

Belonging to the West: The Early Stages of the Greek Civil War

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The first thing that any researcher should always do in a paper is to define his object of research as accurately and comprehensibly as possible. Defining the object of our research might seem easy, as the term 'Greek Civil War' seems quite self-explanatory. But this is not easy at all. As a matter of fact even today there is still disagreement as to what should be considered the time frame of the war. There is also disagreement on the character and the goals of the belligerents. And for a long period of time there was a debate on whether it was a war at all.[1]

The first issue that we have to address is our position on the importance of the international factor. The main argument of this paper is that the international environment had a major impact on, and was the most important factor in, the development of the civil conflict of 1943-1945 in Greece. This is not to say that we believe that the major powers, the Allies of the Second World War—namely Great Britain, USA and USSR, were using the Greeks as mere puppets of their geopolitical game. On the contrary, we believe any research on the Greek Civil War should have three levels of analysis: the international, the regional, and the national. These three terms could respectively be translated into the fragile relationship and power balancing among the Allies; the spread of communist regimes in the Balkans; and the internal struggle for the modernization of the political system, the constitutional issue, and the conduct of free elections. However, in the period under discussion, one of the major powers—Great Britain—was immediately involved as a belligerent. Thus this was not just an external or 'international' factor. Accordingly, our analysis should be closer, for example, to an analysis of the Vietnam War than to an analysis of the Spanish Civil War. Both the Vietnam War and the Greek Civil War were the result of the amalgamation of the international and the national levels of analysis. Conversely, the final, third round of the Greek Civil War had more of a national character.

This paper also has another purpose and that is to show that the protagonists of the drama actually had less options available to them than most historians tend to believe. As explained earlier, there is a tendency among students of the Greek Civil War to put the blame on one side or the other. Some say that it was the KKE's malicious intentions or bad choices that led to the Civil War; others accuse the British of following an imperialistic policy in Greece, which included conflict aimed at imposing the exiled Greek King, George II, and establishing Greece's position in the Western sphere of influence.

In reality, none of the actors had that much flexibility. The major powers, for example, had to balance between the necessities of the war effort and the strategic planning of the future. Things were especially difficult for the British, who had to implement the centuries-old strategy of keeping Russia out of the Mediterranean and maintain communication routes towards the Middle East and beyond, all under the pressure of the security dilemma posed by the Russian advance towards the west and the south. The KKE also had to choose its plan of action while trying to balance its internationalist and revolutionary ideology with the necessity of maintaining its socio-political alliance with progressive and highly democratic elements and the international political reality. The scope of the belligerents was further narrowed by mutual suspicion and hatred fuelled by decades of political oppression and national division.

If we were to give a schematic representation of the situation, it would be a spiral of mutual distrust, preconceptions, and misperceptions that led to confusion, limited the choices available to the actors, and created a situation where violence seemed the most logical route of action. This is not to say that the actors were victims of fate, nor is it an

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effort to create excuses; it is simply a representation of the complex reality in which political figures had to make crucial decisions.

In the pages that follow, we describe the dilemmas of the actors, the environment in which they had to plan their actions, and the ways in which this international and internal environment influenced the course of events. What this paper does not do is describe the mechanics of political communication and the nexus of misperceptions that further aggravated the situation. We try, in the various stages of analysis, to see some of these problems separately, but do not provide a systematic framework for the study of these malfunctions. In our defence, such a framework does not exist and the articulation of one exceeds the purpose and the limits of this paper, as well as, regrettably, our own knowledge and expertise. So we will have to leave this task—currently an important gap in the literature—to sociologists and political scientists.

We will conclude this introduction by presenting the outline of this paper. This paper is divided in two parts: Section One (Chapters 1-3) and Section Two (Chapters 4-6). The first chapter on each section, Chapters 1 and 4 respectively, are dedicated to describing the international context and the geopolitical and strategic planning of the major powers. We will see the evolution of their policies and of the power balance relationships in the Alliance and also how these changes affected the situation in the Balkan region and in Greece.

In Chapters 2 and 5 we will narrate the historical events and look at the protagonists, particularly how their decisions and actions were affected by the international situation. We try to avoid an exhaustive description of the events, but emphasize instead the interaction of internal and external factors.

The last chapters on each section—Chapters 3 and 6—are dedicated to a more holistic evaluation of the events and of their consequences. At this point, besides analyzing why events turned out the way they did, we will also see how they shaped the events that followed.

Finally the paper will close with a conclusive chapter—Chapter 7—in which we will briefly summarize the results of our research and consider their effect on the last round and its result.

Perhaps it would be better for us to consider the historical debates in greater detail before moving on to the exposition of our analysis. Writers on the Greek Civil War generally fall under three broad categories. The first one is the *traditionalist interpretation*. The traditionalist interpretation views the Civil War as the result of a continuous effort by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) to seize power and attach Greece to the political chariot of the Soviet Union. Traditionalist views also utilize the ‘three rounds’ pattern, meaning the three consecutive efforts of the KKE to ascend to power: firstly during the Occupation (October 1943-February 1944), then again soon after liberation (December 1944-January 1945) and finally the last period in the end of the 1940s (1947-1949). Another characteristic of traditionalist approaches is the importance they give to the international dimension of the Civil War, especially the policies followed by Great Britain and the Soviet Union and the position Greece had in the relations between the Allies. Finally, another common characteristic of this interpretation is that they view the result of the war as predetermined, because of the geopolitical balances that were established after the end of World War II. In this view, the communist insurrection was nothing but an effort to reshape these balances, an effort that could not be tolerated.

The most characteristic representatives of the traditionalist interpretation are Colonel C.M. Woodhouse with his two classic books *Apple of Discord* and *The Struggle for Greece*, George Alexander with *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine* and John Loulis with *The Greek Communist Party*. Important researchers that follow a similar path of understanding these events are Andre Gerolymatos (*Red Acropolis, Black Terror*), Vasilios Kontis (*The English-American Policy and the Greek Issue*) and the majority of governmental officials and representatives of the right-wing elite (for example, ex-Prime Minister Evaggelos Averov’s *Fire and Axe*).*

The second category of interpretations of the Greek Civil War is the *revisionist interpretation*. The main position of the revisionist camp is that they refute the three rounds pattern; they insist that the documentation made available in the last few decades provides evidence that there was no organized plan to seize power on behalf of the Communists. The revisionists insist that the party had abandoned its revolutionary agenda for the sake of the Popular

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Front, a broad coalition of progressive forces whose goals were the establishment of democracy, the respect of human and political rights and socioeconomic development. This camp also advocates that any study of the Greek Civil War should take into account developments in the various sub-disciplines of political and social studies, in order to produce a more holistic interpretation of the Civil War that would take into account political, social and anthropological aspects.

From the researchers in the revisionist camp, we can distinguish above all the historical figure of Philipos Iliou, whose seminal work *The Greek Civil War: The Involvement of KKE* defined the historiography of the Greek Civil War for decades. Iliou focused more on the official documents of the KKE, and from this study concluded that the KKE's intentions were only to secure a favourable position in the Greek political system. A similar work has been produced by Grigoris Farakos, another historian of the KKE, who studied the interaction between the KKE and the Soviet Union (*Relationships between KKE and the International Communist Centre*). We should also add at this point Giorgos Margaritis, whose two volumes on *The History of the Greek Civil War* are perhaps the most detailed and accurate narration of the Greek drama. The disclosure of important documentation from the diplomatic and secret services of the great powers gave boost to the publication of other highly important works of scientific literature during the last decade, from which we can distinguish Thanassis Sfikas' *The British Labour Government and the Greek Civil War*, which deals with the interaction of the Greek and British political worlds. A similar endeavour was undertaken by Jordan Baev in his *International Dimensions of the Greek Civil War*, in which he studies the interaction of the Greek political world with the Soviet Union and other communist regimes in the Balkans.

The third and newest interpretation of the Greek Civil War is the self-proclaimed '*new wave of Civil War historiography*'. This camp has also tried to take advantage of progress in the social sciences, but in doing so they have completely rejected international and strategic approaches, which they consider to be out of date and simplistic. The main argument of the 'new wave' is that the origins of the Civil War are to be found in the resistance as a movement. This camp has tried to re-articulate the pattern of the three rounds of the KKE's efforts to seize power by force and has emphasized the Red terrorism of the National Liberation Front (EAM) and its military branch, the National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS) during the Occupation. This camp claims that the Left has imposed its own interpretation of events as the official truth since the 1980s. For scholars in this camp, the Civil War was not an ideological and political conflict; it was the result of the violent and conspiratorial efforts of fanatics and criminals.

An important figures of this trail of thought, which has become very popular over the last few years, is Stathis Kalyvas with numerous articles in newspapers and especially his contribution, 'Red Terror: Leftist Violence During the Occupation', in the collective work *After the War Was Over*. Another notable contributor is Mark Mazower, who was the editor of this collective work.

As always, the reality lies somewhere in-between these three interpretations. A critical analysis of the bibliography on the nature of the Greek Civil War exceeds the scope of this paper, but of course we should explain where we stand on the main questions that stem from the above bibliographical quest. First of all, we have to define the time frame of the Civil War. As is evident from the title of the paper, we also follow the pattern of the three rounds, but we do not agree with the interpretation of this period as a continuous effort of the KKE to take power by force. For us, the thread of continuity lies elsewhere.

First of all, we have to make it clear that for us the pattern should be articulated as two rounds plus one. The common thread that binds these three outbursts of civil violence is the reaction of progressive political forces that lay dormant for a long period of time because of the oppression of the traditional bourgeois elite. This bipolar system kept Greece divided for more than three decades and climaxed during the Metaxas dictatorship that was established in 1936. When the Germans invaded Greece and the old political elites and the King fled the country, these political forces paradoxically found space to breathe and develop. The common people gathered behind them and demanded more than just national liberation. They demanded a socio-political transformation. The revolutionary air of this gathering of different political groups, which was incarnated in the National Liberation Force (EAM), caused the creation of a counter-alliance of the traditional political elite. The friction created between these two opposing poles created the sparks that eventually led to the eruption of violence.

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At this point we should explain why we talk about ‘two rounds plus one’ and why this paper focuses on the first two. There is one characteristic of the first two rounds of the Greek Civil War that distinguishes them from the last three years of the conflict: in the conflict between 1943 and early 1945, we are talking about the struggle of a social and political alliance, the EAM, which wanted to reshape the political reality of Greece. The last period of conflict was just the vain effort of a political entity, the KKE, to maintain a role in the political foreground.

We have two main reasons for focusing on the first two rounds. Firstly, there is not enough focus on them in the Civil War literature. The main focus of enquiry has always been the third round of the Civil War. This is partly because, until recently, there was a lack of hard evidence concerning the real events of the first two rounds in the 1943-45 period. Additionally, these events—especially the events of December 1944— are hard to explain with the conventional interpretations that we previously discussed. Secondly, the developments that took place during the first two rounds had a lasting influence in both domestic and international contexts; to a great extent, they caused the final stage of violence and defined the result of the third round.

Section One

Chapter 1: International Context

It is often argued that the fate of post-war Europe was shaped in the period between early 1943 and the end of 1946. Soon after their double triumph in Stalingrad and in the deserts of northern Africa, the Allies began to feel concerned about the future and the new power distribution in the post-war international system. These concerns led to the negotiations that gave birth to the treaties on which the division of the European continent was based.

The first of these agreements was negotiated and concluded in October 1943. In this, the Balkan Peninsula was divided into spheres of influence between the two Allies, USA and the Soviet Union, and each took upon themselves the power and the responsibility to lead the countries included in those spheres into the uncertain post-war era. The importance of this agreement is proven by the fact that, up until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the boundaries set in this and in all subsequent agreements were respected. [2] ‘These international developments drew a dividing line between East and West, and signalled the start of the Cold War. They also were the international context for the Greek Civil War’.[3]

The German Occupation and the consequent moral and political collapse of the old bourgeois political elites gave the KKE a definite advantage in the struggle to control Greece’s political future after liberation from the Germans. The National Liberation Front (EAM) and its military branch, the National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS), managed to gain momentum and dominate the fields of resistance, mass mobilization, and administration of liberated regions, especially in the mountains of northern Greece. Whether KKE planned to seize power after liberation is still open to debate. We will discuss the strategy of the KKE later on.

The important thing was that by mid-1943 things looked favourable for the Communists both in Greece and in the greater region. The Soviet counter-offensive soon reached the Balkans and the prospect of a Soviet-led liberation of Greece, which was backed in a way by similar on-going processes in other countries of the region (mainly Yugoslavia and Albania), encouraged the Greek Communists to intensify their efforts to consolidate power.

The reality of course was completely different, as the Soviet Union never really showed any interest in the cause of its Greek comrades. In fact there was complete ignorance concerning the political affairs of Greece. Even by the end of 1943 Georgie Dimitrov, the Bulgarian socialist leader who was Secretary General of Comintern and Stalin’s right-hand man in the Balkans, was asking Tito whether ELAS was a ‘true democratic force’ or if it was a nationalistic army like the Cetniks in Serbia.[4]

Throughout the critical period of 1943-44, the absence of Greece from Soviet strategic planning was more than obvious and the Soviets were more interested to achieve objectives in areas more important to them in Eastern Europe, namely Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. One can easily notice the analogy between the developments in Poland and in Greece.

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The Soviet attitude towards the issue of Greece was proven in repeated instances. During the fall of 1943, just before the outbreak of conflict between the various resistance groups in Greece, Russia co-signed a joint statement with the United States, which supported the policy followed by the British and insisted on the unification of all resistance groups under British command. The same policy was reaffirmed on every occasion by the Russian embassy in Cairo—the centre of the exiled Greek government—especially during the crucial Cairo talks in the summer of 1943.[5] The most emphatic instance though of the Soviets' indifference towards the efforts of the KKE was their rejection of the demand for recognition of the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA), a provisional government that was used by the Communists for the administration of the liberated areas and as diplomatic leverage in negotiations with the government-in-exile in the spring of 1944. Neither the Soviet Union nor any of its political allies in the Balkans recognized PEEA as a legitimate government; instead, they pressured the Communist Party to participate in the Lebanon Conference and in the National Unity Government and to put ELAS under the command of the British.[6]

Despite all this, the leadership of the KKE never lost faith in Stalin and believed that when the time was right the 'Motherland' would assist them. Developments in neighbouring countries and the relationships cultivated between the Yugoslavian, Albanian, and Greek Communist parties convinced the Greeks that they had allies in their effort to establish a socialist regime.

The United States' (US) attitude towards the Greek issue was somewhat vague and contradictory, especially during the two first rounds of the Greek Civil War. The US had no traditional interests in the Balkan Peninsula and from the beginning of World War II they had rejected any possibility of involvement in the area. Soon after the US entered the War, President Roosevelt agreed with Prime Minister Churchill that Britain would be responsible for military operations in south-east Europe and the eastern Mediterranean.[7] Despite that, the American Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a negative opinion of the British insistence on restoring King George to the throne in spite of the reactions of the majority of the Greek population. That view was clearly exemplified in the reports of the American Ambassador to the exiled Greek government in Cairo, Lincoln MacVeagh, who repeatedly appealed to President Roosevelt to stop the British from imposing the King.[8]

Ambassador MacVeagh expressed his concerns in 1944, shortly before the liberation of Athens. He believed that the EAM was a large movement that could not be suppressed without causing all-out civil war and he insisted that more time was needed for negotiations between EAM and the exiled government. But despite his and other officials' opinions, the American Government did not adopt any official policy that might annoy the British.

The priority for President Roosevelt was the stability of the Alliance and the situation in Cairo and Greece was not important enough to make the US adopt a more active policy. When the plan for the division of responsibility in the Balkans was introduced by the British, the Americans originally rejected it and Roosevelt personally advised Churchill not to create exclusive spheres. However, on the eve of the Soviet advance in Eastern Europe, Roosevelt agreed with Churchill and the United States accepted British authority over Greek affairs. Accordingly, the US remained passive during the first periods of internal strife in Greece.[9]

As we have seen so far, both the Soviets and the Americans accepted Britain's predominant role in Greek affairs. But British efforts were hindered by two factors. The first was a practical one. The British military forces were already too stretched and no significant numbers could be spared for resistance in Greece, so they had to depend on local bands and groups to carry on the effort of harassing the Axis occupation forces. The second and far more important factor was the conflict of priorities between the British military and political leadership. The military authorities in Cairo, headquarters of the Middle East Command, had placed military efficiency as their first priority. On the other hand, the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister, in particular, considered that the establishment of a Britain-friendly and, if possible, democratic regime in Greece was vitally important for maintaining Britain's dominant position in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean, in order to contain a possible Russian descent into the waters of the Aegean.[10]

The main point of disagreement was what the British attitude towards EAM/ELAS should have been. The Middle East Command was willing to continue to support and equip the forces of ELAS because they had proven to be effective in harassing the Germans. They were necessary for the conduct of Operation Animals, an elaborate effort of

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sabotage and mass resistance to distract the Germans from the imminent invasion of Sicily. The Special Operations Executive that arrived in Greece in September 1942 quickly realised that in order to achieve the military goals in Greece they required the coordination of all the opposing factions, including the EAM, and so they advocated a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

In order to achieve this, the head of the British military mission, Brigadier Edward C.W. Myers, took two initiatives. Firstly, he convinced the Communist leaders to sign an agreement of coexistence with all the anti-communist resistance groups. The Agreement of National Groups, signed on 4 July 1943, created a joint staff of the three major resistance groups (ELAS, EDES, EKKA) and defined areas of responsibility. This agreement created a very short-lived period of peaceful coexistence that was soon followed by a new period of conflict and self-destruction.

Brigadier Myers' second initiative was by far bolder and more controversial. He organized a joint meeting in Cairo between the representatives of the main resistance groups and political parties from Greece and the government-in-exile in August 1943. The goal of the negotiations was to end the political crisis between the EAM and the Greek Government. The discussions were interrupted by the British Foreign Office, which forced the Greek Prime Minister Tsouderos to decline any proposal for the creation of a new government that would include EAM members. They also rejected any discussion on the future of the monarchy. The representatives of the EAM were rudely forced to return to Greece and Brigadier Myers was relieved of his duties and replaced by Colonel Woodhouse.[11] The EAM was now convinced that the British would try to impose the King by any means necessary and that they would not be permitted to keep their political power after liberation. They soon returned to their policy of exterminating their local opponents in order to acquire de facto control over Greece

The Foreign Office's approach to EAM was heavily influenced by Winston Churchill's personal views on the matter. The British Prime Minister viewed the partisans of ELAS as a band of common thugs, whose actions that could endanger the already delicate relationship with Stalin. He knew that after the war a number of issues concerning the future distribution of power would arise, which is why he implemented the spheres of influence agreement. Accordingly, Churchill could not allow the Greek Communists to question the position of Greece in the future world order.[12]

For Churchill the best way to maintain the dominant position of Britain in the Greek political world was to restore King George. He considered the King to be a personal guarantee for the achievement of this goal and felt a 'strange personal obligation towards the leader of the State that stood bravely beside Britain in the period of 1940-41: indeed, at the time Greece was the only ally of the British.'[13]

In this first stage of conflict and violence, Britain maintained its original political goals and, with the persistence of Churchill and the manoeuvres of British diplomacy, managed to restrain the flexibility of the EAM and ELAS. With the Lebanon Accord of 20 May 1944, the British managed to contain EAM/ELAS political power and discard any role held by PEEA through the newly created Government of National Unity, led by the well-known republican Georgios Papandreou. And finally, with the Caserta agreement of 26 September, they managed to put all the resistance groups—including ELAS—under the command of General Scobie, the British head of the allied forces in Greece at that time, and to exclude ELAS from Athens. Under that authority, General Scobie started the negotiations for the disarmament that led to the tragedy of December[14].

Chapter 2: The Struggle for Control of the Mountains

The Belligerents

The defeat by the Germans and the brutal occupation that followed was the catalyst for the eruption of the crisis that was building throughout the 1930s. The traditional elites—whose indecisiveness and narrow-sightedness gave birth to the Metaxas dictatorship of 1936-41—faced political bankruptcy. The political forces that had suffered under the Metaxas regime and the oppression of the old bourgeois class found the opportunity that they were seeking in order to develop and evolve. That opportunity was the organization of an active resistance that could appeal to the majority of the population as an alternative to submission or collaboration.

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The resistance—in the form of armed partisan groups—was further facilitated by two factors. Firstly, in the countryside and in the mountains, there was a powerful urge for these activities. This was the chance for rural Greece, which was neglected by the Athens-dominated political world, to have a voice in political processes. There was also of course the need to protect agricultural production, the value of which had greatly risen in the time of the Occupation. The second factor that facilitated the resistance was the pressure exercised by the British, through their secret service agents, to create military problems for the Axis behind the military front and hinder its line of supply.[15]

At the time, the only political force that seemed able to perform such a task was the KKE. Having spent the last five years operating underground, they had acquired a great familiarity with conspiratorial tactics. Their organizational skills were also of the highest level, a result of decades of experience of working in labour unions. The party was also reinforced with thousands of members who were either imprisoned during the Metaxas years and had escaped in the turmoil of the collapse of central authority, or who had distanced themselves from the party during the dictatorship in order to avoid prosecution, but who were now willing to return.[16]

The EAM was founded on 27 September 1941 after a KKE initiative and was immediately placed under its political control. This initiative was supported by a number of smaller progressive parties such as the Socialist Labour Party, the Democratic Union, the Socialist Union, and various agrarian parties. The EAM attracted massive popular support, with hundreds of thousands of official members making it one of the largest resistance movements in occupied Europe. The movement set three goals: the liberation of Greece from Germany, the conduct of free elections, and the protection of the right of Greeks to decide their form of government and constitution.[17]

The biggest debate concerning the early stages of the EAM's history is what exactly those goals meant. The traditional approach to the KKE's strategy is that it was conspiring to seize power by force, that it wanted to lead the country into the Soviet camp,[18] and that it exploited the people's wish to fight the German occupation in order to achieve its post-war goal of a proletariat dictatorship. The problem with this analysis, as it is noted by Ole L. Smith, is that the EAM's policy during the Occupation is judged without taking into account the policies followed by the KKE in the second half of the 1930s.[19] This policy was a continuation of the strategy of the Popular Front that was introduced in 1935 and included the formation of a broad alliance between progressive parties, a massive popular movement, and the unions. This alliance, which did not come to fruition due to the reaction of the traditional elite prior to the establishment of the Metaxas regime, was now incarnated in the form of the National Liberation Front (EAM).

From the early stages of the resistance, a number of distinguished political personalities from the entire spectrum of the republican—and in some cases even mild royalist—political camps were invited to participate. The EAM also tried to recruit a number of experienced officers of the National Army to participate in the armed resistance as members of ELAS. Very few accepted this invitation, as the traditional elite felt that the EAM was depriving them of electoral and political strength. They were also convinced that the KKE was going to use its power to impose a communist regime in Greece in the future.

Elite worries grew even more when they realized the dynamic of the movement and the amount of popular support it was gaining. What was even more worrying for them was the military capacity of ELAS. Originally equipped by the British, ELAS eventually grew to be independent, especially after it took hold of the military equipment that was left behind by the Italian forces following the official surrender of Italy in the early fall of September 1943. ELAS grew fast in numbers—supposedly 50,000 shortly prior to liberation—and under the efficient political-military control of the Communists and its appointed officers (capetanioi) it proved to be highly efficient against the Germans. Unfortunately, it also proved to be equally if not more efficient against other resistance groups.[20]

The emergence of the Communists as the source of this novel pole of political and military authority deepened the already existing divisions in Greek society. The traditional bourgeois elites in Greece knew that the driving force behind the EAM was the KKE. With the fanatic anti-communism sentiment that was already cultivated in the 1930s, the elites could not come to terms with the idea that the time had come for Communists to play a leading part in Greek society. This is why a number of other groups—more nationalistic and conservative in their ideology—were soon created.

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After ELAS, the largest group was the National Republican Greek League (EDES), which was created by prominent members of the bourgeois political elite of Athens. Its military commander was Colonel Napoleon Zervas, a former officer of the army purged in the 1930s due to his republican beliefs. EDES started off with a mild democratic political agenda that argued for a plebiscite to decide the constitutional future of Greece and the punishment of collaborators. After ELAS forced other, more conservative, resistance groups to disband and due to its apparent KKE-led political direction, EDES started to recruit conservative and royalist ex-members of these groups. Their anti-EAM sentiments were fuelled further by British political pressure. Zervas was urged by the Special Operations Executive to publicly support the King and the government-in-exile.

In the end, Zervas failed to create an equally strong opposing pole to EAM/ELAS, mainly because of his inability to create a coherent organization and to articulate a solid political programme. Also, he never managed to protect his reputation from accusations of collaboration with the Germans against the Communists. Although this rumour was mainly communist propaganda, various events during the course of the first round strengthened these arguments.[21]

The other strong resistance group was the National and Social Liberation (EKKA). EKKA was politically led by the well-known republican George Kartalis and militarily led by Colonel Dimitrios Psarros. Psarros commanded a small but strategically well placed group of men—the 5/42 Regiment—and he repeatedly resisted ELAS' attempts to violently incorporate it. The regiment was finally wiped out shortly after the end of the winter war.

The casting was completed by a number of smaller and highly conservative groups, which were dedicated to the restoration of the monarchy, but were more preoccupied with fighting ELAS than fighting the Germans. Among these groups the most notorious one was X, led by Colonel Georgios Grivas, who later became the leader of the Cypriot right-wing resistance organization EOKA. X was equipped by the puppet government in Athens and its primary purpose was to harass the EAM's activities in the capital as the time for liberation drew near.

The Events

So we see that since the beginning of the resistance, there were opposing groups formulated and suspicion was the dominant element of their relationship. This division was cultivated by the British in order to maximize the possibility of achieving both goals of their strategy: fighting the war against the Germans efficiently and assuring their position in post-war Greek political realities. The Foreign Office and Winston Churchill were suspicious of the Communist camp and decided to support Zervas, whom they viewed as a balancing force against ELAS. Zervas himself managed to convince the British military mission that ELAS was a dangerous group that should be disbanded. He argued that he was the one to do it and asked for the necessary provisions.[22]

On the other side, the rate at which the EAM was developing created a sense of superiority in its leadership. They looked down on other resistance groups—viewed as pawns of British policy—and tried to monopolize the resistance. This attitude further aggravated the conflict.[23]

Soon a war of propaganda broke out that acted as a prelude to the fighting. The anti-EAM groups focused their criticism on the pro-Bulgarian position of the KKE and accused the KKE of being willing to sell territorial integrity to their Slavic Communist comrades. On the other side, ELAS was openly accusing EDES and other groups as collaborators and tried to associate them with the Metaxas regime. This was the period of the cold civil war. Despite the courageous efforts of the British military mission to ameliorate the situation and provide a common understanding for the sake of the military cause (the Agreement of National Groups), things started to become more unstable and hostilities started to break out.

We can identify three developments that led to the winter war of 1943. The first was the result of the Cairo talks in August 1943. The image of the British negotiators sending away the representatives of the EAM, coupled with the constitutional issue and negative attitudes towards any proposal to create a new government that was representative of the true political correlations in Greece, created negative emotions in the Communist ranks. Everyone was now convinced that the British would try to impose the King by force, that the Popular Front would not be allowed to

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convert its de facto control over Greece into political power in the post-war period and, finally, that EDES and EKKA would be used as the hand of the British.

The second development followed the surrender of Italy. When the Italian occupational forces learned about this, they allowed the forces of ELAS, especially in Macedonia, to overtake the storehouses in which they kept all their military equipment. The famous surrender of the Pinerolo Division provided ELAS with enough material to gain some degree of independence from the British and proved especially useful throughout the period.

The third development was the emergence of rumours that the Germans would soon begin a gradual withdrawal of forces from Greece. These rumours spread due to developments on other fronts of the World War. It was believed by the Communist leadership that this would be followed immediately by British operations in order to assume military control. In the fall of 1943 and after pressures from Aris Velouchiotis—who was one of the most important military figures of ELAS—the leadership of the KKE started to devise plans of action for the seizure of Athens and other major cities of Greece. Also, it made the KKE anxious to shrink all other opposing groups that could be used by the British as an internal advance guard.

The hostilities started in October 1943 in Epirus when EDES forces arrested a number of ELAS officers. ELAS responded with a violent operation of disbanding EDES bands in Thessaly and Northern Greece. By mid-October the British military mission considered the situation to be civil war.

It took some time for the British to respond to the crisis. In the beginning they decided to keep their distance from both sides and to halt the flow of supplies towards Greece until the issue was resolved. However the death of a British officer, Lieutenant Hubbard, caused a change of attitude. The Commander of the British forces in the Middle East, General Wilson, demanded a ceasefire and the execution of the perpetrators of Hubbard's death.

The EAM, encouraged by its successes in the field and reinforced with the Italian equipment, denied all appeals for a peaceful resolution and limited EDES' area of control to a small part of eastern Greece. Zervas avoided complete annihilation because of the proximity of his headquarters to the positions held by the Germans after their operations in October against both resistance groups. There are however a number of clues that lead us to believe that the Germans acted mainly against ELAS and that there was indeed an agreement with Zervas.[24]

After a couple of months of stalemate, both sides were exhausted and ready to hear proposals from Cairo for an armistice and new arrangement of boundaries. While Colonel Woodhouse was preparing for the negotiation of an agreement, Zervas started a counter-offensive in January. Fighting resumed and soon EDES was once again forced to retreat. After another month of meaningless skirmishes and international pressure, a truce was agreed on the 4 February 1944 and it was followed by a conference under the Allied military mission. On 29 February the Plaka Agreement was signed and the first round of the Civil War ended.[25]

Under its terms, ELAS and EDES agreed to the final cessation of hostilities and to confine themselves in the areas occupied at the time of the truce. They also bounded themselves to fight only against the collaborators and the occupational forces under a common operational plan designed by the Allied military mission. They also took up responsibility to participate in operation Noah's Ark, which was the allied plan for the liberation of Greece.[26]

Chapter 3: Evaluation

Despite its military successes, ELAS was forced to sign the Plaka Agreement for a variety of reasons. First of all, the process of EDES' annihilation proved to be harder than originally thought. Zervas' force, despite its inferiority in numbers and supplies, had the advantage of superior military training because a great number of its troops were career and reserve officers in the National Army. EDES also had the territorial advantage as the area of its last stand, central Epirus, was naturally protected. There is of course the great debate about the alleged agreement with the Germans, a theory supported by the convenient placement and timing of German operations.

Secondly, and despite the degree of independence that ELAS had gained because of the Italian supplies, it was

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essentially dependent on British assistance, especially since it was not yet known when Greece would finally be liberated. During the conflict, the British assistance was completely halted and the British threatened the EAM that they would completely withdraw their support and recognition. Besides the practical aspects, the EAM's popular support would also be hurt by a possible reaction of this kind by the British, because Britain was still popular among the Greek population. And the EAM's reputation was already hurt because of the brutal way in which the Communists dealt with their opponents.

Nevertheless, the EAM came out of the conflict having ensured its dominant position in most of Greece, contained EDES in a small and controllable area, and gained a significant number of troops after the disbanding of opposing groups. But the war had a long standing effect on the strategic planning process of the leaders of the KKE. It affirmed their suspicions about EDES and the British. Its effects can be found even in the decision of the EAM to concentrate its forces on the destruction of EDES instead of fighting the British in the events of the following December. The leadership of EAM believed that the war proved that only with the destruction of all opposing groups could they ensure the implementation of their programme after liberation.[27] Soon after the signing of the agreement, they resumed their strategy of elimination, which climaxed with the destruction of EKKA and the assassination of Dimitris Psarros in April 1944.

For EDES the outcome of the war was bad, but not destructive. It managed to maintain its position as the second most important resistance group in Greece, it secured the continuation of British support, and it maintained its capacity to influence the events in Greece after the withdrawal of the German forces.

Finally, the British found themselves in a strange position. Despite Churchill's wish to get rid of the EAM/ELAS, Britain had to find common ground for understanding. They were not in a position to stop EAM from taking over Greece by force at the time, so in order to protect the integrity of their policy, the British had to cooperate with the EAM and continue supporting it. Especially after the agreement in October 1943, the British had everything to gain from maintaining their relationship with the Communists in Greece.[28]

Shortly prior to liberation, a superficial national unity was achieved. For a short period of time, this prevented a possible deterioration towards civil conflict. The political division in Greece was too deep and the animosity, fostered by the conflicts during the Occupation, was too strong. The liberation of Athens only aggravated this division. The two formerly opposing poles of authority and their socio-political base—represented by the government in exile and the collaborators—were united under the auspices of the British against the threat to the traditional political balances that was posed by the EAM. These realignments made the eruption of December possible.[29]

Section Two

Chapter 4: International Context

By the second half of 1944, the tide of the war had already turned in favour of the Allies. The double pressure from the Americans and the British in the west and from the Russians in the east was bringing the Germans to their knees day by day. Everybody felt that the war in Europe was close to its end. At the same time, the clearer the light at the end of the tunnel was becoming, the more frictions between the Allies appeared.

The most urgent issue by the fall of 1944 appeared to be the dominant position the Soviet Union was gaining in eastern and south-eastern Europe. The advance in Rumania and Bulgaria proved that Russia was now in control of the Balkans and the British became worried about a possible advance to the south.[30] This uneasiness was evident in May 1944 when the British offered Moscow freedom of action in Rumania in exchange for the same freedom in Greece. The Russians accepted this offer, which secured Britain's role in Greece.

In early June 1944, the Foreign Office produced an important report concerning the Balkans.[31] In that report, its writers expressed concern about the expansion of Russian influence in the region. They noted that the Soviet Union was pursuing a dominant position in the region and that it was using the communist-led movements in Albania, Yugoslavia, and Greece to achieve that. The writers concluded that the support of the Soviet Union to these elements

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was not ideological, but driven by purely strategic criteria. They then proceed to articulate four alternative scenarios for the containment of Soviet influence in the Balkans.

A) Stop supporting all communist movements in south-eastern Europe and support milder elements instead. This proposal was rejected because the military contribution of the partisans in these countries was too important to be ignored.

B) Fully support all the communist movements in order to increase our influence on them and minimize that of the Soviets. In order to achieve this, Britain should withdraw its support of the monarchies, which was considered—especially for Greece— unacceptable.

C) Propose to the Soviet Union an agreement of mutual abstinence from political affairs in the Balkans. This suggestion was considered to be totally unrealistic due to the important interests both countries had in the region.

D) Strive to stabilize the region and its influence in Greece and Turkey and use these countries to contain Soviet influence in the region. At the same time, Britain should avoid any challenges to Russian influence in the rest of the Balkan countries.[32] This last scenario was the most realistic one.

Specifically for Greece, the report notes that Britain must support a friendly political regime in order to counter the increase of Russian influence through the EAM/ELAS. British diplomacy believed that the success of its plan was based on the solid establishment of the Government of National Unity under Georgios Papandreu that was established earlier that year in the Lebanon Conference. British policy had to overcome three obstacles in order to fulfil their plans.

The first was that Greece was already under the control of the EAM, in which the dominance of the KKE was more open after the summer of 1944. The British believed that after the withdrawal of the Nazis, there would be nothing to stop the Communists from taking over Athens and other major cities. This problem was aggravated by the absence of any planning for a major British landing in Greece, which was the second obstacle. The third and last obstacle was how the British would gain international support for their actions in Greece.[33]

The first step to solving their problems was the signing of the Caserta Agreement on 26 September. With this agreement, the EAM accepted the landing of British troops in Greece. It also recognized General Scobie as the supreme commander of all the resistance bands. Furthermore, it reaffirmed the areas of control that each resistance group had: Epirus for EDES under Zervas and Peloponnese for ELAS under Sarafis. ELAS was prohibited from entering Attica and control was given to General Spiiotopoulos, who had been coordinating anti-communist activities in Athens since July.[34]

The EAM's logic behind this agreement will be discussed later, but we can say for now that with it, the KKE relinquished any possibility of forcefully seizing power and it allowed the British to corner the KKE and maintain the initiative during the crucial disarmament negotiations in November that led to the second round.

The last part of the plan was to gain support from the rest of the Allies. Churchill was especially worried about Soviet reactions. In order to overcome them, he decided to meet personally with Stalin. The meeting took place in October 1944 in Moscow. The result of these negotiations was the percentage agreement on the Balkans spheres of influence. The principle was basically the same as the one agreed in 1943. According to this agreement, Britain gave a 90 per cent influence in Rumania to Russia and it was given a similar percentage of influence in Greece. Further study of the meeting reveals Stalin's indifference for the struggle of the KKE in Greece.

The neutral stance of the Soviet Union was repeatedly confirmed prior to and during the second round. In the weeks before the break-out of the battles in Athens, the KKE's representatives visited Belgrade and Sofia requesting help from Moscow. They insisted that a Soviet interference could stop a descent into violence and that it would help Stalin to strengthen his influence in the area.[35]

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Despite what is argued by a number of authors, there is no concrete evidence that the Soviet Union encouraged the Greeks to move on to an armed conflict. On the contrary, we have lots of evidence supporting the opposite. The course of events proved that Stalin kept a cautious and neutral stance towards the events of Athens. When the Bulgarian Army left Macedonia on 12 October, just three days after the percentage agreement, many Greek Communists were disappointed as they saw it as a missed opportunity. Kostov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, informed Dimitrov in a telegram that '... the Greek comrades ask us for weapons. We do not have them and we cannot give them. There is no answer from Moscow on the issue.' Dimitrov, in a communication with Molotov, the Foreign Affairs minister of the Soviet Union, notes that 'Taking into account the international position of Greece, direct assistance to ELAS on behalf of the Soviet Union is probably impossible. We would consider nonetheless that we should express our moral support to the cause.' Molotov refused, however, to publicly state the Soviet position. When the crisis emerged, Petros Roussos—the Greek representative in Sofia—asked to go to Moscow to present the situation to the Soviet leadership. His demand was declined because the Soviets were worried it might be considered a violation of neutrality.[36]

So we see that the Soviet Union had no reason, due to its strategic priorities, to foster a violent confrontation in Greece in 1944. It continued to advise the Greeks that it could not offer any assistance. But in reality, the Soviet Union never advised them *not* to engage in armed conflict either. These vague replies, in addition to the lack of direct communication, contributed to the confusion in the decision-making elite of the party in Greece.

This situation was further aggravated by the mixed signals sent by other Communist parties in the region. It was believed by the party leadership that the interference of the Yugoslav, Albanian, and Bulgarian parties could be interpreted as indirect support from Moscow. Tito, for example, when visited by Greek representative in Belgrade on 15 November advised them to 'withstand and not to give up their arms, but instead to concentrate even more'.[37]

It proved harder for the British to gain American support. The State Department showed great resentment towards the traditional policy of spheres of influence. But once again, the personal relationship of Roosevelt and Churchill proved important. The British Prime Minister managed to convince the American President that these kinds of agreements were, temporarily, important for the stability of the Alliance.

There were, however, elements of American policy that suggested a change in the US attitude to the Greek issue. These originate from the secret report by the American military mission towards General Donovan, who was the military advisor to the President and head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency. After that, there were occasions that proved US support of Britain's Greek policy. Firstly, on 15 June the President welcomed the Greek King George in Washington. In this meeting, Roosevelt offered his support and understanding to the monarch in exile. Prior to the implementation of the Noah's Ark operation for the liberation of Greece, the central offices of the OSS ordered their agents in Greece to stop sharing intelligence with the EAM. Finally, another fact that is indicative of American intentions is that the US Air Force undertook the entire effort of logistic support for the transfer of 60,000 British troops in Athens during the armed confrontation of December.[38]

This does not mean of course that we are talking about an unconditional acceptance of the choices made by England. During the crisis of December, the US voiced its discontent with the way the British managed their conflict with the EAM, which was still viewed as a legitimate resistance group that proved a dedicated ally during the war. The State Department, for example, reported to President Roosevelt that the American public was shocked by the image of the armed conflict between Greeks and British and reacted against the British actions.[39]

The reaction of the Americans was not limited only in public statements. The leader of US naval operations in the Mediterranean ordered American ships not to supply the British forces in Greece. This order was revoked after a personal phone call by a furious Churchill to President Roosevelt. After the end of the crisis, which was sealed in the Varkiza Agreement, Roosevelt suggested the creation of a joint committee of Americans, British, and Soviets to supervise the building of a new Greece. This proposal, made shortly before Roosevelt's death, was a clear indication that Roosevelt was still convinced that international cooperation was still possible.[40]

Chapter 5: Fighting in Athens

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The Disarmament Debate

The Nazi occupation forces started their slow withdrawal from the country in the beginning of September 1944. It took them about a month to completely abandon Athens, which they finally left on 12 October. The first British troops landed in the Peloponnese on 2 October and officially arrived and liberated Athens on the morning of 14 October. In the meantime, fierce fighting had already started in various parts of Greece between EAM forces and the remnants of the collaborators' armed groups, the Security Battalions. In this period ELAS could have easily taken control of Greece and could have implemented its plans, designed in 1943, to take Athens. So why did the EAM decided to bind itself by recognizing and participating in Papandreou's Government of National Unity, and, in particular, why did it sign the Caserta Agreement?

These decisions were the cause of great confusion and argument among the ranks of the communists. There were of course a number of reasons why the EAM followed this policy and gave up the opportunity to seize power. One cause might have been the attitude of the Soviet Union expressed by Colonel Popov, head of the Soviet military mission in Greece. The message from Moscow was quite clear: the EAM should cooperate with the British. From that, the leadership realized that Greece was irrevocably part of the British sphere of influence and that they should avoid direct confrontation. Another important factor was that the unity of the Popular Front was on the line. A large portion of popular opinion and a great number of the political allies of the EAM were strong believers in the idea of national unity and did not share the same views of a communist revolution in Greece as some hard-core KKE followers.[41] In reality, the KKE was still faithful to the strategy of Popular Front, introduced in the mid-1930s, and it would keep trying to influence political affairs through the massive support of the Greek population and the organizational and military force of the EAM/ELAS. It was the decision of the leadership that the KKE would pursue power through political means alone.[42]

But the EAM was not fully ready to abandon armed struggle. It was still suspicious of the British and of the royalist factions and it believed that there was a conspiracy to impose the monarchy. On the other side, the British and Papandreou were equally suspicious of the EAM. Especially since the EAM/ELAS dominated all areas of Greece besides Athens. In total, ELAS forces at the time of liberation were about 50,000 men and women organized into two armies: the South Army, commanded directly by Siantos, and the North Army commanded by Sarafis and Aris, both significant figures in the anti-Nazi struggle.

In this tense climate, the negotiations for the disarmament of ELAS and the creation of a new national army began. On 26 October Papandreou publicly declared that ELAS, EDES, and all the Greek forces of the Middle East should be immediately disbanded. But instead of that, the Greek Prime Minister demanded that the Mountain Brigade, or Rimini Brigade, and the Sacred Band should be transferred to Greece as soon as possible. Both military formations were created in the Middle East after the purge of the Greek armed forces in the region by EAM-friendly and republican elements, which followed a large scale mutiny in April 1944. Papandreou and Scobie were planning to use these formations as the basis of the new national army.[43]

The arrival of the Mountain Brigade on 9 November raised the alertness of the communists. It was considered a clear indication of what was going to follow. They were especially worried that if the new army was going to be based on these forces, the road to reciprocal actions against the EAM all over Greece would be open, thus shuttering the EAM power basis. Even Colonel Woodhouse viewed this development as a provocation.[44]

Both sides started the negotiations with a set agenda. EAM was only willing to accept a plan that would include either the disbanding of all armed groups and the creation of a new army open to all experienced and willing—in which they hoped to achieve influence equal to ELAS' size—or the preservation of an ELAS unit equal to the size of the other armed bands. On the other side, Papandreou and the British were not going to accept the disbanding of the regular troops from the Middle East or the preservation of a large Communist force.[45] Despite this, on 20 November Papandreou and Siantos, secretary general of the KKE, reached an understanding. According to this understanding, ELAS would be disbanded and the members of the brigade would be on a leave for an indefinite period of time.

However the British were not ready to compromise with the EAM and they pressured Papandreou to conform to the

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original plan. In reality, Churchill, with a free hand now after the Moscow agreement, was willing to use British troops, if necessary, to support the Government, collide with the Communists, and finish the business.[46] Papandreou had no choice but to start the negotiations all over again. At that point, he made a very controversial move that led to the final crisis.

On 27 November the EAM made its final proposal: the Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Band were to merge with a unit of ELAS and a unit of EDES. In terms of size and equipment, the unit of ELAS would be equal to the other three. Papandreou accepted the plan, but on the following morning he presented an altered version to Ambassador Leeper and General Scobie. The two units from the Middle East were to remain and they were going to be supplemented by two equal-sized units of EDES and ELAS. When the EAM protested that this was not its proposal, Papandreou accused the EAM of violating the agreement and Leeper officially broke off negotiations.

With his actions, Papandreou managed both to confirm the suspicions of the Left and convince the British and the rest of the political world that the Communists were aggressive and did not want to achieve national unity. In reality, his actions were just a result of his limited political independence. He depended on the support of the British and Churchill was already willing to take up arms against the EAM. So the course of events was more predetermined than most people believe.

On 1 December Scobie ordered ELAS to surrender its weapons by 10 December. The EAM responded with the resignation of all left-wing ministers from the Government and a call for a general strike and a massive demonstration on the 4 December. Siantos ordered forces of ELAS to move closer to Attica and Papandreou announced that he was withdrawing his permission for the demonstration. Leeper was informed that the Prime Minister had instructed the police to use the amount of force they considered necessary to stop the demonstration.[47] Now the stage was set for the tragic events that followed: the so-called second round.

Showdown in Athens

On 3 December a massive demonstration was organized by EAM supporters. When it reached Constitution Square, the police force, under unspecified conditions, opened fire. The police continued to attack indiscriminately against unarmed people in front of the surprised eyes of foreign reporters. The casualty count was severe: 16 dead and numerous injured.

Later that night, the EAM started to retaliate. Its forces attacked police stations all over Athens. By 6 December they had taken control of 19 out of 24 police stations, the Security Battalion's headquarters, one prison, and many other facilities of the security services. By using the supplies they found in these facilities, they managed to increase their numbers to 12,000 fighters.[48] Soon reinforcements from the regular troops of ELAS started to reach Athens and so ELAS quickly gained numerical superiority. Up to that point, no action against British troops was taken.

Confident from their initial successes, Siantos and the rest of the Communist leadership decided that it was time for an all-out attack against their major internal competitors. On 7 December the regular forces in Athens attacked the station of the Mountain Brigade. At the same time, the main body of ELAS troops, with the majority of the artillery equipment, launched an attack against the positions of EDES in Epirus and other anti-EAM groups in Macedonia.

This was the most controversial decision of the period and the main point of critique. Instead of concentrating their efforts on Athens, they made the destruction of their Greek opposition their main objective. They considered they had the necessary strength to effortlessly force their opponents in Attica into submission and they underestimated the willingness and the ability of the British troops to stop them. Activities against the British in Athens were authorized for the first time 7 December and the main forces in the mountains got permission to attack British targets only on the 28 December.[49]

But the British were determined to neutralize EAM. Churchill personally ordered Scobie to reject all proposals made by the EAM for ceasefire and compromise. Once Churchill had gained a guarantee of neutrality by the Soviet Union after a meeting of British officers with Colonel Popov, the British troops entered the battle and by 6 December

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managed to occupy strategic positions in the capital, which they used to provide support with the use of heavy artillery. Despite this, in the beginning the British faced difficulties in facing ELAS due to their limitation of forces. Scobie commanded a weakened armoured vehicle brigade, a paratroopers brigade, the 4th Indian Division, and the Greek Mountain Brigade: a total of approximately 20,000 men.[50]

On the Communist side the original plan of rapidly taking out their opponents during the first week of combat failed. The attacks were poorly organized, as there was a great amount of friction and argument in the ranks of the military commanders of ELAS concerning strategy. The EAM also had to overcome the gap in operational quality. Both the troops of the British and the Mountain Brigade were highly trained professionals. In addition, the technological superiority of the British proved an unsurpassable obstacle for the Communists. After 7 December, the British made extensive use of armoured vehicles, heavy infantry, and aircraft.[51]

It became evident that as soon as the British reinforcements reached Greece, everything would be over. After 12 December, two full divisions from Italy landed in Athens accompanied by segments of the Royal Air Force. They were further assisted by the newly created National Guard, a body of 15,000-20,000 men, the majority of whom were ex-members of right-wing resistance groups like X and the Security Battalions. Soon the British forces started to push the Communists away from Athens and by 5 January ELAS had abandoned the capital.

Despite the negative turn of events, the Communist leadership did not take any of the opportunities for a ceasefire. Especially when Churchill and Eden arrived in Athens on Christmas Eve, the possibility of a compromise emerged. Churchill realized the anti-monarchist sentiments of the public and agreed to the appointment of Archbishop Damascinus as temporary viceroy and agreed to the creation of a new government under the hard-core republican General Plastiras.

The main reason ELAS did not compromise was its successes in other areas in Greece. In Epirus and in Macedonia ELAS forces managed to disband and disarm all other armed groups. They also managed to completely dislocate the forces of EDES, which had to be evacuated with the help of the British Navy. Their biggest success—one that was not used efficiently enough by the military leadership at the time—was that they managed to isolate the British troops in large urban centres of Greece, including Thessaloniki and Patra. At the same time, British forces stationed in Athens could not advance outside the capital due to political pressures. The KKE tried to take advantage of the situation and, in order to consolidate its authority over these areas, called for a temporary truce that was signed on 15 January 1945.[52]

Despite its wishes, the KKE's leadership soon realised that it lacked both the resources and the momentum to continue the war. Had it managed to gain some kind of support from the International Communist Centre, it might have had a better luck. We have already seen that the Soviet Union maintained a strict neutral stance throughout this critical period. Stalin did not want to endanger his political control over Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria for the sake of the Greek Communists. On 13 January, Dimitrov advised the Greeks to proceed to peace. The leadership realised that the war was over and the only thing they could hope for was an honourable peace.

The peace conference was summoned in Varkiza on 2 February. After ten days of negotiations, the Varkiza Agreement was signed and became an official law of the Government. The document consisted of nine articles. Two articles referred to obligations of the EAM and the rest to the obligations of the Government. Article 1 declared that the Greek Government was obliged to abolish all laws that violated political freedoms. Article 3 awarded amnesty for all political crimes that were committed during the war period. Article 6 declared the official disbanding of ELAS and according to Article 4 the EAM had to release all political prisoners. According to Article 5, a new national army was to be established, open to ex-ELAS fighters. Articles 7 and 8 dealt with the issue of purging the public domain of elements that had collaborated with the Germans and/or Metaxas. Finally, Article 9 defined the obligation of the Government to proceed to a referendum concerning the issue of monarchy.[53]

Chapter 6: Evaluation

As we saw, strategic correlations had made it imperative for ELAS to pursue a fast and overwhelming victory during

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the first days of the conflict, in order to stop the opposing camp from mobilizing its vast supplies. This aggressive approach had to answer a number of challenges. The units in Athens lacked the technological and technical quality to fulfil their missions. Furthermore, they also soon lost the advantage of numbers. The other parts of the army—the regular and experienced fighters still in the mountains—had no way to penetrate Athens, since it took them a long time to mobilize and their opponents managed to organize their defence.

The ability of ELAS' enemies to use mechanized units also proved to be a great hindrance to ELAS' military efforts. Throughout the conflict, the EAM's military leadership could not find a way to deal with armoured vehicles, even light ones. It also could not deal with the Royal Air Force. For example, from the British Prime Minister's visit to Athens on the 24th of December, until the resolution of the crisis, 39 Squadron flew sorties against 105 targets, including 7 gun emplacements, 19 different headquarters, 55 buildings, and 10 ammunition and fuel dumps. Simultaneously, the 108 Squadron flew 244 day- and 21 night sorties, while Wellingtons of 221 Squadron were involved in supplying 32 Squadron at Sedes, dropping leaflets and also flares in support of night raids.[54]

The operations by the Royal Air Force succeeded in two ways. Firstly, they made the arrival of reinforcements into Athens impossible and contained the flow of supplies to the fighters in the capital. Secondly, and equally important, they made the concentration of forces in one position difficult. In this way, the EAM could not create a strong front anywhere and failed to achieve local superiority of forces. The EAM objective of taking strategic positions could not be fulfilled and the problem of numerical inferiority was aggravated.[55]

Soon the war was transformed into a war of attrition; the important factor became the mobilization of reserves. It proved impossible for the leadership of the KKE to mobilize and move the forces it required to fulfil its objectives in Athens. The only regular ELAS forces that could participate were parts of the South Army stationed in southern Greece, especially the 2nd, 3rd and 13th divisions. The strongest and most experienced forces, those of the North Army, were engaged in battles with other resistance groups following the strategy of the EAM. Any hope of them descending to Athens was quickly dashed, since the transportation of thousands of armed people in formation for hundreds of kilometres was impossible with no lines of communication or supply and with the Royal Air Force lurking around the skies of Greece ready to decimate them. So ELAS had no choice but to try to fight only with the limited resources available to it in Athens.[56]

After the original enthusiasm started to wear off, the realization of the situation struck the Communist leadership. In comparison to their opponents who could use the massive resources of the Allied camp, the EAM and ELAS were in a dire position. This reality limited the strategic options for Siantos and the other members of the decision-making body of EAM and influenced their thoughts and mentality until the end. Their choices were further restricted by the absence of support from the International Communist Centre. None of the brother parties appeared willing, or capable, to provide material and military support. In January 1945 Stalin— in a personal communication with Dimitrov—made a comment characteristic of the Soviet attitude: 'I advised them not to take up this cause in Greece. ELAS should not have abandoned the Papandreou government . . . Obviously they expected that the Red Army would descend to the Aegean. We could not have sent our troops to Greece. The Greeks acted foolishly.'[57]

Under these conditions the EAM was forced to sign the ceasefire and the Varkiza Agreement. The next day found EAM supporters having the impression of an unconditional surrender. The announcement of the agreement exposed the fragility of the coalition of the Popular Front and the extent of its defeat. A number of the social groups that had pinned hopes for social transformation on the EAM started to abandon it and the Left was once again placed in the background of political life.

Furthermore, the revelation of the cruel behaviour committed by the forces of ELAS stigmatized the resistance movement and paved the way for the 'White Terror', a series of violent actions and violations of personal and political freedoms targeted against the Communists and ex-ELAS fighters that followed the Varkiza Agreement. We could agree with Georgios Papandreou who called the events of December 'a machine for the massive production of royalists' and with Ilias Tsirimokos—another prominent figure of the republican camp—who said 'that December buried any prospect for the creation of a Socialist or Social Democratic Party in Greece for decades.'[58]

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For the British, the result of the second round and the Varkiza Agreement were favourable. Some researchers argue that Churchill actually wanted the conflict to escalate to violence in order to settle the score with the Communists once and for all, to assure British influence over Greece, and to open the way for the restoration of King George.[59] It is of course a fact that the real motivation behind British intervention was the traditional policy of Russian containment. But the British already had too many open fronts and did not want to commit a large number of forces in Greece when war with Germany was still raging and friction among the Allies was growing. This is why the British had no reason to object to the ceasefire and the Varkiza Treaty.[60]

All in all, we can conclude that the events of December 1944 were not the result of carefully calculated actions by either side. It was rather the inevitable eruption of a spiral of mutual distrust and suspicion; a result of wounds carved deep on the body of Greece and the immediate consequence of which was the creation of even deeper wounds that led to further confrontation rather than the long-awaited national unity. Strategically, it was the moment that established Greece as a part of the Western world and it was the first of a series of imperialist interventions at the dawn of the Cold War. It was soon followed by similar interventions by Stalin in Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria. The division of Europe was slowly becoming a reality and the events of 1946, the appeal of the Soviet Union to the United Nations for Greece, the long telegram of George Kennan and the speech of Churchill about the Iron Curtain, were the sparks that ignited the last round of the Greek Civil War, the end of which was just as inevitable as its beginning.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Endgame

Since we have discussed at length the events of the first two rounds of the Greek Civil War, this is now the time to review what we have learned about the protagonists of the drama and test our original assumption that it was the international context that defined the result of the Civil War and the actions of the protagonists.

We will start with a discussion about the three major international actors: the three Allies. Britain's policy was clear and consistent throughout the 1940s. As an imperial power, Britain was interested in keeping a dominant political position in Greece, as part of its strategic planning for the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. Greece was especially essential to keep in check Russian expansionism towards the Aegean Sea. Churchill was convinced of the hostile and aggressive intentions of the EAM, which he viewed as a Soviet agent—an analysis that was inaccurate but also understandable due to the security dilemmas and ideological preconceptions in Greece. He was therefore prepared from the start to go to war if necessary, in order to subdue the partisans.

The British tried to achieve their goal of maintaining Greece in the Western sphere of influence by politically neutralizing the Greek Left and supporting a right-wing coalition of the traditional political forces controlled by the British. They also viewed the restoration of the monarchy as a guarantee of the political orientation of Greece.[61]

After Varkiza—the agreement that concluded the conflict of December 1944—Britain, under the new Labour Government elected in July 1945, tried to establish the dominance of the anti-communist forces through the creation of a strong national army and the restoration of the pre-war status quo.[62] The aim of the British after 1945 was to relegate the KKE to the background of the political life by any means necessary, even if that meant to look the other way when the Government violated the human and political rights of the progressive political world. This decision on behalf of the British undermined any possibility of a normal evolution of the political life of Greece and fostered the civil war that followed.[63]

The United States, on the other hand, did not interfere in Greek affairs during the 1943-45 period. The area was beyond the Americans' strategic planning and their main concern was the perseverance of the balance in the Alliance. They did however express their disagreement with choices made by the British on various occasions, without forcing their own view on the matter. As a matter of fact, President Roosevelt sided with the King and Churchill whenever the position of the monarchy was questioned.

The reversal of the American attitude took place at the same time as, and was perhaps induced by, shifts in the international distribution of power and the deterioration of the relationships between the former allies. This change of policy was sealed with the announcement of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and was a major

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contribution to the result of the war.[64]

US interest started to intensify in the fall of 1946. For them, Greece was the only country in the Balkans that had escaped from Soviet control and it posed a buffer zone against the expansion of Soviet influence. Thus Greece was made into the first example of the anti-communist crusade of the US and the first theatre of the Cold War confrontation. Greece was also viewed as geopolitically vulnerable and a possible bridge for the expansion of communism both to the east—with Turkey and Iran as possible next victims—and to the west, with Italy being the next in line.[65] Therefore the Americans decided that it was crucial to deal militarily with the Democratic Army of Greece, the military branch of the KKE after 1946, and with the economic rehabilitation of Greece.[66]

The Greek Government cooperated fully with the Americans and gave extensive authorities to the American Mission of Aid to Greece, which resulted in the establishment of an American interventionism that severely undermined the sovereignty of Greece. For decades, the country was under a regime of external control over every decision made by Greek governments in the political, military, and economic fields.[67]

The Soviet Union never showed any active interest about the fate of the Communists in Greece. We saw that in all instances up until the end of the second round, the Soviets rejected any appeal from the EAM for help. Greece did not fit in the strategic planning of Stalin in the 1940s. His priority was to create a zone of influence on the periphery of the Soviet Union; it was not to expand the international revolution. Also, Stalin was not willing to jeopardise his agreements with Britain and the US.

After the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, the Soviet Union and the Communist parties in the Balkans changed their attitude towards Greece because they were alarmed by the increasing interventionism of the US in the area. So, they followed a policy of increasing the supply of material support to the Greek Communists. The exact amount of this assistance remains unclear.[68] However, they never, even during the period after 1947, provided any official public political support. And that in the end made a great difference.

From the above facts, some researchers conclude that Stalin used the efforts of the EAM as a propaganda tool and as a bargaining chip to achieve greater freedom of action in areas more important to Soviet strategic planning, namely Hungary, Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria.[69] But this view is simplistic and does not take into account the fact that Soviet foreign policy did not enjoy a great degree of political flexibility for the greatest part of this period, and it was mainly responding to initiatives taken by its opponents—first the Germans and then the Western Alliance of Britain and the US.[70]

Finally, we must summarize the main characteristics of the strategy of the EAM and the Communist Party in Greece. As noticed by Philipos Iliou, the first thing that we have to agree on is that since early 1944, the KKE had abandoned the possibility of a revolution and a violent takeover of power. Instead, it was dedicated to the strategy of the Popular Front—a broad social coalition—and to the amelioration of the political position of the party. If we do not agree on these points, it is very difficult to explain the choices made in Lebanon and in Caserta.

In this sense there is an apparent contradiction in this policy when someone studies the events of December 1944. The KKE chose the road of conflict instead of normal democratic processes. In reality, the KKE tried to prevent the disarmament of ELAS and negotiated the creation of a new national army on a more open basis that would not allow fanatical royalist elements to dominate it. It was the mutual suspicion and a malfunction in the communication of the two opposing camps that saw them resort to extreme military measures.

After its defeat in December, the KKE was no longer in a position to contest the dominant political forces. Its military branch was disbanded and its socio-political coalition was dissolved. It accepted the Varkiza Agreement and supported the Government in its effort to rebuild Greece and to hold the first free national elections. But a series of events in the international arena—which marked the rise of the Cold War era—and the continuous acts of terrorism against the Left paved the way to the last round of civil conflict.

In 1946 the KKE declared its official abstention from the national elections and declared that no true democratic

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political activities could take place in the state of terrorism that reigned over Greece. Later the same year the Partisan Army (DSE) was officially created. The KKE kept a low profile, after instructions by Dimitrov, until 1947. After the announcement of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, the leadership of the KKE abandoned the country and hostilities commenced.[71]

Between February 1947 and February 1948 the game had already ended. The 'Lakes' plan—a large-scale attack on the major cities of northern Greece that was aimed at creating a separate entity—failed. The technical and material superiority of the National Army, fuelled by American support and the inability of the EAM to mobilize reserves and find supplies are the immediate reasons for the KKE's military defeat. At a political level the defeat was even greater. Both the request for recognition of the Temporary Government of Free Greece and all the proposals for declaration of Greece as a neutral and non-aligned state were rejected by Moscow, who was bound by the international agreements of the previous years and respected the accepted boundaries of the spheres of influence. Furthermore, in the later stages, the interruption of the Soviet-Yugoslav relationships—because of Stalin's rejection of Tito's proposal for the federalization of the southern Balkans, and the alignment of the KKE with Stalin—caused the closure of the Greek-Yugoslav borders. This was also the end of the only source of supplies for the Greek Communists. From this point on until the end of August 1949, Greece witnessed the 'vainest bloodshed of its history over a war that was already over.'[72]

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