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THE AMERICAN BASES IN GREECE: THEIR ORIGIN
AND STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE TO THE UNITED STATES IN
ITS GLOBAL POLICIES OF DOMINANCE VERSUS THE SOVIET
UNION IN THE BALKANS AND THE MIDDLE EAST.

An analysis of the policies of Washington on Greece since USA succeeded Britain as the dominant power in Greece, based on recently declassified top secret documents of the National Security Council and the Pentagon¹.

National Security Council's state paper no. 5718 of August 5, 1957, on Greece, approved by president Eisenhower and entitled «U.S. POLICY TOWARD GREECE», set forth, in the most concrete manner, the main guiding lines of the United States policies on Greece as follows:

Greece is important to the United States because of its strategic location, its proximity both to the Soviet Block and to the Near East, its membership to NATO, its ties to Yugoslavia through the Balkan Pact. Together with its Balkan neighbors, Turkey and Yugoslavia, *Greece* forms a land barrier to Soviet access to the Mediterranean².

Also Greece has given extensive base rights. Communications facilities and a USAF support group are maintained in Greece and are important links to our network of bases³.

The democratic administration of president Kennedy in 1961 reiterated these basic principles of American policies toward Greece, but with one significant difference. It placed a far greater emphasis on the role and importance of the American bases located on Greek soil, bases which we-

1. These position papers quoted in this paper have been declassified as early as December, 1982, under my request.

2. Italics mine.

3. National Archives of the United States, National Security Council Papers, NSC 7518 /1, Copy to the President, August 5, 1957, Top Secret, p. 1.

re evolving into diversified instruments of Washington's policy of offensive confrontation with the Soviet Union and the nationalist regimes of the Middle East.

The aforementioned National Security position paper of January 4, 1961, after noticing the loyalty of the Karamanlis regime and expressing grave concern of the mushrooming «leftist» opposition to it¹, and citing measures to be taken by the Karamanlis administration to muzzle the opposition², it went on to emphasize the value of Greece to the United States because of the existence of military bases there. Due to that Washington was not reluctant to go to great lengths to maintain the existence of a conservative regime in Greece as the safest assurance for the continuation of its hegemony in Greece:

An independent and stable Greece, the paper stated, cooperating in Free World defence and maintaining the will and the ability to resist Communist subversion and influence.

Access by the United States and NATO to military facilities in Greece, and Greek cooperation with NATO countries.

Greek armed forces capable³ of maintaining internal se-

1. «The central problem facing the Karamanlis Government is to retain power in the face of political troubles stemming in considerable part from growing dissatisfaction with the failure to allay widespread economic and social grievances. While Karamanlis' control of the electoral system will probably enable him to remain in power after the 1962 election, the pollarization of Greek politics which has developed will continue and may result in a situation in which the Communists could threaten a paralysis of Greek governmental institutions.» *Ibid*, NSC 6101, January 4, 1961, p.8.

2. It seems that this paper of NSC 6101, spells in detail the contingency measures to be taken by the Karamanlis government in the aforementioned elections so as to preclude the coming into power of «unreliable» political forces inimical to the United States. Unfortunately, this part is deleted from the paper considered still highly classified material. However, under the *freedom of information act*, I have requested access to the withheld material. However, the «concern» of the United States and the kind of «advice» offered to the Karamanlis government can be seen from the following comments: «The Communist Party is outlawed. *Although the return to Greece of many of the Communist guerilla elements who fled to the Soviet Block after the Civil War poses a potential threat to internal security, Greek internal security forces are reasonably capable of handling Communist subversion.*

Although EDA and nationalist elements attempt to make political capital of the Government's public security policy, the experiences of the guerrilla war and the present cold war situation have convinced the government of the need for strick police measures». *Ibid*, p. 8.

3. According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and subsequent policy papers adopted by the National Security Council this was the role envisioned by the United States for the Greek armed forces, a role which subsequent events in the late sixties

curity and of resisting, as part of a concerned allied defence, direct Soviet or satellite attack¹.

And hegemony it was to be. Under no circumstances, preposterous as it may seem, was the United States to permit an erosion of her entrenched position in Greece. And an indication of things to come was the not so covert determination of the United States, transcending administrations, to hold its dominance in Greece not only during the period of the cold war confrontation with the Soviet Union but significantly even after that conflict had resulted in a state of affairs favorable to American interests:

(1) The United States should maintain its predominant position in Greece at least until the probably lengthy ideological conflict between the USSR and the West is either resolved peacefully or metamorphosed into open war. Projection at this time of the problem of United States interest in Greece following resolution of the ideological conflict by global war involves so many imponderables that any conclusions that may be drawn would be purely conjectural;

(2) On the other hand, consideration of the situation following a peaceful resolution of the ideological conflict indicates that the United States strategic objective

did fully corroborate: «They consider, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that, during the period of ideological conflict, support should be given to a Greek military establishment which would be capable of maintaining internal security in order to prevent Communist domination of Greece...» *Ibid.* Memorandum for the Secretary of Defence, «The United States Position in Greece», The Joint Chiefs of Staff, Top Secret, December 7, 1949.

«A Greek military establishment, during the period the ideological conflict capable of maintaining internal security in order to prevent Communist domination of Greece and of affording the Greek nation, through certain limited accessories, a modicum of prestige and confidence; in the event of global war, capable of causing some delay to Soviet and/or satellite state advance and within its capabilities of assisting in the over-all war effort.» *Ibid.*, RG 330, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defence, «Study of the United States Position in Greece», Top Secret, p. 6.

1. «With respect to the maintenance of internal security in Greece, the United States, not the British, should continue to advise the Greeks and should retain a comparatively small military mission in Greece with primary responsibility to assist in the development of a small but effective army, navy and air force.» *Ibid.*, p. 5. It seems that the advice expounded here was put to work in April of 1967, just as to do justice to the assigned role of the Greek armed forces.

in Greece should be the evolution of a truly independent Greek Government oriented toward the West AND CAPABLE OF MAINTAINING INTERNAL SECURITY.

If, after the peaceful resolution of the ideological conflict, continued foreign support of the Greek Government is necessary, the United States should review the situation in that country with a view to surrendering its dominant position, PROVIDED THE THEN PREDOMINANT POWERS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WILL BE NATIONS NOT UNFRIENDLY TO THE UNITED STATES¹.

The role then of the Greek Government, as envisioned by both the administration per se and the American military was to keep Greece within the American sphere of influence, preventing the rise of those forces which would challenge the *status quo* as had evolved after the civil war and the new American era of dominance. Since, in the words of policy makers in Washington, not an early mutual accommodation with the Soviet Union, on Washington's terms, was envisioned in the foreseeable future, «...it would be unsound for the United States to agree that any foreign nation should assume a position of dominance in Eastern Mediterranean.»² Of course, the United States, at this period when British power in the region was still a force to be reckoned with, were, reluctant to be sure, to share power in Greece with London:

During the present ideological conflict, the British will expect the United States to support, politically and financially, their position on Greece, as long as this done, will be agreeable to a continuation of the Anglo-American position there on the basis of full and equal partnership, particularly in view of the probable command relationships in the Mediterranean area in event of war.

It is believed that they now consider an Anglo-American position in Greece as a temporary expedient for the duration of their national economic embarrassment only. They will pro-

1. The notions of «armed forces» and «government» are interwoven here both assigned essentially the role of keeping Greece safe within the area of American interests.

2. A conflict which up to now not only has not been resolved but under the present administration in Washington has intensified reaching heights reminiscent of the best years of the cold war when these considerations had been formed as the guiding principles of American policies on Greece.

nable resist termination of their military mission in Greece and would be prepared to counter such a proposal by... a compromise on a «senior-junior» (United States - United Kingdom) arrangement.

Should the ideological conflict be peacefully resolved in a manner favorable to the Western Powers, the British will seek to reassert their dominance in the Middle East. They will seek United States withdrawal from its position on Greece in order that they may assume dominance over Eastern Mediterranean, with or without United States support¹.

But this was to be only a temporary arrangement, Washington expecting that British influence would fade in time with the gradual decline of their power worldwide. But even in this transient period the United States would, using her economic power as leverage, attempt to force the British out of Greece:

If for political reasons, however, the United States must accept and at the same time finance a British mission in Greece, any long-range plan for the integration or formal assignement of responsibilities to the British for the Greek Army, Navy, or Air Force, should be recognized as unacceptable to the United States from a military point of view because of, among other things, the domination of those military forces which would be the natural result. This objection has less force with respect to the Greek gendarmerie and police.

THE UNITED STATES MUST CONTROL THE MILITARY POLICIES OF GREECE AND SHOULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO ASSUME ANY ROLE LESS THAN THAT OF A SENIOR PARTNER IN A «SENIOR-JUNIOR» (UNITED STATES-UNITED KINGDOM) ARRANGEMENT².

Therefore, the bases that Greece provided to the United States and the control of its military establishment assured to the latter the much coveted hegemony and dominance in the area. In the policy planning of the Pentagon, the significance of American bases on Greek soil and the

1. National Archives of the United States RS 330. Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defence, «Study of the United States Dosition in Greece», p. 15.

2. *Ibid*, p. 16.

existence of a conservative Greek military corporate body in the country able to stem off any political evolution, «communist» in nature, that would threatened American dominance there was, paramount. Bases on Greek soil as well as on Turkey, were then the main barriers to an expansion of Soviet power in the region, and more accurately the launching pads for the spearheading of American policies in the Balkans and the MIDDLE EAST:

From the military point of view, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that, as long as the USSR pursues its expansionist policies, the security of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East is of critical importance to the future security of the United States. Greece and Turkey stand in the way of Soviet expansion in this area and thus it is highly important to our national security interest that neither falls under the control or domination of the USSR.

Both countries offer bases from which the USSR could launch operations against the islands of Crete, Rhodes and Cyprus and against communications in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Turkey, is strategically more important than Greece since in addition it dominates major air, land, and sea routes from the USSR to the Cairo-Suez area and to the Middle East oil fields.

The first officially sanctioned³ American bases on Greek soil appeared in

1. «From the United States military point of view, what the British position in Greece should be:

(1) In the light of the cost, the over-all burden which the United States must carry with respect to Greece, and the many difficulties inherent in the presence of both a United States military mission and of military mission of a nation formerly dominant there and desirous of eventually resuming that position, it would be in the military interests of the United States if the British military mission in Greece were gradually withdrawn....» *Ibid.*

2. While the assigned role for the Greek military establishment was «to maintaining internal security», that of the corresponding Turkish ones was as follows: A Turkish military establishment of sufficient size and effectiveness to insure Turkey's continued resistance to Soviet pressure; the development of combat effectiveness...» Something that the Turkish leadership could very well use to spearhead expansionist policies, of course, not against the Soviet Union. *Ibid.* Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defence, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defence, «Decision on Long-Range U. S. Military Interests in Greece and Turkey», Top Secret, by the Chief of Staff admiral William D. Leahy.

3. *Ibid*, p. 1.

1947, when a pertinent agreement was signed between the Greek government and the American airforce. That pact was renewed, on the explicit desire, of the Department of the Air Force in Washington on August 9, 1948:

The Air Force requested action be taken by the Department of State to secure a renewal of our operating rights in Greece prior to their expiration on 26 July 1948, and that the renewal be expanded to include all privileges on our standart list of requirements¹.

Not only bases were developing in Greece at that time, but Greek airports were being build with American financial aid not to serve the needs of the host country but with an eye to the strategic needs of the United States, as can be seen from the despach of the American Air Attache in Athens to the Chief of Intelligence of USAF headqartes inWashington:

During the visit of General Leon W. Johnson, Commanding General 3rd Air Division, to Greece and his visit to the Office of the Air Attache, the subject of strategic airports was discussed and General Johnson expressed his desire a letter be forwarded outlining in brief the recommendations of this office, which are as follows:

That every effort be made.....so that expenditures (in airport building in Greece) be more applicable for the future United States defence value and the possible usage to our interests in the event of an all-out war.

For Strategic Air Command Staff coordination the following airports be considered...

- a. Hellenikon and Elevisis airports in the Athens area.
- b. Larissa and Araxos airbases.
- c. Timbakion airport on the island of Crete
- d. Mikra airbase near Salonika.

Four possible locations within Greece can be considered as sites for all weather operations: namely, Araxos, Larissa Valley, Salonika valley and Hellenikon airfield, Athens. Araxos and Hellenikon should be more valuable than Larissa be-

1. *Ibid.* RG 341, Records of the Headquarters United States Air Force, PD 360, 4 Greece. Memorandum by the acting chief, Policy Division USAF, colonel Moore to general Anderson of August 9, 1948.

cause of their proximity to water which provides for a safe let
- down to a low altitude on a radio beacon...¹

The 1948 «arrangement» was to be of three years duration expiring in 1952. As early as August 1951, preparations were under way not only for the renewal of the agreement but for its covert enlargement. The executive director of plans for the USAF colonel Daniel F. Riva in a memorandum to USAF's general staff of August 21, 1951, proposed the following:

The Directorate of Plans considers present USAF operating rights in Greece the minimum which should be sought in renewing our present agreement with the Greek Government. Any enlargement upon this minimum by broadening certain provisions of the operating agreement, thus increasing the freedom of action of the USAF in the event of an emergency situation in the Balkans is most desirable².

For the agreement of 1948 was considered, to a certain extent, limited and the concurring opinion of the USAF officials was that the Greek government should be persuaded to agree to an expansion of its provisions in accordance with the American requirements:

Attached are four copies of a proposed draft note to be presented to the Greek Government in order to secure an extension and expansion of the agreement authorizing the use of Greek airfields.....

The text of this new proposal in general parallels that of the 1948 agreement. This proposal will, when effective, constitute a new agreement which will confirm the rights enjoyed under the agreement presently in force. In addition, those rights will be extended to:

a. Expand the agreement to include the operation of the JUSMAG transmitting and receiving equipment which, although not directly connected with military air transport operations, are of great importance to the entire American Mission to Greece.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*, PD 360, 7. Memorandum by the American air attache in Athens colonel Leigh Wade to the chief of the Intelligence division of USAF of November 1, 1950.

b. Expand the agreement further by using very general terms in designating the agencies authorized to operate the military air transport, communications and other services.

And adding insult to injury the drafters of the agreement to be signed by the Greek Government, provided that the Greece was to bear the expenses for the facilities provided to the American services:¹

Clearly specify that the provisions of the facilities included in this agreement will be at no cost to the United States Government.²

The final draft which became the celebrated 1952 agreement which was to govern all the subsequent American claims for the use of Greek facilities by the armed forces of the United States was the brainchild of «negotiations» between the American military and the well known American ambassador in Athens John E. Peurifoy. It was submitted to the Greek government and the then minister of foreign affairs S. Venizelos accepted the Peurifoy proposals in toto without any amendments or alterations. Thus note 473 of June 14, 1952 by the American embassy to the Greek Government. constituted the agreement between the two states. Sophocles Venizelos returned the Peurifoy note with these additional comments:

Athens, 18th, June, 1952

Excellency:

I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of Your Excellency's note No 473 of June 14th, 1952, concerning the agreement between the Royal Hellenic Government and the United States Government authorizing the use of Greek Airfields and facilities by the the United States Air Transport Service and which reads as follows:

1. The Royal Hellenic Government grants the United States Government the right to operate military air transport services and communications services in and through Greece for a transitional period of three years, on the understanding that should the military situation warrant such action, this period may hereafter be shortened by agreement of the parties after 30

1. *Ibid*, RG 341. Records of the Headquarters of United States Air Force, memorandum by colonel Rive to the Director of Plans USAF, August 21, 1951.

2. *Ibid*, Memorandum by the executive assistant for air bases to director of plans, USAF, August 13, 1951.

days notice by either party.

2. Specifically the rights included under the general right above stated are as follows:

(a) The right of free transit of military transport and administrative aircraft and civil aircraft under contract operations for the United States Armed forces and of landing without payment of landing fees at bases designated by agreement between the two Governments, as well as transporting personnel, material and mail;

(b) The right to land in emergency in any airfield;

(c) The right to station necessary personell at bases mutually designated as above, to provide for housekeeping, security and all necessary operations including overland supply in addition to personell directly engaged in operating air transport, communications, weather and navigation facilities;

(d) The right to install, maintain and operate facilities as required to provide communication, weather and navigation services and aids, as well as the servicing facilities necessary for all aircraft operations; and

(e) The right to install, maintain and operate communication facilities necessary for the functioning of the United States Military Mission to Greece, including the administrative and logistical support of the Mission and coordination, with other United States military forces. This does not preclude the use of such Military Mission communication facilities by other United States Government agencies operating in Greece.

(f) The right to remove all U.S. property (except permanently fixed of an unclassified nature) which will or has been provided on support of these operations.

(g) The allotment of adequate building space for communication, navigation and weather facilities, i.e., power, control cables, telephone and emergency power services, required to insure continuous and efficient operation of facilities and the provision of local security for the protection of isolated United States military facilities, by the Greek Government.

(h) The right to the use and security of necessary codes;

(i) The right to carry traffic in the national interest of the United States.

(j) The right of exception from police control of the personell of the United States armed forces.

(k) The right of exemption from custom duties of all items belonging to the United States Government or designated for the use of the United States Armed Forces personell or necessary for the maintainance of its aircraft. To this end, the nature, weight and quality of these items should be declared to the custom service, which will immediately grant duty franchise. It is understood that items constituting private property of the military personell will benefit from customs exemptions only insofar as they are imported in reasonable quantities destined for their personal use and that items for personal use will be subject to inspection by the Greek custom authorities.

(l) The right of exemption from standing immigration regulations.

(m) The right to control and discipline United States personell stationed at or in transit through the airfields; and

(n) These rights to be exersised at the discretion of the United States military authorities, and the suspension of scheduled United States military airtransport service operations not to constitute an indication of the United States' desire to terminate the Agreement.

3. In consideration of these rights, and in view of the Hellenic Government's designation of the Hassani Airdrome as the sole airport for international traffic in the vicinity of Athens, the Royal Hellenic Government grants its assurances that should Air Headquarters, Greece decide to abandon its occupancy of Hassani Airdrome during the life of this agreement, the United States will not be disturbed in its occupancy of that part of the Hassani Airdrome assigned to it.

4. It is understood that the provision of the facilities and and utilities included in this Agreement will be at no cost to the United Government, including any existing or future claims of whatever nature, nor there will be any charges for the use of such facilities and utilities which have been provided to the United States communications services and military transport services prior to this Agreement.

5. It is understood that this agreement relates solely to the operation of military transport and administrative aircraft, military communications facilities and civil aircraft under contract operations for the United States Armed Forces and is independent of negotiations relative to civil air transport and civil communications.

6. The phrase «personell of the United States Armed Forces» as issued in this Agreement is to be construet to include military dependents and civilians employed by the armed forces.

The Royal Hellenic Government accepts this Agreement and considers that Yours above mentioned note No 483, of June 14th, 1952, and this reply place on record the understanding arrived at between the two Governments concerning this matter.

Please accept, Excellency, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration .

(signed)

Sophocles Venizelos

The 1952 base agreement while it constituted an unquestionable infringement of the country's sovereignty, it gradually limited its freedom of diplomatic allignements paving the way for an increasing hold by Washington of Greece's foreign policy. And if the basic dogma of American foreign policy was that they ought to maintain their dominant position in Greece until the conflict with the USSR was peacefully resolved and even then that would be conditional to the presence of friendly powers in the area of Eastern Meditteranean, the growth of American military installations in Greece, to combat presisely those forces, was and is one of the bastions of the American claims to dominance in the country, severely restricting and compromising its relations with other states in the region, and of course, constituting the nucleus of potential political instability¹.

1. *Ibid.* It should be remarked that not only the Greek government was to bear some of the cost involved in the maintainance of the American facilities but in the final draft the Greek government was to provide gratis security for isolated American installations.