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THE STATE OF THE OFFICER'S CORP IN THE DECADE
OF THE THIRTIES IN GREECE AND THE ADVENT
OF RIGHT-WIND MILITARISM.

Greek political history of the second quarter of the twentieth century is characterized, above all, by the onset of conservative military dictatorships¹. This was a new phenomenon, political, whose antecedents were to be found in the very failure of the state institutions and essentially the Greek bourgeoisie political parties, to rise to the challenges of their economic crisis, endemic in the country since the debacle of Asia Minor². Of course, in this it should not be overlooked the ineptitude and the profound feebleness of the bourgeoisie administrations to institute the necessary reforms to alter the fundamentally backward and antiquated structures of the Greek state.

The ill started and poorly conceived transformation of the semi-feudal institutions of the state by Venizelos at the start of the century, had ended in a compromise which ushered in potentially dangerous precedents: the officer's corp which under the proper circumstances became the arbitor³ of the political life in the country, in fact abrogating the existing legal foundations of the Greek constitution, taking to itself the everyday administration of the land.

Kommenos Pyromaglou, the political advisor and provisional chief of staff of Zervas' EDES, had made a convincing analysis in the labyrinth of the officers meddling in the political processes of the country and the ensuing disruptions

1. *National Archives of the United States*, Department of State, doc., no., 097.Z 1092 3745/46 of August 15, 1946.

2. *Ibid*, Department of State, 350 Greece. Memorandum on "Greek Politics", by the First secretary of the American Embassy Robert Memminger to the Secretary of State of September 28, 1950.

3. G. Fessopoulos, Major-general, *Hai Dichoniai ton Axiomaticon mas kai he Dialysis tou Stratou mas en Mikra Asia*, Athens, 1934, p. 28. It should be noted here, that the author during the Pagalos dictatorship was the head of Security, a branch of police in charge of political "subversion".



of the constitutional institutions of Greece¹. He did conclusively demonstrated that the *coups d'etat* organized and instigated by the military², which rocked Greece and oscilated the fabric of the country's political institutions from 1922 to 1936, were conceived, initiated and executed with the connivance and the blessing of the political parties, the Liberal and the Populist, and at occasion on their explicit desire. The American military attache in Athens at the turbulent thirties, Lt. colonel F.L. Whitley, reported to Washington as follows on this, by now institutionalized, practice of the Greek military:

The armed forces and the Gendarmes play such important parts in Greek politics that each group (political parties) seeks to control one or the other of these. The one is so valuable for "quick turn-over" of the government or change of regime, while the other is almost equally valuable at election time when a 90% or 95% vote is expedient³.

The American ambassador MacVeagh at precise the same time elaborated on this interrelation of the military men and the professional politicians:

General Plasteras and the other principal military men involved in these affairs were largely the tools of cunning and unscrupulous politicians⁴.

Vice-admiral Alexandros Sakellariou, one of the most controversial personalities, the epitomy I should say of the Greek men "on horseback", in his

1. Pyromaglou, who by the end of the occupation, had fallen into disfavor with Zervas over the latter's abandonment of the reformist democratic goals of EDES, and his slavish subservience to the British military missions in Greece, attempted to provide a reasonable background of EDES' failure to attract and win the confidence of the Greek people in contrast to the widespread popularity of the EAM. In doing so he penetrated the web of Greek political life prior to the war and analyzed the military's part in it. On the same see also the comments of a professional politician and former Governor-General of Epirus A. Kaleuras, *He Hellas kai hai Ideai. Ho Stratos, He Demokratia, Ho Venizelos*, Saloniki, 1935, p.42.

2. See also a very interesting work by a former naval officer, who while in his assessment of the political ideologies is rather naive if not unimaginative, on the contrary he makes provokative and bold analyses of the psychology of the officer corp and their *raison d'etre* for their involvement in a constant struggle for political power and state authority. Nevertheless, the author idolizes the very dogmatic and maleficent officer whom he so condemns. Styl. Charatses, *1023 Axiomatikoi kai 22 Kinemata*, Athens, 1985, 2 vols., vol.1, pp.229-234.

3. National Archives of the United States, Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs. Report by Lt. colonel F.L. Whitley to the War Depart. March 23, 1933.

4. *Ibid.* Department of State, 868.00/711. Report by the American ambassador to the State Department of March 23, 1933.



memoirs provided these self-illuminating insights:

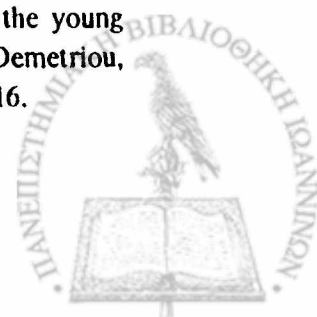
But as we (Greek society, Greek nation), have succeeded, we have left the officers to act wantonly with the policy of demagogy. They do not hesitate when their needs call to seek recourse to arms, which the state has entrusted them to use against their opponents. We have arrived at the wicked conclusion to consider as efficient officers, first the ones interested in the *coups d'etat* and second the ones irrepably associated with political parties¹.

The professional soldier and more particularly the graduate of the elitist military academies² of the Army and the Navy, identified his cast interests with either the Liberal party of Venizelos, the various "liberal" political groups or with the Populist party, the flagbearer of the conservative landlords the old

1. Alex. Sakellariou. *He Thesis tes Hellados hes ton Deuteron Pangosmion Polemon*, second edition. Athens. 1945. p.143.

2. It should be noted that the two academies were, at the time, the exclusive preserve of the land-owning class and the descendants of the military chiefs who had participated in the war of independence in 1821. By the 1900's the bourgeoisie had made some inroads into the *sanctum* of the Greek State. Of course, certain allowances were made for the bright sons of poor farmers and more seldom for the ones of the infantile working class. Captain N. Petropoulos, of the then Royal Navy, writing about the mutiny aboard the *Averoff*, flagship of the Greek Fleet, in 1941 provided an insight into the psychological motives of the mutiniers: "In some of the younger officers the mistrust of the higher ranks had a more ancient origin. The "complexes" created in the naval academy where some foolish officers, supervisors and/or commanders were showing an unconcealed favor for cadets who had come from well-known families, while they could not hide their ridiculous and harmful snobbery towards those, who in their opinion had an unimportant origin." N. Petropoulos. *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaiou Nautikou*, Athens. 1970-1972. 4 vols., vol.2. p.425.

See also the memoirs of an ultra conservative royalist officer, an admirer of King Constatine's despotism and of general Metaxas' dictatorship, Lieutenant-General Tsakalotos. Of buffonic disposition and pompous outlook, he, as may be expected, according to knowledgeable persons, was lacking the necessary intelligence for a staff officer. The general who commanded, the so-called "Rimini Brigade" alongside the British against the ELAS in December 1944, did call the military academy the "Shrine of the Nation", Thrasy. Tsakalotos, *40 Chronia Stratiotes tes Hellados. Pos Ekerdisame tous Agones mas*, Athens 1960, p.38. Of interest are also the comments of a young lieutenant who graduated from the military academy just a few months prior to the outbreak of the Greco-Italian war. Subsequently, he was among the first ones to form a guarrilla band in the Greek mountains, one which was destined to be the cornerstone of the ELAS guerrilla army in central Greece. Unfortunately, his subsequent performance was quite murky, but nevertheless he offered valuable observations of the cast worshipping which shaped the mentality of the young officers and led them to meddle, habitually, in the political affairs of Greece. D. Demetriou, "Nikephoros", *To Antartiko sta Vouna tes Roumelis*, Athens, 1965, 3 vols., vol.1, p.16.



royalist guard and the most destitute sections of the Greek peasantry in the "old Greece"¹. Both of the major political parties formed the great bulk of the organized right-wing opinion in Greece, all other shades of political thought being absent, with the exception of the infantile Communist party. Concurring at all major issues with the exception of the restoration of the monarchy, the only difference among the Liberals and the Populists were mainly those of personality².

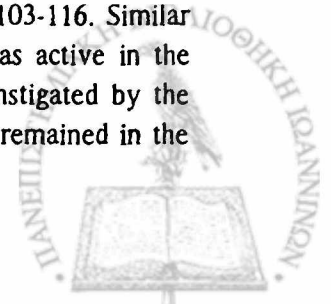
The officer of the Greek armed forces conspired, intrigued at the coffeehouses and barracks, mutinied in the army camps, took over the Fleet³ and threatened to take punitive actions against the legal government, any government, to "persuade" her to accept his demands among which were professional advancement and increased economic benefits⁴. Political initiative by groups of army

1. See the account of admiral Kavvadias, one of the most outstanding royalist officers and the C.-in-C. of the Greek Fleet during the Greco-Italian war and the first part of the Fleet's operations in the Middle East after the fall of Greece. Epam. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*. Athens, 1950, pp. 53-65. A perfect case study of this mentality was aptly described by Mr. MacVeagh when the latter detailed in a report to the State Department how the ultras in October of 1935 formed themselves into a group and forced the legally elected government to bow to their demands: "The method adopted was the old fashioned military *coup d' etat*, ostensibly carried out by the Commander of the Air Force, General Reppas, the Commander of the 1st Army Corps General Papagos, the Chief of Staff of the Navy, Admiral Sakellariou". *National Archives of the United States*, Department of State, 868.00/917. Report by MacVeagh to the State Department of October 14, 1935.

2. *Ibid.*, doc.no.114090. "A Short Guide to Greek Political Parties and Personalities."

3. D. Vratsanos, *Historia ton en Helladi Epanastaseon*. Athens, 1936, pp.303-304.

4. In 1909, the Greek officer corp, under the influence of the non-commissioned officers brought about a change in the semi-feudal regime that governed Greece under the benevolent auspices of the monarchy. Many a fundamental reforms were introduced establishing firmly the power of the bourgeoisie. The absolutist prerogatives of the monarchy were temporarily, at least, limited. The "old parties" were reduced to impotence. A great number of officers, dead wood, were cashiered. New promotions were made to fill the gap left by the retirement of the dismissed officers and to reward the lower ranks. Nevertheless, many new promotions were made on the basis of the same criteria which had been utilized prior to this reformist movement: family links, and social status. Razikostas, a naval commander and a member of one of the most ancient families of the land, tracing its prominence to the days of the Greek war of independence, and national awakening in 1821, speaking to an Ensing after the 1909 events had said: "You see young man you made the revolution, we are promoted." Alex. Sakellariou, *Henas Nauarchos Thymatai. Apomnemeumata tou Nauarchou Alexandrou Sakellariou*, Athens, 1971, 2 vols., vol.2, p.645. See also Charatses, *1023 Axiomatikoi kai 22 Kinimata*, vol.1, pp.103-116. Similar views were also expressed by Lieutenant-General Theo. Gregoropoulos who was active in the affairs of the army up to 1960's. Writing about of one of the *coups d' etat* instigated by the officer corp he concluded as follows: "Incapable elements which could not have remained in the



officers' had become so traditional in this decade as to be regarded as legitimate. So much so that it can be said that contemporary Greek history was ushered in by the traditional military *coup d'etat*. The military officers, beginning the twentieth century became a political organization, a Party, which used the arms entrusted to them by the state to subjugate the citizenry to their will. Indeed, the officer corp was prone to and in reality used the rank and file of the Greek armed forces, as an instrument for the achievement of their goals. "They consider Greece to be their fief and the army to be the means by which to fulfill their personal aims"².

Rank, monetary compensations, and high commands were among the tangible benefits they derived from their violent intrusion into the affairs of the state. On occasion, bands of officers staged *coup de théâtre* to force the administration to bow to their demands³ in a manner reminiscent of the blackmailing methods practiced by the least desirable elements of a society.

The "making" or "breaking" of government administrations, as it was reported by many an analyst of the Greek political scene, was illustrated in an editorial of the mouthpiece of the Populist party the daily *He Kathemerine*:

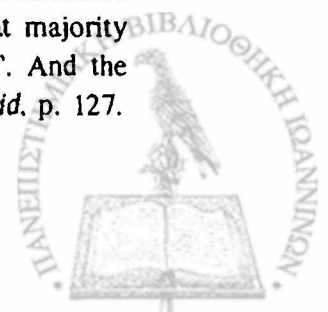
The army officers are the war dogs which we send from their barracks against such and such a revolutionist and we make them fight their battles on hard asphalt streets and afterwards we require them to render death

army even for an hour because they were useless and a liability, in many instances were transformed into personalities and secured not simply their stay in the army but also excellent positions and many other benefits..." Theo. Gregoropoulos, *Apo ten Koryphen tou Lofou. Anamneseis kai Stochasmoi, 1914-1952 & 1959-1966*. Athens. 1966. p.66.

1. See a very thorough study of the Greek army's involvement in politics by the Office of Strategic Services entitled: "The Role of the Army in Politics". Referring to the celebrated trials of the army in Egypt following the abortive mutinies there the study concluded: "At the court-martial of the Greek army mutiniers at Qassassin, Egypt, in June 1944, the defence made the point that though abstinence from political partisanship was desirable in the armed forces and was made a rule in the other armies, in Greece such partisanship had become so traditional as to have acquired a certain legitimacy. A defence attorney challenged the members of the court to declare that they themselves had abstained from political agitation throughout their military careers". *National Archives of the United States*. Office of Strategic Services, doc. no. 097.3 Z 1092 of August 15, 1946.

2. Fessopoulos, *Hai Dichoniai ton Axiomatikon mas kai he Dialysis tou Stratou mas en M. Asia*, p. 28.

3. "One morning we read in the newspapers that as a result of the revolutionary committee the leadership of the revolution (1922) was given to a general repulsive to the great majority of the officers, who would like to kill the committee and the holder of the office". And the author of the book wanted to provide a didactic diatribe to the younger officers. *Ibid*, p. 127.



sentences on their fellow soldiers at court-martial'.

Not infrequently, rival factions among officers clashed with one another over power, in the ensuing process eliminating the government and throwing the country into chaos. Factionalism of the officer corp dynamically expressed kept the country in a state of high tension over anxiety about its future and led the bloody clashes in the barracks and in the streets. This maladjustment of the officer corp and its inner strifes, and of course, its political meddling is described, in this, rather calm fashion, by a foreign observer as a natural thing to have occurred in the state of contemporary Greece:

Failure of the leaders of the Liberal and Populist party and their adherent groups to reach a workable understanding for the formation of a cabinet led by a group of high Army and Navy officers to present on March 4th (1936) a memorial to the King demanding that a cabinet be formed at once from among the persons, outside of the contending political parties who have the confidence of the King.

The proposition, appeared to have the support of officers in the provinces, but not of a local group consisting of general Pitsikas, Commander of the 1st Corps; General Demestichas, Commander of the Athens Infantry Division; General Batas, Commander of the Athens district; The Director of the Evelpides; the Commander of the 1st Infantry Regiment; and others including many General Staff Officers and Rear-Admiral Sakkellariou, Commander of the High Seas Fleet, who, it is said, moved out a division of the Fleet from the naval base to be prepared for counter action².

A familiar tactic, heralding the advent of a new *coup d'etat*, was the circulation of the so-called "protocols", resolutions or rather *demarches* signed by a number of officers of various ranks. Addressed to the administration in power, the "protocols", protested what in the opinion of the signing officers was an "incorrect" policy and, in the name of the "fatherland" called for an immediate "amelioration" of the situation³. In the case that the government did not succumb

1. *National Archives of the United States. Records of the War Department. General and Special Staff, Military Intelligence Division.* Report by the American military attache in Athens to the War Department of March 16, 1936.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Fessopoulos. *Hai Dichoniai ton Axiomatikon mas kai he Dialysis tou Stratou mas en M. Asia*, p.97 & pp.130-133.



to their ultimata, which if heeded, were to provide in essence for an administration under their auspices, the protesting officers would proceed to overthrow the unyielding administration¹.

Circulated among the Army and Navy officers these "protocols", fostered unrest among the armed forces, and, if not detected and exposed early, planted the seeds of secret conspiratorial movements. Accordingly, secret societies were formed among officers whose common link was their desire to impose their views on the rest of the army cadres and through them to the administration. "And appeared the unprecedented spectacle in the chronicles of the armies and the states: Greece being offered or rather being sold to the favorites of the few and bad officers².

In the decade of 1916-1926, there were eleven *coups d'état* or attempted ones³. This maze of intrigues and conspiracy had a twofold impact in the military *esprit de corps* and in the position of the officer corp vis a vis the rank and file of the Greek society. Professionally, the officer corp were considered incompetent and below standards even for a Balkan country:

A national army does not exist today, there are officers... but army... essentially does not exist... the army is still a power to the unarmed because it possesses the gun. It became the weakest institution of the state. It was paralyzed. Its power which it used foolishly and unthoughtfully, where it ought not to have, became the seed of its decomposition⁴.

Lieutenant-general Gyalistras, in a monograph published in 1924, attributed the military escapades of 1922 in Asia Minor to the inferior expertise of the *defeatist* officers who were directing the operations⁵. Here it should be emphasi-

1. *Ibid.* p.137. See also Charatses. *1023 Axiomatikoi kai 22 Kinemata*, vol.1, p.121. "Kolialexis did not sail from Phaleron, but called the newspapermen and stated that he does not intend to obey the governmental orders since he does not recognize neither the government nor the vote of confidence that the latter received in the Parliament. Furthermore, he emphasized that if his requests are not accepted he will show his strength to the government and to the President of the Republic. In a reporter's question as to what he means, *he said that with an ultimatum will ask for the removal of the government and the President of the Republic. It is not I, Kolialexis continued that I am beyond the pale of the law, but the government. The rule of law which I will enforce is not the government's.* Italics mine, p.121.

2. Fessopoulos. *Hai Dichoniai ton Axiomatikon mas kai he Dialysis tou Stratou mas en M. Asia*, p.153.

3. Charatses. *1023 Axiomatikoi kai 22 Kinemata*, vol.1, pp.21-27.

4. Kaleuras, *He Hellas kai he Ideai. Ho Stratos, He Demokratia. Ho Venizelos*, pp.28-29.

5. S. Gyalistras, *Aitia tes Katastrophes tou 1922*, Athens, 1924.



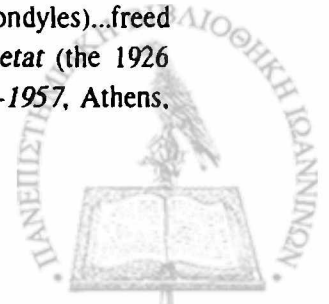
zed that during the period in question, hundreds of officers had been promoted to key positions while the campaign was in progress because of their devotion to the throne and their affiliations with the Populist party, resulting in a considerable purging of seasoned and battle-experienced officers so as to accommodate the stalwarts of the conservative Right.

Kept out of the army, a rival and hostile institution as far as they were concerned, the "Republican" officers who had been maltreated, began conspiring against and undermining the morale and the efficiency of the army of Asia Minor. Conspiratorial groups and cliques were formed among the ex-officers striving to overthrow the government and the monarchy. To such an extent the petty rivalry and cast self-interests had engulfed the rival factions of the officer corp that it provoked the ire and the disgust if not the active discontent of the other segments of the Greek society, that it led to spontaneous violent outbursts of the military¹. The populace, the frugal, timid and conservative petit-bourgeoisie, and the cunning cynical peasant were aghast at the degradation of the former symbols of national pride and national grandeur. That society then according to an analysis by military men themselves, perceived the officer corp as "... a mass without any moral links, an instrument of political profiteering, inspired only by certain ambitions and the most base of self-interests"². Certainly, this state of affairs created, with the exception mentioned above, an apathy amidst the great majority of the Greek people, an event, which naturally, facilitated the by now habitual meddling officer corp in the political affairs of the country:

Paradoxically enough, one thing which undoubtedly aided General Kondylis and his henchmen in maintaining order was the apathy and disgust of the majority of onlookers at this new proof of the ineptitude of self-government in Greece. Even the hoodlums with whose hired aid

1. Charatses writing about the clashes in the streets of Athens on September 9, 1926 between the army and groups of unorganized citizens on the occasion of Kondyles' liquidation of the *Democratic Battalions* makes these revealing conclusions "It was a spontaneous outburst of discontent against the military after a paranoic six years of continuous *coups d'etat*, persecutions and violence". Charatses, *1023 Axiomatikoi kai 22 Kinemata*, vol.1, pp.150-151.

2. Fessopoulos. *Hai Dichoniai ton Axiomatikon mas kai he Dialysis tou Stratou mas en M. Asia*, p.158. See also the comments of Gonatas, an essentially conservative officer of probable royalist sympathies, who described the nature of the puschart officer as follows: "(Kondyles)...freed the jailed and the exiled politicians and satisfied the protagonists of the *coup d'etat* (the 1926 one) with key positions". S.Gonatas, *Apomnemeumata Stylianou Gonata 1897-1957*, Athens, 1958. p.338.



Mr. Metaxas is accustomed to fan the questionable loyalties of Omonia Square, failed to rouse much enthusiasm for Kondylis' latest *coup*¹.

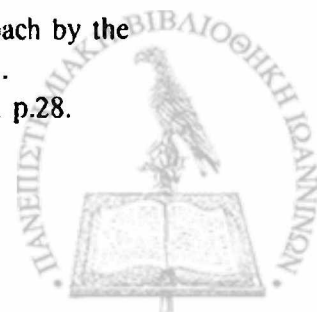
Indignant, the Athens chamber of commerce in 1922 debated the proposal whether the business people should publically denounce the officer corp as the primary factor of the disruption of the country's economic progress and stability. And if that was the case of the most advanced sections of the Greek middle class in the period then of the twenties the then evolving Greek working class and the rural population experienced the most brutal consequences of this politicization of the Greek officer corp. The armed forces transformed into policemen suppressed the political evolution of the nation and served as barrier to the necessary reforms of the country's social and economic institutions².

However, the decade following, that is in the thirties, there is a radical transformation of the nature and the aims of the traditional *coup d'etat*. The haphazardous and disorganized forays into the political life of the country characteristic of the previous decade assumed now new dimensions. The growing social discontent, fomented by unsoluble economic crisis, provided an impetus and a new purpose to the well established and by now institutionalized tradition of military intervention in Greek politics. The customary inter army factionalism and the two party affiliations were now substituted for new allegiances. The officer corp was now self mobilized to serve as a barrier and to stem off the outbursts of reformist demands by the rank and file of the Greek population thus transcending the established bourgeoisie party affiliations.

In this manner, the professional officer, out of cast self-interest, and sensing what it perceived as a potential threat to the country from a left social orientation, menacing its privileged position as the arbiter of Greek politics and that of his political patrons or at times co-sharers of power, took the lead to enforce a vigorous repressive regime, leaving at its wake a track of dictatorships most prominently associated with the extreme right. Transcending the conventional party affiliations, in this process the officer corp became the bulwark of the conservative right, forcefully interfering to uphold the social and economic *status-quo*. Thus the officer corp having the tacid approval of the political parties of the country, which had acknowledged their impotency to contain the social forces, proceeds directly to the establishment of pure military dictatorships.

1. *National Archives of the United States*, Department of State, 868.00/917. Despach by the American ambassador in Greece to the State Department of October 14, 1935, p.11.

2. Kaleuras, *He Hellas kai he Ideai. Ho Stratos, He Demokratia, Ho Venizelos*, p.28.

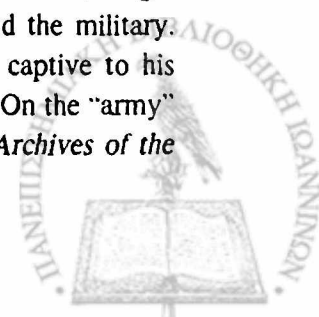


The commencement of this new epoch of Greek militarism, or rather the radical transformation of its political outlook, which heralds the advent of right-wing military supremacy in Greek political life was the military *coup d'etat* of 1935, the October one¹. The military men who emerged victorious in March of 1935 with the exception of Kondeles² who died a year later became identified

1. On October 10, 1935, at 9:45 in the morning general Papagos, a non-entity up to this time in the Greek military, both professionally and in the political conspiracies of the officer corp, Major-general Reppas of the infantile Greek Air Force, and the grand old man of the Navy, Vice-admiral Mimis Oikonomou, acting in unison and on their own, intercepted the car of the Prime Minister in an Athenian street and informed Tsaldares that his government from that moment onward ought to be considered deposed. This audacious and deplorable incident constituted the formal beginning of the establishment of pure military dictatorships in Greece. On admiral Oikonomou see: P. Kanellopoulos, *Hemerologio*, Athens, 1977 p.186. On Kondeles and Tsaldares: Sta. Merkoures, *Georgios Kondeles 1879-1936*, Athens, 1954, pp.214-219; D. K. Svolopoulos, *Panages Tsaldares*, Athens, 1946, pp.176-178. Kondeles, Minister of the army in the deposed government, under whose control the three putschists were and under whose "advice" they acted "consented" to form a new cabinet "urged on" by the stalwarts of the monarchy. Kondeles promptly suspended the existing constitution, reintroduced the monarchical one in use prior to 1911, that is abolished the republic by an illegal act of his own, proclaimed himself Regent until the return of the King and declared the country in a state of siege. This was the beginning of the Kondeles dictatorship. In the short life span of his dictatorship, November 30, 1935, Kondeles introduced punitive repressive measures against political "opponents" and especially labor union people. He exiled them in the Aegean islands a practice which was to be faithfully upheld by the Metaxas dictatorship a year later. Gonatas, *Apomnemoneumata Stylianou Gonata 1897-1957*, pp. 378-379; Ekdoseis tes Kentrikes Epitropes tou KKE, *Pente Chronia Agones 1931-1936*, Athens, 1946, p. 322.

2. Certainly, Kondeles is a case study of the Greek politics prior to the war. A most loyal Venizelist, in the period of the First World War, Kondeles wrote the famous vitriolic slanders against the Greek monarchy and the politicians of the Populist party. "The infamous gang (Populist party), which is led by the most unprincipled men, the insensible King of Athens...is not permissible any longer the confusion of (the idea) of the fatherland with the person of the most infamous King that the world has ever seen". Letter of Kondeles of December 11, 1921, published in the newspaper *Proia* in Constantinople, that city being then the center of raging anti-monarchical propaganda. C.K. Vozikes, ed., *Hai Apologiai ton Thymaton tes 15 Noemvriou*, Athens, 1932, pp. 151-152.

In the period following the expulsion of the monarchy, 1924, Kondeles became the archetype of the Greek military dictators. He did not hesitate to embrace the cause of the monarchy and the ultras in the military, his ancient adversaries, believing that in this way his dictatorship would be assured. However, the restored king installed on the throne through Kondeles' efforts, sought a rapprochement with the Venizelists, an idea fiercely opposed by Kondeles and the military. Naturally, the King was unwilling to reign under the tutelage of a strong man, captive to his policies. Therefore, Kondeles was dismissed, the King relaying solely on the army. On the "army" politics of the era see the comments of the American military attache. *National Archives of the*



with the Metaxas¹ dictatorship of 1936 and the fortunes of the Greek monarchy. The King who returned to Greece after a twelve years exile in Europe, through the means of a fraudulent plebiscite², relied on the officer corp and professional

United States. Department of State 868.00/733. Report of December 20, 1933. It was the opinion of the American ambassador himself that Kondeles and the military who restored the king were steering toward a dictatorship with the royal blessing. Kondeles after the fraudulent plebiscite that brought back the king had made this declaration: "There are happily no longer any political parties in Greece today. The Greek people in presenting itself at the polls as a unit has destroyed them. A new political order began in our land of Greece from the day of the 3rd November." *Ibid*. 868.00/934. Report of MacVeagh to the State Department of November 9, 1935.

1. Metaxas who had been schooled in the despotic traditions of King Constantine's court had repeatedly made known his absolutist political tendencies. In a meeting of the governing committee of the Populist party on April 17th, 1934, he had said "I categorically declare that I am against the parliamentary institutions, that I shall work for the overthrow of the parliamentary institutions..." I. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*. Athens 1951-1960, 4 vols, vol.4, pp.92-93. See also his remarks to Gounares and Protopapadakis in 1921. In a meeting with the aforesaid Metaxas flatly refused to assume the military leadership of the army in Asia Minor, unless he was given the post of Minister of the army as *military dictator*. Indeed, at the most critical period of the campaign in Asia Minor, when defeat by Kemal Ataturk was almost a certainty, Metaxas was willing to serve the land only if he was given the powers of a dictator which would have enabled him to present himself as "the savior of the fatherland", and thus meriting the gratitude of the nation and the office of dictator. His opportunism and militarism are the main characteristics of the political career of Metaxas. *Ibid*, vol.3, pp.71-101 and 167.

2. "The plebiscite took place on November 3rd and yielded the astounding result of 97.8% in favor of the monarchy. Certainly, the Army and the Navy voted, but this was not sufficient to provide such a majority." Gonatas, *Apomnemoneumata Stylianou Gonata 1897-1957*, p.379. Pesmazoglou, the Minister of Finance in the Tsaldares cabinet, wrote that the initial results of the plebiscite were 105% in favor of the monarchy. G. Pesmazoglou, *Gyro apo ten Palinorthosin tou 1935*, Athens, 1950, p.81. See also I. Peponis, *Nikolaos Plasteras*. Athens, 1958, 2 vols., vol.2, p. 570. The Prime minister had warned the King, before the later's arrival in Greece, that the plebiscite was not genuine: "The consequences from this deviation from the path of a genuine plebiscite would be gravest, since he (King), would be forced sooner or latter to seek recourse in dictatorial methods to uphold his throne." G. Vouros, *Panages Tsaldares. He Zoe kai to Ergon tou.1867-1936*, pp.528-529. Also the leaders of the Liberal bourgeoisie parties in an "open letter" to the King, published and circulated secretly, because of the existing censorship, questioned the validity of the referendum and called the announced results "the frenzy of fraudulence". *Ibid*, p.528.

The American ambassador in a despach to the State Department entitled "The Plebiscite and After", wrote the following: "In this connection it may be noted that not only is the Monarchist majority so great as to "prove" Greece practically unanimous in its desire to see the King restored, but the figure given for the Monarchist vote is actually higher than the total vote cast by all parties together in any previous election in Greece, and this by no small margin but by over 400.000 ballots!" *National Archives of the United States*. Department of State, 868.00/934. Report by MacVeagh to the State Department of November 9, 1935.



punchists like Metaxas who was appointed by him as Prime minister on April 1936, to safeguard his throne¹.

The military figured prominently, as it was to be expected, in this administration. The new hierarchy that had emerged in the armed forces after the great purges of 1935, were the pillars of the new administration. The chief of the army Papagos not unlike his colleagues in the armed forces identified the dictatorship with the preservation of their newly won prominence. They were confident "that with the dictatorship they would have secured better the privileges which they had acquired in the military hierarchy since the *coup d'etat* of March 1st, 1935."²

Admiral Kavvadias underscored the main incentives of the newly molded officer corp, what seemed to be essence of their concerns:

The only favorable result for them (Navy officers), of the *coup d'etat* was the improvement of the condition of their promotion. Now (if the dictatorship had not taken place), they were expecting not only this profit evaporating but their own persecution by the mutiniers (participants of the March 1st, 1935 *coup d'etat*), returning with all honors³.

The Army officer corp was motivated by the same principles as their counterparts in the Navy. General Papagos⁴, while he remained consistently silent on the motives of his fellow conspirators to establish a military dictatorship, he did criticize bitterly the state of affairs of the army prior to March 1st, 1935. The purging of the officer corp of the adherents of the liberal parties and the "democratic" punchists, provided according to the general, cohesion to the officer corp, cleansing it of all "undesirable elements". However, castigating the previously existing "chaos" the new generalissimo was preserving

1. In a telephone conversation on October 8th, 1935, with the Greek Foreign minister Maximos the exiled King in a truly dilettante fashion described the personal "sacrifices" that he was making in accepting the throne of Greece so that he may "save" the people of Greece: "I feel that I am abandoning for the Greek people's happiness everything, friends personal life (a girl friend that he had in London) and my beloved old London." P. Pinelis, *Georgios B*, Athens, 1961, p. 80.

2. See Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaïou Nautikou*, vol.1, p. 109.

3. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezaa*, p.57.

4. Alex. Papagos, *Ho Hellinikos Stratos kai he pros ton Polemon Paraskeue tou. Apo Augoustou 1923 mechri Octovriou 1940*, Athens, 1945, p. 25. See also the writings of Mazarakes. Alex. Mazarakes, *Apomnemoneumata*, Athens, 1948, p. 591; Tsakalotos, *40 Chronia Stratiotes tes Hellados. Pos Ekerdisame tous Agones mas 1940-1949*, pp.136-164. Of interest is also a report of general George Bakos who had participated in the first Greek administration under the Germans, the Quisling cabinet of Tsolakoglou. *Ibid*, pp. 199-200.



the methods and the mentality of the politically motivated officer, the type that he was reproving.

This new coherent, ideologically and professionally officer corp, who wrestled the political and military authority in 1935, and were to be guaranteed it by the Metaxas royalist dictatorship, unlike their predecessors, justified their hold over the nation in messianic terms. Their newly bestowed material welfare and authority was now interwoven with an ethical mantle, that they had a special mission to shape the destiny of the Greek nation. They were projecting an image of a caste immune from the "corruption" which had engulfed all the politicians. Above all they considered themselves exempt from the communist "miasma" which had penetrated all other professions¹.

Considering further their cast "pure", in the above sense, incarnations of the "spirit" of Greece itself, that is the defenders of the social *status quo* of the decaying institutions of the state. Therefore, in league with the most backward elements of the church they assumed the mantle of crusaders to purify the Greek nation from the creeping threats posed by outside ideologies and internal enemies².

The officer corp, as projected by admiral Kavvadias³, was conscious of the

1. Demetriou, *To Andartiko sta Vouna tes Roumeles*, vol.1, p. 16. Similar ideas were voiced in a pamphlet published in 1948 under the title "Army and Civilization", by a high school teacher in a provincial high school. The author did emphasize that the army "more than any other element in our society is inspired by nationalist considerations and it is guided by the Hellenic ideas, which like a bright ray light our centuries long history." G.Kyrkiles, *Stratos kai Politismos*, Kalamata, 1948, p. 31.

2. Thrasy. Tsakalotos, *Stratiotika Pneumatika Themata*, Athens, 1953, pp. 9-13. It seems that Tsakalotos while in the army developed a religiosity bordering on superstition. He identified religion with the destinies of the country, using religion as an ideological weapon to advance his extreme right-wing political aspirations. Indeed, this work by Tsakalotos reflects the perplexed psychology of the officer corp in their assumed functions "as the reformers" of the Greek nation. It further provides the justification for their messianic role against the enemies of state and race. Note that the work in question was published by a religious group, a fundamentalist one, and it is full of allegorical metaphors, Christianity and the Army as the bastions of mankind against the supreme enemy, communism. It should be clarified, of course, that under the general title of "communism", the general placed all the reformist elements in Greek society, of whatever political persuasion.

See also a work by Bishop Panteleimon, the Head chaplain of the Greek armed forces in the Middle East and a close collaborator of the general. Panteleimon, Bishop of Chios, *Agones gia ten Patrida sten Xenetia*, Athens, 1955, p. 589. Of similar nature are the comments of general Pezopoulos, D. Pezopoulos, *1941-1950 Tragike Poreia*, Athens, 1953, pp. 33-35.

3. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*, p. 56.



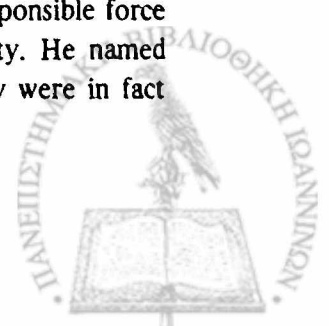
impending dangers to Greece and was therefore, anxious to take measures to overcome them. Since it was their belief that the politicians were vulnerable to the creeping influences of corrupt parliamentarism and the insidious communism, thus rendering them ineffectual if not dangerous to the welfare of the state. Consequently, it was natural for the officer corp to be at loggerheads with the politicians and to contemplate a regime which would have imposed a strict militaristic authoritarian rule giving them the principal voice in the administration of the country.

Direct consequence of these developments, was, of course, the Metaxas dictatorship known also as the "Fourth of August dictatorship". Here it should be noted at least parenthetically, that in this instance, as in no other periods of the contemporary Greek history, the designs of the officer corp to wrestle power from the political institutions, was conformed and its ways paved by a relatively new organization of the Greek state. It was the so-called special security police, a body especially founded by the Security of State Act of 1929¹. This police division whose avowed purpose was to combat political "subversion", had since its genesis a distinct political orientation, an attribute sharply accentuated in the early 1930's. Indeed, the bourgeoisie state which had created the security police as a means to uphold its moribund institutions, was to find itself a victim of that force which in alliance with the officer corp rose to challenge the traditional parliamentary institutions. For as it was inevitable, at the eve of the military's thrust to power in 1935-1936, the social conditions were ripe for an action in unison of the police elite with the officer corp².

The military, significantly, in its contest for power sought also the endorsement of the monarchy to gain respectability and acceptance by the influential segments, of the Greek society as the legitimate heirs to the parliamentary institutions. At this conjunction the officer corp was acting in harmony with the

1. "The basis for the enlarged scope of the Special Security was the so-called Security of the State Act, passed by the Venizelos government in 1929. Though vague in its definitions, this act was interpreted as authorizing wholesale deportations of persons regarded as politically unreliable, raids against offices of leftist organizations, and physical mistreatment of political prisoners". *National Archives of the United States, Department of State, OSS, Research and Analysis Branch, R&A no.2939, The Role of the Police in Greek Politics*, p. 2.

2. "Sophoulis spoke in favor of abrogating the act. He said that half of Greece had groaned under its tyrannical burden, and that the Special Security had behaved as an irresponsible force above the executive power and the representatives of parliamentary sovereignty. He named individuals who had allegedly been deported as dangerous communists when they were in fact peaceful bourgeois". *Ibid.*, p. 2.

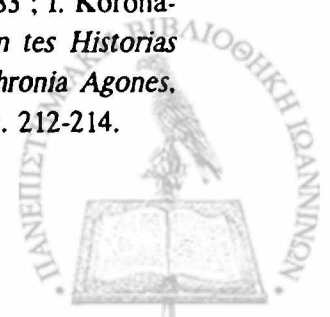


it should be emphasized, that the social crisis looming in the 1930's which was manifested in a continuous outburst of political demonstrations and labor strikes, could not be alleviated by conventional means. The unwillingness of the social elite and the bourgeoisie parties to make the needed concessions, induced them to seek the imposition of a military dictatorship to suppress the social unrest threatening their own well being and their privileged position.

The officer corp had therefore, the blessing of the financial and conservative power structures in their undertaking for power. Their victorious challenge was to be followed by a systematic purging of all possible dissidents, in the corps to a degree unprecedented up to that time in Greece. The officer corp proceeded in a methodological manner to establish therefore a regime essentially controlled by it and whose outward manifestations would be attesting to the values best suited for the justification and the perpetuation of the military cast in power. Therefore, the new regime born on the 4th of August 1936, following several months of unrest and bloodshed in the country, events which were skillfully fomented and exploited by the administration¹, was but a byproduct of the factors mentioned above and was cementing the newly achieved alliance of the

who, through the Undersecretariat of Public Safety, is already running a young G.P.U." *Ibid.* On the 1923 *coup d'état* see an interesting little pamphlet obviously published by a liberal. In it the author, not a professional historian, wrote about the totalitarian tendencies of Metaxas, and of the later's standing with the Greek electorate. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact year of its publication but it seems that it took place immediately after the suppression of the *coup d'état*. P. Gianopoulos, *He Stasis tou I. Metaxa kai ho Thriamvos tes Heganastaseos tou 1922*, Athens, 1924. On the *coup d'état* itself see also the following: "In 1923, after the treaty of Laussane, royalist officers organized a military league, and the opposition responded by organizing a league of officers who had taken part in the 1922 revolution. They were for the most part Venizelist, but described themselves as democrats whose main purpose was to block the royalist designs. A revolt led by colonel John Metaxas in October 1923 was suppressed and the Venizelists who had the upper hand, accused the King of having supported it". *National Archives of the United States*, R&A Report No.3745, *The Role of the Army in Greek Politics*, p. 4.

1. The bloodbath of May 9th, 1936, in Salonika, provided the justification to Metaxas and his apologists for the establishment of the dictatorship. At that date the police deliberately shot at the protesting workers killing twelve and injuring more than two hundred and eighty, thus unleashing a wave of protests and strikes throughout the country. Here it should be noted that the King on the recommendation of Metaxas decorated the police officer Dakos who had led the police assault. Gonatas, *Apomnemoneumata Stylianou Gonata 1897-1957*, p.383 ; I. Koronakis, *He Politeia tes 4es Augoustou. Phos eis mian Plastographemenen Periodon tes Historias mas*, Athens, 1950, p. 37 ; Ekdoseis tes Kentrikes Epitropes tou KKE, *Deka Chronia Agones*, Athens, 1946, pp. 103-108 ; Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, vol.4, pp. 212-214.



officer corp and the monarchy¹.

The coming to power of the military-royalist dictatorship of Metaxas, initially did not cause any alarm, to the traditional influence exerting powers, England and France. On the contrary it can be asserted that it was looked with favor by Britain a country which more than any other was directly associated with the evolution of the contemporary Greek state. The former had maintained relatively vast economic interests not overlooking, of course, the strategic interests. Indeed, England's economic hold over the Greek finances exceeded by far that of any other nation. British financiers were the largest foreign investors in Greece. Not only they were the traditional holders of almost half the public debt of nearly £89 millions but they predominated in investments in the Greek industry, banking and the founding of public utility companies. More than £15 millions of British capital were invested in private Greek enterprises in the period prior to 1940². No doubt therefore, that the restoration

1. See the collective note and protest of the political parties to the King of August 7th, 1936. Gonatas, the representative of the political parties, a former putschist himself, in an audience with the King had called the Metaxas dictatorship, a "royal dictatorship". Gonatas, *Apomnemotata Stylianou Gonata 1897-1957*, p.384. Pipinelis, the trusted advisor and personal friend of the King stated bluntly the decisive involvement of the crown in the establishment of the dictatorship. The King's own opinion was that the "change" was the inevitable alternative to an "unstable" government. This view, of the nature of the Metaxas dictatorship, is reinforced by Nikolouides, the theoretician of the Metaxas regime and its propaganda minister: "And because Metaxas having been called by HM the King...(the) throne was closely and insolubly connected with the period of the 4th of August". The above were contained in telegram that Nikolouides had sent to the prime minister Tsouderos on October 10th, 1942. Copy of the same was despatched to the King who never disputed the implications of Nikolouides' statement. Theologos Nikolouides, *He Hellenike Krisis*, Cairo, 1945, p. 11. See also a little pamphlet by the liberal politician Makkas written in 1945. Leon Makkas, *He Ethnikai Agoniai kai Prosdokiai 1937-1945*, Athens, 1945, p. 88.

2. "Apart from the public debt, the largest single British interest is Whitehall Securities Limited, which has invested nearly £5 million in the lighting, tram and bus services of Athens. Another £5 millions is invested in loans to the chief Greek mortgage bank, Harbo's Bank, which has been the official Greek government banker abroad, is interested in Greek concerns to extent of over £1 million, placed in a chemical works and in laons to various branches of industry through an Anglo-Greek credit institution, the Hellenic and General Trust. A British bank, the Ionian Bank, Limited, is one of Greece's five largest banking institutions; other British companies have invested smaller sums in land reclamation, drainage and mining enterprises, and several British insurance companies have deposited in Greece the guarantee which the Greek government demands before permitting them to open agencies there. In all British capital sunk in private enterprises is though to ammount to nearly £15 millions". *National Archives of the United States*, R&A No. 2818. *British Policy toward Greece, 1941-1944*, p. 2.



of the Greek monarchy was associated with Greece's foreign indebtedness, with the British financial interests which were concerned with the safety of their investments in the country. The British financiers were anxious to have in Greece a strong and stable government which would meet Greece's external obligations without allowing any tampering with¹.

Greece, also was in the epicenter of Britain's Mediterranean defence system, an area particularly critical as far as London was concerned, since it did serve as the main arterial road for her to its possessions in the Middle East and the Indian ocean. Furthermore, the British Mediterranean Fleet which traditionally used the Greek anchorages and waters as its bases in the Levant was a powerful adjunct to the British designs in the whole of the Mediterranean basin. The greater area of Greece was also the arena of possible clash of interests, as it had been at times since the beginning of the nineteenth century, between Britain and the Soviet Union. The latter country was pressing for her legitimate interests in the area, a probable increase of her ability to move freely in the Mediterranean, an access to the areas of southern Europe and the Middle East.

In this context both the British and the American diplomatic representatives in Athens saw in the imposition of this military-monarchical dictatorship of Metaxas an assurance that London's intransigent position in Greece would be safeguarded. The "danger" of the country slipping to socialism, with all its ominous implications in as far as Britain was concerned, was averted. The American military attache in Athens seemed to be quite convinced on the importance of the alliance between the professional military and the crown:

As a French diplomat remarked to me in a conversation on the return of King George of Greece'. It is a triumph of Great Britain².

It would have been, indeed preposterous to associate a right-wing regime of the military with anything but London:

Regardless of the cabinet chosen, Greece's foreign policy will remain fundamentally unchanged. She is committed to England, which opportunely assisted in providing her with an English-minded King and recently exacted from her the use of five important Greek harbors as temporary British naval bases in case of war³.

1. *Ibid*, p. 12.

2. *Ibid*, Office of Naval Intelligence, RG 38, Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Attache Reports, No. 438, p. 2.

3. *Ibid*, Military Intelligence Division, Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs, RG 165, g-2 Report, 2657-V-656. Report by the American military attache to the War Department of February 20, 1936.



The ideological affinities of the new regime and its cadres, the support base of the officer corp with Hitler's Germany, viewing the latter as the possible victor over the Anglo-French, incurred for the military establishment of the Greek armed forces the mistrust of a wide spectrum of British and French officials¹. The military might of German militarism had adverse as far as the British were concerned effects on the Greek officer corp. More precisely, the leadership of the officer corp as it evolved after the 1935 purges was mentally receptive to a German victory over Britain and prone to a change of the British overseeing for a German domination². However, both the regime and

1. On account of the pronounced sentiments in favor of the Nazi regime by the functionaries of the Metaxas regime, at times the Anglo-French exhibited a suspicion toward the military establishment of Greece. For instance, information filtered to London concerning a proposal by Papagos, then C.-in-C. of the Greek armed forces, to general Weygard to have the French coordinate to defences of Yugoslavia and Greece. Knowing the British the tendencies of the Greek officer corp far better than their ally, the French, hastened to warn Paris on the wisdom of such a commitment: "This proposal, observed the Foreign Office on May 20, 1940, clearly has dangerous implications, we have no confirmation that General Metaxas was consulted by General Papagos but presumably latter would not have dared to send off this message on his own". British misconceptions were apparently upheld by the French as it can be seen by the following telegram of the Foreign Office to the British ambassador at Belgrade Sir R. Campbell: "Monsieur Deladier 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". British Foreign Office Document, 371/24915, folios 296, 297.

2. In a work written by a person closely associated with the king, either the court marshal Levides or the extremely intimate friend and advisor of the Crown Pipinelis, it is revealed that the allied headquarters, at the first days of the war, viewed with apprehension and were hesitant to overtures by the Greek general staff on cooperation against the Axis. The King, of course, had, in gathering of high ranking officers declared his conviction that the allies would be the ultimate victors at the war. "At this point the King realized that some of his listeners seemed to be doubt". The important element here was that the officers who were providing the base support of the royalist dictatorship were challenging the foreign policy of the country. Kodros, *Ho Niketes Basileus*, Athens, ?, pp. 28-29. On the same, the growing discontent of the officer corp with the British predominance in Greece and their belief in a German victory see the comments of one of the army's generals who comprised the Greek high command Lieutenant-general Tsolakoglou. The general's blunt pronouncements were uttered during the first months of the Second World War: "Now when we are seeing the rapid results against France it would be possible to change sides with the axis". G. Tsolakoglou, Lieutenant-general, *Apomnemoneumata Georgiou K. Tsolakoglou Antistrategou*, Athens, 1959, p. 13. Naturally, these sentiments of the Greek officer corp, affected adversely the relations of the British military with their counterparts in Greece: "My Air Attache, wrote the British ambassador in Angora Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen on June 11th, 1940, in the following despatch to the Foreign Office in London, states that the King of Greece stressed to him the importance of being kept informed



the officers were restrained in any overt commitments to Berlin because of the pragmatism which characterized Metaxas' foreign policy¹.

The fear of allied reprisals, which would have meant a wholesale reorganization and massive dismissals of the cadres of the officer corp and their replacement with the purged of 1935, determined the relations of the later with the Axis powers and above all with Berlin. The overwhelming realization that the country was exposed and was vulnerable to an Anglo-French naval intervention on the scale of the allied occupation of Macedonia and the islands in 1917, precluded any attempt to materialize any rapport with Germany. So much so that the French high command² with the knowledge of 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 and the strategic anchorages of Argostoli and the Bay of Navarino³.

of any plans 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 152.

1. However, some of the institutions which were more than anything else identified with the dictatorship like the secret police whose function as the watchdog of the regime was systematized under the notorious Maniadakis were infiltrated by German agents. Sir Michael Palàiret, the British ambassador in Athens made this report on the matter to London: "The regime in Grece like that in Germany depends for its maintenance in power very largely on secret police and the Germans have carefully build up close relations with the Greek police over a number of years. The result is that we have already have reason to suspect that a considerable ammount of information about allied activities in Greece is passed on by certain Greek police to the German authorities". *Ibid.*, 371/24915, folio 16.

2. *Ibid.*, 371/24915, folio 311.

3. During the Italo-Ethiopian crisis of 1935-36, the British Navy, at the recommendation of the First Sea Lord Chatfield had proposed that the British use as an advance base for their operations port "X" a code name for the bay of Navarino. They seemed ready to use that fine Fleet anchorage with or without the permission of the Greek government. "I do not know if Greece will give us Port "X", but I shall not hesitate (nor will the cabinet) to seize it. So you can really on that". From a communication of Lord Chatfield to the naval Commander-in-Chief in Mediterranean W.W. Fisher on August 25th, 1935. A. J. Marder, *From the Dardanelles to Oran*, (London, 1974), p. 70, footnote 14. For more details on the role of the British Navy at that crisis see an article by the same author in the *American Historical Review*. A. J. Marder, "The Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36". *American Historical Review*, LXXV (July, 1970), 1327-56.

