

# GREECE: TWISTING THE ELEPHANT'S TAIL

by Stephen Rousseas

Modern Greece has been a hapless country. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Greece was occupied for almost four hundred years by the Turks. The War of Independence, which began in 1821, continued for twelve years before it was finally resolved and the Triple Alliance implanted the Bavarian King Otho on the throne. Great Britain soon came to dominate Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean—a dominance that lasted, except for the German occupation of 1941-44, until 1947, when the U.S. stepped in with the Truman Doctrine. Thus began the period of the latest domination of Greece.

At the outbreak of World War II, Greece was under the dictatorship of General Metaxas. When, on October 28, 1940, Mussolini issued his ultimatum to Greece, Metaxas replied with his now famous "*Ohi!*" and the Greek troops humiliated Mussolini's minions in the mountains of Albania. A year later Nazi Germany occupied Greece, and a resistance movement was quickly formed, led by the National Liberation Front (EAM). Although the upper echelons were dominated by the Greek Communist party (KKE), EAM was broadly enough based to have 1.5 million members (a fifth of the total population) and an army (ELAS) of about fifty thousand guerrilla fighters.

The Germans pulled out of Greece in October of 1944. Churchill, who had come to an agreement with Stalin over the division of the Balkans, was left to play his hand in Greece as he wished. General Scobie and the British Army landed in Piraeus on October 14. Four days later the puppet government of George Papandreou arrived and, backed by an order of General Scobie, called for the disarmament of the ELAS forces. The order was refused and armed clashes took place between the British and ELAS in Athens. By December, 1944, EAM had been defeated in Athens, but the struggle continued. On February 13, 1945, came the Varkiza agreement that promised, in exchange for a laying down of arms, the legal recognition of EAM, free elections, a constitutional plebiscite on

the return of the king, and a purging of all Nazi collaborators. Instead, the extreme Right assumed power with the connivance of the British, and goon squads scoured the countryside spreading terror through indiscriminate summary executions of "leftists." By 1946, Greece was in a state of civil war.

Britain considered Greece, Turkey, and Iran a bulwark against Russian control of the Middle East and its vast petroleum reserves. But by 1947, with its own economy in desperate straits, Britain no longer could sustain the drain of its involvement in Greece. It decided to pull out, but in doing so, it maneuvered the U.S. into filling the vacuum. The American Mission for Aid to Greece virtually governed Greece and, by 1948, General James A. Van Fleet, the American director of joint military aid, was mixing freely in the intrigues of a dim-witted King Paul and an all-powerful Queen Frederica.

Moderates and liberals were quickly pushed aside. Alexander Svolos, the head of the Greek Socialist party and former president of the wartime resistance government, was suspected of Communist sympathies. Liberals such as General Plastiras, Emmanuel Tsouderos, John Sofianopoulos, and Demetrios Lambrakis, who had called for amnesty and reforms, were looked upon as simple-minded dupes and "fellow travelers"—not hard-line anti-Communists by American standards. The U.S. installed instead two extreme rightists, Constantine Tsaldaris and General Papagos. The terror continued unabated. With American encouragement there were mass arrests and deportations to the barren islands—over thirty thousand to the island of Makronisos alone. The CIA installation in Athens emerged as one of the agency's key stations in Europe. It organized and established KYP, the Greek CIA, and fully funded it. Not coincidentally, Colonel Papadopoulos, the eventual head of the junta that held sway from 1967-74, was a high-ranking member of the KYP at the time of the colonels' coup.

For three years the civil war raged, despite the fact that the Greek army of some 250,000 men heavily armed and supported by U.S. matériel was facing a guerrilla force of only 25,000, largely concentrated in the northern mountains of Grammos and Vitsi. The

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Greek army's morale was low and it rarely attacked rebel strongholds, even under pressure from General Van Fleet. Final victory for the government was due not to the massive U.S. military aid or to tactical superiority but to a blunder on the part of the KKE and the feud between Stalin and Tito. The principal leaders of the guerrillas were Markos Vafiades, who preferred a classical and mobile guerrilla tactic, and Nikos Zachariades, the chief of the KKE, who decided to fight a positional war and sustained massive losses in the 1948 offensive. (General Van Fleet insisted upon and finally got a rain of napalm bombings by the Greek air force on the mountain redoubts of the rebels.) The isolation and expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Comintern and its need for Western economic aid eventually succeeded in forcing Tito, in his own self-interest, to close the Yugoslav border to the Greek insurgents—as did Albania and Bulgaria under pressure from Stalin.

#### ELEPHANT AND FLEA

Lawrence S. Wittner in his recent *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-49* (Columbia University Press) makes the point repeatedly that Stalin had all along opposed the Greek uprising and did everything to uphold his agreement with Churchill on their respective spheres of influence. It was the cold war intransigence and blindness of the U.S., which insisted on seeing a grand Communist conspiracy controlled by Russia, that led to the propping up of right-wing governments in Greece and only served to make matters worse. One of the arch villains to emerge in Wittner's tale is Karl Rankin, the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Athens. It was he who insisted that the liberals oppose amnesty and take a hard anti-Communist line, which they refused to do. Rankin also encouraged and supported the mass arrests and executions of the puppet

governments and assured the world that Greek justice afforded "reasonable protection to the individual—certainly as much as can be expected under present circumstances." When the new minister of justice, George Melas, suggested curtailing government terrorism and mass executions, Rankin objected forcefully. It was also clear to Rankin that Greece "is in effect our instrument..., one which we are shaping to use in the furtherance of our foreign policy." And when the insurgent leader Vafiades offered a cease-fire and settlement of the conflict, it was Rankin who advised the U.S. secretary of state to reject it on the grounds that "we are leading from strength" and that the only solution was "the crushing defeat of [the] bandit forces...not...appeasement and conciliation."

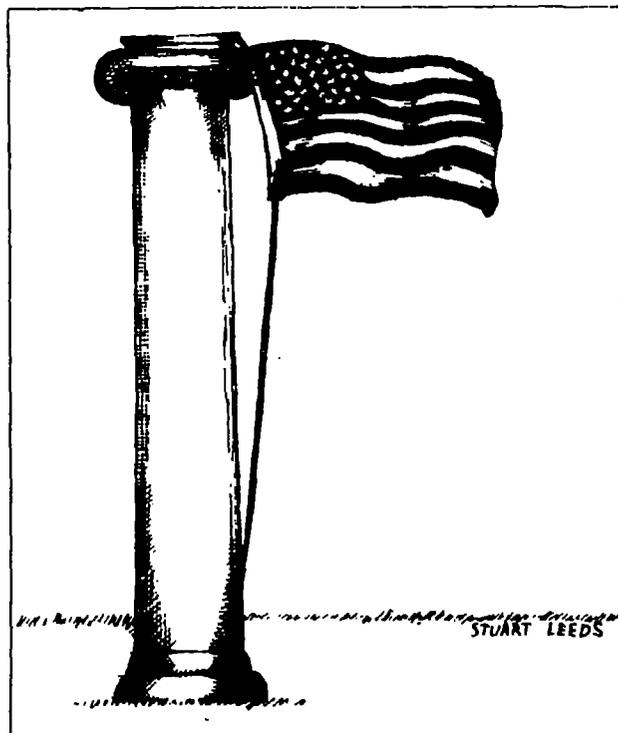
These attitudes carried into the 1967-74 dictatorship of the colonels. President Johnson's secretary of defense, Clark Clifford, appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1968, supported U.S. military aid to the junta in these words: "The obligations imposed on us by NATO are far more important than the kind of government they have in Greece." This same attitude is illustrated in Lyndon Johnson's blast, quoted in Wittner, to the Greek ambassador in Washington a few years before the 1967 coup, when the then prime minister of Greece, George Papandreou, opposed Dean Acheson's plan to partition Cyprus:

Fuck your parliament and your constitution. America is an elephant, Cyprus is a flea. Greece is a flea. If these two fellows [Prime Minister Papandreou and Bishop Makarios, President of Cyprus] continue itching the elephant, they may just get whacked by the elephant's trunk, whacked good....If your Prime Minister gives me talk about democracy, parliament and constitution, he, his parliament and his constitution may not last very long. Don't forget to tell old Papa what's his name what I told you....You hear?

And it was this attitude that was largely behind the coup of 1967, which was an unexpected variation on the big coup that the U.S. had planned all along to prevent the election of the Center Union party of George Papandreou.

Seven years later, when the colonels backed a putsch in Cyprus, they triggered the Turkish invasion and partition of that island and, consequently, their own collapse. Constantine Caramanlis was called back from his eleven-year exile in Paris to take up the reins of government, serving as prime minister until he elevated himself to the presidency in 1980. Finally, in the elections of October, 1981, Andreas Papandreou, son of the former prime minister, swept the field as head of the Greek Socialist party (PASOK).

And what of Papandreou *filis*, the head of the first "socialist" government in the history of Greece—itself the outgrowth of thirty-four years of American interference and misrule in Greece? During his campaign, Andreas (as he is popularly called in Greece) pledged to take the country out of NATO and the Common Market and to expel the U.S. from its military bases in Greece. Since his election he has opened an embassy in Havana, invited Yasir Arafat to Athens



and upgraded the diplomatic status of the PLO above that of Israel, was even prepared to welcome Qaddafi to Athens until Qaddafi pulled back at the last moment, and refused to join the West in censuring the Soviet Union over Poland. He has, however, muted his threat on the Common Market and, more tellingly, has reversed himself on NATO. Andreas has much to fear from the Greek army. He kept the portfolio of minister of defense for himself and is pandering to the army's nationalistic prejudices over Cyprus. His thirty-four-year-old under-secretary of defense, George Petsos, sought to minimize dependence on the U.S. for arms and talked of setting up a Greek arms and aerospace industry, scheduling visits to France and Germany to inspect their military wares. Petsos was summarily fired from his post a short while ago.

Andreas has also granted large housing allowances for officers, increased military salaries substantially, and is in the process of providing free medical care for the military and their dependents, including medical treatment abroad. Greece, moreover, is the only nation I know of in the West where the military runs its own radio and television network—this in a country with only two TV channels! Although Andreas has been quoted as saying that such a state of affairs has “no place in a democracy,” he has done nothing to alter it in a year in power.

The army clearly is a force to be feared. Whether it can be bought off so easily is another matter. But far more important than fringe benefits and salary increases is the officer corps' opposition to any withdrawal from NATO. Andreas has also, apparently, softened his opposition to U.S. bases in Greece, which include two major naval bases in Suda Bay and

Heraklion in Crete, an air base in Athens, a communications center in Nea Makri just outside Athens, and several other minor bases. Still, Andreas is holding to his policy of carefully twisting the elephant's tail. Alexander Haig's visit to Athens last May to discuss military and economic aid, the military bases, and Greek-Turkish problems in the Aegean is of particular interest. The Greek Communist party responded by putting several thousand supporters on the streets, and Andreas replied that he “would not accept lessons from those who exploit national issues to promote their party interests.” Four days after Haig's departure the Greek Socialist government expressed reservations and concern over the U.S. refusal to reaffirm its 1976 pledge, under Kissinger, to oppose any armed action by the Turks against the Greeks. Moscow quickly came down on the side of Greece and warned the Turks about taking any actions against Greece or Cyprus.

Greece now has an avowedly Socialist government, but, as with the army, the old economic oligarchy remains largely intact. Whether the Socialists will be able to change things or will prove to be a passing aberration in the long history of Greece remains to be seen. There certainly is little evidence that the U.S. has learned anything and every indication that the Reagan administration will continue to interfere in the internal politics of Greece, especially if it comes to view Andreas's bluster as something more: a carefully calculated attempt to alter, in time, the real distribution of power in Greece. Andreas clearly is walking on eggs. Staying in power and doing what needs to be done are not compatible objectives in Greece. [VV]

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## COMING

*In January, “GREAT DECISIONS '83,” including Ambassador VIRON VAKY on lessons from the South Atlantic, BENJAMIN COHEN on global trade and unemployment, HAROLD MARCUS on the plight of East Africa, HARVEY WATERMAN on West Germany and the shaky Alliance...also, JAMES FEINERMAN on two views from China, ANGELA STENT on the East looking West, and more...*