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THE TERMINATION OF THE GREEK CIVIL WAR: ITS INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

In 1944 the official policy of the United States regarded Greece primarily as a British responsibility and gave support to the British policies. However, in the period between the revolt in Athens-December 1944, and Truman's offer to help Greece in March 1947, the United States, by force of circumstances and because of the increasingly difficult relations with the Soviet Union, shifted from a passive policy of political idealism to an active, realistic role in Greek affairs. This transition did not occur overnight. American interest in postwar Greece had mounted quickly after 1945—this was manifested in visits of American warships to Greece; in the decision to send observers to the Greek elections; in defending the Mission's report against Soviet criticism; and in supporting Greece in the debates in the Security Council, in February, September and December 1946. Thus, the decision to help Greece in 1947 was logically the next step in the policy followed by the United States in its relations with the Soviet Union in Greece¹.

By the end of 1946, well-supplied guerrilla bands threatened Greece with financial and economic collapse. Both Great Britain and the United States perceived the crisis as a part of a Soviet plan to turn Greece into a People's Republic. In recent years "revisionists" historians² reject as unfounded the American fears about a Soviet plan to take over Greece. They argue that there was no danger from the Soviet Union, and that Stalin opposed from the start the Greek communist attempt to seize power. Generally, there is no evidence to suggest that in 1946 Stalin wanted a communist take-over in Greece and that preparing for the "third round" the Greek communists

1. Basil Kondis, *Η Αγγλοαμερικανική πολιτική και το Ελληνικό πρόβλημα: 1945-1949*, Thessaloniki 1984, *passim*.

2. D. F. Fleming, *The Cold War and its Origins*, New York 1961; David Horowitz, *The Free World Colossus: A Critique of American Foreign Policy in the Cold War*, New York 1965; Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954*, New York 1972; Thomas Paterson, *Soviet-American Confrontations: Postwar Reconstruction and the Origin of the Cold War*, Baltimore 1973.

were following Soviet instructions. There is, however, a definite possibility that the Soviet Union did not object to a KKE bid for power in the summer of 1946, although it was not willing to make the Greek problem a major aspect of Soviet foreign policy; since it wanted to exploit the Greek civil war for its propaganda value, especially when Britain and the United States criticized Soviet policies in Eastern Europe. Stalin changed somehow his attitude towards the Greek civil war only after the enunciation of American aid. It is known, for example, from the works of Djilas, Dedijer and Kardelj that in February, 1948 Stalin told the Yugoslavs that the "uprising in Greece had to fold up"³. Neither Djilas nor Dedijer state anywhere in their studies that Stalin opposed the Greek uprising in 1946, nor that he told the Greeks to stop the armed struggle. Indeed, when Zachariadis learned about the Moscow talk from the Yugoslavs he was not alarmed, as Stalin's views were not expressed directly to the Greek communists⁴. Moreover, when in September 1949 Zachariadis asked Stalin about the information given to him by the Yugoslavs the Soviet leader denied having said anything to them⁵. It is evident that lack of sources makes it very difficult to clarify Soviet policy in 1948. In any event we have contradictory statements. In March 1949 Stalin discussing the Greek problem with the Albanian leader Enver Hoxha stated... "As for the Greek people's war we have always considered it a just war, have supported and backed it wholeheartedly"⁶ ...Also the meeting with Stalin in January 1950 among Hoxha, Zachariadis and Partsalidis gives added evidence that the Soviet leader did not oppose the Greek civil war. At that meeting Zachariadis' position, that he would never have started the armed struggle if he knew in 1946 that Tito would betray the KKE, was severely criticized by Stalin, who pointed out that there was Bulgaria and Albania, and that the Greeks had to fight for the freedom of the people, even when they were encircled⁷. Moreover, he criticized the Varkiza agreement, noting that the Greek communists should not have signed it and should not have laid down their arms⁸.

The conversations of Stalin with the Yugoslavs and the Albanians do

3. Vladimir Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, London 1953, p. 331; Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, New York 1963, p. 181; Edvard Kardelj, *Sećanja: Borba za Priznanje i Nezavisnost Nove Jugoslavije 1944-1957*, Ljubljana 1980, p. 116.

4. Giorgos Vontitsos-Gousias, *Οι αιτίες για τις ήττες, τη διάσπαση του ΚΚΕ και της ελληνικής αριστεράς*, Athens 1978, p. 250.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Enver Hoxha, *With Stalin*, Tirana 1979, p. 122.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

not indicate in any way whether or not Stalin opposed or supported the Greek civil war. One can say that the Soviet Union permitted the Greek communists to go ahead with the revolt, they assuming full responsibility, and the Soviet Union avoiding any official connection with the KKE. Should the revolt be successful, all the better for the Soviets. If it were a failure then the Soviets would maintain their non-involvement.

Today the available sources indicate that only in April 1949 the Soviet Union asked the Greek communists to stop their armed struggle. Of course throughout 1947-1948 “peace feelers” for a negotiated settlement from the Greek rebels⁹ and even from the Soviets¹⁰ in June 1948 produced little results. However, in April 1949 the situation had drastically changed. The threat of an invasion of Albania forced Stalin to order Zachariadis to stop all operations of the Democratic Army.

In the beginning of April the Greek government, starting from the premise that the Cominform would in the near future proclaim a “Macedonian State” as a means of exerting pressure on Tito, sent a memorandum to London and Washington outlining the extremely dangerous consequences for Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Italy and the Western Democracies in general, should the Cominform succeed in overthrowing Tito—either by force or by subversive activities in Macedonia. Consequently, the Greeks were of the opinion that the Western Powers should undertake a naval operation against Albania, which would bring about with certainty the rapid collapse of the Hoxha regime and western occupation of the country. This action, which could be justified on defensive grounds coupled with a promise of eventual withdrawal conditional upon improved Soviet behavior in the Balkans, would cover Tito’s western flank and an important sector of Greece’s northern flank and “would provide the Western Powers with a valuable pawn”. The memorandum pointed out that the Greek role in the contemplated Balkan military operations would be most important and that aid to Greece should be accordingly adjusted¹¹.

The Greek suggestion that action should be taken against Albania had a twofold purpose: to forestall the danger of using the country for operations against Tito and to eliminate Albania as a base for the Democratic Army,

9. For a detail account see Kondis, *Η Αγγλοαμερικανική πολιτική...*, passim. There is no evidence to link these “peace feelers” with Stalin’s statements to the Yugoslavs in Moscow in February 1948.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 354-355.

11. FO 371/78398/4018, Greek Embassy to Foreign Office, London, 4 April 1949; DS 868.00/4-149, Greek Embassy to Department of State, 1 April 1949.

thus making easier its defeat. At this point the Greek proposal was of particular importance since on April 1st large attack had started against Grammos by a rebel force coming straight from Albania¹². To the British the possibility of action against Albania was a tempting suggestion but it would have brought them into direct conflict with the Soviets as a fairly considerable Soviet military mission was in the country and Soviet merchant ships were supplying the Albanians through Durazzo¹³. London thought the most profitable line of action against Albania was the "encouragement of subversive activities inside the country where Titoist elements appeared to be already active"¹⁴. Similarly military intervention might involve a direct clash with the Soviets who had a fairly considerable military mission in the country¹⁵.

The Americans, on their side, could not consider an occupation of Albania. Their concern was directed toward the development of an approach which would compel Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to give Greece and each other border guarantees¹⁶. Thus, Washington supported the efforts of Herbert Evatt, Australian President of the United Nations General Assembly, for the renewal of diplomatic relations with Greece's northern neighbors and the establishment of mixed commissions for the prevention of frontier incidents¹⁷. These discussions had already started in November 1948 and no progress was made owing to Albanian insistence on Greek renunciation of claims to Northern Epirus and to Yugoslav unwillingness to sign bilateral agreement except on condition that agreements with Albania and Bulgaria were signed simultaneously¹⁸. It was, however, unreasonable to expect Athens to make such renunciation in light of a hostile Albania which was furnishing great support to the Democratic Army largely from bases located in Northern Epirus itself. Evatt, on his part, had concluded that Albania and Bulgaria were under strong pressure from the Soviets not to reach any agreement with Greece¹⁹. Thus when the discussions resumed in April-May 1949 were

12. FO 371/78366/4040, General Consulate to Athens Embassy, Thessaloniki, 7 April 1949.

13. FO 371/78398/4018, Minutes, 4 April 1949.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. DS 501. BB/4-949, Department of State to Representative at the United Nations, Washington, 9 April 1949.

17. DS 501. BB /4-2049, Memorandum of Conversation of Department of State officials with Paul Economou-Gouras, Counselor, Greek Embassy, Washington, 20 April 1949.

18. FO 371/72350/13954, Foreign Office to Sofia Embassy, London, 16 December 1948.

19. *Ibid.*

not fruitful and nothing concrete developed²⁰.

As the discussions of the Conciliation Committee proceeded events outside Greece were very crucial for the fate of the Democratic Army. The Soviet Union, probably through its spies at the British Foreign Office, learned the content of the Greek memorandum and being afraid of an occupation of Albania by western forces, if the civil war in Greece continued, asked Zachariadis in the middle of April to stop the armed struggle by the end of May 1949²¹. A direct outcome of the views of the Soviet Union was Andrej Gromyko's response to an American initiative on April 26th to undertake direct negotiations with the Americans and the British²².

At Gromyko's invitation Dean Rusk, assistant secretary of State and Hector McNeil, under secretary for foreign affairs, met in New York on May 4th on an informal basis. At this meeting Gromyko did not make any special proposals but referred to certain ones which had been made by Miltiadis Porphyrogenis, a member of the central committee of the KKE, on April 20th and called for a cease-fire, a general amnesty and new elections in the administration of which the guerrilla forces would participate. Gromyko noted that a cease-fire and arrangements for an election would be only the first step. Moreover, he did not raise the question of the withdrawal of the British forces or the withdrawal of American military assistance, and did not criticize the character of the Greek government²³. Gromyko, however, was disappointed that neither Rusk nor McNeil responded to his suggestions. Indeed, it was very hard for Rusk to comprehend the motives of the Soviet proposal. He thought that "...Gromyko's attitude on Greece suggests once again that the Russians may have made recently a major strategic decision which we have not yet fully uncovered. For example, they may have decided to exploit their favorable operation in Asia and, in order to be able to do so with maximum effect, to stabilize their position in Europe... In any event, I feel that we have not penetrated to the hard-core of their present policy position²⁴.

20. Harry Howard, "Greece and its Balkan Neighbors (1948-1949). The United Nations Attempts at Conciliation", *Balkan Studies*, 21 (1966), pp. 19-26.

21. Vontitsos-Gousias, *Οι αιτίες για τις ήττες...*, Vol. 1, pp. 501-502; Mitsos Partsalidis, *Διπλή αποκατάσταση της εθνικής αντίστασης*, Athens 1978, p. 199.

22. DS 501. BB/4-2749, Memorandum of Conversation of Dean Rusk, Hector McNeil, Andrej Gromyko, New York, 27 April 1949.

23. DS 868.00/5-549, Memorandum of Conversation of Rusk-McNeil-Gromyko, Washington, 5 May 1949.

24. *Ibid.* For a detail account see Kondis, *Η Αγγλοαμερικανική πολιτική...*, pp. 384-387.

On May 14 Rusk and McNeil met with Gromyko and emphasized that while they would welcome the restoration of peace in Greece, they could not negotiate on the matter except in an appropriate international forum which would provide for full participation by the Greek government, nor did they wish to interfere with or change existing United Nations action on the Greek question in which the northern frontier was the main issue. Moreover, Rusk reiterated that the main issue was the illegal activities of Greece's northern neighbors, particularly Albania and Bulgaria, in furnishing assistance to the Democratic Army in Greece, and that if this situation were restored to normal, the internal situation in Greece would improve rapidly²⁵. The important matter at this meeting was that Gromyko specifically proposed: "(1) the Soviet Union would be willing to participate in a commission of great powers to supervise a new Greek parliamentary election; (2) the Soviet Union would be willing to participate in a commission of great powers to control the border between Greece and its northern neighbors; and (3) all foreign military assistance, including material and personnel, should be withdrawn from Greece"²⁶. However, neither Rusk nor McNeil could make any comments on Gromyko's proposal. They could not engage in any substantive talks with the Soviets on the Greek question without Greek participation²⁷.

During the period of the discussions the Soviet Union informed Zachariadis that they had made specific proposals to the Americans and the British for a peaceful solution of the Greek problem. However, the Democratic Army had to postpone temporarily their withdrawal plans and to intensify its offensive activities, in order to give the appearance that the Soviet proposals were not done out of weakness²⁸.

It is interesting to note that Gromyko's suggestions of supervised elections and international border control constituted a departure in Soviet policy. Up to that point the Soviets had agreed that international supervision of internal, political and military developments constituted unjustified invasion of national sovereignty. Apparently the initiative for a negotiated political solution had as an objective to save anything possible out of the Greek communist movement as Stalin had already decided to terminate the armed struggle. Moscow was making an attempt to bring back the Greek communist

25. DS 868.00/5-1849, Secretary of State to Athens Embassy, Washington, 18 May 1949

26. *Ibid.* Also Howard, "Greece and its Balkan Neighbors", p. 13.

27. DS 868.00/5-1649, Secretary of State to President Truman, Washington, 16 May 1949.

28. Partsalidis, *Διπλή αποκατάσταση της εθνικής αντίστασης*, p. 199; Vontitsos-Gousias, *Οι αιτίες για τις ήττες...*, Vol. 1, p. 507 and 516.

party to Greek political life through a broad amnesty and retention of the legal position of the party which would have enabled it to pursue a dynamic internal program.

The American government's position was that they could not relinquish their right to provide military assistance to Greece. However, the military assistance program was made necessary by a situation which was created by foreign aid to the guerrilla movement²⁹. For the Americans the situation in Greece required no special negotiations or discussions, they thought that if Stalin genuinely desired to contribute to peace and recovery in the world he could prove it in Greece, by exercising his influence to terminate the aid and then the Greek problem would have disappeared³⁰. However, Soviet interests would have been better served through the United Nations than through great power negotiations, as for the Soviet Union to negotiate directly concerning the Greek situation would have constituted an admission that they control it³¹. Moreover, the American government would not engage in any talks on the future of Greece without Greek participation³².

The British held similar views as the Americans but they believed that if a reply was given to the Soviets had to include that all assistance given by the northern neighbors to the Democratic Army should cease and that they should surrender with all their arms³³. The Greek government, on their side, would not agree to Soviet supervision of Greek elections, would not legalize the Greek communist Party and could not offer amnesty to the guerrillas prior to laying down of their arms. They felt that Greek interests would be sacrificed to the communists as a part of a general European settlement which would have allowed the Soviets to interfere in Greek internal affairs. So the whole problem had to be kept in the United Nations and the talks with the Soviets had to be postponed³⁴.

Throughout this period the Soviet Union continued to press for talks

29. DS 868 00/5-2049, Memorandum on US reactions to the Gromyko Balkan proposals, Washington, 20 May 1949

30. DS 868.00/5-1949, Secretary of State to Athens Embassy, Washington, 19 May 1949.

31. DS 868.00/5-2049, Memorandum on US reactions to the Gromyko Balkan proposals, Washington, 20 May 1949.

32. DS 868.00/5-1849, Department of State to Athens Embassy, Washington, 18 May 1949.

33. DS 501.BB/5-2549, British Embassy to Department of State, Washington, 25 May 1949.

34. DS 868.00/5-1949, Athens Embassy to Department of State, Athens, 19 May 1949.

on the Greek problem. Indeed, *Pravda* on May 30th in an editorial indicated that the situation in Greece could be solved through the proposals made earlier by Gromyko³⁵. It is quite clear that the editorial was an indication of the eagerness of the Soviets to reach an early settlement of the Greek problem. However, despite the great Soviet interest, the Americans would not compromise. Appraisal of the Greek military outlook indicated to them that the Soviets were leading from weakness in advancing the Gromyko proposals³⁶. Thus further talks with Moscow did not take place.

At this point the Greek government was greatly concerned with the support Albania provided to the Democratic Army and contemplated an invasion of the country in connection with the Vitsi and Grammos campaign which was due to start about the middle of August. The reasoning was that if the army were to stop at the frontier, serious internal difficulties would ensue in Greece, as the Greeks would not understand why the army should not pursue the guerrillas into Albania³⁷. In both 1947 and 1948 the Greek army was deprived of an almost certain chance of surrounding and eliminating large guerrilla forces in Grammos by their escape over the Albanian frontier. Both in August 1947 and in August 1948 the guerrillas reformed in Albania and reentered Greece later to carry on the campaign. Athens, however, had been informed that they would be ill-advised, to permit the entry of Greek troops into Albania³⁸. The Americans, although not happy at all with the situation in Albania, were concerned with possible Soviet reactions and also seriously

35. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, Vol. VI, *The Near East and Africa*, Washington 1977, p. 352.

36. DS 501.BB/5-2849, Athens Embassy to Department of State, Athens, 28 May 1949.

37. FO 371/78443/7354, Athens Embassy to Foreign Office, Athens, 20 July 1949; DS 501. BB/7-2749, Memorandum of Conversation with Greek Ambassador Vasili Dendramis, Washington, 27 July 1949.

38. DS 768.75/8-649, Department of State to Athens Embassy, Washington, 6 August 1949; FO 371/78444/7989, Foreign Office to Athens Embassy, London, 22 August 1949. About the possibility of Greek troops entering Albania to take action against the guerrillas very illuminating are the views of Sir Horace Anthony Rumbold, head of the southern department of the British Foreign Office, who noted: "It is a great pity that the Greeks should ask for advice on this point. They would have done much better to have kept quiet and simply pursued the rebels into Albanian territory as and when they thought it military necessary to do so in order to destroy them. None of the Western Powers would in that event have had the heart to blame them and the worst that could have happened would be some outbursts of indignation from the satellites. It is almost excessively good behaviour on their part to ask our opinion before deciding what to do". FO 371/78443/7136, Minutes Rumbold, 28 July 1949.

worried about a possible Yugoslav invasion of northern Albania³⁹. Direct Greek or Yugoslav intervention in Albania would have operated against the possibility of seizing power there, through a revolt, anti-Communist pro-Western Albanian elements⁴⁰.

Despite the defeat of the Democratic Army and its withdrawal into Albania by the end of August 1949, the Greek government feared that the guerrilla forces would reenter Greece and resume the fighting. Therefore, on September 11th, the war minister Panayotis Kanellopoulos, warned Albania that renewed support to the Democratic Army would result in Greek military action to destroy the guerrilla bases⁴¹. The feeling in Greece was that the Greeks should not stand idly by while preparations went on in Albania.

The Albanians, on their side, fearing an attack by the Greek army, disarmed the guerrillas entering their country and insisted that the men of the Democratic Army should leave Albania⁴². Indicative of the great Soviet interest for Albania was the fact that Stalin agreed with the Albanian measures against the remnants of the Democratic Army, considering them necessary since conditions were such that the independence of Albania would have been placed in jeopardy⁴³.

In short, one might say that despite the defeat of the Democratic Army and the failure of the Soviets to preserve any influence in Greece, Stalin achieved his main objective, namely he managed not to lose Albania. There, after the Hoxha-Tito break in the fall of 1948, Soviet influence became dominant as the country was reoriented away from Yugoslavia and toward the Soviet Union. To Stalin the Greek movement was expendable as he had already allotted Greece in October 1944 to the western sphere of influence.

39. DS 760H.68/8-1249, Memorandum on Greco-Yugoslav Relations, Washington, 12 August 1949.

40. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, Vol. V, *Eastern Europe*, Washington 1977, pp. 952-953.

41. DS 868.00/9-1449, Athens Embassy to Department of State, Athens, 14 September 1949.

42. For the Albanian position see Hoxha, *With Stalin*, pp. 130-134.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 197.