonne organisation's most prominent successes was the discovery that most of EDES in Athens had begun collaborating with the Germans in November 1943. The implications of the collaboration of sections of EDES have been addressed earlier in this chapter. Telegrams from Athens mention how a minority of EDES members in Athens had refused to collaborate with the German authorities and how, as a result, one of the leaders of these dissenters had been murdered by the Greek gendarmerie. Yvonne reported that (trans.) "EDES officially equipped by the Germans in Athens and soon Vretakos and his anti-EAM group equipped by the Germans is being sent to the Peloponnese. EDES claims to be British but equipped and funded by the Germans".<sup>106</sup> Apollo warned Cairo that (trans.):

the Communist are being strengthened by the mistakes of their opponents. The popular movement of EAM needs to be split from its useless or communist leadership and the liberation can do that if the populace isn't fanaticised by then as a reaction against the alliance of Quislings and the EDES fascists.<sup>107</sup>

As a result of this collaboration, in November 1943 Athens seems to have been the stage for what Apollo referred to as a "miniature [Rudolf] Hess rpt Hess affair".<sup>108</sup> Namely, it seems to have hosted an attempt at Anglo-German rapprochement.

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<sup>106</sup> Original text: ΕΔΕΣ οπλίζεται επισήμως υπό Γερμανών Αθήνας και Πελοπόννησον προσεχώς αποστέλλεται Βρετάκος αντιστατική ομάδα ανταρτών εξοπλισθείσα ήδη υπό γερμανών. ΕΔΕΣ επικαλείται Αγγλίαν άλλ'εξοπλίζεται χρηματοδοτείται υπό γερμανών, Message No. 174 to Smyrna, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1943, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>107</sup> Original text: Κομμουνισταί ενισχύονται λάθη αντιπάλων. Πρέπει διακριθή λαϊκόν κίνημα ΕΑΜ από ανικάνους ή κομμουνιστάς ηγέτας αυτού απελευθέρωσις θά φέρη διαχωρισμόν αυτών εφ'όσον πλήθη δέν φανατισθούν εξ αντιδράσεως έναντι μετώπου Κουϊσλικ φασιστών ΕΔΕΣ, Message No. 135 to Smyrna, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1943, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>108</sup> Message No. 177 to Smyrna, 22<sup>nd</sup> November, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

Donald Stott was a member of SOE who had been involved in a number of sabotage operations in Greece, most notably the destruction of the Asopos viaduct during Operation 'Animals'. In November 1943, through his connections with EDES, Stott was introduced by the collaborationist mayor of Athens to German negotiators. According to a report on this to SOE Smyrna, Apollo thought that the aim of the meetings was to create (trans.) "an Anglo-Germanic anticommunist organisation".<sup>109</sup> Knowledge of these meetings caused unease in the command of SOE which realised their implications. Pawson signalled Apollo to tell Stott to return to Cairo immediately and that Apollo should "not get involved in Don's negotiations".<sup>110</sup>

On his return to Cairo, Stott reported that he had discussed with the Germans an armistice and the creation of a "common front against communism [...] whether, with German permission, he [Stott] could bring British arms into the country and heavily equip the Nationalists in order to clear out the communist bands".<sup>111</sup> Stott later argued that he had attended these meetings in order to gauge the extent of German penetration of nationalist bands and maintained that he had done nothing wrong. Even his interrogating officer, a member of SIME (MI5 in the Middle East), stated that Stott "felt he was getting a raw deal at the hands of his superiors".<sup>112</sup> Ultimately, it was concluded within SOE that Stott's German interlocutor "must have originally thought he had a larger fish in his net than he actually

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<sup>109</sup> Original text: Αγγλογερμανική οργάνωσις αντικομμουνιστικού αγώνος, Message No. 10 to Cairo, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1943, Peltekis Archive Benaki Museum.

<sup>110</sup> Message No. 125 from Smyrna, November 1943, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>111</sup> SIME Report No.6 Summary No. 1: Captain Donald Stott, 'Donald Stott. An SOE Officer who in 1943 was a member of the British military mission in Greece, Stott was approached by an intermediary with so-called peace proposals on behalf of the Germans', KV2/3032, TNA, London.

<sup>112</sup> SIME Report No. 5, Donald Stott, 'Greece: Captain R.J. Stott @ Weazel, Negotiations with Germans in Athens', 'Greece: Stott, Captain R.J. @ Weazel, Negotiations with Germans in Athens. October 1943 to February 1944', HS5/535, TNA, London.

had, and that when he discovered a sardine he managed to extract the maximum value from it. The value was to discredit us with the EAM".<sup>113</sup>

As predicted, reports of Stott's meetings with the Germans in Athens did not take long to reach EAM. Unsurprisingly, EAM was livid with Stott and the British. Whether or not the EAM leadership believed that the British were actually negotiating with the Germans is unclear. What is undeniable though is that this information provided easy pickings for EAM to demonstrate to its membership the duplicity of the British mission to Greece. Apollo, also recognising this, warned SOE that:

Don has tightened up relations of nationalist organisations with the Germans [...] please consider if you should be party to the abuse of British prestige which is being made for internal consumption [...] armed attacks are daily being made by mixed bands of Gestapo, Gendarmerie and officers against EAM. This situation condemns EAM from now to the position of an outlaw when the Allies arrive and hardens opinions and actions.<sup>114</sup>

Despite these facts, the official SIME inquiry into the Stott affair concluded that:

having taken this step and opened negotiations, he appears to have conducted himself properly and with the full consciousness of his responsibilities to his uniform and rank. [...] There can be little doubt that he exceeded his duty in voicing anti-communist sympathies to the PAS and on one occasion to the Germans. But it must not be forgotten that his contacts with EAM had not been uniformly successful [...] But if there are organisations of the Right controlled or influenced by the Germans, and thus not purely Greek in aspiration, it must not be forgotten that EAM on the left is under the direct influence of Moscow and cannot be regarded either as a purely Greek party.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> From AD/H to K/POL, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/535, TNA.

<sup>114</sup> From Yvonne via Smyrna, HS5/535, TNA.

<sup>115</sup> Appendix to Report, KV2/3032, TNA.

It is worth emphasising here that a British agent who, of his own accord, initiated contact with the occupation authorities to sign an armistice allowing for a co-ordinated attack on EAM through an Anglo-German understanding, was simply reprimanded for having voiced his opinion a bit more freely than appropriate. This is perhaps the most baffling element of the Stott affair. The substance of Stott's meetings with the Germans is almost unimportant. As agreed by most officials on the case, Stott (who like many of his contemporaries in SOE was there on a sabotage brief) was duped by a highly intelligent and methodical German counter-intelligence apparatus. What is problematic in the Stott affair is the lack of any sort of true condemnation of this behaviour upon Stott's return to Cairo. The inquiry's result also indicates that, for some British officers assigned to Greek matters, there was moral equivalence between the Gestapo's collaboration with, and penetration of, rightwing groups in Greece and the influence of the Soviet Union, nominally Britain's ally in the war against fascism, on a resistance organisation fighting the Nazis. The conclusion that association with the Soviet Union was considered by these officers equally as damning as collaboration with Nazi Germany perhaps indicates that the hostility of the British establishment towards EAM was not just due to attempts by the latter to monopolise the resistance.

Apollo's views on EAM are also particularly interesting and relevant here. On numerous occasions, Apollo sent messages to Cairo stressing his concerns about the organisation. When EAM agreed to the 'Natband' proposals, Apollo warned SOE that Myers was being misled "to the disadvantage of nation's union".<sup>116</sup> Before the Andarte delegation's arrival in Cairo he had warned that one of the delegates and founder of EAM,

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<sup>116</sup> Message No. 49 to Smyrna, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1943, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

Tsirimokos, was the “bourgeois facade of EAM”.<sup>117</sup> During the Civil War he wrote to Smyrna that (trans.):

I understand that GHQME continues to consider EAM as mutineers [...] EAM is informed of Zervas regrouping and the continuous reinforcement of Psarros and it creates a deep-seated turmoil which is exacerbated by the refusal of the old politicians to communicate with EAM because of English attitudes towards it and the activities of Don. EAM is governed stupidly but it is the only popular movement.<sup>118</sup>

This in many ways echoes the views of many SOE officials on EAM. Apollo had great regard for its rank and file while disparaging its leadership which he perceived as an enemy of the Greek resistance. He offered to negotiate with EAM on behalf of the British but received a reply not to meddle in politics because “in the past we [SOE] were accused of meddling in politics and of being partly responsible present strife. We must therefore concentrate only on attacking enemy by all means”.<sup>119</sup> Apollo even warned the British in February 1944 that they should support the Greek government because as liberation approached EAM could create, as they did with PEEA, a “gouvernement montagne”.<sup>120</sup> However, despite having been warned by SOE to avoid meddling in politics, Apollo was soon accused by the Foreign Office of being an EAM double agent.

The accusations against Apollo by the Foreign Office eventually led to a Court of Inquiry being convened in Cairo during September 1944, just before

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<sup>117</sup> Message No. 51 to Smyrna, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1943, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>118</sup> Original text: αντιλαμβάνομαι ότι GHQME εξακολουθεί θεωρεί ομάδα ΕΛΑΣ ως στασιστάς [...] ΕΑΜ πληροφορείται ανασυγκρότηση Ζέρβα διαρκή ενίσχυση Ψαρού και δημιουργείται σφοδρός αναβρασμός εντινόμενος από άρνηση παλαιών κομμάτων συνεννοηθούν ΕΑΜ κατόπιν Αγγλικής στάσεως προς αυτό και δράσεως Ντόν. ΕΑΜ διοικείται βλακοδώς άλλ'αποτελεί πάντως τό μόνον λαϊκόν κίνημα, Message No. 187, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1943, Peltekis archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>119</sup> Signal No. 191 from Smyrna, 13<sup>th</sup> January, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

<sup>120</sup> Message No. 41, February 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

liberation, in which Apollo had to defend himself against them. It is unclear what evidence the Foreign Office presented to back these accusations. SOE's Dolbey, a witness for Apollo's defence, stated that Apollo had been accused by Ellis Waterhouse of the Foreign Office of being a "Russian agent"; a 'double-crosser'; a 'double-agent'; a 'card-sharper'; a 'member of EAM', etc".<sup>121</sup> This view was also held, according to Major Matthews of SOE, by Tsouderos and Leeper. Matthews' statement indicated that:

Tsouderos had said that he had some misgivings about Peltekis' employment. I think the misgivings were that Apollo was out of sympathy with Mr Tsouderos' government [...] I did not dispute that Apollo might be hostile to Mr Tsouderos' government but that many other like him were being employed [...] Mr Leeper referred to the feelings of Mr Tsouderos which I have already mentioned, and then said that he himself had grounds for suspecting that Apollo might be furthering the interests of Russia and might even be in the employ of the Soviet government. I remember that I replied that there was no evidence before us.<sup>122</sup>

Another SOE officer testified that "Mr Leeper insisted that Apollo was politically dangerous and needed careful watching".<sup>123</sup> The FO's Waterhouse, according to Dolbey, mentioned that "ISLD (SIS) had suspicion, and the Greek Government had great suspicion".<sup>124</sup> It is most likely that, by SIS, Waterhouse meant Noel Rees who, as has been mentioned earlier, was no friend to SOE. Indeed this was addressed in court by Paton, who was Pawson's replacement in Turkey in late 1943. He testified that he had heard rumours of Apollo being "a member of the EAM. This was said in a treacherous sense, that is it was meant to be implied that he was a member of an organisation which was running counter to British interests. I associate this last rumour especially with Mr Noel

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<sup>121</sup> Statement by Lt. Colonel J.A. Dolbey, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>122</sup> Statement by Major A.F.N. Matthews, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>123</sup> Statement by Brigadier B.K.B. Benfield, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>124</sup> Statement by Lt. Colonel J.A. Dolbey, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

Rees".<sup>125</sup> Paton also indicated that Apollo was incredulous about these rumours. He recounted that "I told Apollo that it was rumoured that he was a member of the EAM. He laughed and then said 'If that is so, why do they obstruct me so much'".<sup>126</sup>

While the Court of Inquiry in the end cleared Apollo, many of the SOE officers who testified in defence of Apollo made it clear that they considered this a witch hunt against their organisation as a whole. Matthews reported that:

on more than one occasion Mr Leeper has spoken to me about Force 133 [SOE] generally and without reference to Apollo, and from remarks he has used has left me in no doubt whatever that he is profoundly distrustful of the good faith of Force 133. By this I mean that Mr Leeper suspects that Force 133 is playing a political game opposed to his own and not divulged to him.<sup>127</sup>

Another witness mentioned that he had been "cognisant for some time of bad feeling between the British Embassy to Greece and Force 133".<sup>128</sup>

Ambivalent British attitudes towards Apollo earlier in 1944 had some important consequences for him and his organisation. Firstly, the rumours of Apollo's collaboration with EAM meant that British funds to him were slashed. In September 1944, Paton was forced to send Apollo a message that, with reference to the period prior to liberation, "we deeply regret having been obliged to leave you without funds for so long and assure you that it was through circumstances beyond our control".<sup>129</sup> This lack of British support marked the beginning of the end for Apollo. Dolbey recounted to the Court of inquiry that:

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<sup>125</sup> Statement by Major A.W. Paton, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Statement by Major A.F.N Matthews, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>128</sup> Statement by Brigadier W.P. Oliver, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>129</sup> DDD. 241 pt II of 28, September 44, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

In March 1944, the 'Apollo' group was betrayed to the Germans [...] a large number of the group (about 80) were imprisoned, and it is now reported that 59 have since been executed [...] I believe that if despatch of funds to this group had not been banned owing to the charges now investigated by the Court of Inquiry, many of those lives could have been saved.<sup>130</sup>

It is perhaps understandable that an exasperated Apollo in his testimony to the Court of Inquiry said:

I would not consider it a dishonour to be a member of the EAM. If I was a member of the EAM I should admit it straight away for what could be wrong in being a member or admitting that I was a member [...] The only reason why I am now so unpopular with the Greek Government, the British Government, the EAM and the Germans, is because I have been trying to carry out my duty.<sup>131</sup>

This echoed an earlier statement from Apollo in May 1944 in which he had said that:

I have supported neither political parties nor persons. I have indicated the need of unity of the antarte forces from April 1943 as proved by my repeated reports. I worked with this aim in view. I have repeatedly succeeded in this without however being able to put it in force due to the opposite view of the Greeks and British authorities in the ME. I have also informed you of every contact of Greeks or British with the Germans, which could result in the weakening of the spirit of resistance of the Greek people. There are my 'political activities'. I regard them as an attempt to stop political activities in the face of the enemy. After the above I became undesirable and suspected in the ME. Undoubtedly the activities of a man who in a world war has succeeded in being pursued both by the Axis and the Allied authorities are bad.<sup>132</sup>

Apollo, Ioannis Peltekis, organised one of the most valuable resistance networks in Greece and embodied everything that the British could have wanted in an operative in Athens. His organisation seemed to prioritise

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<sup>130</sup> Statement by Lt. Colonel J.A. Dolbey, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>131</sup> Statement by Ioannis Peltekis, October 1944, HS7/156, TNA.

<sup>132</sup> From Peltekis to Force 133, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

winning the war over politics. He also was not a guerrilla or subject to guerrilla politics. In the aftermath of the war, when SOE histories condemned its focus on guerrilla warfare, it is the success of organisations like Yvonne that gave this credence. Yet he was accused by the British Foreign Office of being a double agent because he was not welcome to the Greek government-in-exile and the Foreign Office.

What is certainly clear from the treatment of Apollo by the British is that, in occupied Greece, one could not be apolitical and that both the British and EAM/ELAS, in their fight for control of the resistance, adopted a 'with us or against us' approach to which, in different ways, Psarros, Apollo, and, not least, 59 members of Yvonne who were caught while trying to help in the efforts to liberate Greece, fell victim.

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Chapter 7: Anglo-American Intelligence co-operation in Greece: April  
1942 to November 1944.

The conduct of British officials and officers towards their American counterparts provides a fascinating complement to our understanding of the British government and EAM. The desire of many within US governmental agencies for independent action in Greece was viewed by the British with extreme wariness. To ensure that British policy towards Greece would be carried out, the British government was quick to reach an arrangement with the US State Department according to which the British government was primarily responsible for Greece. This is perhaps indicative of the fact that British attempts to wrest control of Greece from EAM had little to do with the latter's political ideology or its conduct in occupied Greece. The British government was equally wary of sharing control of Greece with the United States government, which can hardly be accused of being composed of communist sympathisers. While a working arrangement had been reached diplomatically between the British and American governments, despite some minor difficulties, co-operation between the Intelligence communities was far less harmonious. From the time of arrival of American Intelligence officers in the region, the British government was keen to stress that it was in control. This meant that the British consistently attempted to supervise, if not restrict, any sort of US initiative in Greece. This led to a particularly tense co-existence between the two, with many of the American officers being outspoken with their suspicions of British intentions in Greece.

### The Americans in Greece

The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), led by William 'Wild Bill' Donovan, was the primary intelligence service of the United States. It first arrived in the Middle East in 1942 in advance of Operation 'Torch'. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1942, SIS's 'C' wrote to the Foreign Office that "I have been conducting correspondence with my representative in the Middle East regarding Colonel Donovan's organisation setting up a secret wireless station near Cairo".<sup>1</sup> By June 1942, British wariness of a perceived American intrusion in Balkan affairs led to negotiations between Donovan and SOE's Charles Hambro to agree on a *modus vivendi* for clandestine work. However, this achieved little in defusing the situation and in August 1942 Anthony Eden was keen to stress to Selborne that:

I have been somewhat shaken on reading the enclosed report by the Office of Strategic Services of the United States Government (Colonel Donovan's organisation). It has, as you will see, a strong anti-King bias and in its general tone it reflects the attitude of SOE in the Middle East, of which we have complained in the past. It seems to me incidentally to be of great importance that the Donovan Organisation should at once be put on the right lines and made aware of the official British view on this subject.<sup>2</sup>

This was reflective of a general unease in Anglo-American relations in the region. Ever since they arrived in the region, American military planners had consistently been very sceptical of the British preoccupation with the Mediterranean theatre of war.<sup>3</sup> They believed that American soldiers were

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<sup>1</sup> C to Peter Loxley, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1942, "C", Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS): wireless communications; Cairo, December 1939 to April 1942', FO 1093/302, TNA, London.

<sup>2</sup> SO to CD, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/296, TNA.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Jones, "Kipling and all that": American perceptions of SOE and British imperial intrigue in the Balkans, 1943-1945' in Neville Wylie (ed.) *The Politics and*

extensively used in North Africa and Italy to preserve and protect the British Empire instead of furthering the war effort by opening a cross-Channel Western Front. The disastrous Dodecanese Campaign did nothing to assuage American concerns that British operations in the theatre were not solely focused on defeating Germany.<sup>4</sup> Even Franklin Roosevelt told his Chiefs of Staff in August 1943 that “the British Foreign Office does not want the Balkans to come under Russian influence. Britain wants to get to the Balkans first”.<sup>5</sup> OSS, chafing under the agreement between it and SOE, was not free of these suspicions of British interests.

Despite a revised version of this agreement signed in July 1943, after Donovan and others in OSS began to agitate for increased independence from British control, the Americans were still the junior partners in Greece.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, OSS resentment of British oversight was widespread throughout the organisation. In November 1943, the head of OSS Special Operations complained to Donovan that, due largely to political considerations, the British “do not welcome any secret intelligence organisation in Europe which is not managed, if not controlled by them”.<sup>7</sup> The inherently tenuous nature of the relationship between the British and American covert organisations was only exacerbated in the maelstrom of Greek politics.

OSS work in Greece was divided between two field sections. The first was involved in Special Operations (OSS/SO) and was more akin to SOE, while the other was dedicated to Secret Intelligence (OSS/SI) and was in nature

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*Strategy of Clandestine War, Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* (Oxford, Routledge, 2007) pp. 90-91.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>6</sup> Kyriakos Nalmpantis, ‘Time on the Mountain: The Office of Strategic Services in Axis-Occupied Greece, 1943-1944’, unpublished PhD thesis, Kent State University (May 2010) p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, “Kipling and all that”, p. 92.

closer to SIS. Finally, the Research and Analysis (R&A) Section of OSS, Donovan's brainchild and staffed mostly by academics (lending it the nickname the 'Campus'), was responsible for analysis and collation of the intelligence gathered by the field divisions of OSS.<sup>8</sup> Relations between OSS/SO and SOE were generally far more harmonious than those between OSS/SI and its British cousins. This was partly due to the nature of the work in which they were involved but also due to the good relationship between Chris Woodhouse and Gerald K. Wines, the second OSS chief in Greece.

Initially, even this relationship had got off to a terrible start as the first OSS chief in Greece, Captain Winston Ehrgott, had a very low opinion of British involvement in Greece. Ehrgott particularly disliked Woodhouse and believed him to be "one of the main obstacles to complete military unity of the various Greek parties".<sup>9</sup> Ehrgott was particularly close to ELAS and Sarafis and even attempted to organise an ELAS cavalry regiment.<sup>10</sup> His behaviour, including taking command of the aforementioned ELAS regiment, was problematic for his status as an observer and he was recalled from Greece in 1943, after the Greek Government-in-exile and the British complained about his behaviour. His successor, Wines, was seen within OSS, and especially the R&A section, as a British lackey.<sup>11</sup> Woodhouse was aware of this as he wrote that "I suspect that OSS fear Wines has become my yes-man".<sup>12</sup> This is particularly interesting because it illuminates that in a study of something as personal as Intelligence, political disposition, temperament, and inter-personal

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<sup>8</sup> Robin W. Winks, *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996) pp. 61-68.

<sup>9</sup> Nalmpantis, 'Time on the Mountain', p. 166.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> C. M. Woodhouse 'Situation in Greece, Jan to May, 44' in Lars Baerentzen (ed.) *British Reports on Greece, 1943-1944* (Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum Press, 1982) p. 101.

relations can have a defining effect on a whole country. In this case, the good relations between SOE and OSS/SO meant that they were in far better position to co-operate and achieve results. However, this was more of the exception than the rule.

Official American policy towards Greece was ill-defined. In July 1943, in response to its reception of the official British policy towards Greece developed in the spring of 1943, the State Department issued a memorandum on its own policy towards Greece. This began by stating that the State Department was “in the most part in agreement with the views [of the British government]”.<sup>13</sup> However, it differentiated itself from the British position by declaring that:

this Government welcomes the British Government’s statements that it holds strongly to the principle that the final government for Greece is a matter for the Greek people to decide; [...] This Government wishes the Greek King and Government well in any efforts they may make to obtain the support of the Greek people [...] it is not prepared to undertake, or actively associate itself with measures designed to promote these purposes.<sup>14</sup>

The United States, probably leaning on its tradition of republicanism and the Atlantic Charter’s call for self-determination, was far less committed to the fate of the Greek monarchy. This signalled quite a break from the British policy of actively supporting and building up George II. The British government, perhaps unsettled by this, responded to the State Department memorandum with an eight page aide memoire. After setting out a number of legalistic arguments in support of the Greek monarch, such as that he would return to Greece as a soldier and not a politician, it concluded that the British government, with the Greek people looking for its guidance:

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<sup>13</sup> Memorandum, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1943, RG 84, Box 1, NARA.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

cannot therefore adopt the non-committal attitude suggested by the United States Government. We are convinced that the King of the Hellenes and the present government, with all its faults, are in the best position to rally all the forces of Greece against the enemy, and that there is no alternative body which could undertake this task.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these British overtures to the US diplomatic establishment, Wallace Murray of the State Department seems to have remained unconvinced, writing to Ambassador MacVeagh that the British “continue in general to run Greek affairs with a very high hand”.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this early divergence of views, the State Department was content to take a back seat in determining Allied policy towards Greece. This was confirmed in a US paper on Anglo-American policy in the Balkans which highlighted that:

strategic responsibility for the Balkan area has from the beginning been assigned to the British. The British authorities in London and the Middle East have shown a disposition to interpret this assignment of responsibility broadly and to welcome United States participation only in so far as the procurement of American supplies is concerned.<sup>17</sup>

This was problematic for many reasons. Dorothy Cox, of the OSS, wrote that the British “had a definite policy with which we were in rather nebulous agreement [...] at all times it was necessary to defend to some extent the rightist attitude of Great Britain as that of an ally with whom we were

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<sup>15</sup> Aide Memoire from the British Embassy, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1943, RG 84, Box 1, NARA.

<sup>16</sup> From Wallace Murray to Lincoln MacVeagh, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1943, RG 84, Box 1, NARA.

<sup>17</sup> Anglo-American Policy in the Balkans, Undated, ‘RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1944:822 to 1944: 850’, Box 4, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

cooperating".<sup>18</sup> There were however exceptions to American diplomatic passivity. When the British approached the State Department with a proposal to create a number of Balkan Affairs committees to administer the region, they received a resounding refusal. The latter not only accused the offer of being lopsided but also stated that:

establishment without American concurrence of a Balkan Affairs Committee and a Balkan Relief Subcommittee which will be predominantly British, even with the addition of the suggested American members [...] constitutes a complete change from the basis on which American agreement to participate in these activities was originally given.<sup>19</sup>

However, the fact that this was more of an exception is confirmed in an OSS paper from the same month that was particularly critical and stated:

it is worth noting that both inside Greece and in Cairo the British convey the impression that the United States is in full agreement with their Greek policy. As matters stand at present, the United States shares equally with Britain the responsibility for Allied mishandling of the Greek problem. In fact however, the United States does not have the resources to enable her to share equally in the actual direction of policy. Allied policy towards Greece is strictly British policy for which the United States will be held equally accountable.<sup>20</sup>

The report also includes a scathing condemnation of ELAS's disarming of EKKA and murder of Psarros, concluding that the "Greek people are caught between the organised pressure of EAM on the one hand and British policy on

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<sup>18</sup> Susan Heuck Allen, *Classical Spies: American Archaeologists with the OSS in World War II Greece* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2013) p. 273.

<sup>19</sup> Organisation of the Balkan Affairs Committee and Related Committees, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1944, RG 84, Box 4, NARA.

<sup>20</sup> Appendix A to OSS weekly Greek Summary, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1944, RG 84, Box 3.

the other”.<sup>21</sup> But clearly a large number of US personnel, diplomatic and military, took a dim view of the US policy of giving the British free rein.

Many within US circles were particularly critical of the level of British involvement in Greece. One of the most prominent of these was Lincoln MacVeagh who was particularly critical of British policy when he reported that it only sought to establish “a stake in the Balkans – obviating total control of Southeastern Europe by any other great power. It is very far from a policy aimed at the reconstruction of the occupied countries as free and independent states”.<sup>22</sup> There were objections not only to the degree of British involvement in domestic Greek politics but also to the level of support for the Greek monarch. A damning OSS report on British politicking in Cairo following the April mutiny, sent to Roosevelt by Donovan, concluded that “Russia’s conduct towards the Greeks has involved less interference in Greek internal affairs than has been exercised by the British”.<sup>23</sup> OSS observers were also aware that there was growing resentment within Greece as a backlash to British policy. In a play on Henry Ford’s saying, it was even reported that Greeks viewed it as “Greece shall freely choose whatever form of government she wishes, provided she chooses monarchy under George II”.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, they were aware that British support for the monarch stoked discontent within the country and polarised public opinion.

This polarisation of Greek politics by British involvement was also highlighted by R.H. Markham of the American Office of War Information, the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Iatrides (ed.), *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 454.

<sup>23</sup> Memorandum for the President, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1944, , ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President’s Secretary’s File (PSF), 1933-1945’, PSF Box 153, FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>24</sup> Inside Greece, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1943, ‘RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Field Station Files, Athens OSS’, Box 7, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

US equivalent of the PWE, who wrote after the Lebanon Conference that “The British are now inclined to come to a showdown with the Greek Reds and Pinkos. (Every Greek is a Red or Pinko who isn’t with Papandreou)”.<sup>25</sup> As a further reflection of this Manichean British view, an OSS report by Moses Hadas, head of the Greek R&A section of OSS, also condemned the British “ambiguous attitude toward the quisling Security Battalions. [...] The implication that the British (like the Germans) were willing to use any stick to beat EAM was clear”.<sup>26</sup> It is hardly surprising that, in the general American distaste of British policy, OSS operatives dealing with Greece were rarely an exception.

The American intelligence officers were also sceptical of their British counterparts in the Middle East. The basis of this mistrust seems to have been that many of them believed that British intelligence services had been playing a political game at the cost of operational efficiency. British secret services in the Middle East had done little to prove the Americans wrong in the early years of the war, as they had been discredited by their early failures and internal conflicts. In anticipation of OSS activities in Greece, a report on the situation would state that “reports from many sources on the efficiency of British Intelligence have not been encouraging. [...] The organisation is characterised as lacking in co-operation, inefficient, and gullible”.<sup>27</sup> More importantly however it suggested that:

British Intelligence on its part will be inclined to push British interests, and again we may expect the distortion and suppression of information. Many Greeks, furthermore, regard

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<sup>25</sup> From R.H. Markham to Wallace Carroll, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1944, RG 84, Box 3, NARA.

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum for the President, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1944, ‘PSF Box 153, FDR Presidential Library.

<sup>27</sup> Comprehensive Greek Project, Undated, ‘RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Field Station Files, Athens OSS’, Box 2, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

the British with a non-unjustified suspicion; they suspect that after the war the British intend to foist upon them an unwanted client King.<sup>28</sup>

The American planners were convinced of the need for a separate intelligence network to obtain independent reports and opinions about conditions in Greece. Thus began a long and subtle struggle between the two Allies.

It should be noted that British attempts to control American policy in the Near East were not just limited to the creation of endless administrative committees. The struggle of OSS for independence was determined and reached all the way to the top. Donovan was particularly loath to be constantly subordinated to British policy in the Mediterranean and had particular reason to be resentful of British involvement in Balkan intelligence. Roosevelt had written to Churchill in October 1943 suggesting that Donovan should be given control of all Allied services working in the Balkans in an effort to unify the resistance.<sup>29</sup> Churchill, unsurprisingly, rejected this proposal which would have vested overall control of Balkan policy on an American by replying that “I have great admiration for Donovan, but I do not see any centre in the Balkans from which he could grip the situation”.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, Donovan spearheaded many attempts to ensure a greater level of autonomy for OSS throughout 1943. A prime motivator was his intense dislike of the primacy of politics in British Balkan planning. This is revealed in his report to the US Chiefs of Staff stating that the war effort in the Balkans had been:

directed by the Foreign Office and, in some cases by Foreign Office representatives in uniform and ostensibly under SOE

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Jones, “Kipling and all that”, p. 96.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

orders [...] the policy of dealing with the situation has been dictated by the considered long-range political necessity of the British in the Balkans rather than the immediate and vital military problem.<sup>31</sup>

The question of American independence came to the fore in July 1944, when the British government was considering denouncing EAM and breaking with it by recalling the BLOs attached to it. During this period, American missions to Greece were sent directives by the British to withdraw. Donovan, who one can only assume was not amused, wrote to Roosevelt that:

the question of independence of American intelligence has come up again [...] The British will undertake to have us leave that area on assumption that we are part of an Allied Military Mission with them. In the case of Yugoslavia, a similar issue was involved and our position was upheld that there had been no agreement for an Allied Military Mission and that any arrangement formerly made for operations had been abrogated by British action in using the mission for political purposes.<sup>32</sup>

In his desire not to embroil the OSS in politics, Donovan had the support of the vast majority of his organisation. Rodney Young, in charge of Greek Desk in Cairo, wrote that the denunciation was a “purely Anglo-Greek Government affair in which America has no part”.<sup>33</sup> When the fear of denunciation dissipated, Young followed up from his previous letter and wrote that it was “perhaps because the idea trickled through some crevice of the limestone brain of the British authorities that it might not be a good idea”.<sup>34</sup> Especially in regards to his efforts to maintain the independence of OSS from British

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>32</sup> Memorandum for the President, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1944, ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President’s Secretary’s File (PSF), 1933-1945’, PSF Box 149, FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>33</sup> Rodney Young to Jack, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1944, RG 226, Field Station Files Box 1, NARA.

<sup>34</sup> Rodney Young to Jack, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1944, RG 226, Field Station Files Box 1, NARA.

interference, Donovan truly represented the attitude of most people in his organisation.

This American frustration with their British counterparts was to a large extent the result of many occasions on which British intelligence services attempted to limit, control, or even altogether obstruct American operations in occupied Greece. These included, in one extreme case, the murder of a Greek working for OSS. Panagos Paralis, a Greek who in the past had worked for SIS's Rees in Smyrna and was later recruited by OSS, was aboard a caique when it was sunk by the British navy in June 1944. Despite the caique having made the correct signals, the British professed that they were unaware that this was an OSS vessel and must have missed the attempts to communicate. The American official subsequently investigating the case uncovered a number of plot holes and contradictions during his attempts to uncover the truth. His final conclusion stated that:

It seems the sinking of 'Irimi' [the caique] was due in part to ISLD/Izmir's unwillingness to have Americans operate in the Dodecanese, in spite of ISLD/Cairo's favouring the mission. The chief reason, however, apparently was the desire to get rid of Paralis. Paralis had long run the ISLD base at Loryma and knew all of ISLD's dispositions in the Dodecanese. ISLD probably feared he would reveal these to us, and that he would win away all of ISLD's operatives for our service.<sup>35</sup>

This is undoubtedly an extreme example, as it was compounded by the nature of intelligence work and the personalities in Smyrna. Namely, the report implicates Rees, who had already been a significant problem for SOE and OSS, in the murder. These specific conditions are probably what distinguish this case from the case of Helias Doundoulakis, who successfully managed to

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<sup>35</sup> Responsibility for sinking of OSS Schooner 'Irimi II' by 43<sup>rd</sup> ML Flotilla, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1945, 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS Classified Sources and Methods Files "Withdrawn Records"', Box 246, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

transition from being a member of SOE to working for OSS.<sup>36</sup> The fact that Doundoulakis also had an American passport probably allowed his upset SOE commanding officers little room for manoeuvre, whereas Paralís was afforded no such protection. It was decided by the investigator that “it would probably be undesirable to reopen the ‘Irimi’ case at this time. The above statement of the background of the incident is submitted in the belief that it should be on record even if no action is taken”.<sup>37</sup>

The general attitude of the British towards OSS is also revealed in an OSS report on its activities in Greece, in which the author noted that:

the attitude of the British Missions in Greece, mostly Force 133, toward us seems to have been that of a jealous elder husband when another man pays attention to his younger wife. They resented us for more than one reasons, but mostly due to selfishness and narrow-mindedness. However, we did not experience anything more than the usual tendencies to impose themselves over us, dictate, and over-see our activities.<sup>38</sup>

Stephen Penrose, head of OSS/SI in the Middle East, also complained that:

we have been the object of considerable pressure on the part of Force 133 (SOE) to confide in them all our secret plans, the identities of our agents, their areas of operation, and anything else which would enable them to keep us well under control. [...] It is plainly evident that the British don't like to have free

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<sup>36</sup> Helias Doundoulakis with Gabriella Gafni, *Trained to be an OSS Spy* (Bloomington, Xlibris, 2014) pp. 93-95.

<sup>37</sup> Responsibility for sinking of OSS Schooner ‘Irimi II’ by 43<sup>rd</sup> ML Flotilla, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1945, RG 226 Classified and Withdrawn Box 246.

<sup>38</sup> Relations with the British p. 4, Undated, ‘RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Field Station Files, Athens OSS’, Box 9, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

information coming out of Greece without their knowledge, and without their control.<sup>39</sup>

Penrose's letter also highlights the divergence between OSS/SI and OSS/SO. In a letter about the future of OSS/SI in Greece, he told his superiors that the British were "aided and abetted by Colonel West".<sup>40</sup> This refers to a joint directive sent out in July 1944 by Paul West, the head of OSS/SO in Cairo, and Nicholas Hammond of SOE, which stated that "agents will not open direct contact with rebels".<sup>41</sup> The directive essentially was an attempt to prevent OSS/SI from establishing any contact with guerrillas in Greece without the presence of an Allied Liaison Officer (ALO).

This attempt to isolate OSS/SI teams in Greece was due to an intense mistrust of the American missions by the British in Greece, including a number of SOE BLOs. Indicatively, a telegram from Epirus to Cairo stated that "these birds most mysterious and uncommunicative. What is mission? We must know roughly their charter otherwise do not feel justified to allow them to circulate".<sup>42</sup> The 'birds' referred to were the OSS/SI missions which were mostly given bird species as call signs, such as 'Gander', 'Albatross', 'Dodo', and 'Pheasant'.<sup>43</sup> The distrust that led to these obstructions is revealed in another telegram by a separate SOE team. The message warns Cairo that "Yanks appear to be gaining ground over ALMILMISS [Allied Military Mission]

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<sup>39</sup> Plans for Greece, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1944, 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Records of the OSS Washington Director's Office, M1642', Roll 83, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> SI Situation, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1944, 'Greece: OSS/SOE Co-ordination, OSS functions, appointments, infiltrations and activities, May 1944 to October 1944. Including: Special folder "Allied Military Mission Relations with SI Mission" June, 1944 to August 1944', HS5/587, TNA, London.

<sup>42</sup> From Renovation to Force 133, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1944, HS5/587, TNA.

<sup>43</sup> Greek Desk Sources 'Birds', 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Field Station Files, Athens OSS', Box 6, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

in Greek minds and getting regular relief drops. This increasing Allied side show outside our knowledge and control is anti-British prop[aganda] gift".<sup>44</sup> OSS/SI's retaliatory attack on West was indicative of friction between the various OSS departments, particularly because OSS/SO in general had significantly better relations with the British than OSS/SI and was more amenable to British directives.

Further British attempts to control American interactions with EAM were also evident when an American operation reported that "in spite of close observation by the British ISLD (SIS) mission 'Carpenter' with which they worked, the team secured information from EAM-ELAS which was refused the British".<sup>45</sup> This highlights not only that OSS teams in Greece generally had amiable relations with EAM but that these good relations often had to be maintained by circumventing British attempts to monitor the American missions.

This was particularly true of Operation 'Horsebreeders' by OSS in eastern Thessaly. Led by George Doundoulakis, brother of Helias mentioned above, the mission arrived in Greece in May 1944 to collect military and economic intelligence. The men of 'Horsebreeders' soon developed good relations with the local ELAS guerrillas who aided their efforts in the region and, as an early token of goodwill, provided the ELAS fighters with a small number of weapons. This immediately caused anxiety to British officers, one of whom reported to Cairo that American intelligence "are supplying ELAS andartes with arms and ammo. If this be true this contrary to my understanding of intelligence functions and will cause considerable

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<sup>44</sup> From Keepsake to Force 133, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1944, HS5/587, TNA.

<sup>45</sup> ETO- Meto- Cable Reports, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1945, 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS History Office', Box 9, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

disturbance unless stopped”.<sup>46</sup> However a later SOE investigation on this transaction confirmed that this was simply a transaction to establish goodwill, with the BLO reporting that “I do not think that they will give more arms to ELAS and am inclined to think that the arms they did give were merely a sweetener to get them on good terms”.<sup>47</sup> Yet, despite this disclaimer from within SOE, the British soon lodged a complaint with OSS that American operations were arming ELAS bands. Doundoulakis wrote back to Rodney Young in Cairo in September 1944 that “regarding the weapons which the British accuse me of arming the Andartes with, this constitutes a lie because I never received any weapons except the 10 Marlins which came with first caique of the Andartes”.<sup>48</sup> The fact that SOE already knew that these accusations were unfounded suggests that the main reason why the British viewed Operation the ‘Horsebreeders’ with such mistrust was not because of any question of supplying weapons but because good relations between EAM and the Americans consistently made them uneasy.

To complement this, it is quite interesting to examine relations between the Americans and EDES. When Wallace had called Zervas a British instrument, as quoted in Chapter 5, he apparently meant more than just as a counterweight to ELAS in the field, as Zervas was also used as a vehicle against their US intelligence cousins. In July 1944 OSS complained that EDES in Corfu had stopped sending agreed reports to it, as Zervas had ordered that intelligence reports should instead be sent to himself who would then pass them on to his BLO, while only furnishing the Americans with carbon copies. This was initiated by an internal memo asking that OSS “make efforts to learn whether the BLO is a member of ISLD or Force 133 and take steps to induce

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<sup>46</sup> From Mortlake to Force 133, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1944, HS5/587, TNA.

<sup>47</sup> From Boarshead to Force 133, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1944, HS5/587, TNA.

<sup>48</sup> From George Dondoulakis to Rodney Young, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1944, Field Station Files Box 9, NARA.

the agency concerned to forego the requirements for information originated by the Corfu headquarters of EDES”.<sup>49</sup>

However, this hampering of American information gathering was far from the only incident concerning Zervas and American intelligence. The OSS ‘Elephant’ mission was sent to North-West Greece, the stronghold of EDES, in the summer of 1944 with a view to reporting on conditions on the ground. Upon arrival at Zervas’s camp, the Americans described Barnes, the chief BLO at EDES headquarters, as being very hostile and their report on the behaviour of the British officers attached to EDES was quite damning. In it, the mission describes how “Col. Barnes burst in on us and let loose with a tirade that momentarily stunned us by reason of its being entirely unexpected and unprovoked. His language was forceful, his attitude threatening and his remarks insulting”.<sup>50</sup> More importantly, it accuses the British of trying to claim all the credit for Allied supplies and relief to Greece and of informing the EDES guerrillas that the Americans were under the command of the British. This led to the British censoring the information shared by the EDES guerrillas and the British “receiving copies of all the military and economic reports that were prepared by various EDES personnel in response to prepared questionnaires we [OSS] submitted to them”.<sup>51</sup> The report also makes a final accusation that the British mission had been trying to create a wedge between EDES and the Americans. With reference to an earlier OSS mission to Zervas, prior to ‘Elephant’, which had been withdrawn, the report claims that:

the British told Zervas that the Americans left Greece because they were dissatisfied with EDES Andartes and had run into difficulties with them. [...] We had already learned, however, through Capt. Verghis [the head of the previous US mission] that

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<sup>49</sup> From Reports Officer to Strategic Services Officer, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1944, HS5/587, TNA.

<sup>50</sup> The Elephant Mission, Field Station Files Box 9, NARA.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

he was leaving Greece because of his disgust with the treatment accorded him and his unit by the British who did not supply him adequately or often enough and who practically forgot that he and his unit existed. Zervas was relieved to learn that he and his men were not responsible for the departure of the Americans from Greece.<sup>52</sup>

In response to 'Elephant', the British lodged a complaint with OSS and demanded that US intelligence missions should be made known to the Allied Military Mission to Greece. SOE retaliated and in fact it was this incident, the one that "upset" Barnes, which instigated the joint declaration by West and Hammond on OSS/SI activities mentioned above. A report in favour of limiting OSS/SI activities stated that "we said that Zervas should refer the SI mission to Lt. Col. Barnes and, without wishing to be uncooperative, I feel that all guerrilla leaders should refer questions of military matters, money and supplies to ALOs if approached by SI".<sup>53</sup> Clearly, the British were trying to prevent direct contact between OSS/SI and EDES but British mistrust of American intentions had little to do with the efficiency of the war effort or with political ideology. Unlike the Soviets, the Americans could not be accused of fostering and supporting Communism. What was at stake here was the primacy of Britain in Greece. The British sought to carve out in Greece a zone of exclusivity in relation to both the Soviets and the Americans.

This became abundantly clear to the OSS men assigned to Crete. Operation 'Apple' was an OSS attempt to lay the groundwork for a possible liberation of Crete from the Axis. Their final report to Donovan was scathing. It stated that the OSS team realised that the liberation of Crete would be an extremely daunting task. But it was not the occupation forces that created the

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> SI Situation, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1944, HS5/587, TNA.

difficulty. Instead, the report cites four reasons why any American attempt to liberate Crete was inadvisable:

1) It was concluded by the members of the 'Apple' Mission that the problem was not military but political 2) That the British, in spite of their traditional Greek-British friendship, were purposely withholding support from the Cretans until their own occupation forces could take over the island and set up a government under King George to preserve the monarchic system of government as an important element in British foreign policy. 3) That the British had merely made a sham attempt to permit the Greeks to choose their own form of government. 4) That bitter British-American clashes over the Mission's penetration of Crete produced obstructionist actions which hampered its work in a serious way.<sup>54</sup>

These actions were elaborated on by Lt. Col. Grady McGlasson who reported that "the British acted firmly, even threateningly against the American mission enroute to the island and strongly objected to their presence".<sup>55</sup> McGlasson also reported that the British tried to ward off the Americans by telling them that the Cretan guerrillas would murder them immediately upon their arrival to rob them.<sup>56</sup> The report finally concluded that "the major reason for the failure of the 'Apple' Mission to Crete in realising its objectives was British obstructionist action".<sup>57</sup>

As the war progressed, the critical geographical position of Greece became increasingly obvious to American planners. A July 1944 paper on American policy towards Greece stated that "the strategic importance of Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean is such that its position deserves more careful

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<sup>54</sup> The 'Apple' Mission to Crete, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1944, 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS Classified Sources and Methods Files "Withdrawn Records"', Box 64, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

consideration by the United States than that of the other states of Southeastern Europe".<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately for the Americans, the British had long established themselves in the region and, as a result, US intelligence services had been forced to accept a subordinate position in Greece from the very beginning. To ensure its dominant position, British Intelligence had consistently attempted to control OSS activities from the moment the American organisation appeared in the Middle East. This will to dominate OSS, and the distrust of its motives, is perfectly illustrated in an SOE memo which claimed that "Donovan's desire for independent role [in the Balkans] is most dangerous".<sup>59</sup> Despite the mostly amiable co-operation between OSS/SO and SOE in the field, these years are defined by numerous disagreements and conflicts between the two Allied organisations, exacerbated by the practical approach of OSS, which prioritised winning the war instead of intervening in Greek politics. This attitude is perhaps comparable to the attitude held by many members of SOE in the early stages of the war. That is not to say that OSS (and especially those in the field such as Wines) did not view EAM/ELAS with some hesitancy and suspicion.<sup>60</sup> However, on the whole, the Americans approached EAM with significantly less predetermined hostility and were far more successful in cooperating with it. This undoubtedly contributed to the uneasy relation between the British and Americans in Greece.

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<sup>58</sup> Policy Toward Liberated States: Greece, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944, RG 84, Box 2, NARA.

<sup>59</sup> Cipher Telegram to Moscow, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1943, 'Balkans: SOE/Soviet NKVD relations in the Balkans, Part 3', HS5/156, TNA, London.

<sup>60</sup> Nalmpantis, 'Time on the Mountain', pp. 190-203.

## Chapter 8: British Intelligence in Liberated Greece: December 1944 to March 1947.

The period after the liberation of Greece in October 1944 is overshadowed by the violence of the Dekemvriana. In many ways, the violence in Athens in December 1944 was the natural culmination of the British dual policy towards EAM. By consistently trying to weaken EAM, the British government had lost any sort of veneer of impartiality and was not perceived as a neutral arbitrator between the Greek factions. At the same time, British efforts to create a counterweight to EAM, both in the resistance and the Greek government and armed forces, meant that the British government had allied itself with an increasingly reactionary force in Greek politics. The spark of the Dekemvriana might be found in the Disarmament Crisis of November 1944 but its roots were much deeper.

After the Dekemvriana, the Greek state was in disarray. A number of successive Greek governments and revolving door of Prime Ministers all failed to prevent the disintegration of the very fabric of Greek society as violence and reprisals became common place. This was partly because the British government found itself unable to control the reactionary forces they had unleashed to combat EAM. The British government sought to champion the Greek centre to control the situation that was spiralling out of control. However, despite encouragement and support by both the UK and US governments, the Greek centre had been sufficiently weakened throughout these years that it was unable to do so and Greek society grew ever more fractured. By 1947, the country was in open war and Britain could no longer support the Greek government. In the place of British support, the Greek government received the support of the Truman administration that ensured its victory in 1949.

Throughout this period, British intelligence services were still heavily involved in Greek politics. While the end of the war had also seen the end of SOE, SIS and MI5 were both active in Greece following its liberation. They even clashed over the operational jurisdiction of Greece in a wider argument over responsibility for the Middle East. The main activities of the Intelligence services in these years aimed to counter any communist influence, whether domestic or international. To a lesser extent, similarly to diplomatic efforts, SIS and MI5 were also tasked with ensuring the survival of the Greek centre by tempering the reactionary nature of the Greek state and protecting it from a rightwing coup. The pursuit of these goals was not as zealous as it might have been since the reactionary right was perceived as the lesser of two evils in Greek politics. But the heyday of British Intelligence in Greece was also coming to a close. The British organisations soon found themselves challenged for supremacy by the arrival of their newly organised and resurgent American intelligence counterparts.

### The Politics of Liberation

The liberation of Greece did very little to reduce the tension between the signatories of the Lebanon Agreement. Within the first weeks of the Greek government's celebratory return to the country, discord between the EAM ministers and the rest of the cabinet became increasingly pronounced. It is interesting to note that most of these disagreements were political rather than economic in nature as might have been expected, as proposed steps to stabilise the Greek currency (including the use of inflationary money to meet internal debts) seemed to find little opposition across the spectrum, according to American Intelligence.<sup>1</sup> Even if there was agreement on the budget, any semblance of unity was wrecked by negotiations over the most incendiary task facing the government, the future composition of the Greek armed forces. The Lebanon Agreement had called for the formation of a new army "which must be free from any influence of parties and organizations, and must belong only to the nation, obeying the Government's orders".<sup>2</sup> To this end, the agreement foresaw a demobilisation of the guerrillas which proved anything but straightforward.

Despite some early promise, there was to be little compromise between the two sides. The arguments peaked when the issue of whether the new army should retain the Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Battalion as core constituents became the main obstacle to an agreement. These two elements of the Greek army were seen by EAM as extremely reactionary since they comprised of soldiers vetted for their loyalty to the king after the mutinies of April 1944. The Mountain Brigade did little to assuage these fears as, on its

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<sup>1</sup> Greek Stabilization, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1944, 'OSS Intelligence Reports: Economic', WO204/12892, TNA, London.

<sup>2</sup> White Book, May 1944 – March 1945, 'Morgenthau, Miscl. Printed Material, Foreign: Africa-Greece', Box 855, FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York.

arrival in Greece, it began to harass EAM members and to coerce Athenians to join in shouting Royalist slogans.<sup>3</sup> Col. Woodhouse was aware of how incendiary the arrival of the Brigade would be and was firmly against it, later even calling the decision to transfer it to Greece “provocative, even if unintentionally”.<sup>4</sup> Another issue for the cabinet was the composition of the Greek officer corps. In 1946 a Joint Intelligence Committee report would stress that “the Greek ‘Officer Corps’ is honeycombed with secret leagues, the most powerful of which are Royalist”.<sup>5</sup> The Republican General Othonaios, who had been appointed Commander-in-chief of the Greek Forces, resigned his post in protest at political interference in the army by the Right.<sup>6</sup> In his stead, Papandreou appointed General Vendiris, with General Spiliotopoulos (one of the ‘Six Colonels’) as his deputy. Both these men were committed anti-communists.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that in February 1945, mere months after these events, Leeper cabled the Foreign Office stating that “Vendiris can be a source of trouble. He has a military coup d’etat mentality”.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, according to Lincoln MacVeagh in October 1944, Vendiris was very critical of Papandreou for trying to co-operate with EAM but, according to the same report, Vendiris would be unable “to stage any coup just at present, but this kind of thing will doubtless make difficult the reorganisation of the National army”.<sup>9</sup> This confirms that a rightist coup was not inconceivable.

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<sup>3</sup> Lars Baerentzen and David H. Close, ‘The British Defeat of EAM’ in David H. Close (ed.) *The Greek Civil War, 1943-1950: Studies of Polarization* (London, Routledge, 1993) p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> JIC Standing Appreciation of Greece, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1946, ‘Greece’ WO204/12575, TNA, London.

<sup>6</sup> Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, p. 163.

<sup>7</sup> Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, pp. 330-332.

<sup>8</sup> From Athens to Foreign Office, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1945, ‘Various, Miscellaneous III’, PREM 3 213/17, TNA, London.

<sup>9</sup> Iatrides (ed.), *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p. 621.

Papandreou's insistence in maintaining these military formations was not purely a result of Greek politics. In fact, this hard line seems to have been forced upon him by the British. The British commander in Greece, General Scobie, had "repeatedly stressed to M. Papandreou that the Greek Mounted [sic] Brigade must be kept intact".<sup>10</sup> This echoed the position of Churchill who had written to General Wilson on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 1944 that "I do not wish to see the Greek Mounted [sic] Brigade from Italy disbanded or weakened in any way. It should not be made a pawn in negotiations with EAM" especially as it was "the only Greek force at the disposal of the Greek Government and also of His Majesty's Government at present".<sup>11</sup> He even called a potential disbandment of these controversial forces a "disaster of the first order".<sup>12</sup> There was little room left for Papandreou to negotiate with EAM on the issue of the Mountain Brigade even if he had been willing to do so.

British officials dealing with Greece must have been aware that the Greek army as it was constituted when the EAM ministers quit the Greek government was an obstacle to any potential attempt by EAM to participate in a coalition government, if not a threat to the whole of Greek political life. The two most influential Greek officers (Vendaris and Spiliotopoulos) had led anti-EAM organisations whose ranks now were bolstered by former members of the Security Battalions escaping the wrath of ELAS. MacVeagh wrote that the "OSS has reported General Vendaris, Spiliotopoulos [...] as being prominent military members of 'X'".<sup>13</sup> 'X' was a paramilitary organisation that, according to

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<sup>10</sup> Ismay to Prime minister, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1944, 'Armament of Greek National Army', PREM 3 213/7, TNA, London.

<sup>11</sup> From Prime Minister to General Wilson, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1944, PREM 3 213/7, TNA.

<sup>12</sup> Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 119

<sup>13</sup> Origin, Growth and Activities of the Greek Royalist Organisation known as 'X', 26<sup>th</sup> October 1945, 'RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1945:800 to 1945: 811.11', Box 7, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

intelligence reports, by the time of the Dekemvriana, targeted not just communists but all Greeks who opposed the monarchy.<sup>14</sup> Yet the British government remained steadfast in its support of the Greek government's demand for the unilateral disarmament of the guerrillas.

After years of British engagement with EAM, trust between the two had been completely eroded. EAM did not trust British intentions in Greece. On the other hand, the British viewed EAM as a duplicitous body that would stop at nothing to seize power, including the brutal liquidation of its opponents like Psarros. Woodhouse later stressed that the KKE "had taken no decision, and made no specific plan, but they were daily giving the impression of both. There comes a point when precautions tend to provoke the very actions against which they are intended as a safeguard".<sup>15</sup> MacVeagh also believed that the main issue was mutual mistrust between the two parties, as Britain had never been an impartial mediator between Left and Right. Defending his earlier call for American mediation in Greece, he wrote "we would have disarmed and reformed the guerrillas, because there would have been no suspicions to our motives like those connected with British insistence on maintaining the Mountain Brigade".<sup>16</sup> This most likely is wishful thinking on the part of the ambassador, but it does confirm a widespread belief that British motives were suspect.

The hardening of British government attitudes towards Greece during the disarmament crisis and the subsequent Dekemvriana is striking. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, Churchill wrote to Eden "having paid the price we have to Russia for freedom of action in Greece, we should not hesitate to use British troops to support the Royal Hellenic Government [...] I fully anticipate a clash

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<sup>14</sup> JIC Standing Appreciation of Greece, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1946, WO204/12575, TNA.

<sup>15</sup> Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, p. 198.

with EAM and we must not shrink from it, provided the ground is well chosen".<sup>17</sup> The 'Percentages Agreement' a month earlier had signalled the end of the dual policy of both supporting and eroding EAM. The British government no longer had patience for the obstructionist politics of the Left in establishing control over Greece.<sup>18</sup> This hard-line position would only become more pronounced in the first days of the Dekemvriana. This is most often represented by the oft-quoted phrase that Churchill used in a letter instructing General Wilson that he should "not hesitate to act as if you were in a conquered city".<sup>19</sup> With the outbreak of fighting his telegrams to Greece indicate a man who had no intention in seeking a compromise with EAM to avoid bloodshed. He wrote to Leeper that "It is very desirable to stop civil war. But it is more important to gain a decisive victory for law and order".<sup>20</sup> In a different letter he stressed that "we do not give way for the sake of kindness what has been won or can still be won by our troops".<sup>21</sup>

The fighting lasted just over a month. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 1945 the two belligerents signed the Treaty of Varkiza which called for the disarming of ELAS. But the signing of the treaty was followed by a turbulent period of extrajudicial violence from the Right. This was no shock as in January 1945 the Foreign Office had received a warning from Leeper that:

Red terror easily leads to a white terror [...] There will however be acts of harshness and probably cases of injustice towards the other side. Human nature here, which is southern and excitable,

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<sup>17</sup> Thanasis D. Sfikas, "The People at the Top Can do These Things, Which others Can't Do": Winston Churchill and the Greeks, 1940-1945' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (April 1991) p. 319.

<sup>18</sup> Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, p. 178.

<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister to General Scobie, 'Political and Military Situation in Greece, December 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> 1944', PREM 3 212/11, TNA, London.

<sup>20</sup> Prime Minister to Mr. Leeper, PREM 3 212/11, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> Prime Minister to General Scobie, T2297/4, 'Political and Military Situation in Greece, December 9<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> 1944', PREM 3 212/12, TNA, London.

will exact some revenge for what it has suffered. It must not be judged too harshly by British standards applied to our own conditions.<sup>22</sup>

By the end of 1946, this violence was one of the main factors that prompted many Greeks to form new guerrilla bands. It was often perpetrated, or at least tolerated, by the Gendarmerie and other official state bodies.<sup>23</sup> An example of this is found in British despatches stating that:

excesses of the National Guard must be punished. This Force has been used by Extreme Right with the connivance of officers of the General staff. Not only were moderate Republicans being beaten up but there was suspicion that certain quantities of ELAS arms discovered by the National Guard were passed to illegal Royalist organisations.<sup>24</sup>

Leonidas Kyrkos, one of Greece's most prominent leftist politicians, later recalled that "3.500 of the best guerrillas of the resistance had been murdered in the towns and villages of Greece and there had been no reaction from the state [...] the mountains were close. This is how it began; initially it was an issue of self defence".<sup>25</sup> This figure is probably an exaggeration but it is indicative of the fear of state-sanctioned violence that existed for many leftwing Greeks.

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<sup>22</sup> From Athens to Foreign Office, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1945, 'White Paper on Greece, January 1945', PREM 3 213/4, TNA, London.

<sup>23</sup> Kalyvas, *Εμφύλια Πάθη*, pp. 259-263.

<sup>24</sup> From Athens to Foreign Office, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1945, 'Re-Organisation of Greek Army and Gendarmerie, May to July 1945', PREM 3 213/16, TNA, London.

<sup>25</sup> Original Text: Είχαν δολοφονηθεί 3.500 από τους καλύτερους αγωνιστές της Ανίστασης στα χωριά και στις πόλεις χωρίς καμιά αντίδραση από το επίσημο κράτος [...] πιο κοντά το βουνό. Έτσι ξεκίνησε αυτή η υπόθεση· σαν υπόθεση αυτοάμυνας. Leonidas Kyrkos, 'Δεκέμβρης του '44: «Μήτσο, οι Εγγλέζοι θα χτυπήσουν» (December 1944: "Mitso, the English are about to attack) in Stelios Kouloglou, *Μαρτυρίες για τον Εμφύλιο και την ελληνική Αριστερά (Testimonies about the Civil War and the Greek Left)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Athens, Εστία, 2006) p. 134.

Acts of violence were not just limited to the extreme right wing though, as a number of small leftist bands continued to operate after Varkiza.<sup>26</sup> Ares Velouchiotes, the ELAS captain, led one of these after his break with the KKE leadership over the Treaty. Furthermore, many ELAS arms were not surrendered to the Greek government as part of the general disarmament but were hidden away, a fact known to the British.<sup>27</sup> However, it seems unlikely that anyone ever believed that ELAS would fully disarm itself. Even before Varkiza, the commanding officer of OSS wrote to MacVeagh that “it is probable that ELAS will not surrender all of its military equipment”.<sup>28</sup> The concealment of arms is probably not enough on its own to support claims made that the KKE was saving its weapons for a future armed struggle. It does however confirm that neither side expected the peace established by the Treaty of Varkiza to last.

One of the main problems with this period is that, in the run-up to the first Greek post-war general election in March 1946 and the plebiscite on the Monarchy in September 1946, the Greek government was a chaotic shambles. In the period between the Treaty of Varkiza and the elections, there were five different short-lived prime ministers.<sup>29</sup> The first, General Plastiras, soon found himself at odds with the British government and was replaced. Harold Macmillan wrote that “the news from Greece is not too good. Rex Leeper seems to be worried about General Plastiras and his ‘goings-on’. Of course he [Plastiras] wants to get all his old Republican and Venizelist friends (mostly

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<sup>26</sup> David H. Close and Thanos Veremis, ‘The Military Struggle, 1945-1949’ in David H. Close (ed.) *The Greek Civil War, 1943-1950: Studies of Polarization* (London, Routledge, 1993) p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> Kalyvas, *Εμφύλια Πάθη*, pp. 258-264.

<sup>28</sup> The Effect of the EAM movement, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1945, RG 84 Box 7, NARA.

<sup>29</sup> David Brewster, *Greece, The Decade of War: Occupation, Resistance and Civil War* (London, Tauris, 2016) p. 205.

aged generals) back into office”.<sup>30</sup> It is true that one of the British concerns was maintaining a broad representative, moderate government in power rather than one made up of the political friends of the Greek premier. However, a report reached Eden claiming that there was an intrigue in Greek affairs “deeply tinted with anti-British tendencies [...] this ‘group’ [Gonatas, Zannas and other Greek republicans] endeavours to convince General Plastiras – if he has not already persuaded him [sic] – that there is nothing to expect from Great Britain and that Greece must look exclusively to America”.<sup>31</sup> This report could have been ignored had Eden not written to Churchill describing the author of the reports as man whose “views are still worthy of respect. You will see that Caclamano’s [the author] account of the evil influences surrounding Plastiras corresponds in many respects with the telegrams Leeper has recently been sending”.<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising that, after being removed from his post, Plastiras complained to the Americans that he was “pushed aside because he strongly objected to scandalous British interference in the internal affairs of Greece”.<sup>33</sup> It is not surprising that Plastiras would be upset and hostile towards the British but MacVeagh also seems to have, at least to an extent, agreed with his view. Quoting an intelligence report, he wrote of Admiral Voulgaris, Plastiras’s successor, that he showed a “willingness to cooperate with the British, which indicates that he may in fact, as the British hope, prove a more pliable instrument than his predecessor, Plastiras”.<sup>34</sup>

The chaos of successive Greek governments begs the question whether an OSS report was prophetic when it argued that:

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<sup>30</sup> Harold Macmillan, *War Diaries: The Mediterranean 1943-1945* (London, Macmillan, 1984) p. 700.

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum by Caclamano, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1945, PREM 3 213/17, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Eden to Winston Churchill, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1945, PREM 3 213/17, TNA.

<sup>33</sup> Present Political Views of General Plastiras, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1945, RG 84 Box 7, NARA.

<sup>34</sup> Report on Greek Prime Minister, Admiral Petros Voulgaris, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1945, RG 84 Box 7, NARA.

the British still favor an eventual restoration of the monarchy, and believe that it may be possible to create a situation in which the people themselves might come –through a gradual disillusionment with an interim government designed to keep order- to favor the King’s restoration.<sup>35</sup>

That is not to say this was a deliberate attempt by the British to destabilise Greece but that political instability was a factor in the restoration of the king.

The instability in Greece was exacerbated by the KKE’s disastrous decision to boycott the parliamentary elections in March 1946. Zachariadis’s exact reasoning in calling for this, especially considering that the Soviet Union had advised against it, is unclear.<sup>36</sup> It has been ascribed not only to his desire to consolidate his leadership but to his belief that the peace established at Varkiza was an illusion.<sup>37</sup> It was not long before this decision was criticised, especially during de-Stalinization.<sup>38</sup> In any case, it allowed the plebiscite to be conducted by a triumphantly victorious royalist government.

It is unsurprising that the plebiscite resulted in a large victory for the Greek monarchy. This was compounded by intimidation and fraud, with Allied observers reporting that leftwing, and to a lesser extent rightwing, claims had:

some substance to these charges [...] the more important part of the intimidation was intangible and very difficult to prove. It took the form of village ostracism, persecution in the way of attacks upon houses, the humiliation of women, threatening gestures and messages [...] assaults along lonely trails, and all sorts of minor incidents [...] These conditions undoubtedly affected the election.

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<sup>35</sup> R&A 1741, Resistance in Greece and its relation to Allied Policy, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1944, RG 226 Field Station Files, Box 5, NARA.

<sup>36</sup> Vlavianos, *Greece, 1941-1949*, p. 215.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225

They had an important bearing on the abstention of EAM members from going to the polls on March 31.<sup>39</sup>

In many ways, after the elections of March 1946, the result of the plebiscite was a foregone conclusion. American reports made it clear that the:

issue in many voters' minds, carefully encouraged by Government and royalist propaganda, is not the return of King George II, or monarchism versus republicanism, but rather nationalism versus communism. [...] [Republicans were] unwilling to identify themselves with Communism by voting on the same side of any issue as Mr. Zachariades.<sup>40</sup>

The country was already well on its way to the 'Third Round' of the Civil War that lasted until 1949.

The British government had been impoverished by the Second World War and was in no condition to support protracted warfare in Greece. Britain's dire finances were known to the Americans, with American intelligence reviews reporting that "for the United Kingdom, 1947 will be a difficult year".<sup>41</sup> This situation was compounded by the Loan Agreement signed by the British with the US, as the sterling's rapid depreciation against the US dollar worsened British financial woes.<sup>42</sup> This disastrous loan had been granted on the condition of reducing British protectionism to facilitate trade between the

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<sup>39</sup> Report of the Allied Mission to Observe the Greek Elections, 'Papers of HST, Official File, OF 206, Misc. (May, 1948-49)', Box 920, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>40</sup> Observations on the forthcoming Greek Plebiscite, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1946, 'RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1946:715 to 1946: 800', Box 10, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>41</sup> The British Commonwealth and Empire in Review, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1947, 'Papers of Harry S. Truman: SMOF: Naval Aide to the President Files, 1945-53, War Department Intelligence Review File, February 1947 to May 1947', Box 20, Truman Presidential Library, Independence Missouri.

<sup>42</sup> Clarke, *The Last Thousand Days of the British Empire*, p. 489.

two.<sup>43</sup> To make matters worse, a coal shortage in January 1947 was exacerbated by a bitter winter that almost brought the British industry to a standstill, with factories shutting down throughout the country.<sup>44</sup> A US intelligence report in May 1947 confirmed the dire condition of the British economy, stating that the “capacity of the United Kingdom to provide the manpower and supplies for large military forces will be greatly curtailed for many years to come”.<sup>45</sup> Already in February 1947 the British ambassador to the US announced that “His Majesty’s Government will not be able to meet the financial commitments of the Greek Armed Forces after March 31, 1947”.<sup>46</sup> This triggered a sequence of events which culminated in President Truman’s declaration of what became known as the Truman Doctrine on the 12<sup>th</sup> March. Britain’s plea for assistance was aided by the rising influence on US foreign policy of men like Secretary of State Dean Acheson, George Kennan, and Averell Harriman.<sup>47</sup> The post-war world was different to that in which Americans had been critical of British intervention in Greece. Instead, the view that the Soviets were on the path to world domination was proliferating and so “the British constitute the first major obstacle in the Soviet path”.<sup>48</sup> It was with tragic foresight then that Charles Edson of the OSS had written that:

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<sup>43</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 50.

<sup>44</sup> Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, p. 298.

<sup>45</sup> The International Economic Position of the United Kingdom, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1947, ‘Papers of Harry S. Truman, Presidential Secretary File’, Box 216, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>46</sup> Aide-Memoire, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1947, ‘British Embassy, Washington, 1947. Greece’, FO 115/4317, TNA, London.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World they Made*, new edn. (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2012) pp. 388-402.

<sup>48</sup> British Views of Soviet Foreign Policy Aims, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1946, ‘RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1946:800 to 1946: 812.3, Box 11, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

The British have tragically mismanaged the Greek situation [...] the Englishmen here in this theatre are Empire-builders [...] the British believe that it is essential for British interests in the Middle East that Greece after the war be under effective British control [...] For us to give them a blank check means that sooner or later, we are going to have to accept responsibility for their policy, and one cannot anticipate how large and serious that responsibility may be.<sup>49</sup>

### Intelligence activities in liberated Greece

The future of the British Secret Services had been a concern for the British government as early as 1943. A report from March 1943 stated that “no human brain could have been guilty of deliberately planning such a system [...] the whole future of the Service[s] should be considered without undue delay”.<sup>50</sup> The main victim of the re-organisation of British covert organisations after the war was SOE. An internal memo in the Foreign Office stressed that “we consider it inconceivable that there should exist in peace-time any secret organisation operating in foreign countries that is not responsible to the Foreign Secretary”.<sup>51</sup> It also stated that “the amount of ‘special operations’ work which it may be desirable to do in peace-time in foreign countries is [illegible] such as to justify the existence of a separate secret organisation for the purpose”.<sup>52</sup> This view permeated to the top of the British government, with Winston Churchill replying to Selborne’s attempts to safeguard his

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<sup>49</sup> Jones, “Kipling and all that”, p. 98.

<sup>50</sup> The Future of the Secret Service, ‘Future of Secret Services, Part II, March 1943 to April 1944’, FO 1093/194, TNA, London.

<sup>51</sup> Foreign Office Desiderata in the Matter of Secret Intelligence in the Post-War World, FO 1093/194, TNA.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

organisation that “My dear Top [Selborne], the part which your naughty deeds in war play, in peace cannot at all be considered”.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from the question of sabotage, SOE’s political actions during the war had irked many in the British government. This was particularly true in the case of Greece where Leeper stated that he viewed with “unmixed alarm any prospect of the continuance of SOE representatives in Greece after liberation [...] I [Leeper] would most strongly recommend a complete break in any form of SOE activity in that unhappy country”.<sup>54</sup> SOE activity, not only in its contentious policy in Greece but elsewhere including Yugoslavia and Romania, had not done enough to persuade the diplomatic establishment of the value of covert political action, a doctrine that would again rise to prominence after the Iranian coup in 1953.<sup>55</sup> In early 1946, SOE was rapidly dismantled and absorbed by SIS, most notably but not exclusively in its Special Operations Branch.<sup>56</sup>

The winding down of SOE, which had been the dominant British organisation in Greece, led to a period of transition. Both the Security Service (MI5) and SIS had been active in the region during the war. MI5 was primarily represented by Security Intelligence Middle East (SIME). In Greek affairs SIME was involved in two aspects, highlighted in a report, as “a) Extracts from interrogations Reports, and b) the local security information on the Greek

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<sup>53</sup> Giles Milton, *Churchill’s Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare*, p. 299.

<sup>54</sup> Leeper to Peter Loxley, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1944, ‘Future of Secret Services, Part III, April 1944 to October 1944’, FO 1093/195, TNA, London.

<sup>55</sup> Neville Wylie, ‘Ungentlemanly Warrior or Unreliable Diplomats? Special Operations Executive and “irregular political activities” in Europe’ in Neville Wylie (ed.) *The Politics and Strategy of Clandestine War: Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* (Oxford, Routledge, 2007) pp. 124-125.

<sup>56</sup> Philip H.J. Davies ‘From special operations special political action: The “rump SOE” and SIS post-war covert action capability, 1945-1977’ in *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 2000) p. 57.

Army, Navy, Air force and minorities”.<sup>57</sup> The interrogation reports had been a thorny issue with SOE as there had been issues with SOE agents being delayed by SIME upon successfully leaving Greece. The crux of the issue seems to have been that, according to an SOE report, “SIME are quite rightly reluctant for us to release into Middle East persons of whose bonafides they have not had the opportunity to satisfy themselves” even when operational demands required a faster transition.<sup>58</sup> Other interrogations included that of a German agent on Greek communists who suggested that “in case of impending British invasion of Greece the Germans would not bother about the Greek Communists as they felt that the British would have the same difficulties with them”.<sup>59</sup> After the liberation of Greece, SIME also established a presence in Greece, having arrived with the British troops.

SIS had also been active in Greece during the war. Under its cover name of Inter Services Liaison Department (ISLD) it had been active in gathering information from Greece. Relations between SOE and SIS had been very difficult, especially in Smyrna (SIS’s main operational centre into Greece)<sup>60</sup> with Noel Rees being often singled out by SOE. By March 1944, SOE complained that “it must be borne in mind that Rees has been warned time after time by his chiefs, both in Turkey and in Cairo, to behave. In spite of this nothing has happened, and every warning has followed by an increase in the

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<sup>57</sup> SIME Letter by G.R. Thomson, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1944, ‘SIME Fortnightly Information Reports on Greek Activities, January to June 1944’, WO204/8854, TNA, London.

<sup>58</sup> From B.6.(POL) to X, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1943, ‘Greece: Security Liaison with SIME. Procedure for the reception of SOE Agents and Potential Recruits arriving in Turkey, August 1943 to September 1943’, HS5/507, TNA, London.

<sup>59</sup> Subject: Greek Communists, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1944, ‘Greece: SIME Interrogations Reports (mostly about suspects), January 1944 to August 1944’ HS5/489, TNA, London.

<sup>60</sup> Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 502.

volume of intrigue”.<sup>61</sup> Captain Harris of SOE later reported that “ISLD has been and has remained the enemy of SOE Greece in Turkey”.<sup>62</sup> Captain Harris also pointed out that ISLD:

did nothing but send voluminous reports compiling accusation on accusation against EAM and, consequently, putting difficulties in the way of EAM which was the main resistance force in Greece. Their reports contained the most fantastic accusations. Persons, for instance, reported to be tortured to death by EAM followers, were in perfect health and never molested at all, as we had occasion to hear from their own lips.<sup>63</sup>

In a different report he continued his accusations by stating that:

every possible endeavour was made by them to describe in dark colours the resistance movement in Greece. Of course, the parties that formed the resistance were not and could not have been all angels and many deplorable incidents did occur [...] the harm ISLD have done through their interference in matters which were not of their competence, that is to enter into politics instead of to just pass information, is immeasurable.<sup>64</sup>

This report, while undoubtedly a product of the deep enmity between the services in Smyrna, contradicts the analysis by SIS’s Nigel Clive that “They [SOE] had no fear whatever of trading in political commodities and knew that resistance in Europe was as political a matter as the composition of government. Hence, in this respect SOE outgunned SIS”.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Summary of Rees case, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1944, ‘Greece: Organisation and Administration. Relations with ISLD and HIS, Intrigues of Lt. Cdr. Noel Rees, removal of Boyotas from Turkey, December 1943 to August 1944’, HS5/519, TNA, London.

<sup>62</sup> SOE Base Smyrna, Supplement to Capt. B.C. Skelly’s Report by Capt. C.J. Harris, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1944, ‘Reports Various: Individual Reports, Smyrna Office: Historical Reports by Captain B.S. Kelly and Captain C.J. Harris’, HS5/710, TNA, London.

<sup>63</sup> Report by Capt. C.J. Harris, December 1944, HS5/710.

<sup>64</sup> SOE Base Smyrna, Supplement to Capt. B.C. Skelly’s Report by Capt. C.J. Harris, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/710, TNA.

<sup>65</sup> Nigel Clive, *A Greek Experience*, p. 29.

Indeed, in January 1944, Orme Sargent among others was anxious that reports from Greece should not go solely to the military but also to Leeper, as it would not be possible for him to “always give the best political guidance unless he is fully in the picture”.<sup>66</sup> With the end of the German occupation looming, SIS intensified its activities in Greece. In June 1944, SIS introduced “three parties led by British officers to Patras, Larissa and Kavalla respectively. In view of the mutually antagonistic political factions now struggling for supremacy in Greece, it is hoped that by this means we shall ensure a flow of impartial and factual information”.<sup>67</sup>

The cohabitation of SIS and MI5 in Greece following liberation proved as difficult as the early interactions between the two services. Some division of labour was easy to achieve, with SIS using Greece as a staging ground for the infiltration of the communist Balkan states.<sup>68</sup> This activity was known to the Americans who reported that an SIS officer in Salonika “was instructed to organize a secret service into Yugoslavia and Bulgaria”.<sup>69</sup> However, not everything was as clear cut, with counter-intelligence being a particularly thorny issue. This was part of a wider conflict between the two services over the maintenance of MI5 in the Middle East. This had begun when Findlater Stewart had compiled a report defining the jurisdiction of the Security Service as “the Defence of the Realm and nothing else”.<sup>70</sup> This included MI5 remaining “responsible for obtaining ‘counter-intelligence’ in the Empire”.<sup>71</sup> The problem

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<sup>66</sup> P.N. Loxley to ‘C’, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1944, “C”, Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS): miscellaneous correspondence, January 1944 to December 1944’, FO1093/279, TNA, London.

<sup>67</sup> June Progress Report, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1944, FO 1093/279, TNA.

<sup>68</sup> Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 674.

<sup>69</sup> Report No. R 125-45, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945, RG 84, Box 7, NARA.

<sup>70</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 322.

<sup>71</sup> Conclusions of the Findlater Stewart Report on the Security Service, ‘Security Service (MI5) Responsibilities in Greece, Egypt and Middle East’, CAB 301/29, TNA, London.

was that the definition of the Empire was rapidly changing, with the Services fighting over jurisdiction in the Commonwealth territories, and nowhere was this more problematic than the Middle East.<sup>72</sup>

The threats to the Realm in the region were identified by Percy Sillitoe, the new Director General of MI5, as “Arab nationalists, Jewish terrorists and Russian agents”.<sup>73</sup> Trouble between the two surviving British services resurfaced in January 1947 when the Foreign Office attempted to curb the activities of SIME by arguing that the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt should have also marked the end of the Security Service in the Middle East. Sargent disputed Sillitoe’s claim that the maintenance of SIME in the region was important and stressed that “there are no longer any British troops in the Levant States, and for your [Sillitoe] confidential information it will probably not be long before our troops are evacuated from Greece”.<sup>74</sup> Eventually, this case was led to arbitration which decided that, as the Middle East had a “special strategic position [...] an organisation responsible for the collation and dissemination of security intelligence affecting British interests was essential, and should continue in being”.<sup>75</sup>

Greece was generally considered an exception to this arrangement, being according to Sillitoe a “less integral part of the Middle East are for which SIME is responsible”.<sup>76</sup> This was also confirmed in October 1947 by Dick White of MI5 who said that “we [MI5] do distinguish Greece, as coming within

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<sup>72</sup> Daniel W. B. Lomas, “...the Defence of the Realm and Nothing Else”: Sir Findlater Stewart, Labour Ministers and the Security Service’ in *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 30, No. 6 (2015) p. 807.

<sup>73</sup> Sillitoe to Sargent, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1947, CAB 301/29, TNA.

<sup>74</sup> Sargent to Sillitoe, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1947, CAB 301/29, TNA.

<sup>75</sup> Note of a Meeting held in Sir Edward Bridges’ Room, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1947, CAB 301/29, TNA.

<sup>76</sup> Sillitoe to Sargent, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1947, CAB 301/29, TNA.

the Balkan or Continental orbit, from the remainder of the SIME area".<sup>77</sup> Partly, this was because only the latter two of Sillitoe's threats were applicable to Greece. When SIME established itself in Athens, under the local name of the British Counter Intelligence Service (BCIS), its main objective had been to track down Greeks who had been trained as stay-behind agents by the German Abwehr.<sup>78</sup> However, its role soon expanded and MI5 officers were involved in combating the wider threats to the region and its presence in the country became established as something more permanent. As early as January 1947, there had been attempts for a transfer of responsibility for counter-intelligence from MI5 to SIS.<sup>79</sup> However, this handover does not seem to have occurred for some time. As late as December 1947, within the Foreign Office communication it is revealed that "for various reasons we have agreed to the continuance of MI5 activities in foreign territory in general and in Greece in particular for the next eighteen months".<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps the reason for the retention of BCIS was that, according to an MI5 report on SIME compiled by James Robertson and Guy Liddell in the summer of 1947:

the Greek security authorities are themselves anxious that he [Major Gerhold, commander of BCIS] and his organisation should stay, and not leave Greece when British forces depart. Secondly, the American intelligence representatives, newly arrived in Athens, and without the local contacts they require, wish Gerhold

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<sup>77</sup> Dick White to William Hayter, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1947, 'Security Service (MI5): Representation Overseas, January 1947 to December 1947', FO 1093/363, TNA, London.

<sup>78</sup> Tryphon Efstathiou Kedros, *A Greek Abroad* (Warwickshire, Starnine Design Print, 2000) p. 79.

<sup>79</sup> Sillitoe to Sargent, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1947, CAB 301/29, TNA.

<sup>80</sup> From William Hayter to Sir Clifford Norton, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1947, FO 1093/363, TNA.

to remain in order to assist them in their own liaison with Greek intelligence.<sup>81</sup>

This strengthened position of MI5 in Greece is apparent in a cable from the head of SIS to the Foreign Office in January 1948 declaring that:

I am not in favour of making an attempt at this stage to take over BCIS's work in Athens. It seems to me that MI5's position in Greece under the terms of the 18 months moratorium is very strong and I feel that an attempt on our part (whether it succeeded or not) to expel BCIS from Greece would serve only to exacerbate the relations between the two services.<sup>82</sup>

The Foreign Office even acquiesced to embedding the resident MI5 officers in the British embassy since "on the withdrawal of British troops from Greece, the British Counter Intelligence Service [...] will lose their present military cover".<sup>83</sup>

After this reorganisation, the Foreign Office reported that "the team will consist of Major [redacted, presumably Gerhold] and Captain T.E. Kedros. We suggest the former should rank as a Second Secretary and the latter as an attaché".<sup>84</sup> In his book, the latter recalls that "as time progressed, my department became involved in keeping an eye on the activities of the Communists; the Russian, Bulgarian and Yugoslav embassies were giving indirect aid to the ELAS forces".<sup>85</sup> SIME reports on communist activities in Greece and general counter-espionage summaries continued to be compiled at least until the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1950, with particular emphasis in the final

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<sup>81</sup> IX. BCIS Greece, 'Visit of James Robertson (B3A) and Guy Liddell (DDG) to Security Intelligence Middle East (SIME) Headquarters in Cairo and outlying offices in Baghdad, Jerusalem and Cyprus, April and May 1947, KV4/438, TNA, London.

<sup>82</sup> 'C' to William Hayter, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1948, 'BCIS (British Correspondents Information Service) in Greece, December 1947 to February 1948', FO 1093/432, TNA, London.

<sup>83</sup> From William Hater to Mr Barclay, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1947, FO 1093/363, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> From William Hayter to Sir Clifford Norton, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1947, FO 1093/363, TNA.

<sup>85</sup> Kedros, *A Greek Abroad*, p. 80.

reports being placed on the activities of the Yugoslav legation in Athens as SIME suspected a secretary of being a “UDB officer”.<sup>86</sup>

The continued presence of British troops until 1950 was SIS’s justification for refusing to take over SIME in Greece in late 1949.<sup>87</sup> This presence has often been portrayed as the main reason that MI5 had jurisdiction in Greece, including in Sir Orme Sargent’s letter to Sillitoe quoted earlier in the chapter. In it, Sargent implies that, with British troops about to leave Greece, this also meant the end of MI5’s jurisdiction in Greece. This was further emphasised when BCIS was attached to the British Embassy as a temporary solution, with the Foreign Office stressing that “it was originally intended that the change-over [from MI5 to SIS] should take place on the withdrawal of British troops from Greece”.<sup>88</sup> However, this view was contested in a report on the conflict between SIS and MI5. It stated that:

The presence or absence of British troops is not really germane to the issue. It is true that MI5 entered the area originally for the purposes of the security of the British Forces. It is also true that, because they were on the spot, they assumed control of SIME. But the original reason for their presence had little or nothing to do with their control of SIME. They took this on because they were best qualified body.<sup>89</sup>

The question of jurisdiction was one that continued to hamper relations between the two intelligence services. This was true in the Middle East and in particular Greece, where the strategic interests of the British government transcended the attempts to forge arrangements in order to avoid misunderstandings between the intelligence services.

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<sup>86</sup> SIME Counter-Espionage Summary, 1<sup>st</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> February 1950, ‘SIME Counter-Intelligence Summary’, KV4/239, TNA, London.

<sup>87</sup> Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 637.

<sup>88</sup> From William Hayter to Sir Clifford Norton, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1947, FO 1093/363, TNA.

<sup>89</sup> SIME/MI5 vs the FO, CAB 301/29, TNA.

This overlap of jurisdictions and duplication of work is apparent in the proposed creation of stay-behind networks by both services during these years. When Robertson and Liddell visited BCIS in the summer of 1947, they reported that the officers there were about to submit a proposal for a “BCIS ‘stay-behind’ organisation”.<sup>90</sup> This was referred to in London with a memo reporting that:

MI5’s proposed stay-behind organisation in Greece more or less coincided with an approach from MI5 to Broadway [SIS] attempting to make a settlement in Greece independent of the general MI5-SIS issue which was at the time still unresolved [...] it is clear that some ad hoc settlement will be required in Greece very shortly.<sup>91</sup>

However, SIS was also keen on setting up its own network of stay-behind networks.<sup>92</sup> As early as June 1947, a plan had been drawn up within SIS for operations in Greece, even though it is referred to as “for lack of a better term – ‘staff studies’ to arrive at conclusions on what activities might be practicable and worthwhile”.<sup>93</sup> But despite these early preparations, in November 1948, SIS’s Menzies wrote to the Foreign Office that:

I may not make any preparations on the ground for SO in war except that, when a Foreign Secret Service asks for help [...] there are, however, Secret Services of two friendly countries who have

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<sup>90</sup> IX. BCIS Greece, KV4/438, TNA.

<sup>91</sup> Letter to J.L Pumphrey, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1947, FO 1093/363, TNA.

<sup>92</sup> Panagiotis Dimitrakis, *The Hidden Wars in China and Greece: The CIA, MI6 and the Civil Wars* (London, Amazon Publishing, 2014) p. 28.

<sup>93</sup> Annex I, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1947, ‘Special Operations: Future Planning, June 1947 to July 1947’, FO 1093/360, TNA, London.

not asked for help and who ought to my mind to be ‘provoked’ to so doing [...] Turkey and Greece.<sup>94</sup>

However, there was new competition for SIS in the form of the newly-founded CIA. The American service had made considerable progress since its founding and reported that “substantial progress has been made in organising stay-behind agents in areas likely to be overrun in the event of further hostilities”.<sup>95</sup> Menzies was concerned with this growth and wrote to the Foreign Office that:

I have pointed out to the Head of CIA that separate action by them places the Foreign Secret Services in a most embarrassing position and must lead to friction between CIA and ourselves [...] In Greece, also, I consider that an approach by us would be welcomed, and there again I fear that CIA has already gone ahead of us in a country full of potential SO value. I do not wish to act in competition with CIA in these countries – where they seem to be getting in first - any more than I do nearer home – where we were first in the field. Nevertheless, I do not think that HMG should let control of resistance movements in war in Turkey and Greece be entirely, or even mainly, American.<sup>96</sup>

This is perhaps the best indication of the gradual waning of British influence in Greece after the war and of how Britain was supplanted as Greece’s prime benefactor, including in matters of intelligence, by the United States.

Despite this competition in the field of Special Operations, throughout the post-liberation period both British and American intelligence services were particularly busy tracking and countering the activities of Greek leftists. The Americans were keenly aware of British interest in Greece, as British reports

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<sup>94</sup> ‘C’ to William Hayter, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1948, “C”, Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS): General Comments on the Effectiveness of the Service, January 1948 to November 1948’, FO1093/373, TNA, London.

<sup>95</sup> Unidentified Paper, ‘Papers of Harry S. Truman, SMOF: National Security Council File’ Box 13, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>96</sup> ‘C’ to William Hayter, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1948, FO 1093/373, TNA.

on communist activities were often shared with OSS and later with the Strategic Services Unit (SSU), the remnants of the OSS following its dissolution in 1945. In July 1945 it was recorded that “a total of 62 reports received from Broadway [SIS] [...] half of them concerned with Greece and Trieste [...] Broadway’s interest OSS reports continues to center in [sic.] Russian activities in the Balkans and Near East”.<sup>97</sup> Shared reports later included British attempts to penetrate the KKE and its meetings in order to glean information about its organisations and its intentions.

One of the crucial questions for British intelligence was the level of co-ordination between the Greek communist party and Moscow. To this end, British intelligence managed to get information out of a number of secret meetings in August 1945 and reported on a number of allusions made to the Third International during these but concluded that “it can be said only that the KKE seem not to be in constant and unremitting receipt of orders from Moscow, but to expect them at all crucially important stages”.<sup>98</sup> Shared reports often warned of strikes and other industrial action organised by the Greek leftists. Numerous SSU reports from London highlight decisions taken in various meetings by the KKE Political Bureau, including a strike by the “electric power company [which] is to be followed immediately by a strike in other public utilities, including transportation, newspapers, and the lignite mines”.<sup>99</sup> British officers in Greece also shared their concerns with the American embassy staff, as in November 1946 the US military attaché in

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<sup>97</sup> ETO-Great Britain, July 1945, ‘RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS History Office’, Box 7, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>98</sup> A Report on the Relations of the KKE with Moscow and other Communist Centres, ‘Communism: Relations of Greek Communist Party with Moscow’, FO 286/1170, TNA, London.

<sup>99</sup> Subject: KKE, Political Action through Strikes, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1946, ‘RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Service, Strategic Services Unit Intelligence Reports, 1945-1946. M1656’, Box 1, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

Greece would cable Washington that “British Intelligence believes armed violence will result from labor strikes in Athens area about seven December”.<sup>100</sup>

Apart from BCIS, SIS ran an extensive network named ‘Damocles’ tracing the activity of Greek communists, which included highly placed sources.<sup>101</sup> Another source of information for the British government according to the Americans was the British Police Mission to Greece. Under its commander, Sir Charles Wickham, this mission was established to reform and train the Greek gendarmerie and police. An American report also claimed that “providing intelligence to British authorities concerning dissident elements in Greece is one of its less publicized but most important functions”.<sup>102</sup>

British counter-intelligence work even included keeping a vigilant watch on organisations closer to home. These included the Federation of Greek Maritime Unions and the League for Democracy in Greece. The League for Democracy in Greece was a left-wing parliamentary pressure group which was founded in 1945 to promote causes that were often contrary to official British policy towards Greece. These included working towards a political amnesty for imprisoned leftist Greeks as well as calls for the liberalisation of the security apparatus of the Greek state.<sup>103</sup> The League remained active until the fall of the Greek Junta of 1967-1974. A report on its founding claimed that:

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<sup>100</sup> To Director of Intelligence, WDGS, Washington, DC from Milattache Greece, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1946, ‘RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1946:820 to 1946: 851, Box 12, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>101</sup> Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 676.

<sup>102</sup> British Missions to Greece, ‘RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Records of the Office of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs, 1947-1950’, Box 12 Lot 24, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>103</sup> John Sakkas, *Britain and the Greek Civil War, 1944-1949: British Imperialism, Public Opinion and the Coming of the Cold War* (Berlin, Peleus, 2013) pp. 116-117.

several known staunch sympathisers with the Left in Greece were canvassed and agreed to become founder members. These included well-known people like Compton Mackenzie, Hannen Swaffer [...] and the 'M.P. Circus' (Seymour Cocks, Edelman, Ben Levy, Dodds, Tiffany, Zilliacus, Wilkes, etc.) [...] all the proprietors of Greek restaurants in London were personally canvassed, (the Greek Government said they were blackmailed), so were the Greek ship owners in the City, and those who weren't Royalists willingly contributed to the funds.<sup>104</sup>

These MPs were all to the left of the Labour leadership and Bevin had even attempted to prevent a delegation of MPs associated with the League from visiting Greece.<sup>105</sup> Eventually the League, perhaps a victim of the polarisation of the Cold War, grew increasingly radical and was proscribed by the Labour Party in 1950 with many of its founding parliamentarian members distancing themselves from the organisation.<sup>106</sup> However, the League had also been closely monitored by both SIS and MI5 and had been brought up in the Joint Intelligence Committee in 1948.<sup>107</sup> This had been preceded a few days earlier by a letter from SIS to the Foreign Office concerning the finances of the League and how many of its supporters "are closely connected with 16, King Street, the Headquarters of the British Communist Party".<sup>108</sup> Clearly, intelligence concerns over left-wing opposition to British policy in Greece extended to organisations operating out of Britain, even those including MPs.

At the same time, there was concern among intelligence and diplomatic circles about the burgeoning Greek extreme right-wing. A British report on its activities stated that:

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<sup>104</sup> League for Democracy in Greece, 'Maritpress and League of Democracy in Greece', FO 1093/461, TNA, London.

<sup>105</sup> Sakkas, *Britain and the Greek Civil War*, p. 117.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>107</sup> Letter to Hayter, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1948, FO 1093/461, TNA.

<sup>108</sup> 'C' to Hayter, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1948, FO 1093/461, TNA.

while the total strength of the extreme Royalist movement is not known, it is evident that it is well organised in those very branches of the Greek administration (the Army and Police) which would normally be relied on to maintain order in the event of political disturbances.<sup>109</sup>

American reports often dealt with the relationship between the British government and right-wing Greek forces. In the summer of 1945, an American report stated that “from an authoritative British security office [sic] it has been learned that the KKE has decided to oppose an attempted coup with force of arms [...] the Greeks have been given adequate notice that such an effort [attempted right-wing coup] would be opposed with arms by the British”.<sup>110</sup> This was because, according to an intelligence report given to MacVeagh, “the British, as is shown by their intelligence reports [...] are aware of the situation and do not approve of it”.<sup>111</sup> American explanations for the British warning to the extreme right were that, according to an OSS report to MacVeagh, “British policy is being measurably, indeed greatly, embarrassed by the actions of the Greek Right”.<sup>112</sup> MacVeagh defined British policy as “middle-of-the-road” and reported that the Greek government was “placing the British in the unenviable position of appearing to support reaction”.<sup>113</sup> He also reported that Britain should “encourage the potentially dynamic force of resurgent Greek liberalism”.<sup>114</sup> This was also the view of American intelligence officers who wrote that “Soviet support for EAM has had its counterpart in British support

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<sup>109</sup> JIC Standing Appreciation of Greece, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1946, WO 204/12575, TNA.

<sup>110</sup> Reported Decisions of KKE in Event of Coup, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1945, RG 84 Box 7, NARA.

<sup>111</sup> From Charles F. Edson to Lincoln MacVeagh, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1945, ‘RG 0226 Office of Strategic Services, Records of OSS Operations, Athens-OSS-AD1’, Container 1, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>112</sup> From Commanding Officer OSS to Lincoln MacVeagh, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1945, RG 0226 Container 1, NARA.

<sup>113</sup> From MacVeagh to Ozalid, RG 84 Box 7, NARA.

<sup>114</sup> IV-Conclusion, From MacVeagh to Ozalid, RG 84 Box 7, NARA.

for the Center parties".<sup>115</sup> To maintain the centre, the British also contemplated curtailing the activities of the extreme right.

Fear of a right-wing coup would not subside throughout this period and British and American observers were clear that this only served to strengthen the hand of the KKE. But MacVeagh also indicates a more practical motive for British concerns about the Greek extreme right. He wrote to Washington that the extreme right had:

driven the republicans into a position paralleling that of the Communists, and provided the latter with justification for their own militancy [...] My British colleague undoubtedly had this in mind when he recently expressed the hope to me that the right would not, after all, provoke serious trouble. 'For' he said, 'if the right begin it, the left will win it'.<sup>116</sup>

However, the British government seems to have erred on the side of caution to prevent a left-wing takeover of Greece and seemed content to be more forgiving when curtailing the activity of the right.

Despite some cases where the British acted to restrain the Greek Police and Army, these are few and far between. These include some British interference in attempted purges of non-royalists in the Gendarmerie, with an American report stating that "subsource complains about the fact that the British do not freely allow the removal or transfer of 'undesirable' personnel; subsource presumably refers to non-rightists".<sup>117</sup> This was also referenced in

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<sup>115</sup> Greek Elections as a Factor in International Stability, 'Papers of Harry S. Truman: SMOF: Naval Aide to the President Files, 1945-53, War Department Intelligence Review File, February 1946 to May 1946', Box 17, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>116</sup> Origin, Growth and Activities of the Greek Royalist Organisation known as 'X', October 26<sup>th</sup> 1945, RG 84 Box 7, NARA.

<sup>117</sup> Opinions of Chief of Security, Gendarmerie, Province of Evros, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1946, 'RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Service, Strategic Services Unit Intelligence Reports, 1945-1946. M1656', Box 3, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

1946 by the Greek minister of Public Security who complained that “although generally helpful, [the British Police Mission] had sometimes objected to the removal or transfer of high Greek Gendarmerie officers of leftist sympathies”.<sup>118</sup>

However, it was more common for the British government not to intervene, even if it was aware of extremist tendencies in members of the Greek cabinet or the Greek army. This was clearly the case when, despite knowledge of reactionary intrigues within the Greek army, it was decided that it was “inadvisable to attempt to remove senior officers of royalist sympathies from the newly reorganised Greek Army at the present juncture”.<sup>119</sup> This was also the case when the British overlooked the activities of Petros Mavromichalis, who joined the cabinet in 1946 as Minister of War, and his close associate Colonel Georgios Reppas. Not only had these men been in “earnest and complete collaboration with the enemy” according to the interrogation of a German agent by MI5, corroborated by OSS reports condemning their “shady association” with German intelligence, they were also deeply involved with “X’, ‘BEN’ and other extreme right-wing organisations”.<sup>120</sup> The SSU also highlighted the close association of the British diplomatic establishment in Greece with a Greek named Diakos, part of ‘X’s Voudouris’s “4<sup>th</sup> of August’ associates”.<sup>121</sup> It was also brought to the attention of the Americans that British threats to counter an attempted coup by force may have been slightly exaggerated as MacVeagh was made aware that “in the event of a [right-wing] bloodless coup

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<sup>118</sup> Public Security, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1946, ‘RG 226 Records of the Office of Strategic Service, Strategic Services Unit Intelligence Reports, 1945-1946. M1656’, Box 2, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>119</sup> JIC Standing Appreciation of Greece, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1946, WO 204/12575, TNA.

<sup>120</sup> Notes on Petros Mavromihalis (Greek Minister of War, Air and Navy) and General Georgios Reppas, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1946, ‘RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1946:020 to 1946: 711.9’, Box 9, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>121</sup> Royalist Intrigues Concerning the Future of ‘X’, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1946, M1656, Box 3, NARA.

d'état, however, the British would not automatically move troops to expel rebels from Greek government buildings, but would rather rely on diplomatic pressure".<sup>122</sup>

In many ways the activities of British intelligence and, more so, of British counter-intelligence in Greece were a continuation of the policy followed during the country's occupation by the Axis. Ideally, the British government would have wanted to collaborate with moderate republicans and liberals to forestall any expansion by the left-wing. Working with Greeks of this part of the political spectrum would have been better both for the international standing of Britain, which was aware that the activities of the Greek government were exposing Britain to criticism both at home and abroad. Indeed, the issue of Greece was often raised by the USSR and its allies often to forestall any scrutiny of their activities. The British, the Americans, and the Greeks were all aware of this diplomatic manoeuvrings. On one occasion the Greek Ambassador to London stated that "this action [raising the issue of Greece in the Security Council] by the Soviet Government would appear to be merely a countermove to the raising of the Iranian issue".<sup>123</sup> However, when the British government failed yet again to find adequate collaborators among Greek liberals and moderates, it had little qualms to turn once more to forces of the extreme right to ensure that the left-wing did not gain a dominant position in Greece.

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<sup>122</sup> Memorandum for the Ambassador, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1945, RG 84 Box 7, NARA.

<sup>123</sup> Memorandum on conversation between Mr Aghnides and Mr Hare, January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1946, RG 84 Box 9, NARA.

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## Conclusion

British policy towards Greece during the Second World War pursued two distinct goals. These were laid out by SOE's J.M. Stevens during his tour in Greece in 1943. In an often quoted excerpt from his report, he wrote that "As I understand it, the aims of the British Government in Greece are twofold: First, to obtain the greatest military effort in the fight against the Axis and, second, to have in post-war Greece a stable government friendly to Great Britain, if possible a Constitutional Monarchy".<sup>1</sup> However, it was readily apparent to all involved that these goals were incompatible. EAM, the movement which was best suited to provide the greatest contribution to the war effort, was also the one most inherently risky for future British interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. This was undoubtedly the view held by the British government, as Orme Sargent wrote that "EAM is at once the most powerful organisation and the most fundamentally opposed to our policy".<sup>2</sup> It was this intrinsic dissonance in British aims in Greece that was the very essence of British interactions, both diplomatic and covert, during the occupation.

This begs the question of why was the British government so adamant in its desire to prevent left-wing control of Greece. One of the drivers of British government policy was a sense of loyalty to, and a belief in the legitimacy of, the Greek government-in-exile and the king. This is one of the rationales ascribed to Churchill by Myers, as the latter recounted how the Prime Minister told him that he should not "let them pre-judge the issue about the King. I want to see him have a fair deal".<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Selborne stressed the issue of the

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<sup>1</sup> J.M. Stevens, 'On Present Conditions in Central Greece' in Lars Baerentzen (ed.) *British Reports on Greece, 1943-1944* (Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum Press, 1982) p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> HMG's Policy Towards Greece, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1943, HS5/218, TNA.

<sup>3</sup> Myers, 'The Andarte Delegation to Cairo', p. 163.

legitimacy of the king as an important reason for SOE to minimise its dealings with republican elements in the resistance. He wrote that:

very serious political considerations are involved in this [support of the Greek government-in-exile] to wit the good faith of Great Britain *vis a vis* our Allies. An attitude which lays itself open to a charge of double dealing on the part of HMG in this respect would have serious repercussions, not only on the post-war policy of Britain, but also on the war effort, because the fact that we are trusted by our Allies is a priceless asset that must be preserved at all costs. And the importance of the matter even extends to neutrals. Salazar, for instance, is always suspecting SOE of plotting with leftwing groups. If he learns from the Greeks that such is our habit his suspicions will be confirmed. The reaction of Franco would be the same<sup>4</sup>

However, the legitimacy of this argument decreased as the war dragged on, especially in the light of British policy towards the governments just north of Greece, and in particular Yugoslavia.

King Peter and the Yugoslav government-in-exile had also found shelter with the British government throughout the war and there are enough similarities between EDES and the Chetniks to raise questions about British policy towards Greece. The Chetniks' passivity as well as accusations of their collaboration had been known to the British through decryption of German communications and helped ensure the cessation of British aid.<sup>5</sup> Similar accusations were levelled at EDES, especially regarding the open collaboration of EDES Athens, yet the British government remained steadfast in its support of Zervas despite his many shortcomings. In fact, nowhere is this divergent policy more obvious than in a telegram from Leeper to the Foreign office in which he states "that however justified our support of Tito may be in a military

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<sup>4</sup> From SO to Lord Glenconner, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1942, HS5/213, TNA.

<sup>5</sup> Roderick Bailey, 'Communist in SOE: Explaining James Klugmann's recruitment and retention' in Neville Wyllie (ed.) *The Politics and Strategy of Clandestine Warfare: Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* (Routledge, London, 2007) p. 71.

sense, we should let him know that we have a direct interest in securing a settlement of existing differences in Greece where we have undertaken operational responsibilities, and that we look to him to keep clear of any links with one party in Greece”.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the Second World War, King Peter was unable to return to Yugoslavia, marking a stark contrast to the almost unlimited support given to the Greek government-in-exile by the British.

The most commonly recurring theme throughout the war in both British and American archives is a constant British fear of EAM being used to increase Russian influence. Nicholas Hammond of SOE wrote in his memoirs “ELAS could not serve two masters. If its loyalty was to Russia, the sooner we became aware of it the better”.<sup>7</sup> One of the earliest appearances of this overriding concern is in a report from 1941, discussing “post-war Anglo-Russian relations” as a wider note on South-East Europe.<sup>8</sup> As early as May 1942, considerations on the post-war relations of Greece appear in a telegram from SOE Cairo setting out that, in agreement with the view of Kanellopoulos, SOE believed Greece would either be “A) a liberal Republic a) looking to England and USA for guidance and alliance [...] or B) a republic of the extreme left a) looking to Russia for guidance and alliance”.<sup>9</sup> This view seems to have been accepted within SOE as it re-appears in a report by Pirie more than a year later in almost exactly the same form.<sup>10</sup> It was even used by Glenconner in his early attempts to persuade the Foreign Office to alter its policy of unconditional support of the monarchy, warning that “adherence to the official policy [will] injure relations between England and Greece, split the country and force

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<sup>6</sup> From HM’s Ambassador to the Greek Government in Cairo to the Foreign Office, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1943, HS5/220, TNA.

<sup>7</sup> N.G.L. Hammond, *Venture into Greece: With the Guerrillas, 1943-1944* (London, W. Kimber, 1983) pp. 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Some notes on South-East Europe, HS5/145, TNA.

<sup>9</sup> Transcript of Telegram B/1362 from D/HV, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1942, HS5/654, TNA.

<sup>10</sup> The Present Crisis in Greek Affairs, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/338, TNA.

Republicans to look towards Russia”.<sup>11</sup> The fear of EAM being synonymous with Russia is also confirmed in a later memorandum by the War Cabinet which stated that “given Russian relations with EAM, it might add Greece to the post-war Balkan Slav bloc which now showed signs of forming under Russian influence and from which we were anxious to keep Greece detached”.<sup>12</sup>

Even after liberation, the British believed that prominent royalists, like the politician Philip Dragoumis, were there to assist in the effort to “counteract the Russian and Balkan Slavic influence exerted through KKE”.<sup>13</sup> This fear of Russian influence was also used to justify the continued presence of British troops in Greece in 1947. An entry in a schedule on British military commitments, under the heading ‘reason for occupation’, reads “it has been the policy of HMG to retain forces in Greece [...] to prevent the spread of Russian influence”.<sup>14</sup> There is enough archival evidence that corroborates that the most pressing concern of British planners was the geostrategic position of Greece and fear of Russian expansion. As shown in the Introduction, ascribing British involvement in the Greek Civil War to ‘British Imperialism’ is often derided. However, the archives provide a glimpse into the thought process of many British officials, both intelligence and diplomatic, when they formulated policy towards Greece. Thus, while it is not the intention of the thesis to ascribe the Greek Civil War to any over-arching policy of ‘British Imperialism’ in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is interesting to note the mentality of those members of the British government who dealt with Greece.

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<sup>11</sup> SOE Policy Towards Greece, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1942, HS5/738, TNA.

<sup>12</sup> WM (44) Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1944, PREM 3 212/1, TNA.

<sup>13</sup> Notes on Personalities, Division of Biographic Information, January 10<sup>th</sup> 1947, ‘Paul A. Porter Papers’, Box 1, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>14</sup> Annex 1: Overseas Commitments, ‘Reductions in the Armed Forces Overseas, 1947’, FO 1093/511, TNA, London.

There is little evidence to support the view that British concerns over Greece, especially before 1945, were an early manifestation of Cold War anxieties. Despite Churchill's rhetorical question to Eden asking whether they were "to acquiesce in the communization of the Balkans"<sup>15</sup>, this was not the main concern of the British government. This was particularly true of the British intelligence community. A report to the Foreign Office stated that:

I have referred to Russian activities and not to Communist. I think it is probably best to look at the matter in this way. It will probably be a good thing that SIS should review their ideas about 'Communism'. Russia may work through Communists in many countries; but she may also work through other parties.<sup>16</sup>

Another suggested that the "antagonism of the Russian system to British interests must be accepted in view of – first her patent mood of internal chauvinism and imperial expansion – (which is pure 'Peter-the-Great'-ism using 'Communism' as a bait for the short sighted)".<sup>17</sup> This was even the view adopted by American observers on Greek events, mere months before American intervention, with a report stating that "Moscow's real interests are territorial, not ideological".<sup>18</sup> Finally, British attempts to exclude American intelligence officers in Greece throughout the occupation, as shown in Chapter 7, are another indicator that British desire for a zone of exclusive action in Greece was clearly not a result of an early Cold War mind-frame.

The language used by many of the British reports on policy towards in Greece in relation to the USSR perhaps reveals that their authors had

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<sup>15</sup> G.M. Alexander, *The Prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British Policy in Greece, 1944-1947* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982) p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> To Mr. Loxley, FO 1093/195, TNA.

<sup>17</sup> Future European Policy and Organisation Particularly affecting the East and South East, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1944, FO 1093/195, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> From LJC to KLR, Memorandum, March 28<sup>th</sup> 1946, RG 84, Box 10, NARA.

inherited the geostrategic theories developed in the long nineteenth century. Perhaps this is why Patrick Hurley wrote that:

I have been told, usually by British and Americans, that the principles of imperialism already have succumbed to the principles of democracy. From my own observations, however, I must say that if imperialism is dead, it seems very reluctant to lie down. [...] British imperialism seems to have acquired a new life.<sup>19</sup>

When Woodhouse and Stevens were formulating SOE strategy, their long term objective was “to ensure success of HMG’s policy that Greece becomes a British sphere of influence and Monarchy at end of war”.<sup>20</sup> The term ‘sphere of influence’ would also be used by Selborne who wrote to Churchill that “it has been part of our policy for some time to keep the Russians out of Greece. We cannot claim Greece as sphere in which our influence should be predominant if we evacuate the country and leave it to civil war and anarchy”.<sup>21</sup> It is undeniable that, for many in the British government and the intelligence services, this was what was at stake in Greece. This was echoed in a later SOE report stating that “it is assumed that our long term policy towards Greece is to retain her as a British sphere of influence and that Russian dominated Greece would not be in accordance with British strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean”.<sup>22</sup> David Talbot-Rice, an officer of British military intelligence, concurred as he was quoted in the minutes of a meeting as having said that “the whole of our policy in the Balkans was associated with the major British aim of securing the Mediterranean as a British highway and that, in furtherance of this policy it was the object of HMG to orientate the

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<sup>19</sup> From Patrick Hurley to the President, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1943, ‘Dean G. Acheson Papers, Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary of State File, 1941-1949’, Box 27, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>20</sup> Keelrow No. 751, received 20<sup>th</sup> May 1943, HS5/215, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> SO to Prime Minister, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1944, HS5/621, TNA.

<sup>22</sup> Paper on Greece’s Strategic Position in the Eastern Mediterranean, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

Mediterranean countries towards Britain and away from Russia”.<sup>23</sup> For many observers, both British and American, Greece had become once again a link in the defence of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Straits against Russian expansionism.

It is interesting to note the importance attached to Greece by British and American officials in relation to the question of the Dardanelles Straits. Indeed, it is arguable that one of the prime motivations of the British government when negotiating on the future of Greece at the Tolstoy conference was to reassure the Turkish government that Britain retained a dominant position in the Mediterranean.<sup>24</sup> But there remained unease about the future of the Straits. There was a fear that, if Greece fell to the Russians, this would have a knock-on effect and lead to a Soviet takeover of Turkey. The SOE report quoted above stated that, if the Soviets established a presence in Greece, it “would fit in with any policy they may have or may develop which is aimed at establishing themselves on the Northern shores of the Dardanelles and in the Aegean. With Russian troops to east and west, Turkey would soon succumb to Russian domination”.<sup>25</sup>

This fear of a domino effect also appeared in American diplomatic papers, with one report stating that the State Department was aware that Greek affairs had:

implications as to Near East. General feeling of commissioners with whom I have close contact particularly British, French, Chinese and Colombian is that if Greece goes not only Near East

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<sup>23</sup> Possibilities of closer SOE cooperation with NKVD in Middle East, January 1944, HS5/154, TNA.

<sup>24</sup> Fraser J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014) pp. 201-202.

<sup>25</sup> Paper on Greece’s Strategic Position in the Eastern Mediterranean, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1944, Peltekis Archive, Benaki Museum.

goes with it but also Italy and France [...] after having been rebuffed in Azerbaijan and Turkey Soviets are finding Greece surprisingly soft.<sup>26</sup>

This of course is also reflective of the growing traction of Containment Theory in American diplomatic circles under the Truman administration. The more immediate concern of the Allies was that control of Greece would allow the Soviets to bypass the Straits altogether. Guy Liddell of MI5 wrote that the Soviet “attempt to isolate Turkey by developing Azerbaijan independence, stirring up the Kurds, support of Bulgarian claims to the Aegean and Greek Left-Wing agitation for eastern Thrace can be interpreted as part of Russia’s traditional desire to control the Straits”.<sup>27</sup> American observers agreed that:

acquisition of all or a substantial part of Northern Greece would give the Russians one outlet on the Aegean and result in the strategic investment of the coveted Dardanelles [...] British diplomacy is presumably equally aware of the possible implications behind the present war of nerves directed against Greece, but it can scarcely afford to adopt a similar policy of retreat. Appeasement on the issue of Northern Greece would involve the surrender of an important bastion of security in the Mediterranean.<sup>28</sup>

A different American report even went one step further and claimed that Greece was crucial because of its “strategic position vis-a-vis Russia. Greece literally and figuratively blocks the fulfilment of two basic Soviet aims in this area. Without a neutral, if not a ‘friendly’ government in Greece, actual control of the Dardanelles would avail Russia but little”<sup>29</sup>. Clearly, British and

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<sup>26</sup> G58/8/47, FO 115/4317, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> Basic Factor in Soviet Diplomatic Action during 1945-1946, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1946, ‘Basic Factor in Soviet Diplomatic Action During 1945-1946’: Paper by Guy Liddell’, FO 1093/542, TNA, London.

<sup>28</sup> Page 15 Unidentified Report, RG 84, Box 7, NARA.

<sup>29</sup> Part III-1 Political Work, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1947, ‘RG 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Greece, US Embassy, Classified General Records, 1943-1963, 1947:100 to 1947: 710, Box 14, NARA, College Park, Maryland.

American officials considered that events in Greece had far wider geopolitical implications.

A final question as regards the issue of control of the Straits is the extent to which this reflected a continuation of 19<sup>th</sup> century politics. The American intelligence circles believed so to a certain extent. In one review, it was written that:

turning to the present policies of these two Powers in respect to the Straits, one finds that, with only slight exception, each maintains the traditional point of view of the State concerned [...] Moscow, nevertheless, continues to flaunt the slogan of 'Security and the Straits' while in reality moving with its old persistence to dominate all of Turkey and, through Turkey, the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. Britain, meanwhile, continues to show slight interest in the Straits themselves but to recognise and resist the Soviet threat to survival of the British position in a strategically vital world area.<sup>30</sup>

However, they also realised that the main root of the conflict was no longer shipping but Middle Eastern oil. The Americans viewed continued British access to oil as "by far the most important aim [of Britain]. The United Kingdom, with practically no oil deposits, depends more than any other Power on the Middle East".<sup>31</sup> However, they also warned of a Soviet desire to "supplant the British interests".<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, they believed that the Mediterranean and "the British lifeline must be examined, not as an avenue between Britain and the British possessions east of Suez, but as an avenue

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<sup>30</sup> The Role of the Straits in Anglo-Russian Rivalry, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1946, 'Papers of Harry S. Truman: SMOF: Naval Aide to the President Files, 1945-53, War Department Intelligence Review File, October 1946 to January 1947', Box 19, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>31</sup> British Military Problems in the Near and Middle East, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1947, SMOF Intelligence Reviews Box 19, Truman Library.

<sup>32</sup> Soviet Foreign Policy in the Middle East, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1946, SMOF Intelligence Reviews Box 17, Truman Library.

from each to the strategically vital Middle East”.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps British policy towards Greece in the 1940s can be viewed as a continuation of the old British Mediterranean policy with a different end goal.

A final open question is the influence of contemporary geostrategic academic work on British officials in this period, primarily of the work of Halford Mackinder. Indeed, in 1942 his book *Democratic Ideas and Reality* was widely debated, mainly in America, both in academic circles and in popular newspapers.<sup>34</sup> Famous for his thesis of “Who rules East Europe commands the heartland; who rules the heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the World”<sup>35</sup>, Mackinder wrote that “the possession of Greece [...] would probably carry with it the control of the World-Island”.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Greece was the only of Mackinder’s Heartland buffer states that did not eventually become a Soviet satellite.<sup>37</sup>

British policy towards Greece was not formulated on the spot and it was not a result of events on the ground. It was the evolution of a consistent policy stretching back decades, even if that policy’s primary concern was no longer shipping lanes but oil deposits. The often brutal attempts by EAM to cement its post-war position as the largest political organisation in Greece were abhorrent to the British but it can hardly be argued that these attempts were the root of implacable British hostility. In fact, it is probable that the only effect of the appearance of EAM on British policy was that it forced Britain to undertake

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<sup>33</sup> Significance of the British Empire Lifeline, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1946, SMOF Intelligence Reviews Box 18, Truman Library.

<sup>34</sup> Torbjorn L. Knutsen, ‘Halford J. Mackinder, Geopolitics and the Heartland Thesis’ in *The International History Review*, Vol. 36, No. 5 (2014) p. 848.

<sup>35</sup> Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, new edn. (New York, Norton Library, 1962) p. 150.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>37</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map tells us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate* (New York, Random House Trade, 2013) p. 77.

more extreme forms of intervention as the conflict escalated.<sup>38</sup> Without wanting to engage in counterfactual history, considering the strategic importance attributed to Greece by British diplomatic and intelligence circles, it seems highly unlikely that they would have acquiesced to an EAM takeover of Greece, even if it had been peaceful. Regardless, what occurred in Greece was a deadly escalation fuelled by mutual mistrust.

The existing historiography on the interactions between the British government, and SOE in particular, and the Greek guerrillas commonly portrays a picture of British policy in two acts.<sup>39</sup> This view, also put forward by Kalyvas and Marantzidis in their co-authored book, describes how (trans.):

British involvement in Greek affairs of the 40s can be divided into two periods. The first begins in 1941 and is present at least until the summer of 1943 (and ‘Operation Animals’ which deceived the Germans into believing of an imminent invasion of Greece) in which the British priority is the war against the Germans and to this end support of any resistance initiative no matter its origin. The second, starting at the end of 1943, concerns the period in which Greece is no longer militarily important to the war effort and the British realise that the biggest danger is a communisation of the Balkans.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece*, p. 225.

<sup>39</sup> Indicatively, Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare*, pp. 348-350, Menelaos Haralambides, *Δεκεμβριανά 1944: Η Μάχη της Αθήνας (December Events 1944: The Battle of Athens)* (Athens, Αλεξάνδρεια, 2014) pp. 18-26, Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, pp. 29-32, Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece*, pp. 141-142, Richter, *Δύο Επανάστασεις και Αντεπαναστάσεις*, pp. 204-210.

<sup>40</sup> Original Text: Η Βρετανική εμπλοκή στα ελληνικά πράγματα της δεκαετίας του '40 μπορεί να χωριστεί σε δύο περιόδους. Η πρώτη ξεκινά το 1941 και φτάνει μέχρι τουλάχιστον το καλοκαίρι του 1943 (σχέδιο Animals παραπλάνης των Γερμανών για επικείμενη απόβαση στην Ελλάδα) κατά την οποία η βρετανική προτεραιότητα είναι ο πόλεμος εναντίον των Γερμανών και η υποστήριξη κάθε αποτελεσματικής αντιστασιακής πρωτοβουλίας απ' όπου και αν προερχόταν. Η δεύτερη περίοδος, τέλη του 1943, όταν η Ελλάδα υποχωρεί σε στρατιωτική σημασία στα μέτωπα του Β' Παγκόσμιου πολέμου και οι Βρετανοί αντιλαμβάνονται ότι ο μέγιστος κίνδυνος πια είναι η κομμουνιστικοποίηση της Βαλκανικής, Kalyvas and Marantzidis, *Εμφύλια Πάθη*, p. 351.

However, it is a mistake to view Britain's pursuit of its aims in Greece as a sequence of differing priorities. Rather, from the very early days of the Greek resistance, the British government sought to square the circle between long-term and short-term goals in pursuit of an unchanging policy.

It is easy to trace the evolution of British hostility towards EAM after the summer of 1943 and this has been presented in this work starting from chapter 6. It can be summarised in an extract from the report by Sargent quoted at the beginning of this chapter, in which he concluded that "we should therefore attempt to weaken it [EAM] and to build up the rival organisations which are less radical and more amenable to our influence, in so far as this can be done without forfeiting the cooperation of EAM to an extent which would seriously weaken the guerrilla effort".<sup>41</sup> His conclusion echoes various statements made by Leeper, Churchill, and others in this period. These have been quoted throughout earlier chapters when analysing the dual policy of the British government towards EAM. But this dual policy was neither conceived nor set in motion in the summer of 1943. It was neither a reaction to the 'First Round' of the Civil War (or even ELAS's earlier attempts to disband other guerrilla groups) nor a response to the improving military prospects of Britain in the war or even to the southward expansion of the Red Army. All these factors accelerated and intensified the dual policy, but this had been developed and acted upon as early as the first few months of 1942. In many ways, the analysis of British intelligence activities in this dissertation reaches a conclusion similar to that reached in Procopis Papastratis's analysis of diplomatic activities, in which he suggests a constant objective of British policy towards Greece before, during, and after the Second World War.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> HMG's Policy Towards Greece, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1943, HS5/218, TNA.

<sup>42</sup> Procopis Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece*, pp. 217-224.

The implementation of this dual policy has been illustrated at length throughout the dissertation. Whatever support was given to EAM, even before Operation 'Animals', was given begrudgingly and was comparatively much less than that given to the other organisations. The discrepancy in the distribution of early funding between the various embryonic organisations in 1942 was addressed in Chapter 3. Even then, whatever sparse funding was provided to EAM was usually granted not out of a desire to expand and support the organisation, but out of a desire to placate and control it until it could be weakened. This was usually attempted through the establishment and support of rival resistance groupings, set up to tempt EAM members away from their organisation. This intent is clearly shown in the interactions between the Foreign Office and SOE in the early days of the Anglo-Greek Committee and SOE's association with Kanellopoulos. Special mention should be made in this context of the support given to EDES throughout the Greek occupation. This support was not only disproportionate to the size and capabilities of the organisation which was dwarfed by EAM, but was also given despite consistent misgivings about its leadership, including the early interactions between Zervas and SOE, as well as the taint of collaboration in the latter part of the war. Yet EDES, even in a period of supposed parity of British support to the Greek guerrillas in early 1943, received twice the quantity of weapons and ammunition that EAM received despite being six times smaller than it.<sup>43</sup> This discrepancy was clearly not a product of the events of the summer of 1943 and in fact had begun in 1942.

In many ways, the majority of SOE activities in 1942 were attempts to build-up a centrist resistance. Operations 'Isinglass', 'Thurgoland', and 'Brevity' were all attempts to form a new dominant resistance organisation

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<sup>43</sup> Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece*, p. 141.

which would be more amenable to British guidance, especially as concerned the future of the Greek monarchy, and which ideally would not include, or at least not be led by, the Greek communists. However, the British, and the Foreign Office in particular, underestimated anti-monarchical fervour in Greece and believed that republicans could be persuaded to put aside, if only temporarily, their enmity towards the king. While members of SOE had been aware that support for the king was a doomed venture, they were unable to change the opinion of the Foreign Office, despite many attempts by Glenconner and others. The delay in realising that a widespread non-communist republican body which would work with the Greek government-in-exile was a false hope gave EAM both time and the moral standing to consolidate the anti-monarchical resistance into one organisation. Additionally, these efforts to form a new organisation did nothing but further discredit anyone who tried to work towards this goal, including Kanellopoulos and Tsigantes. The insistence of British intelligence, at the behest of the Foreign Office, to stimulate some sort of popular resistance which would not owe allegiance to EAM but to a Greek government-in-exile burdened by its past, splintered the Greek republican camp. The timing could not have been worse as it coincided with a pan-European radicalisation, ignited by the war and the widespread experience of occupation. The early splintering of the republicans in Greece, due to the incessant meddling of British intelligence services, eliminated them as a viable option, ironically later depriving the British government of its most valuable ally. Additionally, the demise of the republicans further accelerated the vicious cycle of escalation, as it not only encouraged the Greek right but also created a pool of easy recruits for the left. Most often, a terrible fate befell those men like Psarros who did not adapt to the times. But the failures of the Foreign Office and SOE in creating a third pole of resistance should not be interpreted as a lack of intent in trying to weaken and disrupt EAM prior to 'Operation Harling', much less as a policy of prioritising the war effort.

The only result of these constant attempts to diminish the appeal of EAM was to alienate much of its leadership. When reflecting on his experience of the Greek Civil War, Myers wrote that:

why, they [EAM] asked, should the Allies persuade other Greek leaders to take to the mountains and form rival andarte organisations, when all that was wanted was one big national movement? Why should they be rewarded with gold for doing so? Why should they receive material support from the Allies out of proportion to their numbers? What was the matter with EAM and ELAS, which had been formed solely as a result of their own initiative, unaided by the Allies? [...] Such questions as these would all have been reasonable had EAM themselves pursued a broad-minded policy of moderation.<sup>44</sup>

Regardless of its motivation, EAM had reason to mistrust British intentions long before the debacle of the andarte delegation visit to Cairo in August 1943. It should also be stressed that the intensity of the dual policy towards EAM by the British government did not diminish during the heyday of guerrilla warfare between Operations 'Harling' and 'Animals'. Instead, once again, this period was characterised by British attempts to wrest control of the guerrillas from the EAM leadership, mainly through the creation of the 'Natbands'. Less forgiving of British policy than many of his colleagues at the time, Noel-Baker stated to his SOE superiors that "it would be no exaggeration to say that except at its very inception our attitude towards the EAM – whatever the outward forms – has been one of constant hostility".<sup>45</sup>

These early SOE-EAM interactions also help disprove a corollary of the 'two phases of British policy' theory, which suggests that during this first period of all-out pursuit of the war, SOE created EAM but was then unable (or

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<sup>44</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 277.

<sup>45</sup> British Policy to Greece, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1944, HS5/221, TNA.

unwilling) to control it when the shift in British policy occurred.<sup>46</sup> At best, Gerolymatos writes that “SOE was created to work with radicals and revolutionaries in wartime, but was not prepared to manage these newly mobilized forces [...] The SOE was not responsible for the schisms in Greek society, but it had undermined the country’s legitimate authority”.<sup>47</sup> Makris-Staikos, ever polemic, believes that “SOE’s role is grievous: it misled the Foreign Office [...] Myers and Woodhouse took the shameful route of constantly acquiescing to and appeasing [EAM]”.<sup>48</sup> This theory implies, and often states outright, that, had SOE not been involved in Greece and not fostered guerrilla warfare, the development of the resistance would have been markedly different. This in itself is split into two lines of argumentation. The first is exemplified in an article written by Goulter-Zervoudakis in which she states that “it is likely had Zervas received the exclusive backing of the British from the beginning, then EAM-ELAS’s growth would have been checked”.<sup>49</sup> The second, exemplified by an excerpt from the book by Kalyvas and Marantzidis, suggests that “without British material and technical support, it is doubtful if the appearance of guerrillas in the Greek mountains would have been quite so widespread”.<sup>50</sup> This dissertation has avoided engaging in counterfactual history but finds little credence to either of these claims. Firstly, EAM expanded and developed, in many ways, in spite of British support. Considering the sheer magnitude of disproportionate support given to EDES, there is little evidence to indicate that, had Zervas received slightly more and EAM slightly less, the

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<sup>46</sup> Indicatively, Christina Goulter-Zervoudakis, ‘The Politicization of Intelligence’, pp. 184-185, Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek Resistance*, p. 219, Makris-Staikos, *Ο Άγγλος Πρόξενος*, p. 742.

<sup>47</sup> Gerolymatos, *The British and the Greek Resistance*, p. 219.

<sup>48</sup> Original Text: Ο ρόλος της SOE θα είναι θλιβερός: Παραπλανά το Foreign Office [...] οι Myers και Woodhouse ακολουθούν τον δρόμο της ντροπής, των συνεχών υποχωρήσεων και του κατευνασμού, Makris-Staikos, *Ο Άγγλος Πρόξενος*, p. 742.

<sup>49</sup> Goulter-Zervoudakis, ‘The Politicization of Intelligence’, p. 184.

<sup>50</sup> Kalyvas and Marantzidis, *Εμφύλια Πάθη*, p. 363.

result would have been different. In fact, it is more likely according to Myers that this would have only furthered EAM's attempts to liquidate its opposition, as it would have been certain of the enmity of the British government.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, while it is evidently true that widespread guerrilla activity would not have taken part in Greece had the British not encouraged it, there is no indication that EAM would not have continued to be the largest resistance organisation in Greece. Indeed, both its guerrillas and its dominant position in Greece predate any British interest in promoting guerrilla warfare.

Therefore, it is hoped that, by tracing the activities of the British intelligence services in Greece, this dissertation has established that there were not two distinct periods of British policy towards wartime Greece. Instead, British policy towards left-wing Greek guerrillas remained constant throughout the war and after liberation. What altered as the war progressed was the intensity with which this was pursued. What began as a slow-burning attempt to create organisations to rival EAM and to restrain it through control of its supplies escalated as liberation drew nearer. The avenues pursued in many ways remained the same but became far more brazen. Whereas during the first years of the occupation the rival organisations were to be comprised of moderate republicans like Kanellopoulos and Zannas, by 1944 the British government had few qualms about supporting and promoting extremely reactionary organisations, which often had links to the German occupation forces. Similarly, what had begun as a consistent strangling of Allied supplies to EAM escalated to a complete cessation of supplies during the 'First Round' and multiple occasions on which a full break with EAM, including its denunciation as an enemy, were considered. This escalation between the two sides, while not the main cause of the Greek Civil War, was undeniably

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<sup>51</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 281.

instrumental in creating the conditions for the Dekemvriana and the polarised and violent years of 1945 and 1946 which led to the outbreak of the main phase of the Civil War in 1946. In their attempts to battle for control, both the British and EAM assumed a with-us-or-against-us mentality which made not choosing a side very difficult for most Greeks. This polarisation also hampered, if not made impossible, any attempt at reconciliation after liberation.

The Intelligence Services, despite protestations from some of its members like Pirie, Noel-Baker, and Glenconner, were guided by the Foreign Office in implementing a policy which had been consistent from the early days of the war. Its effect on Greece was not a blunder, created by British pursuit of dissonant short-term and long-term aims. This policy aimed at minimising the effect of the war and occupation on the future political landscape of Greece, in an attempt to defend British geostrategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. This meant suppressing the rapid growth of communism in Greece and popular support for the Left while maintaining a political system which had been corroded by decades of strife due to the 'National Schism'. As the war progressed, and as EAM grew uncontrollable, so the attempts of British intelligence to erode it became more apparent and increasingly desperate. British intervention in Greece was neither a heroic act in defence of freedom nor a sinister plot to suppress Greek liberty but a reflection of underlying British priorities without consideration to consequences.

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