

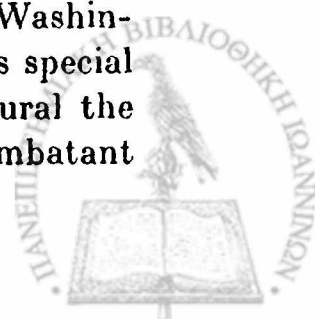
J. MALAKASSES

LONDON'S DIPLOMACY ON GREECE IN 1944.
THE THREE ALLIED POWER'S POSITION ON THE BRITISH
RIGHT TO INTERVENE IN GREECE.

A study based on the pertinent American archival sources.

Traditional right-wing historiography has advanced over the years at times forcefully, the myth of the existence of a formal binding agreement between the USSR and the British over the celebrated partition of the Balkans in 1944. More precisely referring to the «assignment» of Rumania and Greece respectively to the spheres of influence and dominion of USSR and Britain. Nevertheless, nowhere is referred the role of the United States in the momentous events which mark the Greek history of the time. An omission of the first magnitude since for all intents and purposes, the Roosevelt administration not only became a part in the British-Soviet understanding on the Balkans but it was instrumental in the detailed tailoring and step by step evolution of the first phase of that diplomatic *coup d'etat* by the Foreign Office on Greece. The American approval became the necessary foundation stone for the launching of the British offensive in Greece and was a *sine qua non* before the Soviet Union could accept the British proposals.

American consent, however, was secured at a high price for the British. President Roosevelt, who becomes then the architect of a new American policy in the area of Eastern Mediterranean, whose logical fulfilment would be the Truman dogma, three years later, imposed precise terms and exacted definite rights for the United States in the process. America not only was being acknowledged as an arbitrator by the Soviet Union, since its consent was judged necessary before the striking of any agreement, but it was accorded by London an indisputable position of authority over the Greek affairs, to that an extent that we can dare say that Washington becomes Britain's co-partner in eastern Mediterranean. Its special interests there were internationally then affirmed making natural the transition with the Truman doctrine in her new role as a co-combatant



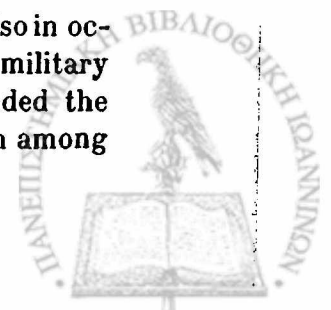
in the Greek civil war, a conflict whose antecedents had their roots in the rights accorded and shared amongst Britain and the United States.

The prelude to the American military intervention in Greece in early 1947 derives its origin in the British - American concert of 1944. The gradual delegation of power in the Balkans by the British to Washington was one aspect of the overall diminution of power by London. Up to that period, and the war had intensified it, the British were firmly entrenched in Greece. Since the fall of 1943 unforeseen and dramatic changes had characterized the Greco-British relations. Following the capitulation of Greece to Axis on 1941 the British had extended by leaps and bounds their hold over the Greek affairs abroad as represented by the Greek government in exile. In the fall months of 1943 the direct British intervention in smashing the insurrection of the Greek armed forces in the Middle East signaled the new turn of events. A major change of policy occurs, the British assuming a direct role in the administration of the Greek establishment abroad the government in exile and its armed forces. That was the outgrowth of the political transformation which had been taking place in Greece and among the Greek forces abroad, an indigenous nationalist movement which was rejecting all vestiges of foreign domination, foremost the British sway over Greece.

Because of that the British rapport with the resistance movements in Greece were at best problematic if not outright hostile. The phenomenal expansion of the EAM's movement was most ominous to the British declared policies. EAM's declared aim to institute wholesale social, political and economic reforms, inevitable meant the reorientation of the country's foreign policy, i.e., the challenge of foreign tutelage practiced up to that time. In that sense British interests in the area of eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East could be jeopardised.

Beginning 1944 the prevailing dogma overshadowing the Greco-British relations was the by all means crushing of the EAM and the annihilation and wiping out of its military counterpart, the ELAS. In that endeavour London had as its more that willing allies and apologists the Greek government of Tsouderos and the royalist remnants of the Metaxas dictatorship clustered around the nominal head of the Greek government in exile, king George II. In the first phase of the campaign against the EAM in Greece proper, the numerous British military missions¹ ma-

1. Not only in Cairo was the administration controlled by the British but also in occupied Greece they extended a decisive influence. For instance there were 53 military missions in Greece while only 19 in Yugoslavia. As a British author commended the Yugoslav communists were amazed with the amount of British control, even among



nipulated the mushrooming of Greek «resistance» to counter the threat of the EAM, and in that Greek phase of the conflict to use those organizations to dismantle the EAM militarily and to discredit it politically with the rank and file of the Greek people. The civil war raging in Greece since the fall of 1943 had its origin and owed its sustenance to the deliberate policies of the British missions to get rid of the EAM with as less as possible use of direct British power.

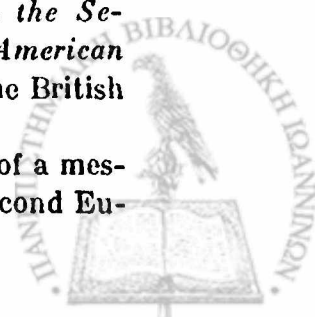
To that end no effort was spared to gain the mantle of an allied sanction. The Foreign Office sought the assent, if not the moral support of the United States and the Soviet Union on its hard line policy on Greece. Initially it was judged appropriate to have the allied endorsement of the British attempts to bring the EAM under its control by diplomatic means after the former would have been brought to its knees by the coordinated activities of the rival «resistance» organizations fanned into action by the British missions. Washington, in spite of the serious apprehensions voiced by the State Department about providing the British with a free hand in Greece did not object because of the personal intervention of President Roosevelt. The Soviet Union refused to become a party to the British-Tsouderos conspiracy on Greece. Not unjustifiably, Molotov suspected that EAM's destruction would have heralded British inroads into the Balkans establishing the old order which at best was inimical to USSR's expanded role in the area. Nevertheless, the Soviet reaction was surprisingly moderate, and in essence indicative of Moscow's neutrality on the issue.

Not having the necessary information about the situation in Greece and not au courant with all events which have taken place among Greek guerillas, the Soviet Government are unable at the present time to express their opinion on Mr. Tsouderos' appeal about the uniting of the various Partisan groups on occupied Greek territory which are fighting amongst themselves on this subject¹.

Moreover, the «hands off» attitude of the Soviet Union was quite significant in as far as the ties of that country with the EAM were con-

the EAM forces. «When Tito's representative ... first visited E.L.A.S. headquarters in the summer of 1943, he was deeply shocked by the degree of British influence on E.L.A.S. and the way in which E.L.A.S. allowed British officers to interfere in their internal affairs». E. Barker, *British Policy in South - East Europe in the Second World War*, London, 1976, p. 167. See also Hoxha's, *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania*, Tirana, 1982, where in the most illustrative manner the British machinations are exposed.

1. National Archives of the United States, Department of State. Text of a message left with the British chargé d' affaires at Moscow by the head of the second European division on December 25, 1943.

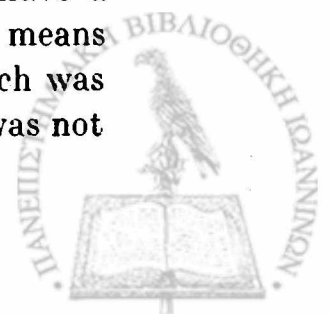


cerned, demonstrating plainly that no visible influence was exercised by Moscow in Greece.

This coordinated effort by Britain did not make any progress toward arresting the expansion of the EAM or even less of destroying it. On the contrary the deterioration of the state of open warfare in Greece was making the position of the British there precarious. The British plan was bumeranging. Anti-British resentment among the Greek forces in exile rose to that an extent in the spring of 1944 as to manifest itself in a series of rebellions against the British. The armed rebellions in the midst of the war against the British meddling in the Greek affairs, culminating in the naval rebellion of April of 1944, brought home to the British the folly of their anti - EAM campaign. Only drastic and immediate action could save the British designs, an action where British forces would be the principal factors. In that respect the assistance of the Soviet Union by Britain was deemed indispensable. The inroads of the Soviet armies into Balkans at the wake of the fleeing German army had brought Soviet influence to bear upon heavily in any developments in the area. Furthermore, the ideological affinity of the EAM with the Soviet Union and the prestige that the latter enjoyed among its leadership extended to the rank and file of the movement, made Moscow a power to be reckoned in any attempt to reshape post-war Greece.

British-Soviet deliberations on the initiative of London began at a frantic pace in early May 1944 just a few days after the British forces aided by Greek loyalists had put down the naval rebellion in Alexandria, the greatest and most awerosome and defiant challenge against the British authority ever to be mounted. Immediate action and stiff resolution was demanded by the British if they wanted to maintain even a modicum of influence in post-war Greece. At that instance the Soviet Union had taken an ambivelant stand, severely criticizing the bloody intervention by the British without at the same time offering any diplomatic assistance to the EAM or any moral sustainance to the forces clamoring for an end of the British tutelage. For in Greece the EAM had founded a rival government to that in exile, which due to the immense prestige enjoyed by the former and the actual authority it exercised all over Greece, was a truly representative administration especially in comparison with the puppet regime of Cairo.

At this conjunction it seemed appropriate to the British to have a free hand to deal with all emergencies and secure by diplomatic means the establishment of a subservient to them regime in Greece which was expected to be liberated within a few months. The Soviet Union was not



at all disamenable to the British proposals for the granting and recognition of the special status of England in Greece. London was in turn «offering» similar assurances to the Russians in Rumania. The package deal advanced by Churchill and known as «Purely Practical War Time Arrangements»¹, was according to the two governments «the lead» in Greece and Rumania respectively. According to the British ambassador by the Greek government in exile Mr. Leeper, «this arrangement would provide for British support of Russian initiative in Rumania and Russian support of British initiative in Greece»². For obvious reasons the Foreign Office was eager to make the distinction and qualify the proposed agreement as a temporary one not presupposing the creation of any spheres of influence in the region. «But there would be no question of dividing the Balkans into spheres of influence»³.

Soviet formal adherence to the «arrangement» was however, withheld, the Soviets demanding that the U.S. bestow its approval on the «arrangement». The United States benevolence was sought just as to ensure the success of the venture, making Washington a part to it and thus satisfying her interests there. Also British designs could be harnessed and even difused by the official association of the United States with this «understanding». And finally any misgivings that Washington could have would be set at ease. And misgivings there were. Prime Minister Churchill was now obliged to call Washington's attention on the proposed British-Soviet arrangement and the Russian reservations therein. In a telegram to President Roosevelt, on May 31, 1944, Churchill advised the President on the British proposals asking for Washington's endorsement. It was a decision prompted by the fact that indeed intimate relations existed among the two and in the past the President had overruled State Department's objections over the British policies in Greece. State Department's advise to the president when the matter was reffered to it was negative in the sense that maintaining its consistent policies on the issue was refusing to become a part to the British designs on Greece. Secretary Hull in his responce to the White House «flatly opposed any division of Europe or sections of Europe into spheres of influence». British plans seemed that had backfired, since the president was not at this stage willing to countermand the advice of his foreign policy planners and rejected Churchill's overtures. On June 12, two days after the presidential reply the

1. *Ibid.* RG 218, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Leahy file 139. Telegram by Mr. MacVeagh to the Secretary of State of June 26, 1944.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*



State Department had a note delivered to the British embassy in Washington along the same lines. It is worth noticing that this memorandum had had the previous approval of the president.

The American rebuffal, given the crisis in Greece did not dissuade Churchill. Three days after the initial American response had been received in London, the British prime minister resubmitted his plans to president Roosevelt. According to Lord Halifax, Britain's ambassador in Washington, basic alterations were effected in the original proposals. Halifax in a letter to Cordell Hull communicated the new version of the British plan:

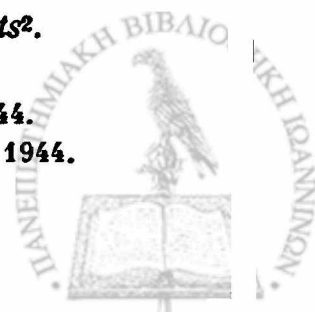
On June 15 Lord Halifax informed me of Mr. Churchill's proposal direct to you that the arrangements be tried out for three months, subject then to review by the three powers¹.

This communication, was the last thing that the head of the State Department was to hear on the matter until a telegram from Mr. MacVeagh America's ambassador by the Greek government in Cairo arrived informing the certainly bewildered secretary that an agreement had been arrived at on the matter, with the approval of the United States. Mr. MacVeagh himself was told by Mr. Leeper of what had taken place, and being at ignorance of any change of American policy on Greece, was asking for advice «since (the) agreement runs contrary to my understanding of the situation, derived from recent advices circulated through the Department's information service.» Referring to the original phase of the negotiations, which he obviously had no previous knowledge he related in the telegram the British version of the proceedings:

My British colleague has recently several times spoken to me of a proposal for what he called a «purely practical war time agreement» between the British and Russian Governments whereby the latter would take the lead in Rumania; the former in Greek affairs. This arrangement, he said, would provide for British support of Russian initiative in Rumania and Russian support of British initiative in Greece, but there would be no question of dividing the Balkans into spheres of influence. He said that the matter had been laid before the Department, since Moscow had reserved full acceptance pending agreement by the United States Government, and he promised to keep me informed of developments².

1. *Ibid.* Letter of Mr. Cordell Hull to President Roosevelt of June 29, 1944.

2. *Ibid.* Telegram by Mr. MacVeagh to the Secretary of State of June 26, 1944.



On June 19, 1943, Mr. MacVeagh, was told by Mr. Leeper that not with standing the previous reservations all difficulties had been ironed out and the American government had given its endorsement of the British-Soviet «arrangement» on Greece:

He has now read me a telegram, dated June 19, from the Foreign Office in London to its Embassy in Moscow, and at my request has confirmed this to me in a personal note dated yesterday the 24th, according to which the United States Government «after some delay» has agreed to the arrangement...¹

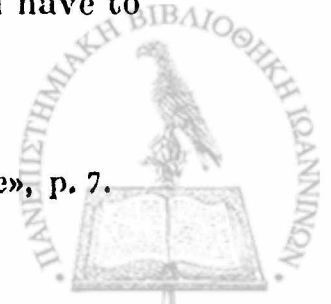
The «arrangement» in question was a far cry from the original document submitted by Churchill. In its new form fully acknowledged the special interests of the United States in the area, and made any Soviet-British war time agreement subject to American veto. «At President Roosevelt's insistence», the British agreed, that it (proposed agreement), should not extend beyond the circumstances for which it was devised». And just to prevent any «misunderstandings» and to make «double sure», in the words of Mr. Leeper, that London would honor its end of the bargain and not considered it as licence to run at will the Greek affairs, «the arrangement should be subject to revision after three months». The cardinal point of the new arrangement was, of course, the categorical assurance drawn from the British government that «it should not lead (the arrangement) to the division of the Balkans into spheres of influence»². Equally important in the future ramifications was the inserted clause that the British scheme, «would not affect the rights and responsibilities which each of the three great powers would exercise at the peace table»³.

The amazement of the American ambassador at Cairo Mr. Mac Veagh at the news was understandable in the context of the circumstances surrounding the new negotiations between Churchill and President Roosevelt. Indeed, the American president having exacted a heavy toll by the British had unilaterally, without the knowledge of the Department of State, consented to the much sought by London plan of action in Greece. The British position had been modified to such an extent as to satisfy American interests in the area, and to accord, in the most explicit manner, a paramount authority to Washington in the shapping of the post-war Balkans, above all in the area designated as Britain special preserve, Greece. President Roosevelt in granting his consent he exacted British promises that further British unilateral action in Greece would have to be subject to and depending upon American confirmation.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.* Joint Chiefs of Staff, «The British Probable Position in Greece», p. 7.



Confronted with the news of the existence of those binding obligations to uphold the British undertaking in Greece, Secretary Hull called on the President for directions in «order that appropriate instructions, in amendment of the telegrams already despatched, can be sent to Mr. MacVeagh and the other Chiefs of Mission dealing with these questions». More plainly Hull was inquiring the particulars of the presidential consent:

From information furnished to Mr. MacVeagh by the British it would appear that some change has been made in our position, although I have not been informed of your views of this new aspect of the question.

I should be grateful if you would let me know what changes have been made in our position...¹

The White House in confirming the existence of the tripartite understanding, was at pains to make the distinction that the United States was not a part to the British sponsored scheme. That that was «an arrangement between the British and Russian Governments relative to Greek and Rumanian affairs.» This was only technically correct. For the United States had, for all intents and purposes, been tossed in the inter-power conflict over the Balkans, and to such an extent that its newly acquired responsibilities, were to become the natural forerunners of her military intervention in the same country three years later with the celebrated Truman Doctrine.

However, the greatest success of the British diplomacy, in this vicious circle of bloody encounters between the liberation movement of the EAM and the British, was yet to come. A masterpiece of the cunning policies of London was a new «agreement», which was to be concocted in Moscow. The «grace period» of the three months of the previous British-Soviet arrangement had expired and the EAM's influence and established authority, in spite the serious setbacks suffered at the negotiation table where their folly had lead them, with the British who on the basis of their accorded mandate acted as the prime force on Greece, was spreading like wild fire all over Greece. The diplomatic concessions and agreements alone entered in by the EAM leaders could not guarantee the British appointed government of Papandreou and its sponsors a free hand in Greece. The first «Greek» government to be installed in Athens following the withdrawal of the Germans, would be simply devoid of any public support relying solely on British military might.

1. *Ibid.* Letter of Cordel Hull to President Roosevelt of June 29, 1944.



The day of reckoning of the British with the EAM's forces and institutions developed was fatefully closing in. Britain was confronted with the almost certain task of an inevitable military confrontation in Greece if she was to maintain her predominance. The commencement of a warfare by regular British forces on Greek territory against the greatest of the resistance movements of the land could have had immense international repercussions, if the Soviet Union was to part with her policy of no intervention. Churchill and Eden boldly decided to neutralize the Soviet threat by securing the advance approbation of that country.

On October 9, 1944 a new «understanding» was reached in Moscow between Churchill and Stalin. At a meeting there AN INFORMAL UNDERSTANDING was arrived upon according to which: «... if the British found it necessary to take military action to quell internal disorders in Greece, the Soviets would not interfere. The British gave similar assurances to the USSR regarding maintainance of order by the Soviets in Rumania»¹.

A few days later, October 12, 1944, the advance party of the British expeditionary forces accompanied by the Greek government in exile, landed in Athens, under the overall military command of lieutenant-general Ronald Scobbie, who was also the head of the whatever Greek forces could be marshalled by the Greek government in exile after the great purges in 1943 and 1944. Within the space of almost fifty days war had erupted in Greece with the forces of the EAM farring badly in the face of a well-coordinated assault by the superior in means and fire power troops of the British viceroy .

British aims seemed achieved and well secured. The bloody encounters in Athens and in the country-side adding misery and destruction to the already ravaged by the war land, were not but the prelude to a most ruthless civil war which was to be fought for four years. The place of the British was now taken by the Americans, who-indeed forcefully-kept Greece within their sphere of influence.

The two «arrangements» concluded by the British with the Soviet Union cannot and are not by any stretch of the imagination to be taken as specific agreements pertaining to the division of the Balkans into spheres of influence. The theory perpetuated by the established historiography about the percentages, Stalin's slipping a piece of paper to

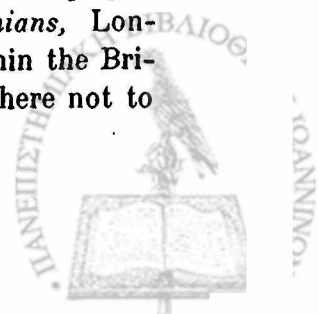
1. *Ibid.* «The British Probable Position in Greece», p. 7.

2. See among others the work of Iatrides, J. Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens*, Princeton, 1972, p. 115. The authority exercised by Scobbie was indeed that of a viceroy, no action could be taken except as directed by the British general».



Churchill¹ about spheres of interests or mandates in the Balkans are simply absurd. Nothing of this nature ever existed, invented later to discredit internationally and assign responsibility, if not take the guilt away from the British, on the Soviet Union for the methodical annihilation of the truly reformist movement the greatest that the land ever known, the EAM.

1. Not only reactionary historians like Kousoulas have advanced the myth of the percentages, «Churchill... wrote on a piece of paper the percentages of the respective responsibilities of Britain and the USSR in the Danubian-Balkan region. Stalin merely wrote on the paper a mark of approval» George Kousoulas, *Revolution and Defeat*, London, 1965, p. 195. Also moderates like S. Xydis, *Greece and the Great Powers, 1944-1947*, Saloniki, 1963, speak of «percentages», although more cautiously and with less vehemence. However, the most astounding version of the events and interpretation comes from an American educated and British employed Albanian expatriate Anton Logoreci. Mr. Logoreci in his work, *The Albanians*, London, 1977 says the following: «After recognizing that Greece came within the British sphere of influence, Stalin had asked the ELAS communist forces there not to seize power but to cooperate with the government in Athens.», p. 81.



APPENDIX¹

1. National Archives of the United States, RG 18, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Leahy File 139.



Secretary of State
Washington.

GREEK

203, June 26, noon.

Cairo

Dated June 26, 1944

My British colleague has recently several times spoken to me of a proposal for what he called a «purely practical war time arrangement» between the British and Russian Governments whereby the latter would take the lead in Rumania; the former in Greek affairs. This arrangement he said, would provide for British support of Russian initiative in Rumania and Russian support of British initiative in Greece, but there would be no question of dividing the Balkans into spheres of influence. He said that the matter had been laid before the Department, since Moscow had reserved full acceptance pending agreement by the United States Government, and he promised to keep me informed of developments.

He has now read me a telegram, dated June 19, from the Foreign Office in London to its Embassy in Moscow, and at my request has confirmed this to me in a personal note dated yesterday the 24th, according to which the United States Government «after some delay» has agreed to the arrangement on the understanding that «it should not extend beyond the circumstances for which it was devised and should not lead to the division of the Balkans into spheres of influence». His note adds that «to make doubly sure» it is agreed that «the arrangement should be subject to revision after three months».

As his information that the United States has given its agreement runs contrary to my own understanding of the situation, derived from recent advices circulated through the Department's information service, and as the matter is one of specific importance to this Embassy, I would appreciate the Department's comments and instructions.

Repeated to Moscow.

MACVEAGH



My dear Mr. President:

June 29, 1944

I am enclosing herewith a copy of a telegram just received from Ambassador MacVeagh at Cairo reporting that he has been informed by his British colleague that the American Government has agreed to the proposal for an arrangement between the British and Russian Governments whereby they would respectively take the lead in Greek affairs and Rumanian affairs, our agreement, according to this information, being subject to the understanding that the arrangement should not extend beyond the circumstances for which it was devised and should not lead to the division of the Balkans into spheres of influence, and with the further provision that the arrangement should be subject to review after three months.

This is the project to which I referred in my letter of June 17 and which goes back to Mr. Churchill's telegram 687 of May 31. You will recall that the Department suggested a draft reply to Mr. Churchill's telegram which I think you despatched on or about June 10. On June 12 the Department delivered to the British Embassy a memorandum in the same sense, the draft of which had been submitted to you for approval, and subsequently the substance of this communication was telegraphed to the American Chiefs of Mission primarily concerned with matters of this kind.

On June 15 Lord Halifax informed me of Mr. Churchill's proposal direct to you that the arrangement be tried out for three months, subject then to review by the three powers. From information furnished to Mr. MacVeagh by the British it would appear that some change has been made in our position, although I have not been informed of your views on this new aspect of the question.

I should be grateful if you would let me know what changes have been made in our position, in order that appropriate instructions, in amendment of the telegrams already despatched, can be sent to Mr. MacVeagh and the other Chiefs of Mission dealing with these questions.

The President
The White House

Faithfully Yours
/s/Cordell Hull

