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THE GREEK NAVY
DURING THE WAR IN METROPOLITAN GREECE.
ITS DISINTEGRATION AND SUBSEQUENT EXODUS TO EGYPT
IN APRIL OF 1941

By the beginning of 1940, notwithstanding whatever reservations the British policy makers had nourished on the ideology of the Metaxas regime, and its loyalty to the western interests as well as the caliber of the administrators who staffed it, they tended to be satisfied by the potential abiding of the dictator to the requirements of the British policies on Greece. The Foreign Office and the British ambassador in Athens Sir Michael Palairet were quite and increasingly satisfied, by the «firmness» of the regime toward the Italians, that Athens, would not submit, by diplomatic pressure alone, to the demands of the Axis and renounce its pro-British course.

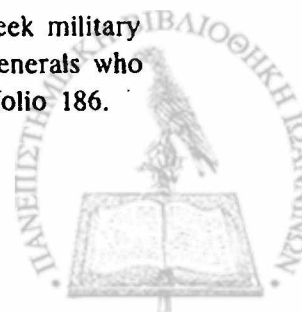
The prevailing doctrine of the Foreign Office governing its policies with the Metaxas regime in Athens, evolved on the pragmatic assumption that the dictatorship in Greece following the purge of the officer corp in 1935, was of a far greatest advantage to the British interests, than anything else available:

From our point of view a revolution would, of course, be against our interests no matter how well disposed the rebels were toward us, and we should do nothing whatever to encourage it. It would almost certainly involve a period of internal chaos which might expose Greece to external pressure in a way detrimental both to her own and our own interests¹.

The British military attache was confident that the officer corp was loyal to the regime, which was tantamount to the conclusion that its vested interests were placing it, tooth and nail, on the side of the dictatorship. «The present military chiefs are King's men and to a certain extent Metaxas men also»².

1. Foreign Office, 371/24909, folio 138. Communication by the Counselor at the British embassy Carcia to the British Consul-General at Salonica E.O. Hole of December 21st, 1939.

2. These conclusions have been generally accepted by the rank and file of the Greek military and by all the authors who have written on the subject. A prime example of the generals who perfectly fit in this category are Lieutenant Generals Pitsikas and Tsolakoglou. *Ibid*, folio 186.



And while admitting that among those purged belonged some «of the best generals and staff officers», the British military expert concluded that the regime was so entrenched that a violent swing against it by the purged officers would have adverse results for the country and the British interests.

On the other hand, Metaxas withstanding veiled German overtures¹, to abrogate the British guarantees extended to Greece in 1939, unilaterally, in his official contacts with the British went out of his way to reaffirm his loyalty to London. On August 13th, 1940, two days prior to the Italian provocation at Tenos, the sinking by an Italian submarine of the Greek light cruiser *Hele*, Metaxas in a discussion with Sir Palaret, had declared, once again, his determination «to remain firm in the face of Italian attitude»². This resolution to defy the Italian challenges reinforced the confidence of the British on the steadfastness of the regime, to keep faith with the western allies. «Please, inform President of the Council, telegraphed the Foreign Office in London, subsequently to this Metaxas reaffirmation, on August 17th, 1940, of the satisfaction with which I have learnt of his determination to remain firm in face of Italian attitude whatever it may prove to be»³.

Beginning, with the second fortnight of August 1940, Metaxas' communication with the British officials in Athens were a daily occurrence. As the conflict with Italy seemed inescapable, means were discussed and plans elaborated on the best possible assistance that the British could provide. And the only immediate sign of a practical forthcoming aid, would have been initially at least, the naval protection by the British Fleet in Alexandria under Sir Andrew Cunningham. For the existing standard plans of the British Admiralty had provided all along for unilateral action on the part of the British Fleet to deny Crete to Italians:

Meanwhile the three Commanders-in-Chief were ordered to prepare an expedition to occupy Crete and Melos. A message received by me

1. Report by Sir Palaret to the Foreign Office of August 21st, 1940. Foreign Office, 371/24917, folio 137. It is worth emphasizing that these German proposals, had never assumed a categorical character or the form of a demand. German diplomacy was convinced that the *volte face* of Metaxas would have been indeed impossible given the vulnerability of Metaxas to the British sea power in spite the assertions of a historian of the German campaign in the Balkans. Martin van Greveld, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941. The Balkan Clue*, Cambridge, 1973, pp. 131-132.

2. Foreign Office, 371/24917, folio 19.

3. *Ibid*, folio 33. Communication addressed by the Foreign Office to Sir Palaret to be conveyed personally by him to Metaxas.



in May ran: If Greek territory is attacked by Italy, expeditions to Crete are to start immediately without further reference to London or Paris'.

More importantly, the plans of Admiral Cunningham, as he disclosed them to the Admiralty, in the event of an Italian attack on Greece had as the initial object of the British Fleet under his command to «secure control of the sea communications in Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean, and to cut off Italian supplies to the Dodecanese». This form of aid was to become the fundamental policy of the British diplomacy in its dealings with Metaxas. The British Fleet's contribution to Greece's war with Italy would have been of paramount value: «British naval effort, wrote Admiral Cunningham in a communication to the Admiralty on May 24th, 1940, on behalf of Greece will in fact be considerable since our naval forces should not only preclude any large scale invasion of their coast but will keep open their lines of communication in the Aegean»².

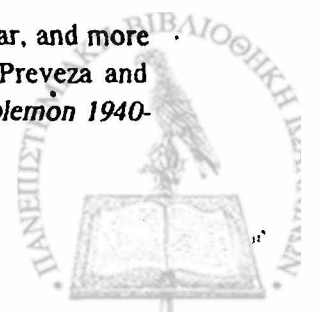
This naval protection was of the utmost significance for Greece, given the extent of the Greek coast, the dependence of the Greek Army in Epirus on the sea lanes for supplies and the transportation of reserves, and the safety of Greece's western coasts and the Ionian Islands from the overwhelming superiority of the Italian Navy. All the more so if the Italian modern units assembled at Taranto were to be matched with the Greek Fleet³.

The coverage of Greece's vulnerable flank and the protection of its sea communications was officially undertaken by the British naval forces in Mediterranean. However, it came about not as a product of staff negotiations of the two Admiralties, but as it was usually the case with the precarious Anglo-Greek relations by a unilateral commitment to Metaxas on the part of the White Hall. It was above all part of the overall British Naval strategy in Mediterranean and consequently originated with the British naval C.-in.-C. Mediterranean. Admiral Cunningham had communicated this to the Admiralty and this strategy approved by London was made known to the Greek government a few days later:

1. Andrew Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, London, 1951-1956, p. 230. French forces were also to participate making this an allied expedition but the overall command would be under the British.

2. Foreign Office, 371/24915, folio 308. Communication by the naval C.-in.-C. Mediterranean to the Admiralty in London of August 25th, 1940.

3. On the inefficiency of the Greek submarine operations at the outbreak of the war, and more so of the couple of submarines detailed for patrol at the approaches to the port of Preveza and the gulf of Patras see D. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, 2 vols. vol. 1, Athens, 1954, pp. 81-88.



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

This British pledge for an «alliance», to be based on the naval might of England in Mediterranean was not be implemented to its logical end, staff negotiations with the two respective Navies. It was kept as a kind of personal guarantee extended to Metaxas personally. The British ambassador in Athens Sir Palairet on August 28, 1940, writing to the Foreign Office noted this «arrangement, implying that it was the British naval protection that was uplifting the spirits of Metaxas». «Latter (British naval assurances) gave him (Metaxas) the greatest satisfaction particularly assurances as to the possibility of action of the West Ionian and in the Adriatic»². Metaxas was adamant in his decision to keep those commitments from becoming known. The British ambassador on August 24th, 1940, had to transmitt to London a request by Metaxas imploring the British government not to initiate steps «of any kind to help Greece whether in Greece or elsewhere, until hostilities had actually broken out»³.

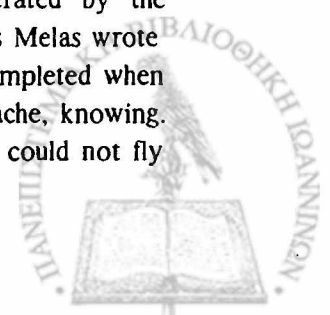
Not surprsingly, the Greek Naval Staff proceeded cautiously to bring to a war footing the Greek Navy on the face of the inevitable by now conflict with Italy. The four destroyers of Balkan wars vintage, *Aetos*, *Ierax*, *Panther* and *Leon* were reactivated and a number of reserve officers were called to colors. And this had to be executed with the utmost precaution so as not to offend the Italians, who, of course, knew⁴ of these developments. Admiral Kavvadias

1. Foreign Office, 371/24918, folio 5. Communication by the C.-in-C. Mediterranean to the Admiralty in London of August 26th, 1940.

2. Foreign Office, 371/24918, folio 77. Communication by Sir Palairet to the Foreign Office of August 28, 1940.

3. *Ibid*, Communication by Sir Palairet to the Foreign Office of August 28th, 1940. 371/24918, folio 77.

4. Due to the internal nature of the regime the Axis espionage was rampart in the country. See a paranthetical comment by Lieutenant-General Vernardos about the «numerous official and obscure Italian spies, agents and propagandists operating in Greece and tolerated by the administration». I. Vernardos, *Davakes-Pindos*, 2nd ed., Athens, 1945, p. 25. Spyros Melas wrote on the same subject the following: «How could these necessary preparations be completed when even a launch could not depart from the pier, without Morin, the Italian naval attache, knowing. An officer in the Ministry of the Navy told me characteristically: 'Even a moscito could not fly



was to admit later the government was conducting this operation clandestinely, since it did not want to provide the Italians with any pretext¹.

By the end of September 1940, the Navy had recalled all of the reserve officers that it was to use during the Greco-Italian war a total of one hundred and thirteen in all. A large percentage of those officers were older men, not of the purged of 1935, high ranking officers, nine admirals and twenty one captains. They were drafted to staff desk office jobs, to fill auxiliary positions, and because of their loyalty to the regime and the King to share the British subsidised war time effort.

The Fleet was crippled by lack of capable officers to man the ships taken out of mothball. The need was striking in officers of lower rank who were to take charge of the small vessels and the land fortifications. The *coup d'etat* of 1935 had resulted in the cashiering of 31% of the available and highly trained officers of the Fleet. Those officers could hardly have been replaced in spite the assertions of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy General Papavasileiou², even if the Naval Academy had quadrupled the number of cadets, in the time between the officers purges and the outbreak of the war.

The Fleet was ill staffed and «the only considerable numerical reinforcement in officers of the Fleet came from the last two classes of cadets in the Naval Academy»³. Notwithstanding this critical shortage of trained personnel, the naval hierarchy, and more particularly Rear-Admiral Sakellariou, C.-in.-C. of the Naval Staff were encountering opposition on the part of the hard core of the established officer corp⁴ who had benefited in rank and seniority by the removal of their peers, and reluctantly recalled to active duty, as reserves a number of the «cashiered of 1935». And of those drafted, their vast majority was explicitly denied any Fleet posts, assigned instead to secondary land positions⁵. The naval staff and above all the Chief of the Fleet Admiral Kavvadias, obstinantly refused to place the reserve officers onboard the ships of the Fleet.

The initial initiative for the recall of a limited number of officers to fill the land vacancies in the naval fortifications around Piraeus and other points of

without Morin having been informed in advance'». S. Melas, *He Doxa tou 1940. Sta Vouna kai sta Pelaga*, 2nd ed., Athens, 1970, pp. 56-57.

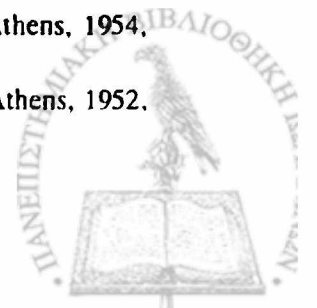
1. E. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 hopos ton ezesa*, Athens, 1950, p. 149.

2. Ippokrates Papavasileiou, *To Nautikon mas kata ten Propolemiken kai ten Polemiken Periodon 1936-41*, Athens, 1945, p. 5.

3. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 hopos ton ezesa*, p. 150.

4. I. Toumbas, *Echros en Opsei. Anamneseis tou Deuterou Pagosmiou Polemou*, Athens, 1954, p. 4.

4. *Ibid.*; K. Alexandris, *To Nautikon mas kata ten Polemiken Periodon 1941-45*, Athens, 1952, p. 12. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 hopos ton Hezesa*, p. 151.



importance rested with Admiral Sakellariou. The C.-in-C.'s proposal raised a storm of protests in the naval officer corp. In a collective manner reminiscent of the decade of the twenties the officers appealed to the «Supreme Naval Council», a most conservative body, for redress demanding the annulment of the orders for the recall of their former colleagues. This fanaticism of the ultras and their not so veiled mutiny was fanned by officers like Admiral Oikonomou the titular Head of the Navy¹.

The case of Lieutenant-Commander Melissinos who had retired from active service due to 1935 upheavals, illustrates, vividly, the callousness of the regime and its steadfastness to retain the ideological «purity» of the officer corp intact, at the risk of jeopardizing the fighting capabilities of the nation. Melissinos, on the first day of the outbreak of the war with Italy, volunteered his services and his expertise the later deemed by the Greek Admiralty of the highest order, since Melissinos in conjunction with the naval staff, had prepared the plans for the use of the Greek Merchant Marine in the mobilization of the land forces. He was flatly turned down and to the protestations of Admiral Sakellariou that he was indispensable it was argued that the UnderSecretary of the Navy could have misinterpreted such a move since Melissinos had been sent in the immediate past in administrative exile.

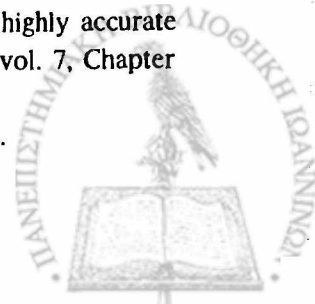
Nevertheless, the gross inability of the pertinent staff to deal with the task and the dire need to expedite the mobilization, forced Admiral Sakellariou to ignore the Ministerial displeasure and to recall immediately not only Melissinos but along with him a number of other reserve officers used by him in the preparation of the mobilization plans. But only in a civilian capacity as technical advisor and only when this scheme also proved unworkable Melissinos was reinstated as full fledged reserve officer². Exactly the same fate had befallen Captain Alexandris the highest ranking officer of the «cashiered» of 1935, to be permitted to reenlist, «after his laborious attempts» but who unlike Melissinos was to retain his civilian status working as manager of a powder factory³.

To such extremes this phobia of the dictatorship toward the officers who were volunteering extended, that the Ministry of Security under Maniades

1. Toumbas, *Echthros en Opsei. Anamneseis tou Deuterou Pagosmiou Polemou*, p. 4.

2. I. G. Melissinos, Lieutenant-Commander, *Historia tou Polemou* is an unpublished corpus of seven volumes, consisting of official documents, personal recollections and correspondence with naval and political personalities of the period. Well bound by the author, the late Melissinos, was graciously given to me by his wife Madame Henrietta Melissinos to be used and to be utilized, at the interceding of the late Captain Petropoulos. This extremely vital, original and highly accurate source will be used by me throughout this work. Melissinos, *Historia tou Polemou*, vol. 7, Chapter «Obstacles in the Mission of the General Naval Staff», p. 3.

3. Alexandris, *To Nautikon mas kata ten Polemiken Periodon 1941-45*, p. 12.



had been specifically ordered to investigate any «numerous enlistments by either volunteers or reserves with suspicious pasts or antinational activities»¹. Metaxas and the Crown² were thus striving to retain the «purity» of the officer corp, and in essence to retain for it its factionalism and loyalty to the dictatorship and the monarchy. Admiral Sakellariou was rebuffed by Metaxas and his request denied to have some officers reinstated with the argument that they could not be trusted and that in case of a collapse in the front they would sabotage the regime³.

The Navy therefore enters the war in October 1940, ill prepared in matters of trained personnel and lacking the ability to utilize to the maximum its capabilities. And the officer corp while realizing this deficiency not only did not cooperate with the select few recalled officers but to the contrary isolated them and behaved in an insolent and hostile manner towards them⁴. The seeds then of mutually jealous and divided officer corp were sown, precluding from the very beginning the formation of a uniform and loyal to the country rather than to political factions officer corp. At the initial phase of the war the cleavage in the officer corp not only remained but it was structurally reinforced and expanded.

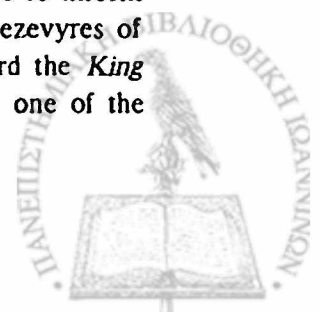
The main function of the Fleet from the very first day of the Italian invasion

1. These were Maniades' orders to the Security Police. The author Goudes, because of his special links with the Metaxas dictatorship, and with some of the Metaxas Ministers later in Alexandria, where they had sought refuge, among them Maniades, was able to quote the above from a position of reliability. Here it should be added that Goudes wanted to praise the «vigilance» of the security to protect the state from the democratic elements. His work was written immediately after the outbreak of the civil war in Greece and many former collaborators of the dictatorship like Goudes, were capitalizing on the anti-communist hysteria dominating the country to defend their past activities. D. Goudes, *He Hellas kata ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon 1939-1945*, Alexandria, 1947, 2 vol., vol. 1, p. 160.

2. See the authoritative biography of the King, written at the instigation of the court by a devotee of the monarchy. D. Kalogeropoulos, *Georgios B.* Athens, 1949, p. 177.

3. Admiral Sakellariou quotes Metaxas as follows: «When everything goes well all are friends but when difficult times come around, and in a war this is not impossible, all these officers will bite like snakes that someone warms in his bosom», A. Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, second edit. Athens, 1945. First Edit. New York 1944, p. 103.

4. When a convoy sailed from the Aegean islands of Chios and Mytilene to Pireaus one of the transports developed a mechanical failure. One of the former naval officers who was aboard the handicapped ship approached on a launch, the leading destroyer escort *King George* to inform its Captain Commander Lappas and the C.-in-C. of the Destroyer Flotilla Captain Mezevryres of the delay in the convoy. Both of the officers denied him permission to come aboard the *King George* treating him in a condescending and arrogant manner, because the later was one of the «cashiered of 1935». Melissinos, *Historia tou Poleμου*, vol. 7, p. 7, footnote 4.

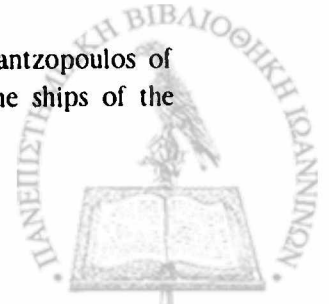


of the country, was the escorting of convoys carrying the reserves and the materiel needed for the completion of the mobilization, under the protective shield of the British Mediterranean Fleet with complete lack of air protection by the Greek Airforce¹. The Navy accomplished this vital function with a considerable degree of efficiency, if it was not for a most serious mishap which put into jeopardy the fate of more than five thousand men transported on nine merchantmen and escorted by six destroyers.

Due to a miscalculation of the staff of the leading destroyer *Ierax* and the C.-in-C. of the 3rd Destroyer Flotilla Captain Chantzopoulos, the convoy instead of following the designated channels through the minefields guarding the approaches to the port of Pireaus and the main naval arsenals in the area, it flatly passed above it. Captain Chatzopoulos was alerted in a cautious way, so as not to incur the wrath of officers on the active list², by Captain Panagiotou the C.-in-C. of the merchant ships convoy, one of the «cashiered of 1935».

1. Admiral Phokas, in his official history of the Navy wrote conclusively, that no air protection of any consequence was afforded to the Navy. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1944*, vol. 1, p. 139. Admiral Sakellariou had called the air force «an atropic child born of defective parents and reared by ignorant guardians». Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados heis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, p. 56. Admiral Kavvadias was also quite blunt on the inefficiency of the airforce during the war and its protection to the sea communications: «With the exception of a few patrols... never again during the whole duration of the war a Greek fighter plan was provided for our Fleet». Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 hopos ton Hezesa*, p. 129. Lieutenant-General Zaphiropoulos is not less critical of the airforce's performance. As a matter of fact he concurs with Admiral Sakellariou's comments on the matter. D. Zaphiropoulos, *Ho HellenoItalikos kai HellenoGermanikos Polemos 1940-1941*, Athens, 1946, p. 114. For the Airforce's view see the following works: E. Kelaides, *Anamneseis hapo ten Aeroporian*, Athens, 1972, pp. 37-48. Kelaides was then a wing-commander. P. Oikonomakos, *He Hellenike Aeroporia mechri tou 1941*, Athens, 1970, pp. 137-138. General of the army Oikonomakos, a man who rose from the ranks without attending a military academy, was appointed by Metaxas as a rubber stamp Minister of the Airforce, after the dictator had dismissed a rather capable officer General Reppas who headed it. General Reppas was sacked over a dispute with Metaxas concerning the reinforcement of the airforce which Reppas was vigorously upholding. Oikonomakos, the «silent Mr. Oikonomakos», as Admiral Sakellariou calls him, became the object of merciless ridicule. Admiral Kollialaxis in a newspaper article published in 1946, did call the special fund established by Oikonomakos for the benefit of the Airforce as being tantamount to embezzlement. The General compared the Metaxas period to the «National work» of the Papadopoulos dictatorship. Of course, Oikonomakos who had been sued for the embezzlement of the airforce fund could only have written these during the period of «April 21st». Oikonomakos, *He Hellenike Aeroporia mechri toy 1941*, pp. 110, 174, 180-181.

2. Captain Panagiotou very cautiously, if not discreetly, informed Captain Chantzopoulos of the mistaken course. It was a well known fact that the regular officers aboard the ships of the Fleet were condescending and insolent towards the «cashiered of 1935».



Already, nine ships had entered the mine field and were transversing it having reached almost the end of the mine field, quite an unflattering event for the minelaying service of the Greek Navy. When Captain Chantzopoulos at least became aware of the position of his ships, committed a far greater error in judgment. Perplexed and undecisive he ordered the ships to reverse course an event that would have the convoy transversing the minefield for a second time:

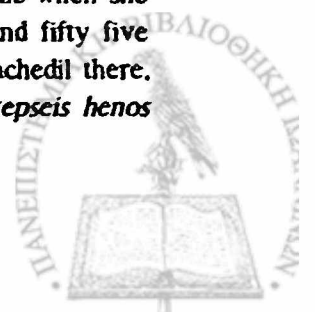
Complete confusion prevailed on the *Ierax*. For full twenty minutes the C.-in-C. remained inactive and when somehow the first shocking impression was gone, he, Captain Chantzopoulos, gave the amazing signal: Sail towards south. «With this second mistake he would once again returned the ships over the mines»¹.

The timely intervention of the master of one of the transports Lieutenant-Commander Laskos one of the «cashiered» of 1935, who frantically signaled: «Course towards south real paranoid», averted the certain disaster. At the outcry that inevitably followed, Admiral Kavvadias could not explain how the seaworthy officers of his Fleet², could have committed such a grave error. However, as a matter of policy he had pointly excluded the «cashiered of 1935», from positions aboard the warships. Admiral Oikonomou who headed the Naval Inquiry Board, absolved of any responsibility the personnel of the naval fort of Fleves who had not detected the passing of the convoy, something which induced Admiral Kavvadias, not without a measure of humor, to write that with such an effective mine field and such an efficient and vigilant naval fortification system, the Italians could have landed in Pireaus with a minimum of hinderance³. Captain Chantzopoulos and commanding officers of the leading destroyers, *Ierax* and *Panther*, Captain Stymphaliades and Commander Vates

1. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. 1, p. 150.

2. It was traditional in the Greek Navy to name the Fleet every year by the name of its commanding officer. It was natural therefore to be a matter of special pride on the part of the respective Admiral to maintain in a high level of efficiency his «Fleet». Therefore, it was rather highly embarrassing that officers of his Fleet could have committed such a blunder. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. 1, p. 150; Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 hopos ton Hezesa*, p. 166.

3. *Ibid.* Captain Chantzopoulos, had been the commander of the light cruiser *Helle* when she was torpedoed by an Italian submarine off the mole of Tenos. There for a hour and fifty five minutes he was trying to weigh anchor so as to tug his ship to shallow water and beachedil there, but to no avail. *She* overturned and capsised. N. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis henos Palaïou Nautikou*, 4 vols., vol. 1, Athens 1966-1972, pp. 198-199.



respectively, were transferred with the provision to be retired at the end of the war.

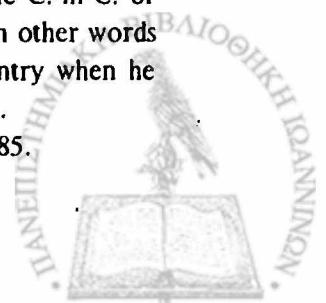
These inner conflicts within the Navy ranks were becoming more pronounced and the schism widened by the administration's policies toward the Navy and its actual head Admiral Sakellariou. With the beginning of the war the high naval officers around the «court» of the Undersecretary of the Navy Papavasileiou, succeeded in dismissing Captain Petropoulos the Chief of Staff of Admiral Sakellariou, the man responsible for and one of the most brilliant officers to have ever served in the ranks of the Greek Navy, architect of the naval defence planning despite the strenuous protests of the head of the Navy¹. Metaxas and his Undersecretary of the Army general Papademas, brought about a rift in the naval leadership, and on their insistence committed the Fleet to a course of action which could have sealed its fate as a fighting force. At a tumultuous meeting on November 11, 1940, at the General Headquarters at the hotel *Grand Bretagne* Papademas spearheading the accusations against the naval leadership for lack of action in the country's war effort, demanded that the Fleet undertake offensive actions against the Italians in the Adriatic. The protestations of the naval C.-in-C. Admiral Sakellariou and the mild objections of Admiral Kavvadias were unheeded:

Repeatedly, then I supported, that the Navy in its plans never considered the possibility of overcoming, in equal terms the Italian, Navy, especially with its terrible superiority in the Adriatic... Besides, I explained to them and the psychological reasons, that did not allow for such a foolish rash and unreasonable, supposedly, heroic raids in the Adriatic².

Admiral Kavvadias' loyalty to the dictatorship overcame his professional judgment and betrayed his trust to the Navy. Bowing to the incessant demands of Metaxas, notwithstanding his expressed fears at the conference «of the possible and unglorious destruction of the Fleet», Kavvadias volunteered to lead the newest five of the Greek destroyers to a raid in Adriatic to intercept

1. «Following a decision of the Council of the Admirals, arrived at due to pressure and demand of the Minister of the Navy... Papavasileiou... was replaced on the eve of the war the C.-in-C. of Third Directory of the Naval General Staff Commander of the reserves Petropoulos, in other words was replaced the one who for four years had designed the naval defence of the country when he was supposed to put that into effect». Melissinos, *Historia tou Polemou*, vol. 7, p. 2.

2. Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, p. 85.



the Italian convoys to Albania¹. The loathing and exasperation of the C.-in-C. Admiral Sakellariou at this maveric attitude knew no bounds:

And the Chief of the Fleet being present at the Council and agreeing with my views, glandly accepted the proposals of the Prime Minister with the hope that probably he would have the opportunity for a heroic act².

In his own admission, the Fleet's C.-in-C. could be accused of «endangering the Fleet of his own country for reasons of personal benefit»³. Understaffed, because of the policy to exclude from the Fleet politically «unreliable» officers, by expert technical personnel, especially gunners, the Greek destroyers, would have their gunnery crews firing for the first time. The certain doom of the operation, along with a lack of discipline or even worse a faith in the Fleet's capabilities, prompted animated discussions among the commanding officers of the Destroyer Flotilla reaching almost a point of hysteria. And it was in this context that the Flag Officer of the Fleet, Captain Zarokostas, who had accompanied Kavvadias on the raid, on the return of the Flotilla, immediately spread rumors at the General Army Headquarters at *Grande Bretagne* about the animated discussions aboard the destroyers on the part of the officers staffs and «...that I led the boats at gun point»⁴.

The utter fiasco⁵ of the operation and the pronounced incidents of the lack of discipline did not reduce the obstancy of Metaxas and his Ministers to

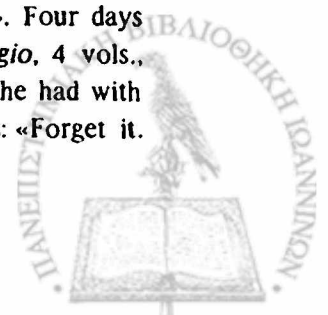
1. During these deliberations Papavasileiou, a crony of Metaxas presented to a speechless Sakellariou the order of operation. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. 1, p. 124. A few days later the same Minister attempted to impress the British naval attache in Athens, Rear-Admiral Turle with his «knowledge» of the tactics of naval warfare. Pointing to a German school map that he drew from his coat pocket, he told the thunderstruck British admiral: «Si j'etais Commandant en Chef, J'aurais mis les cuirasses la». Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis henos Palaίου Nautikou*, vol. 2, pp. 80-81.

2. Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados heis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, p. 85.

3. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Hezesa*, p. 178. Captain Petropoulos believed that the behavior of the Admiral was motivated by the demands of his ego, or his «foolish ambition». Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis henos Palaίου Nautikou*, vol. 2, p. 83.

4. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 hopos ton Hezesa*, p. 183.

5. *Ibid*, p. 172; Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, p. 86. And Metaxas had not been impressed with the raids that he had ordered or the manner by which they were conducted. «Only at my insistence the second naval raid is decided». Four days later he noted: «The raid without results». I. Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Hemerologio*, 4 vols., Athens, 1951-1952-1960, vol. 4, pp. 544-545. Admiral Kavvadias in a discussion that he had with Kotzias, one of the Metaxas ministers is said to have given this account of the raid: «Forget it.



commit, once again, the Navy to major undertaking against Italian surface vessels in the Adriatic. This high handed, if not insolent, tactics by the dictatorship were to bring the brewing crisis in the Navy to a head on collision, which almost cost the later its wartime leadership.

Admiral Sakellariou, hard pressed by the convoy commitments of the Fleet could not release for other duties, as the Metaxas camarila was demanding, the newest and most seaworthy of the Greek destroyers, those of the *King George* class. The sound strategical considerations of the naval hierarchy, and its determined resolution to uphold the sound dogma of the Greek naval strategy, as it had evolved under the circumstances of the conflict with Italy, infuriated Papavasileiou who demanded of Metaxas the sacking of Sakellariou¹.

The dictator now jumped at the opportunity presented to impose a servile leadership in the Navy impervious of the consequences, the certain paralysis and the lowering of the morale of the Navy. Frantically, the administration now began a search of a successor to Admiral Sakellariou. The position was offered to Admiral Oikonomou, who, however, declined politely, after Admiral Kavvadias warned him of his decision to resign in the event that the administration would have proceeded with the removal of Sakellariou². No one seemed willing or capable to assume the office, of the wartime Head of the Navy.

Metaxas, however, according to the admissions of his Minister of the Airforce, would have quelled the reactions in the Navy officer corp, and have appointed a non-entity. But he was restrained by fears that his public image abroad and in Greece would be tarnished by this replacement in the midst of the war³. Not long ago Mussolini, discouraged by the failures of his Army in Albania had forced changes in the top leadership positions, drawing as a result adverse and sarcastic comments everywhere.

Metaxas, did not want to second the example of his fellow dictator. Sakellariou survived. But the arbitrariness of the administration and its selfish disconcern with the fate of the nation, became more ominous for all to see it now. The effects of such a policy would not be late in forthcoming when the

Lack of luck and in that operation. Bad luck follow us. We hit Avlona and at a close range. Its batteries fired at us. We give it to them. Depot and public buildings we hit hard». Nowhere such an account of the raid is to be found. Either Kotzias lied or the Admiral from a sense of propriety declined to include this in his memoirs. K. Kotzias, *He Hellas, Ho Polemos kai He Doxa tes*, New York, 1943, p. 186.

1. Oikonomakos, *He Hellenike Aeroporia mechri tou 1941*, p. 100, footnote 1. For a more accurate account of the events see Admiral Kavvadias' version. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 hopos ton ezesa*, p. 199.

2. *Ibid*, p. 287.

3. Oikonomakos, *He Hellenike Aeroporia mechri tou 1941*, p. 103.



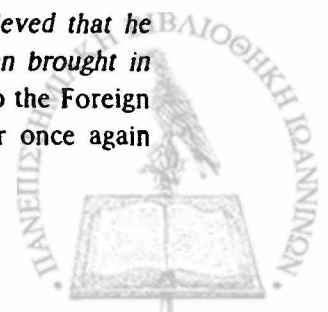
dissolutionment and the defeatism in the Navy would question its very existence.

The passing of Metaxas in January 1941, was a shattering event both in the leadership of the armed forces¹ and in Britain. For due to the nature of the regime, his death unleashed centrifugal powers that threatened to bring down the state and its war effort. The new Prime minister Koryzis, a choice of the Metaxas favorites², was considered a weakling who could not exercise any control over the armed forces leadership. In London there were fears of Koryzis' competency to tangle the worsening Greek situation. The UnderSecretaries of State almost unanimously were in favor of a «National» government to be composed of members of the old political leadership³, an event against which both the Army leadership and the King were adamant against it.

1. «...the death of Metaxas... its repercussion in the Army was such, that the greatest activeness of the Officers was needed to neutralize the produced anxiety». Thr. Tsakalotos, *40 Chronia Stratiotes tes Hellados. Pos Ekerdisame tous Agones mas 1940-1949*, Athens, 1960, p. 155; Theod. Gregoropoulos, *Apo ten Koryphen tou Lophou. Anamneseis kai Stochasmoi. 1914-1952 & 1959-1962*, Athens, 1966, p. 135.

2. The Foreign UnderSecretary Warner had this to say on the appointment of Koryzis: «I find it difficult to believe that this appointment will appeal to the country as a whole. As advocate of the totalitarian state. M. Koryzis will labour under all the disadvantages from which General Metaxas suffered, without enjoying the great reputation which the later has wonned recently». Palairet in a despache to the Foreign Office of February 7th 1941, wrote the following on the intrigues around the choice of Koryzis as the new prime minister: «I know that it was he (Maniadakis) with Diakos who continues to exercise the same influence as before who was responsible for the choice of Koryzis as President of the Council...» In another communication to the Foreign Office Palairet expressed his regret at the appointment of Koryzis who he said «is lacking in strength of character». The King speaking to a special emmissary of President Rossevelt, Colonel Donovan of OSS fame, who had visited him at the entreat of the British in Athens, «admitted that he was not a strong man and Colonel Donovan therefore remarked that he would be only His Majesty's mouthpiece... He (Koryzis) gives the impression, according to Donovan, of suffering from some physical debility which will make him to seek strength in others. He says that he will merely be the King's mask but I cannot feel sure that this mask will always have the King behind it». Foreign Office, 371/29839. Minutes by Warner on the Despache of Palairet of January 27, 1941; *Ibid*, Folio 44 of January 29, 1941.

3. UnderSecretary Warner advised for a «national government of all talents», because of British fears that Koryzis could be influenced to compromise with the Germans: «I fear that the present Greek Government would be capable of compromising with the Germans when it became obvious that no fighting in Albania could continue...». *Ibid*, 371/29839, Folio 56. Minutes by Warner. The King after his visit to the front told Palairet that he «was convinced that the only way of maintaining national unity and determination to purse the war was to make no change of government for the present. *Army commanders at the front had told him that they had been greatly relieved that he had not changed the Government: if representatives of other political parties had been brought in they could have quaranteed support of the army.* *Ibid*, Folio 62. Despache by Palairet to the Foreign Office of February 8, 1941. In another meeting that he had with the King, the latter once again



In the front the unrest among the officer corp about the wisdom of continuing the war effort against the Italians and the possibility of a war with Germany took such dimensions as to bring about the cashiering of the commanders of the 1st Army Corp General Kosmas and the 2nd General Papadopoulos. According to General Tsolakoglou Commander of the 3rd Army Corp the officers of the 1st and the 2nd Army Corp, on the tradition of the period of the «protocols», had circulated petitions expressing the «wish» «that measures be taken to avert a possible military adventure with Germany»¹. That movement had assumed an official character, the corps expressing the general consensus of their officers in the matter. The Metropolitan of Ioannina Spyridon, known for his involvement with the Army leadership in Epirus and the surrendering of the Greek Army, in a report specifically mentioned that after the death of Metaxas, the officers of the 2nd Army corp were contemplating a *coup d'etat* to force the administration in Athens to come to terms with Italy and thus avoid a war with Germany².

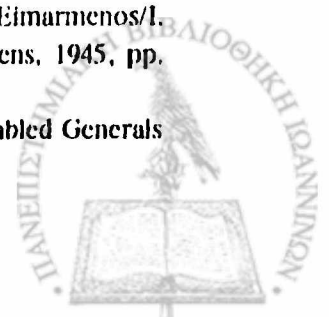
Crown Prince Paul who was despatched to the front to investigate the unrest in the officer corp did not fare much better. The assembled generals and high ranking officers at the Headquarters at Ioannina, reiterated to the Crown Prince their «will» as well as that of their men «that a way must be found to avert a war conflict with Germany»³. Gregoropoulos then Colonel and Chief of Staff

reiterated the opposition of the army officer corp to the formation of a national government: «The King... derived the conviction that the army did not want any immediate alteration of the Government...». *Ibid*, folio 81. Despache by Palaret to the Foreign Office of February 24, 1941. The Italics in the previous note mine.

1. G. Tsolakoglou, *Apomnemoneumata Georgiou K. S. Tsolakoglou, Antistrategou*, edited by his wife K. Tsolakoglou, Athens, 1959, p. 60.

2. Machas who referred to the above mentioned statement of Metropolitan Spyridon, refuted and dismissed them as untrue without citing any evidences to support his contentions. He simply wrote that the statement was false. Machas, *Ho Hellenotalkos Polemos 1940-1941*, vol. 2, p. 94. On that score see the revealing narration of a partisan of the regime, a member of the Athenian high society I. Vorres. Vorres, reported after one of his visits to the front, that only the general staffs of the army corps, 1st and 2nd, were actively discussing the possibility of an «armistice» with the Italians but that it was the widespread belief of the officer corp that the Greek army should not fight against the Germans. Vorres or Eimarmenos, the pseudonym that he used in the writing of his memoirs, was used by the Army Commanders mentioned in the text, as their emissary with Bishop Spyridon of Ioannina with whom he held long discussions. He transmitted those discussions to Koryzes: «I must add Mr. President that also the Metropolitan of Ioannina, whom you do know so well, completely agrees and transmits to you the same request». E. Eimarmenos/I. Vorres, *He Hellas sta Vouna tes Albanias. Aphegesels, Syzetessels kai Skepsels*, Athens, 1945, pp. 160-171.

3. According to Tsolakoglou, then Commander of the 3rd Army Corp, the assembled Generals



to General Drakos Supreme Commander of the 1st and the 2nd Army Corp, deals in detail on the explosive and insubordinate climate that prevailed among the high ranking officers at the military Headquarters at Ioannina, during the visit of the Crown Prince.

During these tumultuous events, governmental transition in Athens and the officers unrest at the front, the Navy continued, uninteruptly, its functions. Nevertheless, the complete lack of direction and the opportunism which now characterizes all the administration's endeavors, had a deep imprint on the Navy. The figure-head Prime Minister Koryzes, devoid as he was, of the element of personal leadership, had abandoned the Navy to its fate. In his official history of the Navy, Admiral Phokas epigrammatically, began the chapter of the Navy's participation in the conflict with Germany, by emphasizing the absence of a firm governmental direction concerning the future of the Fleet¹.

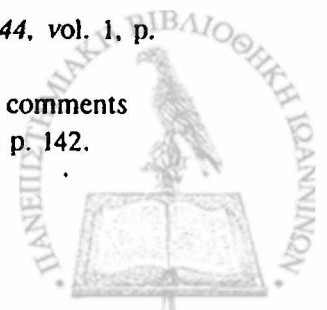
The fatalistic inertia of the naval leadership from February onward to the onset of the German onslaught on Greece on April, 1941, was but a manifestation of the spreading paralysis in the governmental apparatus. The Head of the Navy Admiral Sakellariou, was being ignored by the new administration, if not deliberately brushed aside, by the clique around Koryzes. And Admiral Kavvadias, did not hesitate to conclude that what he leniently termed «lack of communications» between the administration and the naval leadership, was to be the beginning of a chain of unfortunate events which would fatally undermine the morale and the will power of the naval officer corp to continue the war and not to compromise with the enemy².

The naval leadership had *privately* discussed the ominous developments, being hesitant to formulate a plan of action of its own in the continuous absence of precise and comprehensive governmental plans. The forced retirements of

and high ranking officers reiterated to the Crown Prince their «will», and that of their men to avoid a conflict with Germany. Tsolakoglou, *Apomnemonemata Georgiou K.S. Tsolakoglou Antistrategou*, pp. 59-60. The same are reported by Gregoropoulos and Tsakalotos. At the conferences at the Headquarters of the corps their respective commanders Kosmas and Papadopoulos, told the Crown Prince about the «repercussions and the impossibility of resistance against both empires». Tsakalotos, *40 Chronia Stratiotes tes Hellados. Pos Ekerdisame tous Agones mas*, p. 162. Machas, who was later transferred from his post, as a result of the purges in the command of the two corps, vehemently denies that either Papadopoulos or Kosmas ever discussed or allowed their subordinates to indulge in these matters. Machas, *Ho Hellenoitalikos Polemos 1940-41*, vol. 1, pp. 88-95.

1. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1944*, vol. 1, p. 359.

2. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, p. 199. See also the comments of Admiral Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, p. 142.



the army's top leadership positions, could not but have a restraining effect on the decisions of the naval command. The Diakos-Maniadakis clique along with the King looked askance at any initiative by the commanders of the armed forces. Therefore, whatever plans on the future of the Navy were considered in the months of February and in March, 1941, among the four Admirals who comprised the leadership of the Greek Navy, were of the meager possible nature.

The Admirals' as portrayed by Kavvadias, were aware that the drawing on their part of a definite plan of action, could have an effect on the «morale of the fighting men»² and at the same time would not have been binding to the administration. Of course, Admiral Kavvadias, as well as the other Admirals, in the back of their minds were fearing the open disloyalty of the naval officer corp. The naval leadership like its counterpart in the land army mistrusted the officer corp in times of uncertainty, when the fate of the regime was precarious. For a substantial number of the officer corp had identified their welfare and interests with the vitality of the dictatorship. Any serious threat to the well-being of the regime was conceived as a direct personal misfortune. The impending occupation of the country, since no one thought otherwise, by a foreign power and the obliteration of the Metaxas regime seemed to terminate their obligation toward the nation, the last, being subordinate to the state build by the dictatorship³.

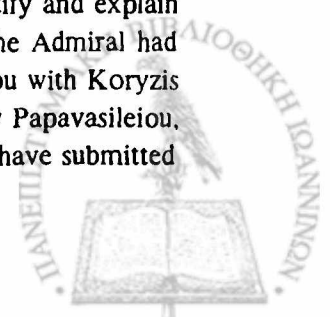
At the first part of March 1941, a periodic routine meeting of the Council of the four Admirals took place. Nothing of critical importance was scheduled, therefore there was a sense of bewilderment when Admiral Kavvadias presented an emergency plan to use the Fleet to evacuate to southern Greece or to Crete or even to Egypt segments of the Greek Army in Albania at the collapse of that front. Kavvadias was voicing the prevailing thought at the armed forces at the time that the resistance of the Greek armed forces to the German attack would be short lived. This bold if not iconoclastic initiative of Admiral Kavvadias, did not meet with any response by the assembled Admirals⁴.

1. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*, p. 228.

2. Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, pp. 142-144.

3. Kavvadias discussed the technical requirements of the proposed operation with Admiral Delagrammatikas who was in charge of the naval arsenal at Skaramagas. Delagrammatikas was the least important in the naval hierarchy. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, pp. 230-231.

4. Captain Petropoulos, Admiral Sakellariou's Chief of Staff, in an effort to justify and explain the behavior of this Chief wrote about the peculiar psychological conditions that the Admiral had found himself confronted with. The relationships of the Naval Staff, that is Sakellariou with Koryziz and the, according to the same author, and Sakellariou, Undersecretary of the Navy Papavasileiou, were characterized it by mutual distrust and mutual contempt. If Sakellariou was to have submitted



Embarrassed and greatly annoyed Sakellariou, interrupted Kavvadias, reminding the Chief of the Fleet that the naval staff did not possess any instructions on the part of the administration to formulate or even discuss such contingency plans. The totalitarianism of the administration, with its stifling of all planning and initiative on the part of the appropriate military planners, had made Sakellariou cautious to the point of neglecting crucial matters as those mentioned by Kavvadias.

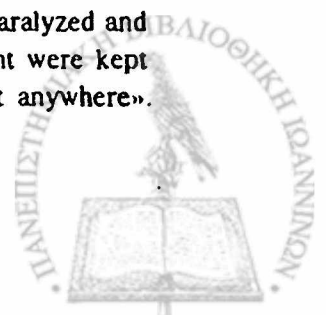
The naivete of the Chief of the Fleet, opened the Pandora's box and the next question that inevitably rose, was on the role that the Navy would have to play and the position that it would hold after the country had been occupied by the enemy. Officially, no one was prepared to formulate contingency plans for such an exigency, notwithstanding the fact that the Naval Council was categorically certain of its inevitability. The spectrum of a defeat and the uncertainty of a future in exile, in the wake of a collapsing political order closely identified with them, had increased their scepticism and their reluctance to act. The utter disorganization¹ of the administration in Athens, had encouraged their fatalism, and in some of them, their dormant opportunism, this inborn opportunism so prevalent in the Metaxist-Royalist officer corp of the time.

The Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Sakellariou, in an outburst of spontaneous reaction to the positions stated by Admiral Kavvadias, on his own accord, stated that an officer from his Headquarters Command, would be despatched to Crete, ostensibly to prepare the ground for the imminent transfer of the Fleet to that island. However, the exact mission of this officer was never clearly clarified or understood, and neither had the Admiral suggested that the Naval Staff would be consulting with the Koryzis administration on this highly controversial policy planning.

On the contrary, Admiral Sakellariou, took it upon himself to proceed a step further. Addressing his remarks to the Chief of the Fleet's home base at Skaramaga, the so called Naustathmos, the junior Admiral Delagrammatikas, a rather uncolorful and of minimal influence officer, informed the assembled naval

the proposals for the withdrawal of the Fleet to Crete, he was concerned, that the habitués of the Prime Minister's antechamber, most probably, would have assigned him the stigma of a defeatist and the saboteur of the morale of the nation and the armed forces. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaïou Nautikou*, vol. 2, pp. 265-266.

1. «...no one was feeling the dermned will of the administration, at a time when this will ought to make its presence felt with diamond clarity and hardness. The administration was paralyzed and slipping away from the hands of those in command, and the affairs of the government were kept in a (workable) order by the power of tradition. Clear directive line ...did not exist anywhere». Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, p. 148.



leadership that the Navy ought to ship to Crete the necessary materiel for the provisionment and upkeeping the Fleet there¹. The Greek Navy, had not created any facilities of its own at Suda Bay, *nor it had drawn any official emergency plans*, for the establishment of the Fleet and its auxiliary services, support forces, at Crete.

The British, who had occupied the strategic island upon the outbreak of the war with Italy, in accordance with the planning of the British Admiralty, had organized, in a rather hasty manner to be sure, the Suda Bay area, for the refuelling of the Mediterranean Fleet. For it was the opinion of Admiral Cunningham, that this advance staging point for the operations of the British Fleet, would have greatly enabled the later to extent its offensive capabilities against the Italians² in both central Mediterranean Adriatic and North Ionian and the Aegean, and also in denying, effectively, to the Italian Fleet, its ability to intervene with British and allied, Greek, movements in those critical zones³.

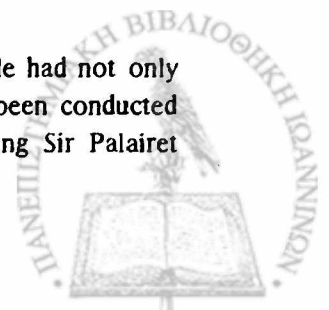
The Greek Naval Staff, and the Greek Navy in general, did not enjoy neither did it have any jurisdiction whatsoever on the operation of the Suda Bay, and its use by the British was a sovereign concern of the later. British sovereignty of the Suda Bay was emphasized also by the fact that whatever a Greek Man of War called at the base area, did so on the status of a visitor, which required the explicit consent of the British commander in question. No written agreement of whatever nature did govern the occupation of the area by the British naval forces, the Greek administrations of both Metaxas and Koryzis, having accepted as a *fait accompli*, the initial British landing⁴.

1. Lieutenant-Commander Evangellos Baltatzes, one of the cashiered of 1935, and who was now serving as Director of the Organizational Bureau of the Naval Staff, had studied such a plan, and on many an occasion, had proposed the transfer of the Fleet, south to Crete. To implement this proposal, he had suggested that the Fleet tender *Hyphaistos*, should sail immediately with all the necessary provisions and naval stores for either Crete or Alexandria. Petropoulos, does not provide a specific date of these deliberations, but from the contents of his work it can be safely deduced that they took place in the months of January and February 1941. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaïou Nautikou*, vol. 2, p. 267.

2. I again strongly urged the occupation of Crete, whatever the political situation, as it would give us a fuelling base for operations in the Central Mediterranean and Aegean». Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 232. See also the rather exaggeratedly inaccurate account of the «exploits of the Italian Navy in Mediterranean and on the subject of the British naval «occupation» of strategic bases in Greece: «occupando numerosi porti e ancoraggi ellenici», which is far from the truth. R. B. Nelli, *Eroismo Sotto i Mari*, Milano, 1968, p. 126.

3. *Ibid*, p. 317.

4. Since June 1940, the Foreign Office, in consultation with the Defence people had not only decreed the occupation of Crete but had decided that this operation should have been conducted in absolute secrecy and that they had «strongest possible objections to authorizing Sir Palaret



Therefore, it is rather not surprising, that notwithstanding the commanding role of the British Mediterranean naval forces, the Greek Naval Staff had not sought a war time cooperation with the British and neither had attempted to become an active participant in the development of the Suda naval base for its own future use. The first indication of anything approaching a formal cooperation with the British Admiralty came on about March 16, 1941, but it was strictly a British affair. The British naval liaison officer in Greece Rear Admiral Turle, had, apparently on the strength of the deliberations mentioned before, and probably on the leakage of the same and some «feelers» by the entourage of Admiral Sakellariou¹, taken the initiative to start informal discussions with the Greek Admiralty, «concerning Greek naval arrangements if Greece is overrun»².

No further deliberations seems to have taken place with the competent Greek naval authorities, no doubt due to the fact that the Greek Naval Staff had refused to come to grips with the fast approaching German onslaught on the country.

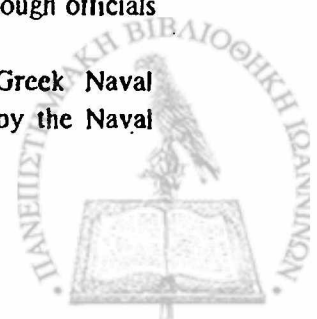
In spite the pronouncements by Admiral Sakellariou no officer was despatched to Crete, and the idea of the relocation of the Fleet's supplies there, was never materialized. What this meeting produced, however, was to set the formal bases for what was to develop in less than two months later, into the greatest, sharpest division in the Greek naval officer corp, far exceeding anything else in magnitude that the naval officer corp had faced at the times of impending national collapse, in 1897 and 1922.

The schism was to be initiated by the senior officer in the Navy Vice Admiral Oikonomou. The Admiral, known for his multiplicity of titles rather than his actual commanding posts, became highly disturbed at the notions set forward by his junior colleagues in command of the Navy. He was fearful of the longterm implications that a departure of the Fleet and the naval officer corp could have had on the fate of the Metaxas regime. The possibility of a gradual or most probably a violent overthrow of the political and social order, which the

telling the President of the Council (Metaxas) beforehand». *Foreign Office*, 371/24915, Folio 317. Draft Communication by the Foreign Office to Sir Palairat of June 1st, 1940.

1. Captain Petropoulos repeatedly refers, in no uncertain terms, of his close and intricate relations with the British Admiral and also establishes the fact that on almost all occasions he acted as the confidant of Sakellariou undertaking missions either too risky to be executed through official channels or to be entrusted to someone else.

2. «I am starting discussions with Greek Admiralty tomorrow concerning Greek Naval arrangements if Greece is overrun». *Foreign Office* 371/29814, Folio 67. Despatche by the Naval Attache Athens to the C.-in-C. Mediterranean of March 16th, 1941.



dictatorship had imposed on the country, were paramount in his thoughts. Oikonomou, one of the stalwarts of the Metaxas regime and the Monarchy was adamant in his resolution that the institution of the dictatorship should be retained intact.

The withdrawal of the naval officer corp abroad, to him, was tantamount, to an abandonment of the country, which would have given the signal for the dreaded change. A truly Byzantine, the Admiral thought that a temporary accomodation with the Germans could be opportune for the maintainance of the essential nationalist-military structures of the country¹.

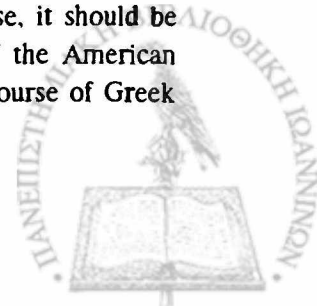
It was then he thought imperative, that only the true backbone of the regime the officer corp, should not leave the country, but also a representative of the monarchy, in this case Crown Prince Paul, ought to remain in Greece as the visible link with the established regime in the land.

Vice-Admiral Oikonomou was categorical in this respect, «the Crown Prince on the other hand must remain in order to contain the situation here»². The choise of the Admiral was a result of indeed skillful if not sinister calculations. The Crown Prince, according to the Admiral, was enjoying the confidence of the German Government. Few weeks earlier Berlin had entrusted to him and his German born wife Princess Frederika, the transmission of Berlin's proposals

1. See the pertinent quotation in Admiral Kavvadias' work. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, pp. 230-231.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 231. Captain Petropoulos, a knowledgeable man when it comes to the prevailing mentality of his fellow nava¹ officers, made these comments on the calculating outlook and lack of firm ethnical values among some of the high ranking officers: «And could someone have supported that some prudent ought on one hand to maintain warm relationships with von Kanaris and on the other to attempt to open a correspondence with the exiled King. In that manner, of course, the prudent would have been the winners on either side. And in the case of a British victory, which they did not believe possible, they would have secured the Royal favor or at least the Royal tolerance. Likewise in the possibility of a German victory, which they considered as more likely, they would have insured their power and kept their privileges, which is doubtful if they were wory of it. But I think this kind of prudence must provoke contempt if not disgust». Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaiou Nautikou*, vol. 2, p. 263.

The State Department in a secret memorandum on the Greek Royal Family on April 16, 1947, made the following evaluation of the then King Paul's pro-Nazi proclivities: «Early reports that Paul was do be a puppet King for the Nazis were almost surely Nazi propaganda». As for Queen Frederika the State Department writes: «Althought certain sources maintain that Frederika was not pro-Nazi during the war others claim that she was». National Archives of the United States, Departmet of State, Division Greece, Biographical Information, p. 10-11. Of course, it should be emphasized that at the time the Greek monarchy was one of the main pillars of the American policies in Greece, when Washington was fully engaged in determining the future course of Greek politics.



to the Greek government to withdraw from the war, signing a separate peace with Italy and expelling the British from the country.

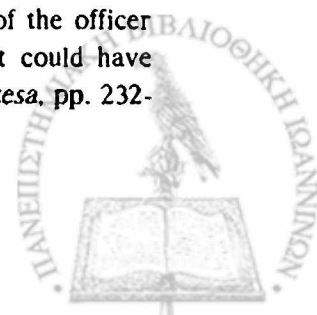
In accordance with that train of thought, the King who was childless, had been compromised in the eyes of both Berlin and the pro-German circles of Athens as an ardent pro-British, if not an outright viceroy of the British interests in Greece. His departure along with the British, would have been convenient to the Metaxas zealots for a duality of reasons. In the event of a German victory, the banishment of the compromised monarch would have sufficed, and the regime would have survived with minor alterations. In the remote case of a British victory, and indeed that a possibility then to the stalwarts of the Metaxas regime, seemed purely hypothetical, nothing would have changed, the king would have returned as the head of the regime by the British, the visible symbol of a redeemed dictatorship, one which would have had participated in the war against totalitarianism on the side of the western powers.

Those utterly defeatist, if not treasonable schemes of Vice-Admiral Oikonomou, were in accordance with the mentality of the high military echelons, which according to Admiral Sakellariou¹ were under the spell of the German might, consequently did not provoke any immediate adverse reactions by the naval hierarchy assembled. Admiral Kavvadias' primary if not deliberate efforts then concentrated on ways to prevent the leaking to the naval officer corp of these impromptu conversations. The top naval leadership had justifiable reservations about the loyalty of the naval officer corp in view of the opinions stated by Vice-Admiral Oikonomou, whether they would have obeyed a policy of withdrawing with their units south to continue the war effort alongside the British².

By the end of March, 1941, the C.-in-C. of the Fleet Admiral Kavvadias invited the commanders of the ships anchored at the Eleusis Bay and those whose ships were under repair at the naval shipyards, for a conference in his flagship the *Averoff*. In a report that the Admiral compiled six months later when at Alexandria, Egypt, and which was based, according to the Admiral, on notes that his Flag Officer Captain Zarakostas had taken during the meeting,

1. Personal interview given to the author by the late Admiral at his residence on February 13, 1976.

2. Admiral Kavvadias, among the reasons that he had cited to justify his policy of withholding the information from the naval officers under his command, and why he had not issued a written order to the Fleet Commanders, said quite plainly, that he was afraid of the morale of the officer corp. «...all of what was said was so disappointing, that if it had become known it could have created a wave of defeatism». Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, pp. 232-233, footnote 1 on page 233.



the items discussed pertained, almost exclusively, to the withdrawal of the Fleet to Alexandria. At the meeting Admiral Kavvadias was adamantly clear in his unequivocal determination that the Fleet should follow the orders of the legitimate government, whatever those would be.

The absence of written orders was justified by Admiral Kavvadias on the rather shaky ground that such an action could have been «exploited by the enemies» of Greece. But it seems logical to assume that the Admiral in his admonitions to the assembled ship commanders and ship staffs as he eagerly emphasized, *did not committ the Navy to continue the war abroad after the capitulation of the country to the Axis*. But he left no doubts on his determination to obey the orders of the Metaxas administration, of the «lawful» government whatever those orders might be.

Barring this rather impromptu and questionable briefing nothing else was done by the naval leadership to prepare the Fleet materially and to condition the officer corp for the incoming trials boosting its morale. From then onward till the fatefull days of April 16th, 1941, events will take their course in the absence of clear cut policy on the matter. Indeed, after the middle of March 1941, the Koryzis administration would haphazardly react on this policy *and only to the initiatives undertaken by the Navy*, either endorsing them because of foreign pressures or because of the self-interest, of its members¹.

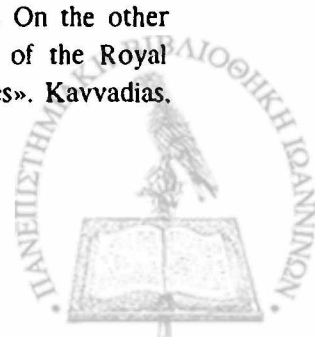
This curtailment of initiative and the corresponding discouragment of the naval leadership, notwithstanding the protestations and the not so veiled accusations of Admiral Kavvadias, about the inactivity and the fatalism of the Chief of the Naval Staff², had dissolutioned the later, preventing him, to a great measure, from adopting a resolute and clear cut plan of operations³. Nevertheless, probed on by his own concern for the fate of the Fleet, Admiral Sakellariou issued an order on March 23rd, 1941, to the Commandant of the Fleet's home base, Skaramangas, Rear-Admiral Delagrammatikas, to proceed with the transportation to Crete of the naval stores and the Fleet's ammunition.

The atmosphere, nevertheless, of defeatism and general paralysis which

1. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. 1, pp. 358-359.

2. See the tirades of Admiral Kavvadias about the inefficiency and lack of responsibility on the part of the General Naval Staff. At one point contemplating with the Inspector - General of the Navy Vice-Admiral Oikonomou had resorted to fantasies about instigating a *coup d'etat* to force the administration to a more resolute stand on the continuation of the war. On the other hand he was assuring his officers that he would obey, to the letter, any order of the Royal government, of whatever nature, since as he explained, «we are not making policies». Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, pp. 231-233.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 235.



characterized the existing spirit in the naval hierarchy at the time, prevented the materialization of this first visible measure of the Navy's will to continue the fight beyond the home waters after the fall of the country. Oral reminders and communications by Admiral Sakellariou to Delagrammatikas for the execution of his orders were to no avail. It should be, of course, remembered, that Admiral Sakellariou, well versed in the intrigues and the virtual absence of governmental directions on the future policies of the country, had not consulted and neither had notified Koryzis or his immediate superior the Under Secretary of the Navy Papavasileiou on this measure which was heralding a new course for the Fleet.

The war with Germany which everybody was expecting finally came on April 6th, 1941, amidst allegations, both domestic and allied, of an administration prone to compromise with the invading forces:

I fear that the present Greek Government would be capable of compromising with the Germans when it became obvious that no fighting in Albania could continue¹.

' In the armed forces, the outbreak of hostilities with the Germans was a time of confusion and had created a state of defeatism. Many in the officer corps thought as illogical and in many an instance as *unGreek* the resistance against the Germans:

In many regiments, without hesitation some officers and lower rank ones were spreading propaganda slogans in favor of the Germans... The fear of the German road-roller influenced the thoughts of many...²

The Commander of the Greek armies in Eastern Macedonia, Lieutenant-General Bakopoulos, after surrendering to the Germans, on April 8th, 1941, three days only after the German onslaught on the country, made this address to the German officer to whom ceremoniously surrendered his armies:

I am sorry that the circumstances have forced upon us that the Greek armies find themselves face to face with the German army, with whom nothing separates him, but on the contrary was unified with links of friendship and respect³.

1. Foreign Office, 371/29839. Despache by Sir Palairet to the Foreign Office. Minutes by the Permanent UnderSecretary Warner of February 7, 1941.

2. Tsakalotos, *40 Chronia Stratiotes tes Hellados. Pos Ekerdisame tous Agones mas, 1940-1949*, p. 206. See also the work of Koronakes, *He Politeia tes 4es Augoustou. Phos eis mian Plastographemenen Periodon tes Historias mas*, p. 269.

3. I. Kokkinos, *Hoi Dyo Polemoi 1940-1941*, Athens, 1946, p. 480.



The defeatism, if not collaborationist proclivities of the Army Officer Corp, *throughout Greece* were contrasted equally sharply with the determination of the rank and file of the army recruits and the non-commissioned officers as it can be seen from the following despatch of the British ambassador at Angora Sir Knatchbull-Hugessen to the Foreign Office:

British Consul in Mitylene on arrival at Ismir... (reported that) about 60% of 1200 Greek soldiers of all divisions who escaped there from Thrace, Macedonia... were anxious to resist. But the pro-German General Marascis, Colonel Dimakis (Chief of Police of Aegean islands) and Major Katsareas (Chief of Police Mitylene), had swayed many of the remainder and united resistance would, therefore, be unlikely, The Archbishop of the island Monseigneur Yakova had recently been converted to Nazism (according to his own account for fear of his flock)¹.

But what the American ambassador in Athens MacVeagh in a detailed report to the War Department in Washington called the pro-German clique of Metaxas² was not confined to the army officers corp alone. The administration in the capital was as responsible for the breaking down of the resistance as it was the army officers corp if not to a greater degree.

The British in Athens, both the diplomatic representatives and the British military of the British expeditionary force, that had been arriving in the country since March 1941, after April 12th, 1941, became, in essence, the moving spirit of the resistance, *forcing* literary the Koryzis administration to continue the war against the advancing Germans. By April 12th, 1941, the Koryzis administration in a state of panic was at the verge of abandoning the country for Crete and thus effectively surrendering to Germans:

Yesterday (April 11, 1941), was however a day of something like panic in Athens. I took the liberty of suggesting that His Majesty's immediate advisers were deplorably subject to panic and had given him an exaggeratedly alarmist view of eventualities... The King said, and I agree, that the morale of the ordinary man is excellent, it is only in circles near the Government that panic, which was particularly prevalent on April 11th, is to be feared. King assured me if any Ministers should panic, he would send them away.

1. Foreign Office, 371/29820/ Folio 95. Despatch by the British ambassador at Angora Sir Knatchbull-Hugessen to the Foreign Office of May 2, 1941.

2. National Archives of the United States, RG 165. Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Military Intelligence Division. Report by the American Military attache in Berlin to the War Department of July 25, 1941, p. 5.



The King repeated to me this morning that there was no question of immediate removal of the Government from Athens...¹

The comments from London to the imposed resoluteness of the King could not but bring a much needed relief at this diplomatic *coup d'etat*. «It is satisfying that the Government are not contemplating leaving Greek territory immediately»².

Two days later the Foreign Office in London directed the British ambassador in Athens to convey the King his gratification on the decision and at the same time to warn that if the evacuation became necessary it had to be in Crete rather than in Egypt as the Koryzis group was contemplating, an effort to sustain the resistance on Greek soil as long as possible³.

The British stranglehold on the King could not prevent a new outbreak of defeatism on the part of the administration, which a few days later on April 16, 1941, having secured without any great difficulty, if not urged on, by Generalissimo Papagos' consent⁴, informed the British, point blanc, through the King himself, that they were leaving for Crete the following evening. The British military, General Wilson head of the British expeditionary force, along with Sir Palairet, the former «motoring from Thebes» on the morning of April 18th, 1941, called on the King in Tatoi, and there in the presence of General Papagos «forced» the King to recall the Government's decision to quit the Greek capital that evening:

In the meantime as General Wilson was able to assure His Majesty that there could be no threat to the safety of himself or His government for at least a week⁵...

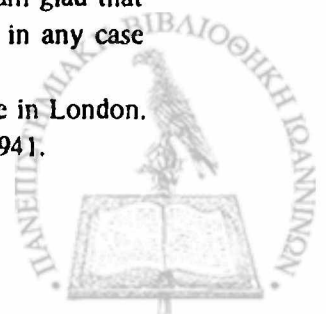
1. Foreign Office 371/29840 Folios 11 and 20. Parts of two despatches by Sir Palairet to the Foreign Office on April 12 and April 14, 1941.

2. *Ibid.* Minutes by the UnderSecretary Boulder at the Foreign Office on the comments of Sir Palairet on the first aforementioned despatch on the decision of the King to postpone his departure from continental Greece.

3. *Ibid.*, 371 Folio 24. Communication by the Foreign Office to the British ambassador in Athens in April 15th, 1941. «You should speak to the King on the following lines, 'I am glad that the Greek Government do not contemplate immediate removal from Athens and that in any case they intent to go first to Crete'».

4. *Ibid.*, 371 Folio 195. Despatch from the C.-in-C. Mediterranean to the War Office in London.

5. *Ibid.*, 371/29819. Despatch by Sir Palairet to the Foreign Office of April 17, 1941.



The Greek Generalissimo in the face of the stern British interrogation at the meeting was compelled to admit that the defeatism of the administration was but instrumental in the rising unrest in the Army and the Greek Navy, «...General Papagos stated that report of transfer of Government had most serious effect on morale of the army...»¹. This deplorable state of affairs while relieving temporarily, at least British anxieties about the faithfulness of the regime that they had shielded could not prevent cynical and derogatory comments from the Foreign Office about the Greek people as a whole:

It was always understood that the Greeks were of a mercurial disposition and that if things went badly their morale could not be relied on. No doubt from this point of view the retention of the King and Government in Athens till the last moment is the right decision².

The general disintegration and collapse in the administration and collapse in the administration, they had actually embarked along with their wives and dependents on two destroyers on April 16th, 1941, to quit Greece, until the British literally disembarked them, could not but touch the army's upper echelons being as it was endemic. Already, in the Army of Epirus there was in evidence a *coup d'etat* of the Generals. The General Headquarters in Athens began issuing a series of orders which provided the death knell to the structure of the army. On April 15th, 1941, the Chief of Staff of the General Headquarters, Major-General Melissenos, issued in the name of the generalissimo an order of far reaching consequences. It provided for the issuance of obligatory leaves of absence to the army cadres of the Thebes training camp as well as to all reserve officers. More importantly, this measure was to be extended to include the other units not deployed on the front as well as the staff of the General Headquarters in Athens³.

On the very next day the General Headquarters, this time the name of general Melissinos does not appear in the order issued, directed the Athens garrison command not to issue the despatch papers to regular and reserve officers destined for the front and instead to keep them in Athens. And the process of the disintegration and the dismantling of the army culminated with the most notorious act of defeatism if not treason yet to be recorded. On April

1. *Ibid*, 371/29819 Folio 8. Despatch by Sir Palairret to the Foreign Office of April 18th, 1941.

2. *Ibid*, 378/29819. Comments by the UnderSecretary of Foreign Affairs Warner to a despatch by Palairret to the Foreign Office of April 18, 1941.

3. See the text of the entire order in Koronakes, *He Politeia tes 4es Augoustou. Phos eis mian Plastographemenen Periodon tes Historias mas*, p. 288.



16th, 1941, the UnderSecretary of War, the virtual Minister of War, the portfolio nominally held by Koryzis, General Papademas, ordered the dismantling of the army, the forces that is which were outside the jurisdiction of the Generals in Epirus¹. A two months leave of absence was given to the new recruits and a regular one, monthly, to the reserve officers.

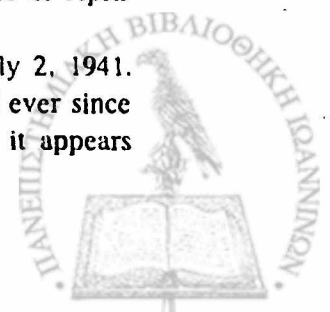
The effect of Papademas' order cannot be overestimated. Not only it disorganized the armed forces but it was used by the most effective German propaganda in Athens to call on the army to surrender since any further resistance was futile. However, the most far reaching consequence of the Papademas treason was the utter chaos that the administration was to find itself with the suicide of Prime Minister Koryzis, a direct consequence of that series of subversive behavior. The British who along with the King were more than distressed by Koryzis' passivity and complicity in the defeatism of Papademas, saw the passing of the last visible remnant of the Metaxas legacy with relief. On April 18th, 1941, the British ambassador in Athens transmitted to the Foreign Office this: «President of Council just committed suicide after telling the King that he felt he had failed Him in the task entrusted to him»². Three months later while the reshuffled Greek government had been transported to Egypt, Tsouderos, the new Greek Prime Minister in the presence of the King and the British ambassador provided official sanction to the extent of the treason committed by Papademas and the administration in the collapse of the Greek armed forces:

Korizis had been incapable of dealing with the situation which he found and had committed suicide on discovering that the majority of his cabinet including the service ministers, were contrary to the policy of carrying on the struggle agreed on by the King, General Wavell and himself and they were actually taking steps against this policy by ordering demobilization to begin³.

1. On the impact of the order see Tsakalotos, *40 Chronia Stratiotes tes Hellados. Pos Ekerdisame tous Agones mas*, p. 194. See also the writings of a member of that Army who epigrammatically wrote: «The King and those around him were ordering the soldiers at the front, «Fight to the end» and in the rear were decomposing the military prowess of the country». Stavros Kalogiannis, *To Hemerologio enos Stratiote*, Athens, 1945, pp. 38-39.

2. *Foreign Office*, 371/2918 Folio 193. Despatch from Athens to the Foreign Office of April 17th, 1941.

3. *Ibid*, Despatch from the British Embassy in Cairo to the Foreign Office of July 2, 1941. See also the comments of MacVeagh, who seems to give credence to rumors circulated ever since on British complicity in Koryzi's death: «This order was speedily countermanded, but it appears



The British Foreign Office was no less merciful on the part played by Papademas. The permanent UnderSecretary for Foreign Affairs commented on April 20th, 1941, on the formation of the Tsouderos government that steps had been taken to «put M. Papademas... who is suspected of treason out of harm's way»¹. And the sealing blow to the degradation of the Koryzis administration, in as far as the British were concerned, was fully revealed in a letter by Marjorie C. Davis, wife of Dr. Homer Davis, President of the American College in Athens. That letter which was mailed from Lisbon to a Greek friend in London Andreas Adossiades, was intercepted by the British counter-intelligence and became a part of the Foreign Office records on Greece. In it Mrs. Davis related, most vividly, the collapse of the Greek armed forces brought about by the service ministers of the Koryzis administration:

The Minister of Aviation (Oikonomakos), was a complete funk, said that the whole army had received orders to surrender. Costas and other aviators said there was no need to burn their planes. The Minister... would hear nothing of it².

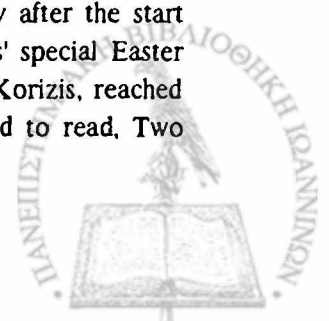
The minutes by UnderSecretary Warner portrayed the disgust radiated by the actions of the Koryzis' associates, in the British government:

Throws new light on the part played by UnderSecretary for Air

to have been a plot involving the Ministers of Finance, War and Navy, resulted in not only a wave of defeatism spreading throughout the capital, but in the suicide of the Prime Minister Mr. Koryzes... *The British are supposed to have taken a stiff attitude in regard to this affair, and to have borne down heavily on the Premier for what had happened, and this is probably the origin of certain stories to the effect that they had him put out of the way*». National Archives of the United States, RG 165, Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs, Military Intelligence Division. Report by the American Military Attache in Germany «Notes on the German Conquest and Occupation of Greece» of June 23, 1941. Italics mine.

1. *Ibid*, 371/29840 Folio 39. Minutes by the Undersecretary Warner to the despache by Palairat to the Foreign Office of April 20th, 1941.

2. *Ibid*, 371/29840 Folio 133. Letter by Marjorie C. Davis to Andreas Adossiades of August 1941. See also the writings of an American journalist then in residence in Athens covering the conflict. Miss Betty Wason in her work *Miracle in Hellas. The Greeks Fight On*, writes: «Gradually we pieced together the wild story of the events which culminated in the suicide of Alexandre Korizis. The archtraitor in the plot was the Minister of War, Papademas. Shortly after the start of the war with Germany, King George had signed an order granting two months' special Easter pay to the officers of the army... But when the order, countersigned by Premier Korizis, reached certain officers in strategic posts along the Macedonian front, it had been altered to read, Two monts pay and leave». Betty Wason, *Miracle in Hellas*, New York, 1943, p. 35.



Oikonomakos. Gives a vivid account of Papademas' *treason of which we already know*¹.

The passing of Koryzis², brought things to a head. The British now took over the everyday running of Government, «advising» the King, rejecting choices imposed on the later by the Metaxas entourage:

King send for me to tell me that he proposed to make M. Kotzias Vice-President... He was he said the only person round him to leave for Crete tonight... I was at first horrified at the suggestion and pointed out the unfurtunate effect at this juncture of appointing someone accused of pro-Germanism³.

Sir Palairret feet that he had to rally the support of the American ambassador MacVeagh to exclude the naming of Kotzias as the strong man of the new administration:

American (ambassador), and myself have just been together to urge His Majesty to form a strong military Government at once which we found Him preparing to do. He hopes to achieve its formation before meeting with General Wavel this afternoon⁴.

This drastic alternative to a new authoritarian rule was judged rather

1. Foreign Office 371/29840 Folio 133. Minutes by the UnderSecretary Warner. See also the writings of Oikonomakos on the same subject. Oikonomakos, *He Hellenike Aeroporia mechri tou 1941*, pp. 149-150.

2. A milestone in the turbulent history of intrigues and defeatism of the Metaxas era. On that subject, besides the able writings of the British diplomats see a rather voluminous Greek bibliography, some of it by the chief protagonists of the events. Selectively see the following: Spyros Salenas, *He Hellas eis ton Polemon*, Athens, 1946, pp. 233-240, Agis Tambakopoulos, *Ho Mythos tes Dictatorias*, Athens, 1945, Kotzias, *He Hellas, Ho Polemos kai he Doxa tes*, pp. 385-389, D. Gatopoulos, *Historia tes Katoches*, Athens, 1946, 4 vols, vol. 1, pp. 119-125, Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, pp. 201-202. Makkas, *Ethnikai Agoniai*, pp. 98-99, Ch. Christides, *Chronia Katoches 1941-1944. Martyries Hemerologiou, Prologos, Symple-romata, Semeoseis*, Athens, 1971, p. 71.

3. Foreign Office 371/29819 Folio 24. Despache by Palairret to the Foreign Office of April 19, 1941.

4. *Ibid*, 371/29840 Folio 34. Despache by Palairret to the Foreign Office of April 19th, 1941. On Kotzias see the following comments by Undersecretary Warner, «Kotzias. A large bluff man... a demagogue who succeeded in acquiring a certain following among the Metaxas Youth Movement and in football circles. He was at one time courted by the Germans and acquired a reputation for pro-German sympathies which may not have been justified». *Ibid*, 371/29819 Folio 19.



imperative to lift the country from the crisis brought about by the wanton defeatism and disorganization. And given the fact that the King, tragically alone, seemed to present the only semblance of legitimate authority in the country, it is not strange that the British insisted that he assume the chairmanship of the new cabinet. The King's choice, with the concurrence of the British ambassador was General Mazarakes¹, but the legacy and the intrigues of the Metaxas camarilla was bringing things to an impasse preventing the formation of a «Mazarakes» «government»:

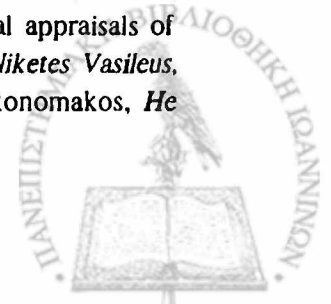
On arriving at Tatoi this afternoon we found that the King had practically appointed General Alexander Mazarakes as Vice President of the Council instead M. Kotzias but had not yet been able to complete a Government. I impressed on him the extreme urgency of this and He said he fully intended to do so².

The deliverance felt by all concerned was indeed short lived. General Mazarakes the next morning withdrew his acceptance mainly because of the British and the King's insistence to retain Maniades in the administration³. The King along with the British needed the facade of a «liberal» government without risking the consequences of a fundamental departure from the authoritarian system as it had been evolved during the Metaxas year. This is the principal reason that Mazarakes, in spite the contentions of Kotzias and several

1. *Ibid*, 36. See also the views of A. Mazarakes, *Apomnemonemata*, Athens, 1948, 608, Kodros, *Ho Niketes Vasileus*, p. 77, Tambakopoulos, *Ho Mythos tes Dictatorias*, p. 47.

2. *Foreign Office*, 371/29840 Folio 36. Despatch by Palairt to the Foreign Office of April 19th, 1941.

3. Another equally important consideration that weighed heavily in Mazarakes' rejection was his and his associates belief that they should not be shouldered the responsibilities for the collapse of the Greek Army and the treasonable acts of the military and political hierarchy of the Metaxas regime. Mazarakes, *Apomnemonemata*, p. 609. Sir Palairt while he emphasizes the factor Maniades revealing the fact that the British insisted that he be retained for reasons of security, he introduces a new element to interpret Mazarakes' refusal. He attributes to the liberal old General defeatism a view that surprisigly is shared by a Greek politician Kanellopoulos in a rather recent work of his. And the surprise assumes bigger propotions since the same author in an earlier work of his defending his own unwillingness to take part in the same administration headed by Mazarakes argues in the same exact manner as Mazarakes. *Foreign Office*, 371/29819 Folio 54. Despatch by Palairt to the Foreign Office of April 20, 1941, Kanellopoulos, *1935-1945. Enas Apologismos*, p. 17; *Ta Chronia tou Megalou Polemou 1939-1944. Historike Anadrome kai Keimena*, Athens, 1964, second edit., p. 10, footnote 2. For more mild but nevertheless highly critical appraisals of Mazarakes refusal see a host of moderate to extreme right writers. Kodros, *Ho Niketes Vasileus*, p. 78, Kyros, *Oneira kai Pragmatikotes*, p. 203, Pipinelis, *Georgios B.*, p. 106, Oikonomakos, *He Hellenike Aeroporja mechri tou 1941*, p. 151.



other authors, was not offered a free hand in the formation of his own cabinet¹.

The state of panic and desperation reached now a point of frenzy. The British ambassador questioned the King point blank whether «many of his Ministers had advised him to make a separate peace», implying that the very safety of the «administration» was in jeopardy.

The only service which was still retaining a modicum of discipline, notwithstanding the series of mutinies among the staffs of the warships anchored at the Athens naval anchorages, was the Navy. The Head of the Navy therefore, turned to the besieged King, with the blessings of the British, to salvage whatever could be saved.

Admiral Sakellariou who was commuting on a most hectic pace between Skaramaga and the administrations' Headquarters, the *Grande Bretagne*, seemingly² casually but actually an expression of hopelessness was offered by the King, the Vice-Presidency of a reorganized Administration, the Monarch being the titular head of the «new Administration». Not as Kotzias contended a mandate to form a new cabinet but rather the King was attempting to provide the appearance of a workable government, all other schemes for a new administration having been failed³. However, there was a significant and ominous development. The timid launching into political foreground of a moderate Venizelist, a late victim of the Metaxas dictatorship and Maniades' secret police, the former governor of the Bank of Greece, Tsouderos. Both of those appointments, a matter of the utmost expediency, drew the unqualified support of the British:

New cabinet... consists of 10 members, excluding the King.

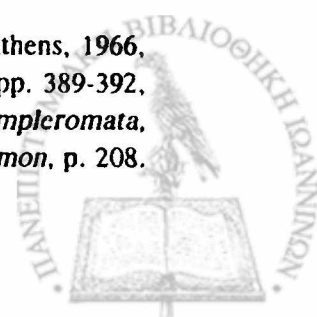
Admiral Sakellariou is Vice-President of the Council and Minister of Marine... The Vice-President of the Government is Greece's most experience sailor who has been chief of the Naval Staff since 1936. He is a Royalist and strongly Anglophile. He took a very strong line in connection with the suppression of the Venizelist rising in 1935, which he helped largely to put down. He had no previous political experience but can be regarded as an honest and capable man of strong character⁴.

1. *Ibid.*

2. Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, p. 206.

3. Kotzias, *Hellas ho Polemos kai he Doxa tes*, p. 393.

4. E. Venezes, *Emmanouel Tsouderos. Ho Prothypourgos tes Maches tes Kretes*, Athens, 1966, pp. 173-174. Goudes, *He Hellas kata ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon 1939-1945*, pp. 389-392. Chrestides, *Chronia Katoches, 1941-1944. Martyries Hemerologiou, Prologos, Sympleromata, Semeioseis*, p. 51, Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, p. 208.



Equally laudatory was the Foreign Office for the next choice the newly appointed Prime Minister Tsouderos:

M. Tsouderos is an excellent choice in present circumstances.
He is a strong Venizelist and a Cretan¹.

The same enthusiastic appraisal was shared by the ambassador in Athens:

M. Tsouderos inspires Generals Wilson and Wavel with great confidence and I think he can be trusted to handle the difficult situation with strength and prudence.

The candidacy of Tsouderos had been considered, by the British, well ahead of time. Tsouderos, who in the words of Sir Palaret, in January 1940, "was always friendly with this Legation" and strongly pro-British, at times used to offer his «expertise» to the British Embassy briefing it on the State of Affairs of Greece with secret memorandums. Not surprising, therefore, that Tsouderos in the opinion of his British friends provided a good choice for the Premiership:

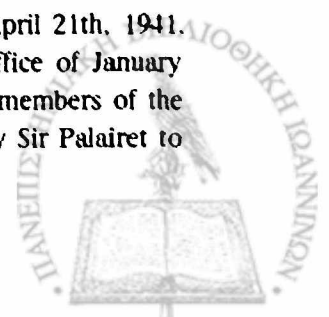
...for Monsieur Tsouderos in a man of standing and is often mentioned as the person who could best take over from General Metaxas, if the King decided to dismiss the President of the Council and gradually revert to a more democratic system².

In the Navy, both at the Fleet and at the auxiliary services on land, those events constituted a time of trial, agony and, alas, of vindication for the ineptitude of the regime which was in charge of the service since 1935. Admiral Sakellariou, on his own initiative, because of the hopelessness and the collapse of the front and the corresponding panicky state of the political leadership, submitted to the government a precise plan for the orderly evacuation from the Greek waters of the Fleet. His plan articulated that late a date April 10th.

The quotes on the text, of course, are from the Foreign Office. Foreign Office, 371/29819 Folio 52. Minutes by UnderSecretary Nickols to the above mentioned telegram by Palaret to the Foreign Office of April 20th, 1941.

1. *Ibid.* Minutes by UnderSecretary Warner to the telegram by Palaret to the Foreign Office 371/29840 Folio 38 of April 20, 1941.

2. *Ibid.* 371/29840 Folio 44. Telegram by Palaret to the Foreign Office of April 21th, 1941. Foreign Office, 371/24909, folio 173. Despache by Sir Palaret to the Foreign Office of January 26, 1940. *Ibid.* «Tsouderos... secretly left at the Legation a document stating that members of the Government are anxious about Monsieur Metaxas' health». Folio 167. Despache by Sir Palaret to the Foreign Office of January 20, 1940. *Ibid.*



1941, was of course, influenced by all the above and bore the air of hastiness if not compromise.

It was submitted in the form of a memorandum attempting to evaluate the strategic position of the Navy and indirectly to suggest that the government and the King ought to consider, in advance, some emergency measures. As Captain Petropoulos observed, was the only plan by any of the services, that realistically assessed the evolving events and proposed a prompt, efficient and within the realm of possible solution. The practical recommendations of Admiral Sakellariou, unhesitatingly specified that the Greek destroyers, submarines, and the repair ship *Hyphastos* depart for Alexandria, Egypt «...in case of the occupation of the national soil by the enemy»¹. According to the same plan the Flagship *Averoff* and some of the less seaworthy old torpedo boats, would accompany the Fleet only if the British Admiralty approved otherwise be scuttled.

What Admiral Sakellariou did not disclose was that since the middle of March 1941, the British Naval Attache in Athens Rear-Admiral Turle had initiated discussions with the Greek Admiralty «concerning Greek naval arrangements if Greece is overrun»².

On the afternoon of April 11th, 1941, a day after Sakellariou's memorandum had reached the desk of the Prime Minister, the King «ordered» the four Admirals along with the UnderSecretary of the Navy Papavasileiou to his office at the Headquarters. There, according to Admiral Kavvadias the monarch did not seem interested in the formulation of a policy for the Fleet to move south, but suffering from visible signs of fatigue and affliction, warned the assembled Admirals of the repercussions of insubordination toward the regime. An astonishing demonstration of royal mistrust to the trusted servants of the Crown, who, of course, did not contemplate any *coup d'etat*, unless, of course, if we are to accept Captain Petropoulos³ speculations, that the King had been aware of the defeatist comments of Vice-Admiral Oikonomou.

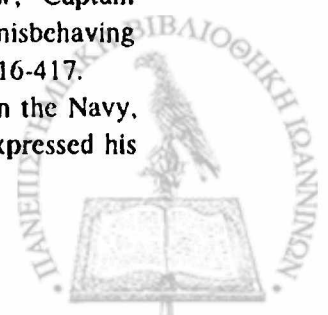
The senior Admiral of the Greek Navy according to the «official history» of the Navy⁴ was adamantly opposed to the departure of the Fleet. His main

1. Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, pp. 168-171.

2. Foreign Office, 371/29814, Folio 67. Communication of the British Naval Attache in Athens to the C.-in-C. British Fleet Mediterranean of March 16, 1941.

3. Petropoulos is of the opinion that the King had been informed about the gossiping of the Admirals, that Vice-Admiral Oikonomou had acted alone. Nevertheless, somehow, Captain Petropoulos did not fail to observe that the King behaved, «as a Sergeant Major towards misbehaving recruits...». Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaiou Nautikou*, vol. 2, pp. 416-417.

4. Admiral Kavvadias agrees that no insubordination of any kind was to be found in the Navy, either among the enlisted men or the officer corp. And paranthetically, the Admiral expressed his



aim was the maintenance of the regime intact even under the tutelage of the German occupation forces a concern shared by an enviable number of senior officers of the armed forces leadership. The Admiral furthermore, in the same vain, wanted to entangle the monarchy inferring that the Crown Prince Paul ought to remain in Greece to signify the continuity of the regime¹.

The royal reaction, given the commitments of the Monarchy to the British, had an additional orientation more practical this time. The evening of the same day King George summoned Sir Palaret, and after reviewing the military collapse at the front, attempted to lure the British into consenting for the evacuation of the Greek administration from Athens to Crete. One of the reasons advanced, that the proximity of the Fleet to Athens was not permitting the function of the government there. «His Majesty thinks that Athens would become untenable as a seat of government partly owing to panic here and Salamis as a naval base»². And on the strength of Sakellariou's memorandum and to provide a justification of the evacuation South of the administration, the King made for the first time what up to the time seemed an astonishing offer, to have the Greek Fleet, bag and baggage, move to Egypt under British command:

If necessary could the Greek Fleet move to Alexandria and be placed under the command of Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean?

Would Commander-in Chief accept Greek Navy as a whole or only certain units would be useful to him?

Is any case His Majesty hoped that the whole of the Fleet (except *Kilkis* which would be sent to Crete), would be allowed to come to Alexandria³.

The response of the British Admiralty and the British Government was indicative of the great value placed by the later in sustaining the regime's resolution not to surrender:

faith in the stability of the regime by praising the never ending vigilance of the Minister of Security Maniades. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, pp. 245-246.

1. Another interpretation has it that while Vice-Admiral Oikonomou was the most visible symbol of what professor Pyromaglou has defined as the bankrupt military leadership of Greece, he was essentially harmless to the regime. The King and the Cerberus of the regime Maniades were alarmed by the Sakellariou's memorandum. To them the departure of the Fleet at once, besides the implications that it could have on the fate of the regime, it could have given birth to the creation of an opposing force hostile to the regime and the monarchy.

2. Foreign Office, 371/29839 Folio 158. Communication by Sir Palaret to the Foreign Office of April 12, 1941.

3. *Ibid.*



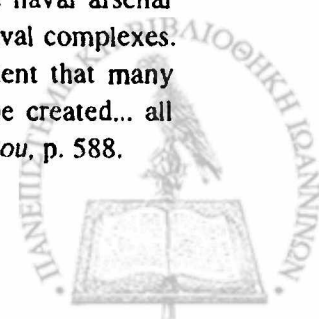
The Chiefs of Staff would be glad to have the whole Greek Fleet placed under the command of the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean. Accomodation would be provided in Alexandria¹.

The King's action was not to be an isolated initiative. On the day of the issuance of the by now notorious memorandum by Sakellariou, Prime Minister Koryzes, acting on royal summons called an immediate meeting of the Highest Naval Council to be presided over by the UnderSecretary of the Navy Papavasileiou. The decisions reached differed only slightly from the recommendations advanced by Sakellariou. They were approved almost unanimously, unless if we take into account the negative and obstructionist dissent of Vice-Admiral Oikonomou, and according to which the destroyers and the available submarines of the Fleet accompanied by a number of auxiliary vessels should be ready to sail south at any given moment. The main bulk of the Fleet would proceed to Alexandria while the aging flagship *Averoff* and the remaining 13 torpedo boats would move to the Bay of Suda in Crete.

The manpower of the Navy, the ones not departing with the Fleet, officers, non-commisioned officers and enlisted men would be discharged, send on a permanent leave. The fortifications maintained by the Navy, such as antiaircraft installations and harbor batteries and the mine fields at the approaches of the main harbors would be demolished. But not the «machinery, materiel, installations, and the building ought to remain intact»². And apparently, after rather private consultations among the Chiefs of the Naval Staff and the Under Secretary of the Navy Papavasileiou, Sakellariou agreed, on principle, to follow the Fleet south as the principal naval advisor to the government to in exile.

1. In the minutes of the same Despache Sir Sargent of the pertinent office of the Foreign Office penciled the following: «The Chiefs would jump at having the whole of the Greek Fleet at Alexandria». And this is a measure of the anxiety of the British about the Greek Fleet and their fears with the procrastinations of the Greek naval leadership and the regime in general. *Ibid*, 165.

2. This was one of the most controversial items in both memorandum and in subsequent decisions of the administration. All the installations were surrendered to the Germans and used by them to the fullest extent throughout the period of the war up to 1944 when the country was liberated. The *raison d' être* for this decision was that the Greek Fleet would be in need of the facilities at the war's end. The authors, of course of this order believed that the Germans would have spared them from destruction. Here is how Admiral Toumbas, the first Commander of the naval arsenal of Skaramangas after the liberation of the country, described the conditions at the naval complexes. «The picture that the naval base was presenting then was despairing to that an extent that many expressed the opinion whether it should not be abandoned and a new naval base be created... all were in ruins». Toumbas, *Echthros en Opsei. Anamneseis tou Deuterou Pagosmiou Polemou*, p. 588.



Those deliberations were officially approved by the Prime Minister on the very next day and it was now the declared policy of the administration to identify its fate along with that of the allies continuing the war beyond the national confines. The new orientation of the country's foreign policy, was not however, made known even to the cabinet itself, the Prime Minister advising the Naval General Staff to issue an urgent directive to the three admirals of the confidential nature of this decision warning them not to be communicate it to the naval staffs¹. Additionally, the administration, urged in the same classified note that all measures to be taken of the impending withdrawal of the Fleet should be kept secret². It was evident, wrote Admiral Phokas, the uneasiness of the administration, the Prime Minister, that the departure of the Fleet would have created a panic that could sweep aside the remnants of the Metaxas dictatorship³. And Admiral Kavvadias, asked the loaded question, whether if the administration did not wish the Navy to know of its intentions why then to issue the order in the first place⁴.

Indeed, conflicting and self annulling orders emanating from the government increased the nervousness, and provided additional causes of misapprehension among the naval officer corp. Vice-Admiral Oikonomou, according to the official history of the Navy⁵, apparently unreprieved for his earlier remarks

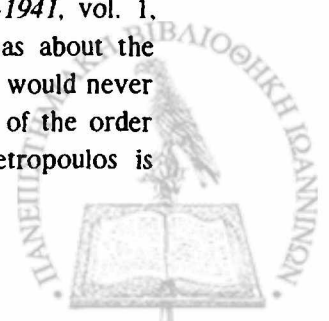
1. See the pertinent details in the writings of the two Admirals and in the official history of the Navy. The last, written by an Admiral who was not a direct participant in the events attempts to provide some interpretations of the possible motives of the conflicting policies of the administration in regards to the departure of the Fleet. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, pp. 238-239, Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pagosmion Polemon*, pp. 170-171, Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. 1, pp. 379-383. See also some not so complimentary observations on the issue by Captain Petropoulos especially as they pertain to Admiral Kavvadias. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaiou Nautikou*, p. 414.

2. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, p. 239.

3. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. 1, pp. 379-383.

4. It reached the verge of comical the sophistries of the Admiral in his attempt to cloud the issue. Admiral Kavvadias did not approve of the order altogether. He was of the opinion that since the four Admirals knew of the memorandum of the Chief of the Navy that was sufficient. The Navy, according to the Chief of the Fleet, should leave Greece in secrecy, its own men kept in ignorance and escape like thieves. Kavvadias. *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton ezesa*, p. 239.

5. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. 1, pp. 382-383. Captain Petropoulos, seems to doubt the assertions of Admiral Phokas about the appeal of Admiral Oikonomou to the King. He bases that on the belief that the King would never have allowed such an action by the Admiral. And is of the opinion that the change of the order came rather from the UnderSecretary of the Navy. The reasoning of Captain Petropoulos is



at the session of the «Highest Naval Council», did not cease his, by now premeditated efforts, to nulify if not minimize what he considered the negative for the regime effects of the Fleet's departure from the country. In agreement with the UnderSecretary of the Navy Papavasileiou sought and was granted an audience with the King in order to convince the Monarch that the naval services had to retain the «essential» personnel, so as to surrender in good faith to the Germans. Vice-Admiral Oikonomou was arguing that a nucleus of naval officers, *career officers* not those of the naval reserve, should remain in active duty during the German occupation¹.

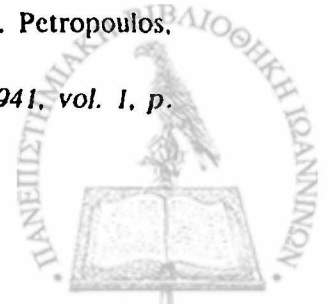
Cloaked in words reminiscent of the farewell orations of Lieutenant-General Bakopoulos, Vice-Admiral Oikonomou advanced the argument that it was not worthy of men who had fought honorably to hide. The other Admiral who mentions this incident, Kavvadias, justified it with the argument that the civilian employees would have suffered reprisals by the occupational armies, if the naval cadres had been discharged. The surprising element, of course, was the receptiveness of the King and his willingness to even *entertain* such projects, which were in complete contradiction with the accepted dogma and the firm commitments undertaken by the King to the British.

For the Admiral now with royal approval was to divide the officer corp and foment the scepticism of those defeatist or pro-Metaxist cadres who were opposing the exodus to Alexandria. With royal connivance then the standing order of the Prime Minister of April 11th, 1941, which had been made privy to the British was being sidestepped. An Admiral who had disagreed with his rest of his peers and with the Prime Minister, now on the moral strength of the royal acquiescence effected an alteration in the long terms objectives of the Navy, subordinating the later to the considerations of the survival of the regime. The seeds of the creeping collaboration with the occupational forces and the advent of the civil war amongst the Greek people were thus firmly planted.

On April 16th, 1941, the UnderSecretary of the Navy in the confidential Order 944 amended the previous standing order for the withdrawal of the Fleet and its auxilliary personnel, providing now that regular career naval officers and non-commisioned officers in land installations would not follow the Fleet or discharged but would remain on active duty to surrender their respective commands to the Germans. It should be said, however, that on the very same

reminiscing of the faith of the Russian peasants to the Tsar, that all unfurtunate events in that country was the work of advisors of the Tsar rather that of the Emperor himself. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Paliou Nautikou*, vol. 2, p. 417.

1. Phokas, *Ekthesis epi tes Draseos tou B. Nautikou kata ton Polemon 1940-1941*, vol. 1, p. 382.



day when this preposterous and treasonable order was issued Koryzis delivered to the British ambassador Sir Palairet the following communication:

In the event of the capture of Athens, which could easily be achieved if the front line were broken, the Greek Fleet could no longer remain at Salamis. It is, therefore necessary to determine from now its disposition in the eventuality. The Council of Admirals, having examined the development of the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, consider without reserve that the Fleet can have no other base except Alexandria. Suda Bay is precluded owing to its vulnerability. Further, it is considered highly advisable that the two Fleets should operate from the same base. After this point has been determined on principle, it will remain for the two staffs to determine which units of the Greek Fleet can be used and which other auxiliary units and reserve personnel should accompany the Greek Fleet to Alexandria¹.

The effort of the Greek administration to swift to the British, or better to win in advance their approval for the contemplated dichotomy in the naval officer corp is quite evident in the last paragraph of this communication. And it should be added that the pernicious order was issued in the name of the UnderSecretary of the Navy Papavasileiou two days after he had submitted this resignation. Evidently, neither Koryzis nor the King who were in full knowledge of the far reaching implications and the far reaching results of this action wanted to be associated with it.

1. Foreign Office, 371/29818 Folio 177. Communication by the Greek government to the British ambassador Sir Michael Palairet.



ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

ΤΟ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΝΑΥΤΙΚΟ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΗ ΔΙΑΡΚΕΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΠΟΛΕΜΟΥ ΣΤΗ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ

του

Ιωάννη Θ. Μαλακάση

Η Βρετανική διπλωματία, παρά τις επιμέρους επιφυλάξεις της από το 1940 και μετά, εμφανίζεται ικανοποιημένη από την εκφρασμένη τάση του Μεταξά να προσαρμόσει την πολιτική της Ελλάδας στις απαιτήσεις της Βρετανικής πολιτικής στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο.

Το κυρίαρχο δόγμα του Foreign Office για την Ελλάδα διαμορφώνεται με βάση την πραγματιστική θέση, ότι δηλ. η δικτατορία, μετά τις εκκαθαρίσεις του 1935, ανέπτυξε ένα στρατιωτικό δυναμικό, το Σώμα Αξιωματικών ταυτισμένο, με άρρηκτους δεσμούς συμφερόντων και πολιτικής ιδεολογίας, με το καθεστώς της 4ης Αυγούστου. Κάθε προσπάθεια ανατροπής του καθεστώτος αυτού, σύμφωνα με το ίδιο δόγμα, συνεπαγόταν ιδιαίτερα αυξημένους κινδύνους αστάθειας που θα υπονόμευαν την Βρετανική θέση στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο.

Ο Μεταξάς, από το καλοκαίρι του 1940, αγνοώντας τις πιέσεις του Βερολίνου, να εγκαταλείψει την «φιλοαγγλική» πολιτική του, επαναλαμβάνει την πρόθεσή του να «συνεργασθεί» με το Λονδίνο ενάντια στον Ιταλικό επεκτατισμό στην Α. Μεσόγειο.

Η Μεγάλη Βρετανία, με τον Στόλο της Μεσογείου, εξασφάλιζε την προστασία της χώρας από θαλάσσης και εγγυόταν την ασφάλεια των ελληνικών στρατιωτικών μεταφορών από ιταλικές επεμβάσεις. Η «συνεργασία» όμως αυτή δεν πήρε ποτέ την μορφή έστω μιάς άτυπης συμμαχίας με ουσιαστικές επιτελικές διεργασίες των αντίστοιχων Ναυτικών επιτελείων. Η κυβέρνηση Μεταξά με ιδιαίτερη προσοχή απέφευγε να προσδώσει επίσημο χαρακτήρα στη σύγκλιση αυτή, για να αποφύγει μια ενδεχόμενη ρήξη με το Βερολίνο ή να «προκαλέσει» την Ρώμη.

Η αμφίρροπη αυτή πολιτική έχει άμεσες συνέπειες στον επιτελικό σχεδιασμό και την ετοιμότητα του Πολεμικού Ναυτικού. Το Γενικό Επιτελείο Ναυτικού προχωρεί, με ιδιαίτερη διστακτικότητα, στην πολεμική ετοιμότητα του δυναμικού του Ελληνικού Στόλου. Οι περιορισμοί που επιβάλλονται στο



Γενικό Επιτελείο Ναυτικού από την εκφρασμένη πολιτική θέληση της κυβέρνησης Μεταξά αποβαίνουν ιδιαίτερα οδυνηροί για το Πολεμικό Ναυτικό, διότι εντείνουν τις εγγενείς δυσκολίες που αντιμετωπίζει στην πολεμική στελέχωση από το υπάρχον δόγμα της Ναυτικής ηγεσίας και ιδίως των Ναυάρχων Οικονόμου-Καββαδία. Η ανώτατη ηγεσία του Πολεμικού Ναυτικού που προήλθε από τις εκκαθαρίσεις του 1935, είχε αναγάγει σε κυρίαρχο δόγμα την απομάκρυνση από τις τάξεις του Πολεμικού Ναυτικού των ενεργών στελεχών, όλων εκείνων που θα ενέπνεαν εμπιστοσύνη στα νέα μεταβενιζελικά συντηρητικά καθεστώτα.

Οι εκκαθαρίσεις αυτές είχαν «απαλλάξει» το Πολεμικό Ναυτικό από το 31% των άκρως εκπαιδευμένων νεωτέρων στελεχών του ενεργού Στόλου. Η ουσιαστική ολοκλήρωση της πολεμικής ετοιμότητας στην οποία καλείται τώρα το Πολεμικό Ναυτικό προσκρούει στην ασάφεια των σχέσεων Μεταξά-Μ. Βρετανίας και στην πολιτική των εκκαθαρίσεων. Έτσι το Πολεμικό Ναυτικό εισέρχεται στον πόλεμο, τον Οκτώβριο του 1940, μάλλον απροπαρασκευο σε θέματα εκπαιδευμένων στελεχών, έχοντας α ριπίοκι αποκλείσει την πλήρη αξιοποίηση του δυναμικού του.

