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THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE METAXAS REGIME *VIS A VIS*
LONDON AT THE EVE OF THE GRECO - ITALIAN WAR.

The aim of this study is to re-examine critically and, on the basis of the recently made available foreign archives, the diplomatic position of the Metaxas dictatorship *vis a vis* the western democracies, and more precisely to shed some light in the web of intricate relationships existing between Britain and Athens. The available bibliography on the subject tends to overplay the significance of the ideological affinity of the regime with the axis powers and, on the basis of its domestic policies to interpret the long term goals and the conduct of the external relations of Athens.

Essentially this study was based on archival materiel, in its greater part unpublished, and available to researchers either at London, or here in Greece at the Center of Research on Modern Greek History of the Academy of Athens. However, parts of the documents used here have been published, in Greek translation, but in a manner which is not conducive to scholarly research. Therefore, these editions are not being cited.

Certainly, various initiatives undertaken by the tightly centralized dictatorship, which otherwise were but an expression of the limitations imposed on it by its proclaimed adherence to the "new order", supplied the *raison d'être* for the students of the regime to indentify it, more or less unequivocably, and to place it bag and baggage in the orbit of the axis powers.

In the area of rearmament of the different branches of the Greek armed forces on the eve of the European war, the regime was prone to follow an inconsistent and vaccillating policy. Something which provided the critics of the regime with ready-made evidences of the unholy alliance of Metaxas with his ideological mentors. General Papagos, who had risen to the supreme command of the army because of what the well known soldier and scholar Alexandros Mazarakes had

called "his arrivism"¹, while he vehemently had accused the civilian governments of the period 1928-1936 for their neglect of resupplying properly, even for the peace time, the military establishment, he was forced on the strength of statistics mentioned by him, to admit that the Metaxas dictatorship spent very little on the military reorganization of Greece². Indeed, a great percentage of the proposals of the general staff in the realm of rearmament submitted by Papagos to the administration and dealing exclusively with military supplies or the expansion of the army, were outright dismissed by Metaxas. Coinciding with this expressed negligence a great part of the limited orders which the administration had deemed necessary to supply the armed forces with were placed with German and Italian war industries and never delivered.

The same fate awaited similar standing orders being manufactured by British firms. It can be said, that with the exception of two destroyers for the fleet, the well known pair *King George* and *Queen Olga*³, not any other substantial additions to the country's rearmament

1. A. Mazarakes, [Lieutenant-General], *Apomnemonemata*, (Athens, 1948), p. 471.

2. See A. Papagos, [Field Marshall], *Ho Hellenikos Stratos kai he pros Polemon Preparaskeve tou. Apo Augoustou 1923 mechri Octovriou 1940*, (Athens, 1945), pp. 148-206; T. Tsakalotos, [Lieutenant-General], *40 Chronia Stratiotes tes Hellados. Pos Ekerdisame tous Agones mas. 1940-1949*, 2 vols., (Athens, 1960), pp. 329-330. Of interest are also the comments of major-general D. Machas, who had served as chief of staff of the army corp of Epirus during the first part of the Greco-Italian war. The major-general characteristically wrote that the "political leadership" had refused to take even the most elementary measures to fortify the western frontiers of the country menaced as they were following the Italian landing in Albania in 1939. D. Machas, [Major-General], *HellenoItalikos Polemos 1940-1941*, (Athens, 1967), vol. I, pp. 30-31.

3. All the available Greek naval sources praise highly the sea-worthiness and the actual value to the royal navy of those two British-made units. The Greek bibliography on the subject of the fleet, I should say, is quite comprehensive. Here, I will refer the reader to three different works which approach the issue from a widely different spectrum. These are the following: E. Kavvadias, [Vice-Admiral, R. N.], *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 hopos ton Ezesa*, (Athens, 1950), p. 113; G. Mezevires, [Vice-Admiral, R. N.], *Tessares Dekacterides eis ten Hyperesian tou B. Nautikou*, (Athens, 1970), pp. 160-227. The admiral in this noteworthy account reveals an aspect characteristic of the Metaxas mentality on rearmament. For reasons of saving money as the regime had let it be known equipped the two destroyers with guns purchased from Germany rather than from the British manufacturers. The consequences at least as far as the anti-aircraft guns were concerned became evident when those two warships had to use their anti-aircraft guns to counter the German airforce's raids in April 1941. Lacking stability

was to come from the western democracies prior to the actual involvement of Greece into an armed conflict with Italy. Two torpedo-boats being built in British shipyards for the coastal fleet¹ were taken over by the admiralty at the outbreak of the war.

Similarly, some airplanes to be added to the conglomerate euphemistically known as the royal airforce never left British soil. The Greek general staff conscious of the pronounced deficiencies facing the army in all sorts of absolutely necessary material, had petitioned the administration for a "minimum" of military hardware judged to be necessary for the defence of country.

On January 30th, 1940, the chief of staff general Papagos paid a visit to the British military attaché in Athens. At that meeting the pressing needs of the army were elaborated upon, and more precisely the supply of armaments altogether absent in the Greek army. "General Papagos", wrote Sir M. Palairret, "reduced the requirements to a minimum, and trusts that it may be possible to do something to meet him"².

With the war raging in Europe Metaxas found increasingly diffi-

and frequently involved in mechanical trouble they ill afforded the protection necessary to face modern warfare. Furthermore, with their specifications known to the Germans it was much easier to the German airforce to deal with them. N. Petropoulos [Captain, R. N.], *Anamneseis kai Skepseis henos Palaiou Nautikou* (4 vols., Athens, 1970-1972), vol 2, pp. 434-435.

1. The Greek navy possessed one torpedo-boat which was used for the visits of the minister of the navy Papavasileiou to the fleet and later by the inspector of the navy vice-admiral Oikonomou to visit the local naval commands.

2. *British Foreign Office Documents, Foreign Office*, 371/24916, folio 86. Despatch by Sir M. Palairret to the Foreign Office of January 30th, 1940. The above documents hereafter will be cited as *Foreign Office*, etc. These materials are in microfilm form, published by the Public Record Office in London. In Greece, they are to be found at the Research Center of Modern Greek History at the Academy of Athens. These have been procured from England by Professor E. Prevelakis, who graciously made available the microfilms and the facilities of the Center for my research. I am quite obliged to him and to his able staff, especially Mr. Loukos, for the assistance rendered to me during my visits there. My thanks also go to Professor S. Papadopoulos of the University of Ioannina whose unflinching aid made possible this research.

Parts of the aforementioned documents have been published in the Athenian daily *Vema* and selected ones in a Greek edition titled *Ta Mystika Archeia tou Foreign Office*, (Athens, 1971). However, the publishers of this edition have grossly neglected to give the reader any indications as to the source, classification and importance of the documents, thus making next to impossible the use of this booklet by historians and even by the ordinary reading public.

cult to procure any weapons whatsoever. The Greek minister of economy Apostolides had visited London during the first part of January 1940. His mission was twofold. Even at this late period in the war and, with the realignments in the Balkans the Metaxas administration considered that the threat to Greece was from Bulgaria rather than from Italian expansionism.

The British officials were warned by Apostolides that Bulgaria possibly would attack Turkey with the assistance of the Soviet Union and Germany. Lord Halifax, as far as we know, did not respond in any manner to those apprehensions of the Metaxas emissaries. Neither was there a willingness on the part of White Hall to act positively to Apostolide's request to obtain war material in Britain.

Probably, but not conclusively, the manœuvre by the Greek mission to insinuate to London that its country's needs would be satisfied by a willing Berlin¹, could not but leave sceptical the British officials about the seriousness of the commitment of Metaxas to the western allies. Obviously, the lack of a comprehensive programme, to upgrade the defense abilities of Greece, was forcing Metaxas to last minute solutions, which by their nature were compromising to the prestige of his administration.

These *sui generis* affairs with Berlin proved to be a source of frustration for Athens. On January 8th, 1940, the British admiralty found necessary to draw the attention of the Foreign Office to a German scheme to establish in the Greek capital a wireless station to link Athens with Berlin. No doubt the German intelligence services would have exploited to the outmost this facility to coordinate the flow of intelligence reports in the area of the Middle East.

The generally sympathetic to the Germans climate in the Greek capital would have transformed the city into a German spy station. Hence, the apprehension of the admiralty which explicitly warned the Foreign Office: "I am to add, moreover that My Lords are much concerned at the prospect of Germany obtaining control of the proposed Wireless links, and consider it essential that this should be prevented"².

The reaction of the British while leaving no grounds for excuses

1. The Greek finance minister had made the following statement: "M. Apostolides then referred to his government's inability to buy any war materiel in this country and stated that Germany was offering to supply Greece's needs in this respect". *Ibid.*, folio 70. Despatch by the foreign office to the British ambassador in Athens of January 10th, 1940.

2. *Ibid.*, folio 91.

to the Greek administration, was to demand in a mild way that Greece refuse the German request, postponing till the end of the war the establishment of the station on her soil¹. This demarche stirred up in Athens a hornet's nest. A reply by a minor functionary is illustrative of the frustrations and the compromises which the Metaxas diplomacy had to undergo to survive its own conflicting foreign policy :

The head of the Commercial Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tells me that the Greek government for their part have no desire to insist upon opening the Berlin circuit for the duration of the war. Should the German Government however press for the opening, they would not wish to have to refuse point-blank for two reasons. Firstly the Greek Government are under a moral, if not actually contractual, obligation to the German Government in this matter since the latter were among the first to ask for these facilities. Secondly the Greek Government feel that they would be laying themselves open to reproach either that their attitude was unneutral or that they were not masters in their own house².

But in spite these claims made to Sir Palairet, it was a far outcry that Metaxas was bound to follow inevitably the demands of the British officials. It was four days later following the conversation quoted above when the administration chose to appease London. The process employed is quite indicative of the lack of self-respect and the Levantine mentality of its functionaries. The administration at the time was contemplating the construction of some radio stations.

Bids were invited among the major European countries with the strongest contenders being Britain and Germany. The administration took this occasion to placate the Germans and to satisfy the British. Sir Palairet, wrote to his government, that Greece was ready to give the contract to a British firm. But the ambassador continued, "...they would prefer other firms as well as Marconi's to submit offers"³.

Apparently, the Greek Government wanted to give the appea-

1. *Ibid.*, folio 91. Despatch by the Foreign Office to Sir M. Palairet of January 16th, 1940.

2. *Ibid.*, folio 143. Communication by Sir M. Palairet to the Foreign Office of February 10th, 1940.

3. *Ibid.*, folio 155. Communication by Sir M. Palairet to the Foreign Office of February 14th, 1940.

rance of legality to the scheme which she was contemplating. And it was, as they envisioned, as unethical as it was simple. "If this could be arranged", the ambassador reported, "they would go through formality of calling tenders in such a way as to give special advantages to British firms"¹.

The regime then of the 4rth of August, for those inner conflicts which were never to be resolved throughout its usurpation of power, exhibited a marked preference in the placement of its military orders to German nationals. And it proceeded a step further in this questionable policy. Vital works of fortification in Greece proper were done under the over all supervision of German officers.

The greatest part of the new armament, like the sophisticated anti-aircraft fortifications installed around the Saronic gulf and in the fleet bases of Skaramangas and the islands of Aegina and Salamis², the pertinent staff studies, on the spot surveys, and the actual installation was done by German naval officers³. The organization of the naval defense works at strategic places in Greece was supervised by German officers. They had arrived in Greece at the request of the Metaxas administration.

The presence and engagement of Nazi officials in the defense preparation of the country raised serious controversies among the of-

1. *Ibid.*

2. That island Salamis, along with Poros, had traditionally been the cites of the Greek fleet's bases since the founding of the modern Greek state. And since they, along with Aegina, commanded the entrances to the main Greek port of Pireaus their fortification was of the utmost importance for the adequate defense of the port city of the Greek capital.

3. The first German officers, retired rear-admiral Kinzel and his mission, had been invited to Greece by the military dictatorship of general Kondeles, on the last part of 1935. The rear-admiral accompanied by experts of the Greek navy, under the then lieutenant commander Konstas, and aboard the Greek destroyer *Thyella* made a survey of the Greek coast. The German admiral then proceeded to draw the map of the naval defenses of the whole country. During the Metaxas dictatorship more German officers were brought to Greece. They were colonel of the engineer corps Habicht and naval officer Mirrus. Those new experts stayed in Greece up to the middle of 1937 supervising the fortification of the Greek coasts by the Greek navy. P. Konstas [Vice-Admiral, R. N.], *Hai Polemikai, Politikai kai Diplomatikai Anamneseis tou tes Dekaeτίας 1940-1950*, (Athens, 1950), pp. 20-23; D. Phokas [Vice-Admiral, R. N.], *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1944*, (2 vols., Athens, 1953), vol. I, pp. 12-15. The last work it, should be noted, is the official history of the Navy and it was published under the latter's auspices by the Navy's historical service.

officers of the Greek navy and the Greek public in general¹. The defenses of the Greek seas were certainly directed not against Britain but of course, their mission was to defend the country's vital sea communications in view of the threat posed by the rising Italian menace. Italy already possessed strong air and sea bases in the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean, which could be transformed into advance offensive stations for the German drive to the Middle East. The collaboration of the two axis allies could not be doubted by anybody. The employment of military experts from one of the axis states could not but be considered as scandalous and detrimental to the country's best interests. Certainly, no one of serious mind could have claimed that the defensive network of naval artillery, mine fields etc., was to safeguard Greece against the possibility of a sea attack on the part of Bulgaria, a state with no access to the Mediterranean and whose fleet was made up of one obsolete submarine².

The collaboration in military matters and in the most sensitive

1. Notwithstanding the repressive Metaxas regime, certain officers along with private citizens brought to the attention of the ministry of justice, certainly a futile and dangerous action under the circumstances, the presence of German officers in the Greek naval staff which was reorganizing the Greek defenses. The district attorney of the Athens court of Appeals P. Garezos instituted an investigation of preliminary nature. He called among other witnesses lieutenant commander Konstas, on suspicion of espionage... However, it could have been incomprehensible to file such charges against an officer who was following the precise orders of the administration. And this being the case the investigation came to an abrupt end with no reports of the case ever submitted. As a matter of fact admiral Konstas in his work commended as follows on this incident: "A fact which proves how unwise is sometimes the involvement of justice in areas that deal with politics and diplomacy and which only the responsible government knows". Konstas, *Hai Polemikai, Politikai kai Diplomatikai Anamneseis tes Dekaeτίας 1940-1950*, pp. 21-22.

2. See Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai skepseis enos Palaiau Nautikou*, vol. I pp. 122-123, 126-129; A. Sakellariou ([Vice-Admiral, R. N.], *Enas Nauarchos Thematai*, (2 vols., Athens, 1970), vol. I, pp. 208-209. According to admiral Sakellariou, Metaxas had said the following concerning the defense preparations of Greece: "Our first function is to become ourselves capable to withstand an attack against us on the part of the only visible enemy in the Balkans, Bulgaria". *Ibid.*, p. 208. See also the comments of A. Korozes, colonel of the general army staff, who said the following: "Confronting up to now (April 1939) in our (war) preparation a Balkan opponent, that is Bulgaria, who had means equivalent to ours, we created Balkan divisions sufficient for a Balkan war". A. Korozes [Colonel], *HellenoTourkikoi Agones kai Philiai, 1914-1940*, (Athens, 1949), p. 631.

ones, demonstrated with some force the peculiar ideological identification of the Metaxas administration with the axis powers. Indeed, frequent visits by the leading members of the Nazi hierarchy, men like Göring and Joseph Göbbels in Athens accompanied with magnificent receptions, as the one given in the Athens National stadium in honor of Göring, cemented the intellectual affinities of the Metaxas regime with the totalitarian states of Europe¹. Theoreticians of the new order made pilgrimages on a regular bases to the capitals of Italy and Germany to reinforce their philosophical beliefs in the Meccas of totalitarianism².

As late as the fall of 1938, at the height of the Czechoslovakian crisis, when a confrontation between the western allies and Hitler seemed imminent, the Metaxas administration permitted, if not encouraged, the head of the Greek general staff, general Papagos, to visit Germany as a guest of the German general staff to observe the great fall exercises of the reborn German army in eastern Germany. Those military manœuvres were used by Hitler as means to force Czechoslovakia into submission and of course, to impress the rest of Europe with the German military might³.

No doubt, intellectually, Metaxas himself and a number of his

1. G. Daphnes, *He Hellas Metaxy dyo Polemon 1923-1940*, (2 vols, Athens, 1955), vol. 2, p. 473. Petropoulos writes that when Göring arrived in Athens the government organized a reception in the national stadium in an effort to demonstrate that there existed a mass enthusiasm for the achievements of Nazism. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaïou Nautikou*, vol. I, p. 194. However, Alexis Kyrrou, then Greek diplomatic attaché in Berlin, in his memoirs claims that the visit of Göring took place in the early part of 1935 during the Tsaldares administration. At that visit the government bestowed on the German official the highest decoration of the Greek state, that of the Grand Cross of Phoinix. According to Kyrrou the visitor "...returned very enthusiastic, not only because of the archaeological treasures and the beauty of the country, but because it was bestowed on him the Grand Cross of the order of Phoinix...he was so satisfied that he said to my superior and myself who had welcomed him in the airport that from now on we should consider him as the second ambassador of Greece and to call on him whenever we thought it necessary". A. Kyrrou, *Oneira kai Pragmatikotetes. Chronia Diplomatikes Zoes, 1924-1953*, (Athens, 1972), pp. 132-135.

2. See Daphnes, *He Hellas Metaxy dyo Polemon*, vol. 2, p. 473; I. Koronakes, *He Politeia tes 4es Augoustou. Phos eis mian Plastographemenen Periodon tes Historias mas*, (Athens, 1950), p. 178.

3. Th. Gregoropoulos [Lieutenant-General], *Apo ten Koryphen tou Lophou. Anamneseis kai Stochasmoi 1914-1952 kai 1959-1962*, (Athens, 1966), pp. 75-80. Petropoulos, then a captain in the navy on active duty, wrote that following the fall of France, the regime was allowing military officers to attend special

close associates tended to view Germany as the victor over the western democracies¹, incurring therefore the mistrust of a wide spectrum of allied officials.

film showings at the German embassy in Athens, films demonstrating the military superiority and the efficiency of the German military establishment, and above all the utter collapse of the Anglo-French armies. Petropoulos, *Anamne-seis kai Skepseis enos Palaiau Nautikou*, vol. I, pp. 194-195; A. Sakellariou [Vice-Admiral, R. N.], *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pangosmion Polemon*, p. 20. Similarly the Germans had invited on the fall of 1940, through general Papagos, a number of Greek officers to visit the Maginot line and the French battle-fields. According to the military attaché in Athens, Papagos "...had tried to evade accepting but had ultimately thought wiser to accept and not to give offense". Consequently, a group of four officers was arranged to leave but Berlin took the initiative to postpone the tour at the very day when the visitors were about to depart for Germany. Probably the Germans in Athens had got wind of a British scheme to use the Greek officers as spies.

Indeed, the British intelligence services had attempted to capitalize on the opportunity offered to procure informations on the state of affairs of the German army. The chief deputy director of the military intelligence W. J. Jervois, wrote to the undersecretary of state Nickols the following: "You might hint to President of Council (Metaxas) that officers should be selected qualified to obtain useful information...". What sort of information the undersecretary had in mind was revealed in his reply to W. J. Jervois: *Foreign Office*, 371/24913, folios 53, 51, 56, 58 of October 9th, 17th and 18th, 1940.

1. Metaxas in his diary, at the entries of the first days of the war, had expressed the fear and the agony for the stability and the safety of the regime: "...if the democracies prevailed". On another instance the founder of the dictatorship had claimed that the war was the result of the revenge of the Jews against Germany. He had considered the conflict as "necessary" for all involved, the west as well as the totalitarian regimes. For the western states in order to maintain their empires and, as far as Germany was concerned, to prevent internal "dissolution", a fixed idea indeed in all of the fascist totalitarian regimes. "The prevalence of the national-socialists had not succeeded, wrote Metaxas, in overcoming the grumbling and overcritical mentality of the German middle class. We are witnessing it even now. The danger of destruction will remove the dividing intellectual elements and will forge their character. Without the war national-socialism could have crumbled because the Germans would have lacked their morning butter".

Metaxas insecure about the position of the regime, frequently expressed his anxiety about a possible action on the part of the allies. "But from inside me the agony and the *fear* can not go away concerning the manner by which the French and the British are treating us, and are threatening to treat us". On April 18th, 1940 the dictator wrote: "The British want to destroy Nazism. But with this, in reality, they mean anti-Parliamentarism. They want therefore to impose everywhere their antiquated liberal system. Therefore, they work with heads looking backwards". Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, (4 vols., Athens, 1951-1970), vol. 4. pp. 396, 399, 405-406 and 453. Italics mine.

The admiration for everything German¹ and the inner belief on a final German victory which had engulfed the functionaries of the regime, had permeated the palace entourage, the seemingly strong bastion of English power and influence in the country². King George was mentally prone to accept favorably the concerns of Metaxas that a vi-

1. Some informations filtered to the foreign office in London about what really was a hypothetical proposal for military cooperation between Greece and the western allies and, advanced by Papagos, raised a storm of protest in London which immediately initiated a high level consultation with the French government on the best way to stop it. The Greek head of the general army staff, according to the same informations, had despatched a personal appeal to his French counterpart, general Weygand, calling on the latter to co-ordinate the defenses of Yugoslavia and Greece. On learning of this the British, knowing the peculiarities of Greek politics and the balance of power in the contry, much better than their allies, questioned Paris on the wisdom of such a commitment. "This proposal", the Foreign Office wrote, "has dangerous implications, (we have no confirmation that General Metaxas was consulted by General Papagos but presumably the latter could not have dared send off this message on his own)". In a telegram to the British ambassador in Belgrade Sir R. Campbell, the foreign office assured him of the "common" front among the Anglo-French on this issue, thus putting at ease the fears of the seasoned Balkan expert of a premature movement in the area. "Monsieur Daladier", the communiqué to Sir R. Campbell continued, "promises not to send reply without consulting us. He agrees that the proposal is dangerous and is inclined to think that General Papagos acted without authority". *Foreign Office*, 371/24915, folios 371, 297. Italics mine.

2. In a work written by a person closely associated with the King of Greece, either the court-marshal Levides or the extremely intimate friend and advisor of the crown diplomat Panagiotes Pipineles, it is revealed that the allied headquarters, at the first days of the war, viewed with suspicion and were hesitant to overtures made by the Greek general staff, on the advisability of co-ordinating means of defense of Greece against the axis. The important element here of course is that officers holding positions of power were well known royalists on whose loyalty the crown was entrusting its fate. Kodros, *Ho Niketes Basileus*, (Athens ?), pp. 28-29.

King George in a speech to the gathering of high ranking officers had emphasized his conviction that the allies would have been the ultimate victors. "At this point some of his listeners seemed to doubt, the King realised". Kodros, *Ho Niketes Basileus*, pp. 28-29. On the latter point about the growing belief of the officer corps on the German victory, see the statement of lieutenant-general Tsolakoglou on the comments of one of the generals who was part the high military command. The comment was made during the first months of the second world war. "Now", the general said, "when we see the rapid results against France, it would be possible to change sides toward the Axis". G. Tsolakoglou [Lieutenant-General], *Apomnemonemata Georgiou K. Tsolakoglou, Antistratigou*, (Athens, 1959), p. 13.

These sentiments known as they were to the British services affected in

ctory of the democracies would have forced the regime, which both had brought into being, to make concessions¹.

The perpetuation of the dictatorship *intact*, while identical ideologically to the totalitarian regimes in Italy and Germany, was obliging the dyarchy of Metaxas and the King to collaborate with the British on exchange of the latter's respect of the *status quo* in the country. The King was more sensitive to the need for a *modus vivendi* with the allies. In October 1938 Metaxas telegraphed King George, then visiting London, an undiplomatic act indeed, to visit with Hitler when the Greek monarch would travel through Germany on his way to Greece. "The King was displeased", wrote his biographer, "with the recommendation of his prime-minister, which, taking place in that well effected manner, had the character of light subservience and surely was destined to cool our great friends, to whom in case of danger we would have to turn"².

And it is of interest to note that the negative response of the King to the demand of his prime-minister at the former's admission was not sent through the official channels that is the Greek foreign ministry. The King was not oblivious to the fact that the foreign service had been staffed with persons known for their pro-German orienta-

another manner from what already has been indicated the military co-operation of Greece and Britain. The British ambassador in Ankara Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen on June 11th, 1940 reported to the Foreign Office the following: "My Air Attaché... state that the King of Greece stressed to him the importance of always being kept informed of any plan which involved Greece. But Chief British Naval delegate replied that he did not intend to pass on such information to the Greeks". *Foreign Office*, 371/24915, folio 317. Italics mine. See also the contentions of the Greek authors Koronakes and Pyromaglou who in general terms refer to the same phenomenon. Koronakes, *He Politeia tes 4es Augoustou. Phos eis mian Plastographemenen Periodon tes Historias mas*, pp. 179-180; K. Pyromaglou, *He Ethnike Antistasis*, (Athens, 1947), p. 33. It should be emphasized that there was a consensus among the Greek politicians that the Anglo-French mistrusted the Metaxas regime because of its German leanings. Daphnes, *He Hellas Metaxy dyo Polemon*, vol. 2, p. 473.

1. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 396.

2. P. Pipineles, *Georgios B*, (Athens, 1961), pp. 94-95. See also the text of the reply of King George to Metaxas in D. Kitsikes, *He Hellas tes 4es Augoustou kai hai Megalai Dynameis*, (Athens 1974), p. 76. See also the work by Spyros Linardatos, *He Hexoterike Politike tes 4es Augoustou*, (2 vols., Athens, 1975), vol. 1. This work by a journalist is of little or no value for the understanding of the period. However, it provides an acceptable background for a comprehensive view of Europe at the time.

tion¹. To avoid "indiscretions", he sent a message to Metaxas with a relative of his who occupied a diplomatic post in the Greek foreign service².

The fear of severe allied reprisals became the prime factor of the Metaxas diplomacy in the shaping of its relations with the Axis powers and above all with Berlin. The overwhelming realization on the part of the administration that Greece was exposed, and therefore vulnerable to an Anglo-French naval intervention, due to her extended sea coast and her numerous islands, on the scale of the allied occupation of 1917, along with the knowledge that a great part of the Greek people would have risen against the regime urged on by the allies, made quite haphazardous a closer association with the German diplomacy in the Balkans³.

1. In addition to Mauroudes, the foreign undersecretary of whom more will be said later, there was in the foreign service individuals like the diplomatic attaché Kyrou. The man, a devoted arch-royalist, whose family paper *Hestia* had traditionally advanced the cause of the monarchy in Greece, had fallen to such a disrepute even with Metaxas because of his pro-Axis position that the latter wrote the famous phrase in his diary on the day of the outbreak of the war with Italy: "All loyal except Kyrou".

Up to the eve of the hostilities with Italy Kyrou was advocating an appeasement with Italy, and a continuation of the talks with Germany. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 516. Kyrou's own version of the incident tends to substantiate the view of the existence of a strong pro-axis group within Greece. Kyrou, *Oneira kai Pragmatikotes*, pp. 190-191.

2. Pipineles, *Georgios B*, pp. 94-95.

3. Metaxas persistently rebuked the constant overtures of the Anglo-French for the establishment of an allied base in Macedonia. The literature on the military merits of such an operation from the Greek side is quite extensive. However, the criteria used by Metaxas for the rejection of the allied proposals were rather purely domestic considerations. His rejection of the allied military plans stemmed from his everpresent fears, that the democratic parties, old Venizelists, would have taken advantage of the presence of the allied armies to demand a broader political representation in the government and the liberalization of the country in general.

Probably, this type of war time collaboration would have made it imperative for the dictatorship to make concessions to the political parties, and the eventual Metaxas' lack of popular basis would have forced him out of power. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, pp. 468-469. On another occasion Metaxas, when forced by increasing Italian provocations and real threats of war to mobilize an infantry division, secretly of course, had remarked: "Internal despair. My work crumbles". *Ibid.*, p. 500. See also his self-explanatory remarks to the publishers of the Athenian dailies on the possibilities of allied reprisals and of internal revolts in Greece against his authority if he was to enter into an alliance with Germany. *Ibid.*, pp. 523-524.

Indeed, the French high command¹ in collaboration with the British, but essentially utilizing purely French resources, had planned all along, as soon as the European conflict had erupted, to occupy militarily the islands of Salamis and Melos, the strategic naval anchorages of Argostoli in the Ionian sea and the bay of Navarino.

The dismembering of the Metaxas state was therefore part of the contingency plans of the west. Visions of recreating the Macedonian front of first world war fame in Salonica were an integral part of the strategy of the French general staff on Greece².

The British contingency plans on Greece were less ambitious, due to circumstances, than those of Paris, but equally damaging to the Metaxas regime. London contemplated the occupation of Crete³ as a pu-

On the military arguments concerning the establishment of the front in Macedonia arguing the case against, see the reasoning of Papagos, the chief defender, at least in his official writings, of the military policies of the dictatorship. Papagos, *Ho Polemos tes Hellados 1940-1941*, (Athens, 1953), pp. 210-230.

1. *Foreign Office*, 371/24915, folio 311, Sir O. Sargent to General Ismay.

2. *Ibid.*, folio 315. Despatch of the Foreign Office to Sir Michael Palairret.

3. On August 17th, 1940, the Foreign Office in a communication to Sir M. Palairret inquired of him the following: "I shall be glad if you will at the same time inquire of His Excellency (Metaxas) whether, in view of the threatening attitude of the Italian government in general and of the exposed and vulnerable position of Crete in particular, the Greek government have any intention of reinforcing the garrison in that island and improving its defences" *Ibid.*, 371/24909, folio 121. The Greek military authorities were fully aware of this interest of the British which led to the "occupation" of the island by a symbolic force of British armed forces. That this was imposed on the Greek government and rejected by the Greek military hierarchy, at least when the German menace became more evident, it is shown by the following written statement of lieutenant-colonel Petinis, a member of the staff of the commander in chief of the Greek army corps in Macedonia to the German consulate in the Macedonian capital: "The occupation of Crete by the English occurred without the co-operation of Greece".

A clarification here is necessary to underline the importance of the move by lieutenant-colonel Petinis. The German ambassador in Athens Prince Erbach on the basis of the informations furnished by his military attaché had informed Berlin that Petinis was acting on behalf of Tsolakoglou. A link between Petinis and Tsolakoglou at this stage could probably provide an explanation of the behavior of Tsolakoglou later. However, it seems to me that lieutenant-colonel Petinis was acting on orders of the commander of the corps based in Salonica, lieutenant-general Bakopoulos. Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. The War Years*, vol. VI, 1940-1941, (Washington, D. C. 1959), Document number 155, pp. 279-280. Italics mine.

rely British operation, using in a combined operation her naval and amphibious forces, a fundamental credo of a power like England which based her strategy on small efficient mobile forces.

Metaxas and his henchmen knew and fully appreciated the undisputed control which the British Mediterranean fleet, regardless of the presence of the strong naval Italian bases at the Dodecanese islands, commanded in the area of eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean sea. So much the British trusted their naval supremacy in the region, that in the case of an armed conflict of the Metaxas regime with Italy, their assistance would have been confined initially to whatever protection their fleet could have afforded¹. This form of aid was to become the fundamental policy of the British diplomacy in its dealings with the Metaxas dictatorship. England, hard pressed by what her leaders thought as her "vital defense commitments and (her) limited resources"², could not have extended to Greece any other form of military reinforcements.

As far as the project Crete was concerned, Britain, that is the British military hierarchy, not oblivious to the pro-German proclivities of a good many of the Metaxas functionaries³, had serious objections in making it known beforehand to the Greek authorities:

I have spoken, wrote an official of the Foreign Office, to major Cornwall Jones (war cabinet officer) who tells me that the Chiefs of Staff consider that secrecy is absolutely vital in regard to the Crete project, and that they would have the strongest possible objections to our authorizing Sir M. Palairet telling the President of the Cou-

1. According to the C. in C. Mediterranean in memorandum that he had despatched to the admiralty in London he had this to say: "...British naval effort on behalf of Greece will in fact be considerable since action of our Naval forces should not only preclude army large scale invasion of their coast but will keep open their lines of communication in Aegean". *Ibid.*, 371/24915, folio 308.

2. *Ibid.*, 371/24915, folio 315.

3. The British ambassador in Athens, who, as it will be seen, was ready to defend at the White Hall the Metaxas policies and the latter's loyalty to England, had this to say about the regime's functionaries in an official communiqué to Lord Halifax: "*The regime in Greece, like that in Germany depends for its maintainance in power very largely on secret police; the Germans have carefully build up close relations with the Greek police over a number of years. The result is that we already have reason to suspect that a considerable amount of information about allied authorities in Greece is passed on by certain members of the Greek police to German authorities*". Report by Sir M. Palairet to Halifax of February 16th, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24913, folio 16. Italics mine.

*ncil beforehand... In other words he is authorized to tell the Greek Government of the Crete plan as soon as he receives information either direct or from us to the effect that an Italian attack on Greek territory has taken place*¹.

On August 17th, 1940, a month after the above had taken place, the Foreign Office mindful of the hesitation expressed by the military people, aware of the turn to the worse of the Greco-Italian relations, and above all concerned by the absence of serious defense preparations by the Metaxas regime against the impending Italian aggression, made this "discreet" inquiry about Crete to the Greek government :

*I shall be glad if you will at the same time enquire of His Excellency whether, in view of the threatening attitude of the Italian Government in general and of the exposed and vulnerable position of Crete in particular, the Greek Government have any intention of reinforcing the garrison in that island and improving its defenses*².

But whatever reservations the British policy-makers had nourished on the ideology of the Metaxas regime and the loyalty and caliber of the administrators who staffed it, they tended to be satisfied by the potential abiding of the dictator to the demands of the British policies. The British diplomacy, the Foreign Office and the British ambassador in Athens, were quite confident and increasingly satisfied by the "firmness" of the regime, something, of course, which could be translated simply that Athens would not submit by diplomatic pressure alone to the Axis forces and expel the British from its territory.

This being a fundamental principle and a guiding force of the Foreign Office toward its handling of the Metaxas regime, all the other characteristics of the obnoxious dictatorship tended to be obliterated. Notwithstanding the wide unpopularity of the regime at home, the awe and contempt by which it was held abroad and the tremendous liability that this meant for the future of England's interests in Greece, London, irrespective of the administration in power, was adamant in its faith to Metaxas. And very careful not to upset the foundations of this delicate understanding by sponsoring the Greek internal opposition³ to the Metaxas dictatorship.

1. *Ibid.*, 371/24915, folio 317.

2. *Ibid.*, 371/24909, folio 121.

3. *I doubt indeed whether any other Greek Government would be more satisfactory to His Majesty's Government than the present one, with all its defects, or whether it would be more stable in itself*". *Ibid.*, 371/24909, folio 167. Italics mine.

The fundamental doctrine of the Foreign Office *vis à vis* the regime in Athens evolved on the pragmatic assumption, on its part, that the dictatorship in Greece under the circumstances, especially following the purges in the officer corps, was of far greatest advantage to the current British interests than anything else available. In pursuance of this established policy both Sir M. Palairet and his superiors in London vigorously objected and in the most categorical manner condemned any idea of initiating or encouraging any *coup d'état* aimed at upsetting the political *status quo* in Greece.

The embassy in Athens addressing itself to a memorandum by the British consul-general in Salonica, E. O. Hole of December 21st, 1939, who had virtually called for a British intervention on the side of the Greek politicians conspiring to overthrow Metaxas¹, set forth what could be called the guiding principle of the British foreign policy in regard to its relations with the Metaxas dictatorship:

From our point of view a revolution would of course be against our interests, no matter how well disposed the rebels were towards us, and we should do nothing whatever to encourage it. It would almost certainly involve a period of internal chaos which might expose Greece to external pressure in a way detrimental both to her own and our own interests².

It was in this spirit that Greek politicians and known personalities of the Greek Venizelist camp were constantly rebuked and discouraged in their repeated attempts to enlist the overt participation of the British to bring about a change of regime in the country.

The case of the British diplomatic official mentioned above, E. O. Hole, is characteristic of the realism imbued in the British policies. The consul-general stationed in the Macedonian capital was naturally engulfed in the strong Venizelist tradition kept alive in that city and in the still vivid memories of the wartime comradeship of the same elements, Venizelists, with the Anglo-French armies. The liberals there, because of the indigenous social conditions and the demography of the area, were more sensitive to the repression of the regime. Easily therefore they became transmitters of the popular discontent to the foreign representative.

1. *Ibid.*, Report by E. O. Hole British consul-general in Salonica to the British embassy in Athens and to the Foreign Office. 371/24909, folio 133.

2. *Ibid.*, Reply of Carcia counselor of the embassy to the consul-general of December 26th, 1940. 371/24909, folio 138. Italics mine.

The tradition of foreign power enlistment to advance party or national goals was also not an alien idea to the Greek politicians. As a matter of fact it was part of the political mores, as much as any other reputable method used to upset their political opponents. The appealing politicians, who were to find a warm defender in the person of the British diplomat, based their arguments for assistance on their potential utility to the British interests.

An assistance rendered to them was an investment for the British for future services against the main enemy of London in the area, Germany¹. On that basis they found an ally in the person of the British representative in Salonica, who in a most unpolitic manner and, with lack of perspective, filled a somewhat inflammatory report on the state of affairs of the dictatorship:

...indications of the sentiments of the regime (toward England) have been multiplied this year, in spite of renewed official professions of friendliness: the dismissal of M. Tsouderos on account of his British affiliations; the suppression of the British Boy Scouts with their British traditions; the muzzling of Cinema audiences to prevent the expression of anti-German feeling; the imposition of the so-called neutrality on the press, interpreted by repeated telephonic orders from M. Nikoloudis to give prominence to German matter... the appointment or maintainance of pro-German officials in every department of the administration. In the civil administration he is vigorously seconded by M. Maniadakis, who proclaims his conviction that the regime stands or falls with the Nazi party... and some officials like the Prefect M. Almeida, regard themselves as servants of the German Reich².

This report was communicated to London via the British embassy in Athens, where it had met the most unusual reception. At no time it was rebuked and its author was mildly reprimanded. In addition, due to the fact that information of the existence of such a report could had leaked to Metaxas, the embassy took the unusual and somehow highly undiplomatic step of making the dictator a privy to its contents.

Certainly, the British diplomats besides being worried about the

1. In the appeals addressed by the Greek politicians to the British for aid the frequently used argument to solicit that aid was that London needed a "pro-western" administration in Athens to combat better the German menace.

2. *Foreign Office*, 371/24909, folio 133.

possible effects of the report in London wanted also to present to the dictatorship evidence of the "support" that London was rendering to the regime by disavowing the originator of this report¹.

Another instance where the new doctrine was upheld and, I should say, severely tested was in the case of E. Tsouderos. Tsouderos, whose "anglophilia" was his passport for British favor and his claim to power, in the words of the British reporter Maitland² was "intriguing" with opposition leaders in exile against the regime. In the words of the same reporter, Mr. Tsouderos, was also intriguing in London against the regime by representing the finances of Greece with a far more ruthless accuracy than he ever employed when dealing with Metaxas himself.

In 1939 Tsouderos became involved in another of the petty conspiracies against the regime. It seems that his primary role was to be the link between the conspirators and the English embassy³. And he did pursue his mission most consciously. According to Sir M. Palairet, "Monsieur Tsouderos, who until a few months ago was Governor of the Bank of Greece, secretly left at the Legation a document stating that members of the Government are anxious about Monsieur Metaxas' death"⁴.

Tsouderos, warned the British that the Metaxas stalwarts were ready to stage a *coup d'état*, in the words of Sir M. Palairet, a *mise en scene*, to overthrow Metaxas. The anatomy of the motives of the plotting camarilla, Kotzias, Maniadakis and Diakos, the "*éminence grise*",

1. In the Metaxas diary, in the entry of April 21st, 1940 we read the following: "Intrigue by the British consul of Salonica with false news against the regime. Happily they (British) informed us on their own. However, the special case of the British in Salonica" must be investigated. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 463.

2. Mr. Maitland was the reporter at large of the *Times* in the Balkans. In his capacity as the representative of the prestigious London daily had interviews with both the King and Metaxas. His conclusions reflected the liberal bias of the liberal western climate with its strong opposition to the dictatorship. In this manner the criticism of the regime in Greece was a bit embarrassing to the Foreign Office. It reacted therefore with scepticism and indirectly intervened by the paper not to give any publicity to those reports. *Foreign Office*, 371/24909, folio 152.

3. For a brief account of the conspiracies see the work by Daphnes, *He Hellas Metaxy dyo Polemon*, p. 461.

4. Report to the Foreign Office by Sir M. Palairet of January 20th, 1940. *Foreign Office*, 371/24909, folio 164.

as Sir M. Palairret called the latter¹, bear a striking resemblance to the reasons advanced by Metaxas for the establishment of his dictatorship. They were projecting the "danger of outbreaks by the working classes" to persuade the King to grant them succession, in other words to have the royal sanction to overthrow Metaxas.

It seems that Tsouderos' aim was to forewarn the British embassy and, confident of his standing with them, to advance his own candidacy to power, as the "proper" successor to the dictatorship². The crafty banker³, however, was greatly misjudging his usefulness to his "protectors", at least at this particular time. The comments of Sir M. Palairret, if they could have been communicated to Tsouderos, would have indeed a profound effect and would have provided him with a working knowledge of the long range goals of the British diplomacy:

The exiling of M. Tsouderos is disquieting for he was a close personal friend of the King and I scarcely think that this measure would have been taken unless the Government themselves were nervous of their position. I am sorry too, for M. Tsouderos was always friendly with this legation and strongly pro-British. This latter should, however, not be taken as modifying the views about the regime which I expressed in paragraphs 6 and 7 of my despatch no. 20 of 20th of January⁴.

1. This was the exact phraseology used by Sir M. Palairret in his description of the "personages" of the regime and especially about Diakos: "...and Monsieur Joannis Diakos (who is the confidential adviser of the President of the Council and the 'Eminence Grise' of the regime)". On Kotzias the ambassador had these refined comments: "Monsieur Kotzias appears to have little in his favor beyond energy and strong physique". However, Maitland's views on the "Governor of Attica" are almost identical with many contemporary Greek sources and equally scornful and cynical: "I also get the impression that Kotzias, the loud and vulgar Governor of Attica, who rose to wealth with Metaxas..." *Ibid.*, 371/24909, folio 152.

Here it should be added that the Axis politicians had in high esteem Mr. Kotzias evidently due to his pro-Nazi tendencies. As a matter of fact the Italian foreign minister Ciano on April 27th, 1941 had proposed to the German ambassador at Rome Mackensen the following: "He (Ciano) added in his connection that he would, of course, have to make efforts also to seek the remaining members of the future government from among the Greek circles who were friendly toward us. He had in mind among others the Governor of Athens Kotzias. *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. The War Years*, vol. VI 1940-1941, document 540, p. 916.

2. *Ibid.*, 371/24909, folio 164.

3. Sakellariou, *Enas Nauarchos Thymatai*, p. 340.

4. *Foreign Office*, 371/24909, folio 173.

The "non-intervention" doctrine of the British embassy, if one could thus mildly characterize the support to the Metaxas regime, was not only a product of calculated pragmatic political evaluations but at the same time was a realistic assessment of the ethos of the Greek military establishment, the professional military corps, as it had evolved in Greece since the middle of 1935.

The British military attaché in Athens was confident that the officer corps was loyal to the regime, which was tantamount to the conclusion that its vested interests had placed it tooth and nail on the side of the dictatorship.

The purges of 1935 and the "screening" by the dictatorship had molded an officer corps which was identifying its maintenance in power with the perpetuation of the Metaxas regime and a totalitarian monarchy. Certainly, the military attaché was a most careful observer of the realities in the Greek military establishment when in his report to London he concluded as follows: "The present military chiefs are 'King's men' and to a certain extent Metaxas men also"¹.

What admiral Kavvadias was constantly reiterating, that "no politics" were any longer permitted in the "*new armed forces*", in the loyalist monolithic military apparatus that had been built since Kondeles, was indeed a reality by which the military attaché was concurring. A prime exponent who vigorously and adamantly pursued this principle was the King himself. The monarch was determined to maintain the purity of the officer corps, the exclusiveness of that body, meticulously erasing any remnants of Venizelist adherents².

And if both the monarchy and the dictatorship needed the officer corps, literally for their survival, the officers themselves as the British military attaché cleverly noted, were protecting their own syndi-

1. These conclusions have been generally accepted by the rank and file of the Greek military circles and by all the authors who have dealt with the period. A prime example would be the case of lieutenant-generals Pitsikas and Tsolakoglou. *Ibid.*, 371/24909, folio 186.

2. "For this reason presumably, His Majesty has constantly set his face against the return to military service of the Venizelist officers dismissed in 1935". *Ibid.* A note should be inserted here that the British military attaché had, contrary to what his contemporaries in the Greek army believed, high esteem for the then chief of the Greek general staff, general Papagos. "General Papagos is from all evidences exceptional among Balkan military personalities in breath of outlook and I have never heard him express views other than those which are sound and moderate from a military point of view, though he is not highly thought of in the country".

calistic interests. The widespread cashiering of a large number of officers had created a vacuum in the military seniority which had been filled by the royalist upstarts and a variety of royalist converts, whose professional ability was at variance with their devotion to the totalitarian regime.

The British military expert while admitting that among those expelled from the army belonged some of the "best generals and staff officers" he realised that the regime was so entrenched that a violent swing could have adverse results for the country¹. Rather than upsetting the *status quo* in the armed forces, withstanding the fact that their professional talents were mediocre and their ideology that of the totalitarian right, the British officials were prone to uphold it as faithfully as possible. And this evaluation by one of the two allies was corroborated and given additional credence in the west by the harmony of views expressed by the French military attaché in the Greek capital.

The French military expert, probably influenced by the same factors as the British one, subscribed, "without reservations" on the inadmissibility of changes in the Greek military establishment. Consequently, the French policy, as it was influenced by its representatives on the spot was not encouraging any incendiary movements against the regime by the traditional liberals.

The identical and definitive, somehow guarded endorsement of the Metaxas regime by the most appropriate authorities of the British government in residence in Athens, produced a stir at the White Hall and an all-engulfing reappraisal of the British foreign policy in regard to Metaxas. A special meeting was summoned at the Foreign Office of all appropriate officials in charge of setting England's relations with Athens.

The fundamental question posed was whether they possessed the means for a "change of regime" in Athens. A "change", of course, which would have been achieved as safely as possible. The consensus was overwhelmingly negative. Indeed, the specialists in London did not seem to place strong hopes on the abilities of the Greek liberals to unseat Metaxas. In the same forthright manner was answered the second and logical sequence of the first proposition, the question whether a "change" in the regime would be advancing the immediate interests of Britain in Greece².

1. *Ibid.*

2. Minutes of a meeting at the Foreign Office held on February 26th, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24909, folio 176.

Most categorically then it can be concluded from that meeting that British policy at the time was not in a position to threaten successfully the *status quo*, thus compromising the delicate balance of power which so well without any troublesome commitments to Greece, obligations that probably would have become inevitable if the liberals were to be installed to power by their assistance, was advancing the British strategic interests in Greece.

The credo of the British foreign policy *vis à vis* Metaxas was therefore somewhat, cynically but epigrammatically in its clarity, summed up in the following sentence: "*in short we are wedded to M. Metaxas and so we shall remain until death or the Greeks part us*"¹.

This "attitude" of London was altogether at variance with the conglomeration of Greek politicians and military men aspiring power in Athens, and who had at no time commanded, for a host of reasons, the confidence of the oppressed Greek people.

A case illustrative of the firmness by which the non-intervention policy of Britain in the Greek internal affairs was applied was the fate of an "attempt" by a Greek politician to solicit aid against Metaxas. Colonel Venizelos, son of the liberal political chieftain, had submitted at the beginning of 1940 a memorandum to the British Middle East Intelligence Center at Cairo. It was presented not directly by Venizelos, but according to the British, by a friend of his.

The response to this appeal for help to this brain center of the British intelligence activities in the region encompassing Greece was swift, immediate and left no room for doubt to Venizelos as to the true intentions of the British toward the regime in Greece. "I have taken steps to stop any contact with Venizelos", wrote an official of the center, "and to make it quite clear we are in no way concerned with such matters"².

The last time prior to the outbreak of the Greco-Italian war that a Greek politician was to even indirectly appeal for British help was on September 1940. Again, as with Venizelos, the supplicant was a Cretan, one who had energetically involved himself in the abortive *coup d'état* against Metaxas in 1938 in Crete.

Following the failure of that armed rebellion³, Metsotakes, was

1. *Ibid.*, Italics mine.

2. Report by the British Middle East Intelligence Center at Cairo of February 10th, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24909, folio 196.

3. Metsotakes, as it has been already detailed elsewhere, was involved in a rebellion on the island of Crete to unseat Metaxas. For details on this affair

“permitted” by Metaxas to flee the country and go to Cyprus. Probably the destination of the chief of the armed rebellion was not altogether unrelated to the fact that he was a *pro-British* politician. While in Cyprus, enjoying the “tolerant” benevolence of the British colonial office, Metsotakes seems to have been involved, like many others of the opponents of the dictatorship abroad did, in all sorts of demonstrations to lower and undermine the prestige of the dictatorship. His *tour de force* aimed at enlisting the support of his hosts, by contrasting his liberalism and his pro-allied sympathies to the popularly accepted pro-Germanism of the regime in Athens, was a telegram that he dispatched to the dictator on September 15th, 1940.

The colonial authorities did not object to this act by Metsotakes. The text of the telegram was quite provocative as far as the dictator was concerned. In it Metsotakes called “on the President of the Council to resign because he is incapable of adopting the policy furthering British victory which constitutes sole salvation for Greece”¹.

The telegram was also published in toto in two Greek Cypriot newspapers, *Kyriekos Philax* (sic) and *Elefteria*. The telegram was, of course, intercepted by the government censor, but it produced a commotion in Athens irking the disgust of the dictatorship against the British officials who had become a party, in its estimation, to the affair. But the possible effects on the Greco-British entente did not escape the attention of Sir M. Palairt.

The British ambassador in Athens exhibited a nervousness and a sensitivity well above what the significance of the incident justified. Using such words, as “scandalous”, to underline the foolishness of the “attack” on Metaxas, Sir Palairt, once again found it expedient to reiterate his faith on the dictator². He found the affair opportune

the work of Daphnes is the best available source. See also an article by the liberal politician of Macedonia A. Zannas, published in the newspaper *Vema* on March 19th, 1959. See also the comments of the editor of the Metaxas diary, Vranas. Mr. Vranas, obviously lacking the information contained in the archival material of the Foreign Office not surprisingly wrote some generalities, especially ends and bits of gossiping that was reaching the desk of the dictator through his network of spies. And here it should be admitted that this information repeated by Mr. Vranas were pitifully poor. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, pp. 258-263.

1. See the text of Metsotakes' telegram in a despatch of Sir M. Palairt to the Foreign Office of September 19th, 1940. *Foreign Office*, 371/24912, folio 344.

2. The word “flabbergast”, I think best describes the puzzlement felt in

to reinstate to the Foreign Office the guiding principle of his policies in the area, namely that Metaxas was to be supported, thus preventing all movements by Greek politicians aiming at bringing about his downfall with British help. "Incidentally", the ambassador wrote to the Foreign Office, "it is to me very regrettable as the *President of the Council not only is our firm friend but now has all Greece including Crete behind him*"¹.

The affair ended, on the British side, by a note of Lord Halifax to the colonial authorities in Cyprus suggesting that they ought to send a formal expression of regrets to Metaxas. The reasoning of Lord Halifax was that the "best" interests of Britain were demanding this deference to the "injured" party. This solidarity of the functionaries of the Foreign Office with Metaxas should not, of course, be taken as a seal of faith to the dictatorship by London.

Throughout the period there was a constant concern that the close relations of the regime with Berlin could influence the former's foreign policy orientation. For instance, an article published by Maitland in the *Times* on August 1940, contained some information on movements by the Metaxas administration to reach an understanding with Italy using the good services of Berlin. And it was not all journalistic writing the assumptions of Maitland. The undersecretary of state Nickols, on the basis of informations from Athens² wrote on September 6th, 1940 that the suspicions of Maitland were substantiated³.

As it might have been expected, Sir M. Palairet, labored to mini-

the British embassy at the news of the Metsotakes telegram. *Ibid.* Metaxas dismissed the whole affair as "foolishness". Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 505.

1. The comments of Sir M. Palairet testify here to the growing "acceptance" of the regime by the broader elements of the people. That is to the national unity which was achieved in the country following the series of Italian provocations. To the British diplomat this was an additional asset in favor of the dictatorship, and of course, a welcomed relief for his country which now was supporting a government that seemed to enjoy a measure of popular understanding. *Foreign Office*, 371/24912, folio 344. Italics mine.

2. Nickols in penciled remarks on the margin of the telegram of Sir M. Palairet wrote the following: "It is quite clear from Athens telegrams Nos. 698 and 713 that there is something in the story". On September 6th, he continued: "Presumably he (Maitland) got wind of approaches to Berlin reported in Athens telegrams 698 and 713". *Ibid.*, 371/24913, folios 34, 35.

3. *Ibid.*

mize the significance of the existence of such movements and the bearing of them on the Greco-British understanding¹.

The Metaxas administration, it is true, not only was prone to a "covered" understanding with the axis, but at times energetically pursued such a policy. The grave concern that it exhibited toward its own political future, the identification of the nation with the maintenance of the regime, interwoven with the ideological antecedents of the administration, made it sceptical of its existing understanding with Britain. And it forced the regime to adopt a conciliatory policy toward Italy which was the least conforming with the spirit of its obligations to London. In the face of the growing Italian provocations and the increasing threats of war, the administration tended to follow a haphazardous, inconsistent and, at times conflicting policy which led to an uneasiness in London and to an increase of the pressure on the part of Italy on Greece². The administration besides that, due to the gene-

1. Sir M. Palairt indirectly, at this stage, expressed his disapproval and presumably his disbelief of the story of Maitland. His report to the Foreign Office was drafted in such a way as to register the dislike of the Metaxas administration of the English circles of Athens who nourished such heretical views. "President of the Council is annoyed by article in "Times" telephoned from Athens by Maitland reporting that Greek Government are in constant touch with Berlin". *Ibid.*, 371/24913, folio 34.

2. On August 1939 Metaxas, pursuing the policy of appeasement toward Italy, forced the Greek military attaché at Belgrade to retire from his post because the latter, according to the Italians, had made some derogatory comments on the fighting qualities of the Italian soldier. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 388. At the outbreak of the war in Europe Maniades, the infamous minister of internal security, on orders from the dictator, had forbidden any public discussions on the belligerents, threatening the populace in case of disobedience with his dreadful "security committees" and with eventual exile. The regime was sensitive to expressions of public sentiment sympathetic to the allies and of comparisons between the western democracies and the totalitarian dictatorships of Italy and Germany, which of course would have led to comments about the regime in Greece. *Ibid.*, pp. 392-393.

Of great interest as underlining the insecurity of the regime, a classic example in fact of the methods of a totalitarian regime and of its suspicions on the patriotic motives of its citizens, is the case of the medical doctor Theocharis Karvounes. This man with the approach of the second world war, had developed a system of espionage in southern Albania, the area known as Northern Epirus, for the purpose of collecting information on the Italian activities for the benefit of the Greek authorities. The British intelligence in Athens realizing the importance of his work attempted to lure him into co-operation. Dr. Karvounes flatly refused, since in his estimation the British wanted to serve

ral military unpreparedness of the country to face a conflict with Italy, tended to rely heavily on unofficial diplomatic contact with Germany to stem the forthcoming Italian assault¹. Alarmed and perplexed by the constant and insatiable Italian demands and cowed by scarcity of faith and defeatism of his key advisors², Metaxas sought the good of-

their own interests rather than the goals of the Greek irredentists. The Metaxas authorities in this case the dictator himself mistrusting the actions of this man who in the past had been his collaborator, had him arrested, interrogated in isolation for forty five days and then shipped him off to exile in one of the Aegean islands. Ironically after the war had ended Dr. Karvounes received from the British a certificate in recognition of his services to the allies for the very same services that he had been punished by the dictatorship. D. Goudes, *He Hellas kata ton Deuteron Pangosmion Polemon 1939-1945*, (Alexandria, 1947), vol. I, pp. 164-166.

1. Kyrrou, *Oneira kai Pragmatikotes*, pp. 176-190; Kodros, *Ho Niketes Basileus*, pp. 29-30; Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, pp. 492-501.

2. "My decision to resist to the last. Hesitant in doing so some ministers and Papagos". *Ibid.*, p. 492. The vice-chief of the Greek general staff major-general Andreas Plates, along with the former minister of interior Skylakakes, a cashiered officer and some other former royalist officers had called on the German embassy in Athens to replace the "Anglophile" administration of Metaxas by a government headed by them. These pro-German partisans did not impress the German officials favorably. According to general Mazarakes who reports the incident Prince Erbach informed Metaxas who had them exiled.

If we are to draw any conclusions at all from this incident is that both the British and the Germans were sceptical of the abilities of Metaxas' opponents to overthrow him. Mazarakes, *Apomnemeumata*, p. 567. On this episode quite revealing are the comments of a member of the then Greek general staff major Papathanasiades. The major a confidant of Papagos attributes to the latter the cashiering of major-general Plates. "The 1st vice-chief of staff major-general Plates had private contacts with the German military attaché. This came to the attention of the chief of staff general Papagos who immediately, in spite of the personal friendship and respect that they had for each other, removed him from office and placed him on the reserves". Theodosios Papathanasiades [Lieutenant-General], *Apo ten Skopian mou, 1939-1959*, (Athens, 1976), p. 15.

Metaxas on several occasions referred to this episode mentioning as participants in addition to the army officers an admiral, my guess being that he was vice-admiral Oikonomou, who later was replaced as the chief of the fleet. Admiral Oikonomou was taken abruptly from his top leadership position on September 1939 following the submission of a memorandum to Metaxas and the King. In it the "most ancient of the serving officers of the Greek armed forces" expressed the belief that Greece could not face the Italian threat and consequently all plans contemplated by the government for military preparedness were futile. These sentiments became more pronounced when the country collapsed in April 1941. The admiral then wanted submission to the invaders, stron-

fices of Berlin to appease Italy. His intention was, at least on paper, to "inform" the German officials of the provocative acts by Italy against Greece and to ask them to intervene unofficially and, if at all possible, to stop them¹. To achieve this Metaxas did his best to utilize his pro-German contacts, even if these intermediaries were quite low in his esteem². But in Berlin the dictator's hopes were thwarted.

The secret mission of the dictator headed by Kyrou proved fruitless. The German government counterposed to the timid supplications for help the view that she now had the right to initiate direct nego-

gly opposing the continuation of the war effort abroad. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaïou Nautikou*, vol. I, pp. 177-179.

The editor of Metaxas' diary noted on the same events that the Germans had actually asked the administration to replace Papagos with major-general Plates. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, pp. 482-483.

Ambassador Papadakes in his zeal to praise the Metaxas regime which he quite faithfully served refutes altogether as Italian propaganda the incident ; something which Metaxas with some respect for history had refused to indulge to. B. Papadakes, *Diplomatike Historia tou Hellenikou Poleμου 1940-1945*, (Athens 1956), p. 91. Lieutenant-general Tsolakoglou, then commander of the third army corps in Salonica, had found it necessary in June 1940 to issue an order to the officers under his command to refrain from comments about the belligerents "since the government is unable to propagandize or to advise what path should be followed". As he explained, huge crowds were listening to the radio broadcasts of Berlin, the only ones permitted by the authorities. Tsolakoglou, *Apomnemonemata Georgiou K. Tsolakoglou, Antistrategu*, p. 14. Italics mine.

1. Kyrou had explicit instructions from Metaxas to seek the assistance of admiral Kanaris to serve as mediator with the Wilhelmstrasse. Not to be over-shot by Metaxas the Greek diplomat sought the aid of another unofficial intermediary, the sculptor Arno Breker, an artist who according to Kyrou maintained close ties with Hitler. Kyrou, *Oneira kai Pragmatikotes*, pp. 177-178. On the day of Kyrou's departure for Berlin, Metaxas had called the ambassador of Germany and requested of him to intervene by the Italian government to achieve a reconciliation. Metaxas told him that whatever his personal sympathies were, Greece could not take a position against Great Britain, since that power had the control of eastern Mediterranean. The above information is contained in an article by the then Italian ambassador in Athens Grazzi, which was published by the latter in the Italian newspaper *Giornale del Mattino* of Rome on August 18th, 1945. Vice-admiral Konstas, who in 1945 had served as technical advisor to the Greek delegation in the inter-allied commission in Rome, uses extensively this article in a work that he published on the contribution of the Greek navy during the Greco-Italian war. Konstas, *Hai Polemikai, Politikai kai Diplomatikai Anamneseis tou tes Dekaeτίας 1940-1950*, p. 32.

2. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 506. The entry in the diary on September 6th, 1940 quite curtly notes : "Rangaves, Kyrou defeatists".

tiations between Italy and Greece¹. Kyrou and Mauroudes² seemed to have favored these means to avert a Greco-Italian war.

But such a commitment, the recognition on the part of the administration of a dominant role to Berlin in the shaping of the country's future, implying an Italian preponderance in Greece, could have unforeseen repercussions for the integrity of the Metaxas regime.

The probability of a British occupation of some of the Greek islands and the creation of a rival Greek state could not be dismissed. The nervousness of the regime on this matter had become evident as early as May 1940, when it had despatched four of the newest destroyers of the fleet to establish a patrol outside the waters of Melos nearby the strategic pass of Crete. In the words of the chief of the fleet admiral Kavvadias this was done so as to avert the repetition of the allied landing on the Greek soil during the first world war³.

Something of the same nature with Kyrou's mission but with much less pomposity was undertaken by the Greek ambassador in Berlin Rangaves⁴. On September 25th, 1940 Rangaves called on the director of the political department of the Wilhelmstrasse Herr Woermann and begging the question invited his host to declare openly whatever grievances Berlin may have against Greece. For a seasoned diplomat like Rangaves, one who had for so long been engaged in the despondent task of appeasing Berlin, the new appeal directed by

1. Kyrou, *Oneira kai Pragmatikotes*, pp. 188-189.

2. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 502.

3. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*, p. 137. See also the comments by captain Petropoulos which are quite critical of the dispersion of the fleet. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaiou Nautikou*, vol. I, pp. 244-255. Admiral Phokas in his official history of the navy in the second world war, mentions the same reasons as admiral Kavvadias does, for the stationing of the four destroyers at Melos, accepting the views of the administration. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. I, pp. 44-46. See also the comments of vice-admiral Mezeveres, then the chief of the destroyer flotilla. Mezeveres, *Tessares Dekaterides eis ten Hypereisian tou B. Nautikou*, pp. 177-179. Colonel Saraphes, at the time an exile at Melos because of his role in the 1935 military rebellion, had met with several officers of the naval squadron. They repeated to Saraphes that the purpose of the fleet's presence in those waters was the protection of Greece's sovereignty from Italian or British incursions. S. Saraphes [Major-general], *Historikai Anamneseis*, (Athens, 1952), pp. 440-441.

4. See the memorandum by the director of the political department of the Wilhelmstrasse of September 25th, 1940. Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, vol. XI, 1940-1941, p. 185.

Athens could certainly be interpreted as a sign of despair, part of the wretched policy of Metaxas to dupe Berlin into believing that he was following an even-handed policy¹, made of course more painful by the knowledge that Athens all the meanwhile was under the inescapable awe of the British presence.

Notwithstanding this, the ambassador being himself one of the dedicated pro-Germans in the Metaxas administration could not but have known the inner pressures exerted on the dictator by the coterie of conscientious Germanophiles in Athens. They possessed the means of direct communication with the highest echelons of power in the Axis capitals and, using their leverage or implied influence with the dictatorship, were making frantic efforts to create a *fait accompli* in the country in favor of Berlin².

In this context therefore the move by Mauroudes of October 24th, 1940 should not be surprising. At that date the permanent under-secretary of state for foreign affairs made the most amazing offer to the Germans yet to come, one whose magnitude had as yet to be observed in the annals of the nationally compromised dictatorship. Greece would have given possibly sympathetic consideration to a German request for acquisition of land bases in Greece, facilities which could

1. *Ibid.*

2. See two characteristic "initiatives" by two widely different sources of power in the Metaxas administration: The military and the fascist politicians both of whom were perfectly interwoven and integrated within the regime. The former, as it will be seen in a different study which I am preparing, had contracted the Germans with a plan to accept a separate peace with the Axis and to expel the British from Greece, in return for retaining the *status quo* in Albania. The latter, in this case a minor political figure Merkoures, an associate of the previous dictator Kondeles, were advancing, seemingly on behalf of the Greek government, similar concrete offers to the Germans. See a communiqué by Prince Erbach, classified as "most urgent" to the Wilhelmstrasse of March 12th, 1941 and a telegram by both the ambassador and the military attaché Glemm to the same of March 16th, 1941. *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280 and 299-300.

In the case of Mauroudes it should be said in all fairness that his hard line pro-Germanism was a source of anxiety for Metaxas, who on several occasions spoke quite harshly of him. Specifically on October 10th, 1940 Metaxas did not hesitate to call him a person "faithless" to Greece. However, in a certain manner even these disreputable functionaries were part of the game played by the dictator, thus explaining their maintenance in the state machine. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 510.

be used by the German armed forces for offensive operations against the British in Egypt¹.

What Mauroudes contemplated and proceeded to propose amounted to a complete reversal of the foreign policy of Greece. And as such, needless to say, under the existing circumstances it was devoid of any seriousness. Accordingly, it was treated as a matter of no consequence by its intended beneficiaries. Neither Berlin could be deceived by the merits of signs of loyalty to its interests by the various pro-German elements in the Metaxas administration, nor, of course, Metaxas could be effectively bound by the pronouncements of such people, even those in responsible positions such as Mauroudes, although it certainly served him at times, to permit such feelers to Berlin.

However, and this is of the single most important consequence, the implications and the extent of such activities could not but have a divisive and corruptive impact on the cohesiveness and the faith of the administration in as far as the facing of the Axis was concerned. The Metaxas dictatorship did its utmost to utilize its pro-German contacts so as to reach a *modus vivendi* with Rome. But according to the British ambassador in Athens, the Greek initiatives at Berlin did not fare all that well.

The German foreign policy makers, obviously not strangers to the existing British influence in Athens, were sceptical to encourage situations which could not be under their control. Wilhelmstrasse, was under an unceasing "pressure" by the Greek diplomats in the German capital to take a stand in the growing Greco-Italian conflict. Rangaves, as it has been mentioned elsewhere, did his best to soothe the German "feelings" toward the Metaxas regime. The Greek ambassador on instructions from his superiors in Athens, namely Metaxas, was more than pleased to exert "pressure" on the German foreign ministry to take a benevolent position toward Greece. The seeming indifference of the German officials, their reluctance to commit themselves openly as mediators in the Greco-Italian conflict had not discouraged neither Rangaves nor Athens.

The guarded optimism of the various exponents of the German

1. Communiqué by the ambassador of Germany to Wilhelmstrasse of October 24th, 1940. The pertinent part of the document has as follows: "Mauroudis stated for the first time that Greece might possibly give sympathetic consideration to a demand to obtain bases in connection with operations against Egypt". Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, vol. XI, 1940-1941, p. 384.

foreign ministry, was interpreted by the circles of the Greek legation as a sign of German benevolence toward Greece, "The Greek legation at Berlin", telegraphed Sir M. Palairet to the Foreign Office on August 21st, 1940, "were of the opinion that the German Government had in fact intervened with Italy as regards to Greece"¹.

One day later, on August 22nd, 1940, the British ambassador in Ankara Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen reported to London that his Greek counterpart at the same capital on instructions from Athens had advanced some concrete proposals to the Turkish foreign minister asking him to intervene by the German ambassador von Pappen, aiming at using the latter's good offices to resolve the conflict with Rome. It seems that the Turkish foreign minister was asked to transmit to von Pappen the view that the Greek government was most anxious to restore friendly relations with Rome. Athens, was willing to reach a friendly understanding and certainly dissolve its differences with Italy on an amicable basis. It was to be understood, however, that Greece could not possibly "accept territorial concessions or humiliating conditions of any kind"².

Apparently, the Metaxas administration seemed to have a high degree of faith in the astute and dynamic German ambassador at Ankara as being somehow capable to influence decisively Germany's foreign policy in regards to the issue at stake. Certainly, the dictatorship was of lately extremely nervous and at a loss to understand the Italian diplomatic games³. The Turkish foreign minister Saraçoğlu, notwithstanding the flattering role entrusted to him by Greece, was recalcitrant in undertaking such an impromptu and obviously haphazard personal diplomacy with von Pappen. He declined the request. To soothe a possible Greek disappointment Saraçoğlu offered as comfort to the Greek ambassador information on the international gossip on Greco-Italian relations, which the Turkish ministry have had from its legations in Rome and in Berlin. Things already known in ge-

1. On August 21st, 1940 Sir M. Palairet sent the following despatch to London: "The same source corroborated that as no answer had been received the Greek minister at Berlin had been instructed to repeat the message". *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folio 137.

2. Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to the Foreign Office, August 22nd, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 149.

3. See the writing of Martin van Creveld, *Hitlers's Strategy 1940-1941. The Balkan Clue*, (London, 1973), pp. 16-18.

neral lines by the Greek administration¹, that war at the moment was not in the making by Italy³.

The feverish activities and deliberations by the Greek diplomacy at Ankara were not strange to the British diplomats there. Indeed, the Greek ambassador had not considered improper for his country's best interests to make his British colleague a privy of both his démarche to Saraçoglou, and to brief Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen of the contents of his exchange with the Turk. The Greek diplomatic "offensive" in Turkey as in elsewhere largely implemented on the spot by the improvisations of the Greek ambassadors, was twin-folded. Some information of a vague interest on the existing crisis by von Pappen, divulged by the latter to Saraçoglou, had been judged sufficient by the Greek diplomat to undertake a personal visit to the German embassy, "with the object of ascertaining whether Herr von Pappen was speaking for his Government when he asked the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs whether he could do anything to lessen the tension between Greece and Italy..."³.

This conference proved to be as fruitless and as disheartening, if not damaging to Greece's prestige and position *vis à vis* Germany, as the one with Saraçoglou had been. Von Pappen did not exhibit any willingness to seek any clues from his superiors on the issue⁴. On the contrary, he left to his visitor the impression of a disinterested and a neutral individual who like anyone else of a similar post stationed in a Balkan country could have muttered some private comments on the situation.

This sophisticated "hands off" position of the German diplo-

1. See the entries in the Metaxas diary for those crucial days in August. Metaxas, *To Prosopiki tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, pp. 499-501.

2. The rumors were rampant in the major European capitals and among others the Greek ambassadors at the Spanish and the Hungarian capitals had transmitted them to the Metaxas administration in Athens. *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folio 161.

3. It is certain to assume that von Pappen was not the bearer of any new initiative by Berlin on the issue troubling Greece. Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, August 21st, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 80. For more on the German side of the affair see the well-documented study of Martin van Creveld.

4. "From the conversation which took place he derived the impression that Herr von Pappen must have been speaking personally and on the spur of the moment. In general Herr von Pappen showed no anxiety whatever as to the situation between Greece and Italy". *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 94.

macy upheld by one of its foremost diplomats in the region favored the Italian goals in Greece and corresponded to the broader designs of the German policies. Ribbentrop as well as Hitler did not have any scruples in providing the green light to Italy for an assault against Greece, since this operation was part and parcel of the major war effort by the Axis to defeat England¹. Metaxas² had appealed to Berlin to mediate in the dispute. This was a part of the co-ordinated campaign by the administration to seek a temporary at least postponement of the inevitable. Berlin, to whom essentially all Greek hopes were tied was not oblivious of the advantages of this "pilgrimage".

In Athens the German embassy, according to the reports of the British stationed there, had let it be known unofficially that the Greek government could easily obtain grace by denouncing the British guarantees and by including two pro-German politicians in the council of ministers³. Not that there did not already exist in the cabinet a strong and vocal pro-German element. In a report made, in the words of Sir M. Palairret in the "strictest confidence", by the security minister Maniades to the British ambassador on September 20th, 1940 two ministers Tambakopoulos and Kotzias were "giving trouble" to the administration due to their pro-Axis leanings⁴. And in the words of

1. See van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941. The Balkan Clue*, pp. 18-21.

2. *Ibid.* Obviously, the author here refers to the different means employed by Metaxas, which are discussed fully elsewhere in this study, to persuade the German officials to intervene by Rome and discourage the Italians from undertaking any military operations against Greece. *Ibid.*, p. 23. From the study of the Metaxas diary we tend to gather the impression that all the feverish activities on the part of the Greeks in Berlin were emanating from the Greek diplomatic representatives there without any specific directives from Athens. Of course, we here refer to the period of August, 1940. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, pp. 492-499.

3. Report by Sir M. Palairret to the Foreign Office of August 21st, 1940. *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folio 137. It is worth emphasizing that these proposals by the Germans had never assumed a categorical character or the form of a demand. They can be better classified as]] "wishes" and this because German diplomacy was convinced that the *volte face* by Metaxas would have been indeed an impossibility due to the encroachments of the British power in Greece. Therefore, all of the German diplomatic efforts in this direction should be analyzed in the realm of the existing circumstances and their significance weighed in this context.

4. This communication by Sir M. Palairret to the Foreign Office bears the mark of "most secret" and certainly its contents fully justify the classification. Not unlike the case of Tsouderos before, who was leaving notices at

the same man, Maniadakes, who by the manner of disseminating information to the British legation did not very much differ from a spy at the service of the British, both of the culprits, his colleagues, were closely watched¹.

The German archival sources tend to confirm the information of the British. It is certain, that an official "approach" by the Germans was made to Metaxas with the object of course of persuading the latter to realign his country's foreign orientation. However, the designation of the German communiqué as "demand" by Mr. van Creveld in his analysis of the German overtures, as I have attempted to explain on footnote 3 of the previous page, does not reflect the realities of the time. It was almost accepted as a *fait accompli* by the planners of Wilhelmstrasse and subsequent evidence fully corroborates this assumption²: the effective control which the British were exercising over the policies of the Metaxas administration and their firm hold of Greece.

A show of force by Berlin to intimidate Metaxas could only provide a service to the latter, who would be strengthening their position *vis à vis* the dictatorship. It comes then as a natural sequence the fact that no pressure was applied officially by Berlin to Metaxas to bring about the expulsion of their entrenched opponents. The British diplomatic agents in Greece were kept abreast of the unsuccessful and "ingenious" Greek escapades to seek the German benevolence.

On August 19th, 1940 Sir M. Palairt informed the Foreign Office about some information leaked to his attaché Mr. Cassia by the

the British embassy in the most conspiratorial manner on the affairs of his country, in this case we have the minister of security spying on behalf of the same embassy amongst the cabinet members of which he was a part. This admirable devotion of Maniadakes to the British certainly provides a reasonable clue for the insistence of the British officials in Greece during the last days of the war to keep Maniadakes, at all costs, in the new government formed by the King and headed by Tsouderos and originally by the resolute and inspiring admiral Sakellariou. *Ibid.*, 371/24922, folio 411. The date of this communiqué is September 20th, 1940.

1. In the case of Tambakopoulos it is worth noticing the comments made about him by Metaxas when he had designated him in 1938 to occupy the post of the minister of justice. In a telegram to the King Metaxas said: "Mr. Tambakopoulos is a young lawyer of excellent education, of conduct beyond reproach and prestige". The King also did not have any different opinion; he knew him personally. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, pp. 661-662.

2. van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941. The Balkan Clue*, pp. 131-132.

head of the commercial department of the Greek ministry of foreign affairs. That functionary had indirectly and in a quite naive manner presented the approaches of Rangaves to Berlin as almost a Greek warning to the Germans, revealing simultaneously the extent of the Greek activities in the German capital. No doubt, the British embassy in Athens had a most productive network of information and these "indiscretions" by the Greek functionary did not add anything new. Sir M. Palairet in his communiqués to the Foreign Office frequently spoke about "sources" impeccable as to their accuracy, which supplied him with confidential information on the state of affairs of the Metaxas administration¹. The somewhat double-faced tactics of the dictatorship in regard to its relations with Berlin and its obligations toward the British never really created a headache to the latter.

The protestations of Metaxas to the gently inferences of Sir M. Palairet on the affair that he knew nothing of the alleged Greek overtures to Berlin were treated casually and with the confidence which the entrenched power of the British allowed them to function. Metaxas was flagrantly lying and the British were in full knowledge of it. "President of the Council", wrote Sir M. Palairet, "told me that he had made no démarche at Berlin (but see my telegram 698)"². In a lengthy discussion with the British ambassador, the dictator could not overcome the temptation to state to him that notwithstanding the absence of Greek appeals, Berlin should be credited with the maintenance of peace in the Balkans³.

But the Greek dictator proceeded a step further in this crafty game to communicate to his visitor the German terms made to Greece. As he was quick to explain to the British ambassador, he had heard of them unofficially. Foremost amongst the provisions of this German "offer" was the renouncement by Greece of the British guarantee ex-

1. See the reports of Sir M. Palairet to the Foreign Office of August 21st and 22nd, 1940. *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folios 123 and 137.

2. Communication of Sir M. Palairet to the Foreign Office of August 22nd, 1940. *Ibid.*, folio 148. This despatch by the British ambassador should be contrasted with the writings of van Creveld on exactly the same incident: "Alarmed by the press campaigns directed against his country, the Greek Prime Minister appealed to Berlin". The author here quotes from a report by the German ambassador Prince Erbach to Berlin. van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941. The Balkan Clue*, p. 19 and footnote 124 on p. 194.

3. Communication by Sir M. Palairet to the Foreign Office of August 22nd, 1940. *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folio 148.

tended to Metaxas in 1939. At this instance, Metaxas, was careful to emphasize, as it had been pointed out to him, that the British would have probably *implemented* it, even if he had abrogated the "guarantee". The implications of a unilateral British action in the remote possibility of a Greek "neutrality" favorable to the Axis, were strong and menacing for the welfare of the regime. No choice was then available to Metaxas and his affirmation of his fidelity to the English was as polite and as palatable as possible. "He replied", wrote Sir M. Palairet, "that nothing would induce him to insult England in this way..."¹.

Both the Greek dictator and the British diplomat were satisfied that the one was in full understanding of the other. Doubts however about possible compromises by the dictatorship could not be dispersed in the British mind. London, was suggesting "moderation" to Athens in the Greco-Italian crisis, lest of course an unnecessary bravado provoke an Italian action, or most probably speed up the process of disintegration in the fabric of the administration and in the armed forces. But the British were clever to emphasize, for obvious reasons, that "it is quite obvious that when we asked them to refrain from doing anything which might provoke Italy, we did not mean that they should abstain from measures of self-defense"².

Fear that these admonitions could comfortably be interpreted by the dictatorial regime as a hint by the British to have Greece enter into negotiations with Rome induced the Foreign Office to warn the British embassy in Athens of the danger. "You", referring to the British ambassador, "should, of course, controvert energetically any suggestion by the Greek Government that if they remain inactive it is with our approval"³. Metaxas, on his part did everything in his official contacts with the British to reaffirm his faith to London. On August 13th, 1940 in a discussion that he had with Sir M. Palairet once again declared his determination "to remain firm in face of Italian attitude"⁴. The Foreign Office was not oblivious of the dire need to encourage and in fact, in spite of whatever doubts it might have, consider the pronouncements of Metaxas as being of contractual nature, binding the Greek foreign policy.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*, Foreign Office to Sir M. Palairet, May 31st, 1940. 371/24915, folio 315.

3. *Idid.*

4. This of course, was the week of the not so concealed Italian manœuvres intended to inspire fear by a series of co-ordinated press attacks and individual acts of provocation. *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 19.

Similar views on the course of the Greek foreign policy were coming to the Foreign Office from its representatives in Cairo. The British ambassador there Sir M. Lampson had received confidential information from his Greek colleague on the "firm" decision of the administration not to yield to Italian pressure. The information had it, that the Greek undersecretary of state¹ for foreign affairs had let it be known to the Italian ambassador in Athens that an Italian attack would have been inevitably met by Greek armed resistance. And not to leave any misconceptions to his visitor as to the seriousness of the Greek intentions, justifiable because of the peculiar diplomacy which had been pursued by the Metaxas administration, Mauroudes underlined, according to the report, that Greece was *firmly* determined to resist. These assurances were confirmed by similar reports originating in Athens. Sir M. Palairret had received the same comforting news from sources within the administration. Significantly, the newly expressed resolution to resist was made known to the Italian ambassador on August 13th, 1940, two days prior to the sinking of *Helle* at the height of the crisis. A moment of high emotional tension, when the psychological pressure by Italy had reached its apogee.

This "turn" of the Greek foreign policy could not but be greeted in London with relief. The openly proclaimed defiance of the Italian provocations seemingly reinforced the confidence of the British in the steadfastness of the regime in Athens. "Please inform President of the Council" telegraphed the Foreign Office to Sir M. Palairret on August 17th, 1940 "of the satisfaction with which I have learnt his determination to remain firm in face of Italian attitude whatever it may prove to be"². And the Foreign Office had additional reasons to consider as binding the expressed protestations of loyalty. The British military attaché in Athens had learned on August 13th, 1940 that the limited Greek forces which, according to him, had been mobilized were indeed given orders to offer a last ditch resistance should they be attacked³.

1. *Ibid.*, Communication by Sir M. Lampson to the Foreign Office of August 16th, 1940. 371/24917, folio 24.

2. *Ibid.*, Communication addressed by the Foreign Office to Sir M. Palairret to be conveyed personally by him to Metaxas. 371/24917, folio 33.

3. The information of the military attaché were, to say the least, exaggerated. The first mobilization of any significance took place on August 23rd, 1940. At that time several units belonging to divisions stationed near the borders with Albania were called. Prior to that time we can say that the resi-

The assertions of the military attaché were more or less correct. Metaxas, was determined not to succumb without any resistance, at the worst a nominal one. A decision which he did not share with the rest of the administration, since in the words of the dictator "some ministers and Papagos are reluctant"¹. But the temporary resolvment of the crisis, which had lessened considerably following the August 15th, 1940 incident at Tenos, was attributed by Metaxas to an intervention on the part of Berlin. Italy, he believed, was held back by a concerned action on the part of her ally. Germany according to Metaxas "was forbidding her (Italy) from taking the aggressive action which he had thought imminent"².

Having weathered this trial Metaxas felt that nothing should be done which could have jeopardized the delicate relations with Italy. Accordingly, acts by Italy compromising the country's neutral status were tolerated. An Italian civilian airplane of the *Air Littorio* carrying soldiers had made a forced landing at the Eleusina air field. All possible facilities were made available to the crew to make the necessary repairs without having the soldiers interned. In the meantime Metaxas had found expedient to call Sir M. Palaret and "brief" him on the incident. "President of the Council apologized to His Majesty's Government for his action but thought that in the circumstances it was better to allow them to proceed than to risk an incident that might provoke war"³. Explanations and apologies supplicated to the British to gain repentance and to preclude any uncomfortable confrontations seemed to be in order since the compromises of the Greek neutrality were weighed in favor of Italy rather than of the ally of Greece, England.

The enforcement of the rules of neutrality concerning the passage of some British destroyers within Greek territorial waters around

stance which could be mustered by the Greek border units would have been only of a symbolic nature. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 500. The report of the military attaché was contained in a communication that he had sent to the War Office in London on August 15th, 1940. *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folio 40.

1. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 492.

2. The same confidence on the beneficial intervention of Berlin was stated once more by Metaxas to the British ambassador two days later. At that time the dictator confidently assured his ally that Berlin was acting as a peace keeper in the dispute with Rome. *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folio 36 of August 17th, and 148 of August 22nd, 1940. See also the Metaxas diary. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 502.

3. *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folio 141 of August 23rd, 1940.

the vicinity of Hydra and the internment of a British flying boat and its crew characterized the uneven treatment of the two belligerents by the Metaxas administration: acts which provoked the ire of the British admiralty and of the C.in C. Mediterranean. Not of course, that it had any consequence on the official British diplomatic position versus Metaxas. But it did succeed in inspiring apprehension and puzzlement to the British officials on the spot with the tactics of the dictatorship, in other words to the men on whom in case of an Italian attack Metaxas would have to call for assistance. "All these indications", telegraphed the C.in C. Mediterranean to the War Office in London, "show that Greeks are doing all that the Italians wish because they are afraid of them, whilst they are not afraid of what we may do"¹. Nevertheless Metaxas' acumen and dire need to confront the approaching onslaught drove him inevitably into closer contact with the British.

Beginning with the second fortnight of August 1940 his communications with the British officials in Athens were a daily occurrence. Sir M. Palairret takes the place of a close and confidential counselor. All issues of foreign policy were examined and the paramount threat of the Italian attack became the subject of the most detailed scrutiny. As the conflict seemed inescapable, the lamentable state of the Greek army created wide apprehension.

The enormous deficiencies in armaments were clearly and officially referred to the British in a memorandum to the military attaché in Athens. The Greek general staff had not entertained any illusions about the country's capabilities to sustain not a prolonged war but even one lasting a few weeks. The war was fourteen days old when the British ambassador brought home to the Foreign Office the pitiful conditions of the Greek army as far as its ammunition supply was concerned². The absence of stockpiles of ammunitions was parallel to the lack of modern weapons, especially of the type to counter the threat

1. This complaint of the C.in C. Mediterranean was filed on August 25th, 1940. Probably the C.in C. was angered by the docility of the Greek administration which had tolerated the repeated Italian provocations. *Ibid.*, 371/24918, folio 28.

2. "Some months before Greece went to war Military Attaché supplied War Office with complete and up to-day details of all guns in use in Greek army together with stocks of ammunition from each type. *These stocks are so few that Greek General Staff requires ammunition of all types...*" Communication by Sir M. Palairret to the Foreign Office of November 11th, 1940, *Ibid.*, 371/24916, folio 44. Italics mine.

of the Italian armor. The dictatorship was well aware of the military strength of the Italians. However, its last moment requests to the British did not seem to lead anywhere. On the eve of the war not more than 22 anti-tank weapons had been delivered. And those were quite ineffective for the work for which they had been allocated. The undersecretary of state for foreign affairs Nicols commenting on a memorandum on the Greek armaments which he had received from the Greek ambassador in London made these remarks: "These guns are of little use to the Greek army since they are short of ammunition"¹.

In the airforce nothing better was to be observed. Last minute efforts to reinforce its numbers with American fighter planes, via the good offices of the British government, did not produce any of the expected results². In addition and beyond the appeals made through the competent Greek authorities on the subject, Metaxas personally made requests in earnest to the British ambassador to ascertain what kind of assistance, material and otherwise, could be delivered should Greece be attacked. On August 22nd, 1940 the date of this meeting Sir M. Palairet was of the opinion that the Italian attack was a matter of a few days³.

The only immediate show of forthcoming help on which the Greek administration could rely on was naval protection by the eastern Mediterranean squadron of the British fleet. Quite a valuable asset, given the extent of the exposure of the Greek coasts, the dependence of the Greek army of Epirus on the seaways for supplies, the dominance of the Italian fleet in the area, especially if it was to be compared with the few Greek men of war which comprised the Greek fleet. The coverage of Greece's vulnerable flank and the protection of its sea communications was officially undertaken by the British naval forces in Mediterranean. It came about not as a product of staff nego-

1. *Ibid.*, 371/24916, folio 37.

2. See the correspondence of the Greek ambassador in London Mr. Simopoulos with the Foreign Office, and the papers exchanged among the latter and the ministry of aircraft production. The Greek government was chiefly negotiating for the procurement of American aircraft through the British. These negotiations were fruitless. Some American machines were delivered to the Greek government when the war was over as far as continental Greece was concerned and following some maneuvering these aircraft were not given to the Greek air force being formed in the middle east but rather were taken over by the British. *Ibid.*, 371/24916, folios 22, 26, and 33.

3. Sir M. Palairet to the Foreign Office August 22nd, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 123.

tiations of the pertinent services of the two countries, but as it was usual the case with the precarious Anglo-Greek relations, by a unilateral commitment on the part of the British. It originated with the British C. in C. Mediterranean. The supreme commander of His Britannic Majesty's navy in those waters, the C. in C. Mediterranean, had communicated this to the admiralty, and his decision was made known to the Greek government a few days later. It was a general policy statement rather than a detailed plan and was limited by other considerations, namely the total British obligations in the area:

The Aegean can be regarded now as very largely in our control and our force operating frequently there should act as a deterrent against attack on Greek coast from Dodecanese. On West coast we should certainly take up challenge of any attempt to pass forces by sea to Greek ports and can seriously interfere with trans-Adriatic routes by submarine and to a certain extent surface activity¹.

Its implementation was of course subject to the official outbreak of hostilities. As such, since it precluded any beforehand arrangements and did not require the establishment on Greek soil of any British bases it was welcomed by the Metaxas administration². The latter was scrupulously avoiding anything of this nature which could have been interpreted by Italy as provocative, even measures of elementary self-defense. The British assurances of naval protection were treated by Metaxas as a sort of a personal guarantee extended by the British to him. No specific consultation had been undertaken by the British authorities with the Greek naval staff or the military planners of the Greek army. Metaxas had not wished to have these commitments made known and above all to use them as means for the opening of official negotiations between the two countries. He was quite categorical on that. The British ambassador on August 24th, 1940 had to transmit to London a Metaxas' request begging the British government that it should not take steps "of any kind to help Greece whether in Crete or elsewhere, until hostilities had actually broken out"³.

1. Communication by the C. in C. Mediterranean to the admiralty in London of August 26th, 1940 *Ibid.*, 371/24918, folio 5.

2. In the records of the Greek naval staff published and in the memoirs of individual high-ranking officers, most of whom in position to know, nothing is mentioned about the co-operation of the two navies, at least as far as the specific plan is concerned.

3. Sir M. Palaret to the Foreign Office of August 24th, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 185.

Two days earlier with the same force and with not less obstinacy he had reiterated the same reservations, that he did not want the British to "do anything" *until* the actual attack took place¹.

The Metaxas administration was obsessed with fear that the British could have instituted a process of reinforcing the Greek defenses in anticipation of the forthcoming war. And this was keeping Metaxas in a state of constant alarm. On August 29th, 1940 he thought it necessary to have a special message sent to the British ambassador to warn him most explicitly that no announcement whatsoever should be made by the British that he had asked for help; under no circumstances the requests for military assistance should be allowed to become known. "Any leakage", the dictator said, "would of course be disastrous"². On the same day, obviously not content with the written message after having made, in the words of Sir M. Palairet, the most earnest inquiry as to what help they could give Greece; "Metaxas repeated several times that he does not want us to do anything until the Italian attack takes place"³.

At the height of the Italian diplomatic campaign against Greece, the week following the *Helle* incident, Metaxas in a state of panic,

1. *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 123.

2. Communication by Sir M. Palairet to the Foreign Office of August 29th, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24918, folio 54.

3. As it has been referred elsewhere in this study, Metaxas had instructed the Greek units already deployed, at peace time strength, along the Greco-Albanian frontier, to fight to the last in the event of an Italian attack. However, such a demonstration of willingness to preserve national independence would only have an abstract value to the country if she was going to suffer the brunt of the Italian attack, unprepared and alone. Since Britain could not in all cases have reinforced the Greek defenses with land units and therefore her contribution would have to be reckoned only in terms of air protection, Metaxas reluctance to proceed with arranging the ground facilities for the establishment of the British air force in Greece, was limiting the degree of the country's effective resistance to a considerable level.

Essentially, it seems, Metaxas, was gambling the national sovereignty of the country putting his faith in his diplomatic contacts with Berlin. Or he wanted to buy time until the coming of the winter. At least this is the impression conveyed by general Papagos. He seems to have placed the fate of the country on the forbidding weather conditions in the mountains of southern Albania, conditions which could have precluded the waging of a war. Unfortunately, it was to work the other way around later. "He (Papagos)", wrote the British ambassador to the Foreign Office on September 24th, 1940 "does not think an attack on the North possible after winter snows become deep and considers operations would be very hazardous in Epirus in winter". *Ibid.*, 371/24919, folio 18.

was bombarding the British ambassador to inquire of his government as to what help could be supplied to Greece. On August 24th, 1940 or rather the night before Metaxas had called on the telephone the British ambassador and in agony wanted to know whether he had a reply to his telegram for aid "as situation was causing him gravest anxiety"¹. His agitation was duly shared by the cabinet in London. The war was considered as imminent there, as it was in Athens. But no practical measures were announced to reassure Athens. Evidently, the British government, pressed hard as it was by its other commitments and probably sceptical as a result of the reservations of Metaxas, was not in a position to pledge anything more to the Greeks than what already had been promised.

Instead, in this instance the Foreign Office thought it appropriate to suggest to the prime-minister that the King of England broadcast in the event of an Italian attack a message to the Greek people. Certainly this was a gesture of good will, and simultaneously an effort to boost the morale of the Greek people. In the royal message mention was to be made of the existing ties between the British reigning house and the Greek King. But the Foreign Office which had the ultimate responsibility of putting together the first draft rejected that idea, being quite sensitive to the world opinion where the image of the Greek King was identified with the Metaxas dictatorship². Nevertheless allowances were made for the draft which was intended to be broadcast in Greek.

The frantic but quite reasonable search of Metaxas for "assistance" and his unquestionable realization of the immediacy of the impending war were severely handicapped by his absolute refusal to initiate the process to bring about the mobilization of the country's armed forces. On August 22nd, 1940 at a meeting with Sir M. Palaret he volunteered the prediction that the massing of Italian army units near the Greek frontier constituted a clear threat to Epirus. The imposing threat of this armed concentration was somewhat ironically discarded by the British service attachés, in whose opinion the Italian forces were not so overwhelmingly superior that the Greek units there could not have a fair chance to hold them.

1. *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 185.

2. The message read as follows: "In this hour of Greece's need I wish to say to the heroic Greek nation and to my dear cousin George, King of Hellenes..." *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 237. Italics mine.

But this exhibition of faith in the Greek armed forces was made subject to the appropriate fire power of the Greek army, which in their opinion was absent. Non-existent anti-tank weapons and a "modicum of air support" were the prerequisites for a successful resistance¹. Metaxas, well aware of the army's limitations in weapons *vis à vis* his prospective opponent, was adamant and meticulously cautious to order a mobilization of the Greek army. On that score he was categorical in his decision not to do anything short of calling up dispersed units. In a discussion with Sir M. Palairet, Metaxas is presented to have said the following: "He would not mobilize until attacked, as he had reason to believe that Italy wished to provoke Greek mobilization in order to give them the pretext of attack"².

But Metaxas protestations and expedience were founded on a quite different analysis of the situation. They came following Rangave's visit to Wilhelmstrasse and his failure to extract any favorable assurances. On the contrary, that "unfortunate" ambassador in a cat and mouse game with the German officials was subjected to severe humiliations, only to be finally told by Ribbentrop that once mobilization was undertaken by Greece, it would have had the greatest possible consequences for the integrity of the country. "A mobilization" said Ribbentrop, "had started the Czech crisis and had led to the total annihilation of Czechoslovakia"³. Similar utterances by Prince Erbach in Athens at the same time did not certainly uplift the morale of Metaxas.

1. That, of course, presupposed the maintenance of forces at those levels as had been maintained up to that time. *Ibid.*, 371/24918, folio 54.

2. *Ibid.*, 371/24917, folio 64. See also the detailed chronicle of mobilization in the memoirs of the Greek generals who participated in the war.

3. On August 23rd, 1940 after an urgent meeting with Papagos and Maouroudes, Metaxas "proceeded" in ordering the mobilization of the 8th infantry division. But on the same date the vacillating dictator hastened to inform the Greek ambassadors in Rome and in Berlin, and through them the governments to which they were accredited, that no measures of significance were taken to rearm Greece. "Following the continuation of the concentrations in our border with Albania, we were forced by reasons of elementary precaution to draft some categories and not to conscript reserves of that region (Epirus), in order to reinforce the border area. It is not a levy *en masse* but a simple strengthening of our border guards". Goudes, *He Hellas kata ton Deuteron Pangosmion Polemon 1939-1945*, p. 182. See also Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 500.

More than a month later on September 28th, 1940 the actual mobilization of the 8th infantry division was far from beginning. On that date Metaxas repeated his pledge and determination to call finally a large unit so as to appease the alarmed population of Epirus. The chief of the Greek general staff had re-

Therefore, the Greek policies on the subject, that is non-mobilization, which was maintained with such a perseverance, was as much a product of German dictation as it was probably a result of a genuine fear by the dictator that anything of this nature would have provoked

commended the drafting of additional troops. The general staff was anxious to have as strategic reserves a large unit. "The government had not approved my proposals" wrote Papagos, "and this was done so that the spreading of our mobilization not be considered by Italy as provocation. But when, around the first fortnight of September 1940, the above mentioned Italian concentration (the gathering of the Italian troops on the Greco-Albanian frontier) began to assume the shape of a clear offensive deployment against us, I persistently asked from the President of the Government the immediate mobilization of the 2nd and the 3rd army corps. One evening I went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and I was presented to the Prime-Minister. At this meeting I insisted forcefully that the government adopts my proposals". Papagos, *Ho Polemos tes Hellados 1940-1941*, p. 73.

Metaxas resentful of the "initiative" of the chief of the Greek general staff and probably suspecting an uneasiness in the general headquarters with his policy of appeasement, attempted to capitalize on the pro-German leanings of the army's higher echelons. That night, in the presence of Papagos the Greek prime-minister called on the telephone Rangaves in Berlin and instructed the well-known pro-German to inform Athens, if possible within the same night, whether Germany knew of the threatening intentions of Italy and whether these designs had the stamp of approval by Berlin. Rangaves, under pressure for time resorted to the use of a highly questionable source of information. He contacted an individual who, according to the Greek naval attaché in Berlin lieutenant-commander Konstantinides, was an agent. To this "trustworthy" source the Greek ambassador addressed himself that night. Few hours later he called on the telephone the awaiting Metaxas to announce to the head of the Greek government the "authoritative" views of the German administration. "Having met with person most confidential, of the immediate entourage of Hitler, and to whom I have absolute confidence, I was informed that Hitler will never allow the Italian attack against Greece; and particularly Hitler recommends that no measures be taken which could be considered by Italy as a provocation on the part of Greece". Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaiou Nautikou*, vol. I, p. 246.

Captain Petropoulos, then occupying a sensitive position in the naval staff, had accompanied Papagos that night to the office of the prime-minister. Anxious and worried about the deterioration of the conflict, he sought some information about the intentions of the government. Such a chaos was prevailing that nobody, even those in responsible positions, knew much about the precise policies of the administration. See also the writing of Kitsikes, *He Hellas tes 4es Augoustou kai he Megalai Dynameis*, pp. 70-71.

Metaxas, who desperately wanted to avoid a further rupture with Italy, was visibly relieved by the "intervention" of Berlin. His usual suspicious character did not question the credibility of the "advice", nor did he inquire on

Italy into an attack. He certainly believed that by such dilatory methods Italy could have been placated and the *status quo* in the area preserved.

It is worth noticing at the same time the vehemence by which the dictator had denied to Sir M. Palairret the existence of any negotiations

the source and its credibility. To Metaxas it sufficed that the information emanated from Germany to reject conclusively the plans submitted by Papagos. "You see what Germany advises me. Although I recognize that the rejection of the measures proposed by you is dangerous, in spite of that, because I want to have my conscience clear that I did everything possible to avoid the war, I am not approving of your proposals". Papagos, *Ho Polemos tes Hellados 1940-1949*, p. 73.

The pleas of Papagos, who had been elevated to that high office because of his unquestionable loyalty to the regime, had utterly failed. "Mr. President having not been dissuaded, I asked at least that the mobilization of the 1st infantry division be approved... But even this was rejected". *Ibid.* Ambassador Papadakes, the author of a conglomeration of official communiqués drawn together with the avowed purpose to defend the policies of the regime, called the German proposals "astonishing". And he does not find "astonishing" the fact that the Greek government was told about it for the first time from the German White Book in 1941. Papadakes, *Diplomatike Historia tou Hellenikou Polemou 1940-1945*, p. 75.

Germany, of course, used all means at her disposal, above all Greek official channels, to discourage Metaxas from taking active measures to put the country on war footing. The official despatches of the Greek naval attaché in Berlin, Konstantinides to the chiefs of staff of the Greek army and navy is a sufficient proof. Papagos, *Ho Polemos tes Hellados 1940-1941*, pp. 186-190. The reports of Kyrou from Berlin is another source. Kyrou, *Oneira kai Pragmatikotes*, p. 188.

Berlin skilfully stressed to the Greek administration the dangers in store for Greece from Italy, if the former was to proceed with the mobilization of its armed forces. According to official and semi-official German sources, "as soon as the royal decree of mobilization is signed", Italy would have attacked Greece. However, the same sources insisted that Rome would have refrained from attacking, if Greece had chosen instead to remain idle and not to provoke her. German officials "quite moved pleaded" with the Greek representatives in Berlin, on their own initiative, that they felt somehow obligated to hasten to transmit these vital news to the Greek government. For instance lieutenant-commander Konstantinides in his despatch emphasized the fact that known "friends" of Greece had spoken to him "very much moved almost pleaded with me to transmit further the information so as to save as much as it could be saved". Papagos, *Ho Polemos tes Hellados 1940-1941*, pp. 186-187.

Von Kanaris also became involved in the chorus of the German enticing "Philhellenes". According to Kyrou the admiral had pleaded with him to persuade the Greek government not to "provoke" Italy. "Ich rate", von Kanaris told him, "ich bitte Sie auf's warmste, ich flehe Sie an..." Kyrou, *Oneira kai Pragmatikotes*, p. 188. These "appeals" sometimes were done in the name of

going on with Berlin. Metaxas was in such a tumultuous and pathetic state of agitation that for a few days he seemed staggering and profoundly at a loss to define his relationship with Italy.

On August 24th, 1940 a quite revealing discussion with Sir M. Palairret took place. "The President of the Council", the latter was to report to the Foreign Office, "has still received no communication from Italian Government. He is at loss to understand their tactics. Concentration of troops on frontier has been completed but nothing happens"¹.

Metaxas was expecting an Italian declaration of war but was reluctant to either have his only ally take some precautionary measures to bolster the country's defenses or to commit the country wholeheartedly to resist it. Some spasmodic movements to change the army's leadership as a preparation for the war were also finally rejected; it had been rumored that the post of the Greek generalissimo would be offered to general Drakos².

With the crisis on the borders somewhat subsiding, and the gradual lessening of the hostile attacks by the Italian press, it looked even the to British that it was due more to the German diplomacy than anything else³.

Hitler who was posing as a great admirer of ancient Greece. See also the comments of Kotzias. Kotzias, *He Hellas, ho Polemos kai he Doxa tes*, p. 12.

Tsouderos who became the prime-minister of Greece of the first Greek government in exile, drawing information from the ministry of foreign affairs, revealed the "agreement" of Metaxas with the Germans, according to which the mobilized Greek units ought to be disarmed so as to appease Italy. Compare this information with Kyrrou's. See also a letter by Apostolides published by Tsouderos. E. Tsouderos, *Diplomatika Parashenia 1941-1944*, (Athens, 1945), pp. 70-75.

Finally it should be stressed that the Greek representatives in Berlin transmitted the German proposals in a manner indicating their endorsement of Germany's "sincere" interest for Greece's welfare. It is safe to assume therefore that the Greek mobilization plan or rather its absence was due more to Berlin's ingenuity and less to the military prowess of Metaxas.

1. I believe that this is an important piece of information, truly illustrating the bewilderment of Metaxas and his fatalistic resignation to the inevitable. *Foreign Office*, 371/24917, folio 185.

2. See the report by the British military attaché to the War Office of August 24th, 1940. *Ibid.*, folio 233.

3. "There has certainly been a lessening of the tension between Italy and Greece and it rather looks as if Germany had been exercising a moderating influence on Italy". Communication by Sir M. Palairret to the Foreign Office of August 26th, 1940. *Ibid.*, 371/24918, folio 1.

The belief of at least a temporary accomodation with Italy was conveniently accepted by Metaxas. He tended to project the notion that the "crisis will blow over". Nevertheless he could not entertain any illusions about either the seriousness of the Italian warnings or about the fact that the recurrence of the crisis was a matter of time¹. He attempted to persuade the British ambassador that the military measures which had been put into effect would have enabled the beefed up frontier advance unit to "make a serious resistance"².

But the Greek capability for resistance was for all intents and purposes quite impotent. The Greek army could have offered a minimum of resistance of symbolic rather than of real value. In conclusion it can be said that the Metaxas foreign policy was for all practical considerations ultimately tied up with the British interests and reflected at times, to a varied degree, those interests in Greece. Inescapably, the dictator came to recognize the bitter truth that his ideological orientation could not provide a shield to uphold the integrity of his regime and the country's from the expansionism of the Italian fascist imperialism. His relationship with England was characterized by the limitations of the regime itself, more precisely by the fact that within its mechanisms there were forces tending to disintegrate its monolithic orientation in spite of the prestige of his personality. Both in the administration proper and in the armed forces the Germanophiles were potent enough to challenge, even overtly, the guiding lines of the administration's foreign policy, the recognition by Metaxas of the pre-eminence of England in the affairs of Greece. And they were emboldened, sufficiently at times, by the absence of fervor that characterized Metaxas' commitment to Britain to challenge and obstruct his policies.

1. *Ibid.*, folio 80. This report by Sir M. Palairet was filed to the Foreign Office on August 28th, 1940. On August 27th, 1940 the following entry appears in the Metaxas diary: "A true abatement". On the following day, the day of Sir Palairet's report, Metaxas wrote the following: "Agony all day long as to what Kyrou will bring. German demands? He arrived at night. In general good. For guarantees (they) do not insist... Once again they saved us from the Italians". Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 502.

2. *Foreign Office*, 471/24918, folio 80. On August 23rd, 1940, Metaxas despatched the following communiqué to the Greek embassies in Berlin and Rome: "Because of the continuation of the concentrations in our borders with Albania we were forced, by reasons of elementary precaution, to call some categories, not classes, of reservists from the area to strengthen the border troops. It is not a mobilization but a simple reinforcement of our borders". Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol. 4, p. 509, footnote 2.

Metaxas, in his desperate quest for a secure way to preserve the regime of the 4th of August had come to an understanding with Britain, but without boldly committing the country to a clear anti-Axis position. While Greece in his person had accepted the British guarantees of 1939, he obstinately refused to take any practical measure to implement the alliance implied.

To the British this half-hearted position of Metaxas was, under the circumstances, the best that they could expect. This being realized, it became the fundamental principle of the British foreign policy to co-operate with the dictatorship and in the process to lend to Metaxas its full-fledged support against any incendiary movement to overthrow him by the anglophile politicians of liberal extraction. The hard realism of the British diplomacy contributed substantially to the consolidation of the dictatorship, systematically discouraging all manifestations of opposition by ambitious liberal politicians who were manoeuvring to climb to power offering their services to the British.

The purging of the armed forces officer corps in 1935 had created an ideologically uniform body of officers who owed their position at the army's leadership and their authority in the political affairs of the country to the royalist dictatorship of Metaxas. Any attempt to unseat the dictatorship would have met their stiff resistance and would have severely tested the armed forces, diminishing their fighting capabilities and inviting in the process a series of *coup d'états* by organized groups of officers of the type endemic in Greece. Military considerations therefore played a cardinal role in the decision of the British to uphold the Metaxas regime and to maintain a discreet benevolence toward it. On his part Metaxas personally was meticulously careful not to offend the British in any major decision.

The existence however of a powerful lobby of pro-German functionaries in the administration heavily accounts for the frequent outbreaks of individual "conspiracies" to bring about a closer "understanding" with Berlin¹.

1. See the following comments of G. H. N. Seton-Watson in a most interesting analysis of the British view of Metaxas: "But is also true that most supporters of Metaxas were lukewarm or even hostile toward Britain, and that it was in the ranks of their opponents that S. O. E. (Strategic Operation Executive) members could expect to find allies". Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg, edit., *British Policy Toward Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, (London, 1975), p. 288.

The Metaxas' mission to Berlin in the last fortnight of August, 1940 could not be interpreted as a genuine reorientation of Greece's foreign policy. What Metaxas hoped was to use German diplomacy to avert the Italian attack without offering the concessions which the Germans, quite logically, were demanding of him. The effort to placate the Germans by pointing to the ideological affinity of the two regimes was certainly naive and futile when not accompanied by concrete offers of collaboration. Since Metaxas was lacking the capability of extricating himself from the British hold, it could be said, with some certainty, that the policies of his administration reflected his dilemma. And it took the stalemate at the Albanian front and the general breakdown in the administration following the German presence in the Balkans, along with his demise, the ceasing of his personal stewardship, for the conglomerate gathered under his auspices to fall apart, surrendering the country to the Germans and forming the first Quisling administration in Greece.