The End of an Affair: Anglo-Greek relations, 1939-55

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In her memoir *An Affair of the Heart*, published in 1957, writing about her return to Athens in 1945, and still harbouring the "remembered magic" of pre-war days, Dilys Powell conjured up her uneasiness at that time, even the consciousness of a threat. "There was nothing to which one could point," she wrote. "Occasionally a sullen face, perhaps; sometimes a blank [stare] instead of the old eagerness of manner... It was ... like a faint drum-beat in the air... I was horrified to find myself beginning to dislike my friends."[1] It may be that Powell was here transposing on to her memories of 1945 tendencies that had by 1957 become more explicit because of recent Cypriot events. But in the years after the appearance of Powell's book any widespread remembrance, either British or Greek, that there ever had been "an affair of the heart" between the two countries more or less dissolved. When the then British Ambassador went to Corfu Town in May 1964 for the centennial celebrations of Ionian accession to Greece, he was disappointed to find that there was little if any token that it had been a *British* cession in the first place; nor was there seemingly any recognition of a special historical tie between Britain and Greece.[2] And if we leap further ahead to the current trauma within the eurozone, there is almost no vestige in British public debate that Greece is a nation with which the United

[1] Dilys Powell, *An Affair of the Heart* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1957), pp. 39-40.
[2] R. Murray to R. Butler, 25 May 1964 FO371/174838, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA).

Kingdom had enjoyed over a long period an intimate, if always ambivalent, connection.

Powell's "remembered magic" of the 1930s need not be taken too much at face value. It was the magic of the expatriate archaeologists – her husband had been the Director of the British School at Athens – and in these circles engagement with anything other than ancient pots and pans in host societies can sometimes be limited. Anglo-Greek relations had often been anything but magical. After the Asia Minor disaster of 1922 there had been a strong reaction. Still, there had been something of a revival towards the end of the 1930s. The retiring British Ambassador in Athens, Sir Sydney Waterlow, when writing his final despatch on 31 May 1939, credited a recent strengthening in Britain's standing, as he saw it, to the fact that it was no longer firmly tied to the faction of Eleutherios Venizelos.[3] The British had been careful not to extend any sympathy to Venizelos' botched coup in 1935, even though his usual Cretan sympathizers had signalled a willingness to "raise the British flag".[4] Ambassador Waterlow also noted the benefits from the cultural endeavours of the newly founded British Council, for which Greece, and the Mediterranean in general afforded an early focus. Great Britain now being equally popular, he claimed, with the two hostile camps in Greek political life, Waterlow concluded: "... there seems nothing in the situation to cause uneasiness as to the future course of Anglo-Greek relations. Their foundations are broad and firm ... nothing but our defeat in battle is likely to shake them."[5]

But of course the British were to be defeated in battle in Greece during the spring of 1941. The American Ambassador, Lincoln MacVeagh, attributed the surprising resilience of Greece in responding to Mussolini's attack across the Epirus frontier after October 1940 to the effects of "national intoxication", a people

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[3] Sir S. Waterlow to Viscount Halifax, 31 May 1939 CAB21/1912, TNA.

[4] James Barros, *Britain, Greece and the politics of sanctions: Ethiopia, 1936-1936* (London: Royal Historical Society 1982), p. 119.

[5] Waterlow to Halifax, 31 May 1939 CAB21/1912, TNA.

united in "one party, one class, one purpose".[6] The phenomenon bore some similarities to Britain's own collective apotheosis in the Blitz. But there was a resemblance rather than any lasting tie between these two experiences. In British diplomatic and military circles, the idea of diverting troops from the hard-pressed front in Egypt to Greece from the end of 1940 found many doubters. Such critics felt that the Greeks, like the Yugoslavs, must be left to their fate if and when German forces descended in overwhelming strength to make up for Italian feebleness. General Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, was instinctively opposed to his army being stripped for Greece's sake.[7] The decision to send a British Commonwealth expeditionary force (mostly Australian and New Zealand formations) to Greece was essentially political. Churchill said that it was necessary for Britain to "share Greece's ordeal".[8] But Anthony Eden's role as Foreign Secretary in this new intervention in Greece stands out just as significantly. More than any other British leader from the mid-1930s he had been committed to defending the country's stake in the Mediterranean. Eden's marked sympathy with Greece was consistent with that commitment. This is worth underlining because the gradual disintegration of Anglo-Hellenic friendship in the early and middle 1950s was to be closely linked to Eden's own person; his attitude then to Greece was often to be characterized by biting sarcasm, albeit tinged by a certain fond nostalgia.

But what did "sharing Greece's ordeal" mean for the British? It did not really mean saving Greece from Germany. Nobody thought that was actually possible. It was a moral, rather than immediately practical, argument, but moral in an inevitably subtle sense. Only by making its own blood sacrifice on Greek soil could

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[6] J. O. Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh reports: Greece, 1933-1947* (Princeton: 1980), p. 286.

[7] Ronald Lewin, *The Chief: Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, commander-in-chief and viceroy, 1939-1947* (London: Hutchinson 1980), p. 61.

[8] Charles Cruickshank, *Greece, 1940-41* (London: Davis-Poynter 1976), p. 112.

the British Empire legitimate the later restoration of its influence in the southern Balkans if and when Germany should be defeated in other, more decisive, theatres. There were good reasons for the Greek leadership to doubt whether the "saving" they were being offered in all those heated conferences with the British in Athens during February and March 1941 was really worth it. Going over yet again all those differences about troop dispositions, and whether the concentration should be on the Aliakmon Line or further to the north – "haggling at an oriental bazaar", as it seemed to British participants – there is a constant implication that the subtext was more telling than the text.[9]

The real test of the British commitment to Greece was the size of the expedition sent. This was enough to share Greek travails but not enough to seriously resist Hitler's "Operation Marita". Suggestively, and in contrast to what happened some months later when Japan attacked Malaya, once things went badly wrong Churchill did not send an order to General Wilson at the head of the expeditionary forces in Greece to make a last stand. It had been enough, symbolically, to go there in the first place. The story of the highly improvised, dispersed and varyingly successful evacuations in 1941 – things went very badly wrong at Kalamata – are well known. Some 58,000 troops got away. It might be easy for those of a cynical disposition to write off the frequent anecdotes of British and Anzac troop carriers passing through the villages of Thessaly and the Peloponnese, strewn with flowers by local inhabitants amidst calls to "come back soon", as self-serving inventions to cover a catastrophic defeat, were it not that the evidence for such displays of local feeling are so numerous.[10] But the psychology of the end-game in Greece during the spring of

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[9] Ibid., p. 109. See also [Lord] Henry Maitland Wilson, *Eight years overseas, 1937-1947* (London and New York: Hutchinson 1950), pp. 69-72.

[10] See, for example, "Personal diary of Captain Oliphant" in CAB 106/555, TNA describing experiences of the Australian Imperial Force during the retreat and evacuation.

1941 was extremely complicated, and its shadow was to hang over almost everything that came later.

Greece itself almost disappeared from British minds for some while thereafter. Insofar as the British kept a stake in Greek affairs, this was purely external. The role of the exiled Greek government from May 1941 was little more than to authorize the use of its national forces under British command in the Middle East. Greek politicians who left the country were helplessly subordinate to British civil and military authority, notably in Cairo, and one suspects that the petty humiliations then endured led to a hankering later on for a pay-back time. A British observer at Allied Forces Headquarters in the Mediterranean, perhaps as a female all the more astute in picking up purely personal vibrations, noted the growing mental distance between the British and counterparts from those countries undergoing physical occupation.[11] In the Greek case this had a special relevance.

Still, had the Anglo-Americans done what many anticipated and, after occupying Sicily in mid-1943, launched a full-scale *Balkan* offensive, subsequent events would surely have been very different. With a clearly superior force on Greek soil the Allies could have successfully imposed a new order of their own. This would have been extremely messy regarding governance and rehabilitation, probably even more so than the fairly dire experience of Sicily, but no local forces – not even the Communists (KKE) – would have dared to actually launch a counter-challenge. Instead the Allies got bogged down in mainland Italy from September 1943. Greece, admittedly, became an obsession with Churchill himself, though even for the British Prime Minister Greece would have quickly taken a back-seat had he ever succeeded in his vision of getting Turkey to become a belligerent on the Allied side. (Turkey entered the war, and then only nominally, in February 1945.) The disastrous operation in the Dodecanese in the late summer of 1943 – one very much imposed

[11] Hermione, Countess of Ranfurly, *To war with Whitaker: the wartime diaries of the Countess of Ranfurly, 1939-1945* (London: Heinemann 1994), p. 242.

by Churchill on his military advisers – had about it the air of 1941: another sharing of the ordeal by a force too small and vulnerable to sustain a strategic lodgement. By this time very few in Whitehall were party to Churchill's enthusiasm for the Aegean. The disillusionment about, and marginalization of, Greece was capped by the mutinies amongst the Royal Hellenic Forces, climaxing in April 1944. Richard Capell's scathing references recorded in his *Simiomata* to the formation of the Greek Mountain Brigade – later to have a notable fighting record in Italy – as being driven by the need to expiate the shame of the mutinies in Egypt was typical of the sharp feelings amongst soldiers in the field.[12]

Against that background, we can see that what happened inside Greece after 1941, including the resistance, or what passed for a resistance, including the role of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), was decidedly obscure so far as most Britons were concerned. SOE itself in this setting was a half-cock exercise run from Cairo with much bluster and what seems also to have been a degree of personal peculation, just when the Egyptian capital was being relegated in the wartime hierarchy: a backwater within a backwater. The British themselves, of course, were also being relegated within the wartime Grand Alliance, second-class players behind the Americans and Soviets. C. M. Woodhouse could still recall how "In the name of the British" resonated with significance on Greek mountainsides, especially when lubricated by gold sovereigns.[13] Similarly, Richard Capell discovered on Chios the sentiment "Dear England, you are beloved! ...Your name spells hope", whilst on hungry Andros the islanders dreamed of British rule. But touching and comprehensible though this might be, it was equally testimony to just how hermetically sealed off from the outside world Greece had been for four years whilst so much elsewhere had drastically altered.[14] The reconnect

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[12] Richard Capell, *Simiomata: A Greek note book, 1944-1945* (London: Macdonald n.d.), p. 13.
[13] C. M. Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord* (London: Hutchinson 1948), p. 25.
[14] Capell, *Simiomata*, pp. 16, 38.

was bound to be fraught with miscalculations and false, even fatal, steps.

The constrained and highly tentative nature of British re-intervention on the Greek mainland after September 1944 – Operation Manna – flowed from much of this, as did a large degree of confusion amongst Greeks as to what was actually intended. This fresh expedition was little more than 8,000 troops at first, and not all of those were combatants. It had no heavy artillery. The overall force was very naval – "a small Anglo-Greek armada" in one description[15] – and had the distinctly old-fashioned feel of a nineteenth-century limited pacification, a bit like the partial occupation of Crete by the local fleets of the Powers in 1897. Its very quaintness was one reason why the Americans regarded it with such disdain. The US Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral King, sarcastically remarked that the exercise being embarked upon "does not appear to be part of a war in which the United States is participating".[16] This was indeed the point. Churchill's new intervention in Greece had little to do with events which we today lump together as the Second World War.

Who was actually responsible for the bloodshed in Syntagma Square on 3 December 1944, and for the wider breakdown thereafter, is now beyond meaningful reconstruction. The British were not going to let themselves be written out of the script for Greece's future, especially once they had already been ejected from elsewhere in the Balkans. Likewise the Communists were not going to have prised from their grasp a leading place, perhaps the leading place, in the government of Greece, especially given their leading position in what sporadic resistance there had been to the occupation by the fascist states. Compared to these two actors, everybody else – including Papandreou, Zervas, the King, et al. – were just bit-part actors. On the face of it, there was, or should have been, plenty of scope to make uncomfortable but workable

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[15] C. M. Woodhouse, *The struggle for Greece, 1941-1949* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon 1976), pp. 100-1.

[16] Quoted in Robert Holland, *The pursuit of greatness: Britain and the world role, 1900-1970* (London: Fontana Press 1991), p. 192.

entirely smoothly.[21] On the other hand, British Army surplus – clothing, equipment, guns – was almost universal, and for most of the following period the Greek National Army looked like the British Army, as did some parts of its enemy, the Democratic Army. Amidst the chaos of the *Dekemvriana* the priority was large-scale emergency recruitment into Greek Government forces to bring them up to an operational level, necessarily with little regard to any real training.

At least after Varkiza the goal of creating a "new model" Greek Army could make some modest progress. After October 1945 the British Military Mission was able to withdraw from operations proper into the advisory and logistical role that had been intended in the first place. The onset of real civil war, however, in mid to late 1946 brought about a further reversal of functions. Thereafter, for some time British officers were present at both brigade and corps levels, though scrupulously kept junior in rank to the Greek officers to whom they were attached. Because the *gendarmerie* under current Greek conditions played a military rather than strictly police role, the British Police Mission could hardly get on with its intended job of reform. All it could do was exercise a loose supervision over Government prisons, though these responsibilities did not extend to the political detention camps. Obtaining secondments to Greece from British Police Forces, including the Royal Ulster Constabulary – the long-time Head of the Mission in Greece, Sir Charles Wickham, was predictably an RUC man, a reprise of that Force's established role in underpinning the Palestine Police – always proved difficult.[22] Still, of all these activities, the British Police Mission in Greece was arguably the most effective and left the most distinctive legacy.

Suggestively, the work of these various British agencies was subject to a ban on any official news reporting back in the United

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[21] "The work and achievements of the British Military Mission to Greece, 1945-49", in FO371/87754, TNA.

[22] P. Reilly to D. S. Laskey, 21 February 1946 FO371/58684, TNA.

Kingdom.[23] No official communiqués were issued at any point. The reasons were political. British actions in late 1944 had been intensely controversial at home, especially in the Labour Party, whose party conference at the time was as preoccupied with this matter as with the vision of a New Jerusalem at home.[24] This engagement with Greece, however, soon faded, and – to the bitter disappointment of the Greek Left – Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary in the Labour Government after July 1945 continued Churchill's policy on Greece without triggering a revolt in party ranks. But this did not mean that the moral and ideological rancour associated with Greece amongst leftists and progressives in Britain evaporated. As a result, the last thing the Labour Government wanted was to trumpet the effort being made there. The blackout policy on news continuing to the end of the civil war therefore arose from the need to keep embarrassments to a minimum. One subsidiary effect was that no British military service medals were issued for service in Greece, in considerable contrast with American practice after 1948, where such medals abounded. The lack of any recognition caused resentment among British personnel. Such service in Greece certainly did little for individual preferment and careers; often quite the reverse, since to be out of sight was also to be out of mind.[25] Overall, in the British domestic setting, Greece quickly lost the transient salience it had possessed in late 1944 and early 1945. This contrasted keenly with Spain's civil war ten years before, which had made such a lasting impact on highly polarized British imaginations and ideals. In

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[23] A. Rumbold to Brigadier Hamilton, 25 May 1948 WO32/15547, TNA.

[24] Andrew Thorpe, "'In a rather emotional state: The Labour Party and British intervention in Greece, 1944-5", *English Historical Review* 121 (2006) 1075-1105.

[25] D. McCarthy minute, 12 November 1945 FO371/67052, TNA. In fact these special rules meant that not even the Head of the British Military Mission in Greece, Major-General E. Down, on leaving the post in 1949, received any mark of distinction. He had to make do with a letter thanking him for his services.

effect, Greek affairs were tucked away in an obscure corner, and covered over with a drape.

The British Information Services (BIS) – in which Osbert Lancaster was prominent, evoked in his *Classical landscape with figures*[26] – offered another aspect of intervention. It evolved out of the Allied information machinery (the Anglo-Greek Information Service, or AIS) with its wartime military intelligence bias, and the transition to a civilian role was never complete. After "liberation" the local press was in disarray, and the only place that ordinary Greeks (certainly outside Athens) could get substantial printed new matter was often in BIS and British Council provincial offices. Distribution of scarce newsprint was one means of encouraging a press of the "moderate" sort that the British keenly wished to see. Articles were planted in "friendly" papers. The BIS was also instrumental in establishing a national broadcasting authority, supposedly on the BBC model. What followed was a microcosm of the wider British experience. The capacity for detailed management or control soon disintegrated, and British oversight was withdrawn as a hopeless exercise. When Osbert Lancaster wrote an extended review for Whitehall of the BIS's work in mid-1946, his conclusion was that it had already failed in its political aim.[27] He advised that the whole thing should be scaled down to the narrower goal of promoting Anglo-Greek cultural ties, and the activities of the British Council and British Institutes (the latter concerned with English-language instruction) over the next few years followed naturally, until the Cyprus issue came along and made their work almost impossible.

Certainly during 1945-6 anything British was still very much *en vogue* in Athens. There was even a new Chair of British Life and Thought at the University of Athens. The fact that the appointee was an English academic with hardly any credentials did not seem to matter ("obviously not first class", it was

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[26] Osbert Lancaster, *Classical landscape with figures* (London: John Murray 1947).

[27] Account of the British Information Services in Greece, December 1944-May 1946 FO924/424, TNA.

remarked in the Foreign Office).[28] In this the semi-farcical elements in Olivia Manning's portrayal of high-brow British propaganda in the Balkans, *Friends and Heroes*, had a post-war expression. In Anglo-Greek context high-brow also meant high-class. In the Foreign Office the Anglo-Hellenic League was scathingly termed as "run by Mayfair for Mayfair", and was thought to have squandered an opportunity to break out of its narrow circles both in Athens and London.[29] Contemporary accounts and memories of the period – Capell's *Simiomata* has already been mentioned, and Mary Henderson's sometimes moving *Xenia: a memoir*[30] – bring out something of this flavour. Such a constraint has perhaps never entirely gone away, as the mini-cult around Patrick Leigh Fermor – with perhaps rather frozen conceptions of what both Britain and Greece were actually about as societies – also suggests.

The political narrative after Varkiza hinged on the elections of April 1946 and the ensuing September's plebiscite on the monarchy. By the start of that year the Labour Government began to look around for an elected Greek Government on to which responsibility could be shoved. Having thereafter pushed through the elections, boycotted by KKE, the British were not well placed to delay the plebiscite. Arguments at the time and since that further delay would have been preferable leave out of account the constraints operating on the British. Had the parliamentary elections provided for the ideal British outcome – a rough balance between the Right and the ostensibly Republican Left-Centre – they might have had the sort of equilibrium needed to secure their own purposes. But the dynamic unleashed proved far too strong for the British to manipulate in one direction or another. "As usual," Harold Caccia at the Foreign Office commented, "we are

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[28] British Council to Cultural Relations Department, Foreign Office, 25 February 1946 FO924/424, TNA.

[29] Kenneth Johnstone (British Council) to W. Montagu-Pollock, 19 February 1946 FO924/424, TNA.

[30] Mary Henderson, *Xenia – A memoir* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1988).

faced with a choice of evils."[31] There could not be much doubt which was the preferred evil in the circumstances. In making that choice, however, the abject dependence of the Greek Right on the British came to be offset by a degree of British dependence on the Greek Right – assuming, that is, that the British still wished to stay in the Greek arena at all.

The motif of a "choice of evils" at this time regarding Greece is striking to anybody acquainted with the making of British policies regarding Cyprus a few years later. By the middle of 1958, as events span out of control in that island, the need to make a "choice of evils" became central to the formulation of British dilemmas.[32] Such a convergence of language and metaphors is perhaps logical, since the same officials were often involved, Sir Harold Caccia included. Just as one seemingly had to choose between repugnant Communists and only slightly more acceptable Rightists in Greece in 1946-7, so one had to choose between obdurate Greek-Cypriots and obstreperous Turks in 1958-9. In each case, the choice was purely theoretical, because it could only go one way under prevailing conditions. One is left wondering to what extent British images and formulations embedded in the Greek Civil War got transposed on to Cypriot developments later.

Meanwhile, to return to 1946 as it unfolded in Greece, Britain's standing with both the Left and the Right became subject to erosion. On the Left a basic paradox between a residual desire for British patronage and a deep resentment arising from recent events, gave way to outright hatred. Yet although the Right might *profess* strong attachment to the traditional British connection, more equivocal feelings existed there also and, after parliamentary elections and the plebiscite, these sentiments came more into the open. The British could be blamed for getting in the way of a draconian and swift liquidation of rebellion. It was in this milieu

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[31] See the chapter "A choice of evils", in G. M. Alexander, *The prelude to the Truman Doctrine: British policy in Greece, 1944-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1982), pp. 109-39 (p. 129).

[32] See Robert Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1958* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1998), pp. 236-62.

that Grivas, at the head of his "Chi" militia, began to develop strong anti-British traits. Already in 1947 Osbert Lancaster could point out that, although the British position in the country remained exalted thanks, as he expressed it, to "Byron and 'all that'", it was rather less secure than most people seemed to imagine.[33] If Sir Sydney Waterlow had been able in 1939 to find comfort in the fact that Britain had become equally popular with *both* mutually hostile camps in Greece, one aspect of the later 1940s was that the British were compromised whether they looked to the Left or to the Right, though the implications of this were not to be transparent for a few more years yet.

Questions of irredentism offered one expression for such unstable tendencies. In 1944-45 this was more than offset by the fact that Britain offered almost the only guarantee of keeping existing Greek frontiers intact, let alone expanding them. Nor did this factor altogether disappear afterwards. But British abstention on Greek claims concerning northern Epirus at the Paris Peace Conference during 1946 constituted an early turning point. In Salonica local people, both on Left and Right, stayed at home in mass protest.[34] The British were conscious that one way to make absolutely sure of Greek goodwill was to hand over Cyprus. Cretan autonomy after 1898 offered one possible model to adopt in this case.[35] But it did not take much discussion for the dominant view to form that the Greeks had a long way to go before becoming reliable recipients for such a new gift. Although the ex-Italian Dodecanese were handed over in stages during 1947-8, this was only because Turkey remained as yet still in the doghouse. It was axiomatic that the cession of the Dodecanese represented the last such extension of Greek territorial sovereignty, not a mere payment on account, as the Greeks hoped and believed.[36] British

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[33] Lancaster, *Classical landscape*, pp. 36-7.
[34] Chandler, *Divided land*, p. 174.
[35] J. R. Colville minute, 3 November 1947 FO371/58761, TNA.
[36] Robert Holland and Diana Markides, *The British and the Hellenes: Struggles for mastery in the eastern Mediterranean, 1850-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), pp. 194, 203.

attitudes to what were designated as "Hellenistic-Byzantine" ambitions got more sarcastic than ever.[37] The edginess over Cyprus on both sides by the end of the 1940s evolved in this setting, though in February 1950 the British Embassy in Athens could still feel that "the average Greek is too much concerned with the internal situation ... to work up much excitement over Cyprus".[38]

Irredentism offered just one aspect of the basic problem at the heart of British engagements with Greek public affairs: a search for the ever-elusive grail of "moderation" and the "middle ground". Geoffrey Chandler, with wide personal experience of northern Greece in the 1940s, later provided an assessment in *The Divided Land: An Anglo-Greek tragedy*. From his position as a field officer in Macedonia, he had sent a series of pleas to the Embassy to come out more actively in favour of a Left-Centre coalition. They – and similar pleas by other British personnel out in the country – went unheeded. The enigma of the British presence was summed up in the contemporary anecdote, recalled by Chandler, that in London it was assumed that the Embassy had a policy without ever saying quite what it was, whilst the Embassy complained that London had a policy which it failed to communicate to anybody.[39] Suggestively, essentially the same anecdote was circulating at the same time in Palestine.[40] In Greece, as in Palestine, there was no policy. But then for a policy you need raw materials to make one. Hector McNeil, the Labour minister, noted in March 1946 that "The Centre [in Greece] have squandered every chance we have given them", and it is the case that "moderates" – nice and cuddly though they may be made to appear to outsiders - are not necessarily or indeed usually any less

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[37] Sir Charles Norton to C. H. Bateman, 15 July 1948 FO371/72349, TNA.

[38] Athens Embassy to Southern Department, Foreign Office, 31 January 1951 FO371/78344, TNA.

[39] Chandler, *Divided land*, p. 159.

[40] These frustrations in Palestine are expressed in Motti Galani (ed.), *The end of the British mandate for Palestine, 1948: The diary of Sir Henry Gurney* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009).

venal or politically toxic than other contending factions.[41] In fact dependence on outside forces often make them the least effective partners in building sustainable positions for the future.

"Our [British] duty," the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Orme Sargent, said of Greece on the eve of renewed civil war, "is to hold the ring and see fair play, not to take part in the battle ourselves."[42] But the response of people like Chandler, then and in retrospect, was that the British had taken part in the battle over a long period, and most notably during the events of December 1944. There was no point, it seemed to some, in pretending otherwise. To act as the British had done, and then to draw back and claim just to "hold the ring", as opposed to acting decisively to encourage and even impose a balanced approach to internal divisions, was to adopt the worst of all halfway-house policies. Had the British done nothing in the first place to stop an ELAS drive to power, at least an equilibrium with at least some semblance of representing Greek society as a whole might eventually have come about, albeit no doubt with victims along the way, but avoiding the extremities that subsequently occurred.

The variables here, however, could go round in endless debate. But the key fact regarding the evolution of British policy was that by mid-1946 the essential context had changed from eighteen months before. In late 1944 Greece had still seemed an important stake in British regional strategy. As such, London was still prepared to pay the price of finding scarce resources to intervene, however tentatively. From mid-1946, however, Greece increasingly counted for little in British Mediterranean calculations – and least of all with Prime Minister Attlee, sceptical towards all Mediterranean and Middle Eastern engagements.[43] Willingness to stump up hard cash was fast evaporating. As the Cabinet Secretary summed up to Attlee the financial pressures surrounding the Greek commitment, "the time has come to stop

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[41] Note by Hector McNeil, 1 March 1946 FO371/15876, TNA.
[42] Quoted in Alexander, *Prelude to the Truman Doctrine*, p. 142.
[43] Holland, *The pursuit of greatness*, p. 205.

this drain".[44] Hugh Dalton – who as Minister of Economic Warfare a few years earlier had been against any easing of the wartime blockade on enemy-occupied Greece – now as Chancellor of the Exchequer pressed for a limit of 50,000 to be put on the strength of the Greek National Army, a number that could only mean defeat. "Holding the ring", with all its failings, was in fact the utmost that the British had ever been willing to do, and even that was coming very much into question.

The British would soon have got out, bag and baggage, from Greece, as they eventually did in Palestine, if the Americans had not pressed them to stay, and then accepted much of the financial burden themselves under the Truman Doctrine. But the usual narrative that the Americans effectively replaced the British in Greece needs qualification. American marines did not arrive till the end of 1947, and they never did come in large numbers. The emphasis of the American effort throughout was on economics and reconstruction. Their achievements, especially in reviving the infrastructure of transport, were considerable. But this priority had its limitations, and both the British and the Greeks came to share a concern that, strategically, Greece was regarded in Washington as a mere "holding operation" in the nascent Cold War.[45] By early 1949 there was even anxiety that at the first opportunity General Van Fleet, the US Commander, and his men would "weigh anchor and sail away" as soon as the chance arose.[46] This explains why Greek reliance on the British had such an after-life, principally as a kind of insurance policy, even when its material base had largely disappeared.

The modus operandi of the British and American Missions is important. The Greek authorities had no direct access on supply questions to London or, much more importantly from 1947, to Washington. The Greeks had to plead with the Missions for whatever they wanted, and if convinced the Missions then argued

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[44] Sir Norman Brook to Prime Minister, 29 January 1947 PREM8/797, TNA.
[45] Sir Charles Peak minute, 3 March 1949 FO371/78481, TNA.
[46] G. Wallinger minute, 1 June 1948 FO1110/61, TNA.

the Greek case with their own governments. This process was a key feature of the "disabled" nature of Greek governance, and partly explains why genuine responsibility only developed in a partial and distorted manner. The British and American mission commanders were represented on the main Greek defence organs, and not much could happen without their concurrence. Much chafing arose, and on becoming Commander-in-Chief during January 1949 General Alexandros Papagos insisted on more autonomy for his own decisions.

Significantly, however, the British and American Missions were by no means integrated, leaving some limited room to Greek ministers for playing off one against the other. General Van Fleet was adamantly opposed to any Anglo-American integration.[47] Co-ordination was patchy at best. At Ambassadorial level things were generally cordial. US Ambassador Grady had come from Delhi, where he had enjoyed good, if still guarded, relations with the Mountbattens.[48] But Van Fleet himself – who had learned his trade under the egregious Anglophobe General George Patton during the war – was "universally disliked" in the British Military Mission.[49] Greece in the later 1940s offered a connecting stage in prickly Anglo-American relations in the wider Mediterranean from Operation Torch in North Africa during November 1942 through to Suez in 1956, and indeed beyond.[50] Greek beliefs in the seamlessness of "Anglo-American" aims and ambitions in the region are invariably illusory, though in many ways an understandable expression of Greece's own recurring vulnerability.

British and American assessments of Greece and its prospects, nonetheless, certainly came to overlap, above all in their uniform direness. British Ambassador Norton's comment in June 1948 that

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[47] Peak minute, 24 January 1948 FO371/78481, TNA.

[48] Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten: The official biography* (London: Collins 1985), p. 467.

[49] Brig. Hamilton to Peak, 28 January 1949 FO371/78481, TNA.

[50] In this context Greece enters interestingly into the article by Dionysios Chorchoulis, "High hopes, bold aims, limited results: Britain and the establishment of the NATO Mediterranean Command, 1950-1953", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 20.3 (2009) 434-52.

"nothing in Greece is quite as bad or as good as it appears on the surface" was about as sympathetic as things got.[51] Greek politicians and the Greek officer class were particular butts of opprobrium. An insidious threat to the survival of a democratic Greece was seen to be the basic failure to give the ordinary footslogger in the National Army a real reason for fighting.[52] Most Athenians, and that meant most politicians, in these years hardly ever set foot outside a tight circle around the capital, making any real empathy with the sufferings of the countryside limited at best. Against this background even seemingly good news was usually interpreted by outsiders as something else. The repulse of the "rebel" attack on Florina in February 1949 was described as "more depressing than a defeat".[53] Politically, the ministerial crisis at the start of that year sparked a fresh wave of disillusionment, and introduced what Norton termed "the shadow of a sort of dictatorship" that perhaps never entirely lifted before the Junta arrived eighteen years later.[54] Nor did the Communist defeat in the summer of 1949 lead to any revision of this pessimism, since it could be argued that henceforth the Communists might prove even more dangerous back in "civvies" than they had been as ragged insurgents.[55]

By 1949, anyway, the British Army was on the sidelines of operations in Greece, whilst the Greeks themselves were "quite capable of running their own show".[56] By this time it was British military personnel who were driving around in bashed-up Second World War troop carriers, and their Greek counterparts who

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[51] Norton to Sir Orme Sargent, 23 June 1948 FO1110/62. TNA.
[52] Norton to Bateman, 22 December 1948 FO371/78393, TNA.
[53] Athens Embassy to Foreign Office, 19 February 1949 FO371/78357, TNA.
[54] Norton to Southern Department, Foreign Office, 8 January 1949 FO371/78341, TNA.
[55] Embassy (Athens) to Foreign Office, 4 September 1949, FO371/78359.
[56] "Work and achievements of the British Military Mission", FO371/87754 (5), TNA.

instead possessed shiny new American transporters.[57] On the other hand, if it was not inconceivable that in some sudden crisis Greece might still need Britain, Britain no longer really needed Greece. This was not because the British had forsaken the broader regional stake underpinning the original re-intervention of 1944-45, but its shape had changed, and essentially disengaged from the Balkans. British Mediterranean, and increasingly Middle Eastern, interests were serviced through other partners – with Turkey gaining new salience – eventually to take shape in the Baghdad Pact of the mid-1950s. In this setting the Aegean itself slipped to the margins of British strategic cartography. Almost as soon as the Communist rump on Mount Grammos was liquidated, the War Office in London was keen to get British troops off Greek soil once and for all. They had for some months been planning to divert part of the garrison in Greece to Malta, where they would be far better placed for redeployment in any regional emergency.[58] Nor were the Greek authorities at all reluctant. On 19 November the Minister of War hosted a farewell dinner for the British Military Mission at, inevitably, the Hôtel Grande Bretagne, attended by Marshal Papagos himself.

The following, gloriously sunny, day the British military departure from Athens was accompanied by an appropriate ceremonial, the Commander of the 1st East Surreys laying a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, after which King Paul inspected the troops.[59] There were, inevitably, many references to 1941 and to December 1944, whilst Queen Frederika told Mrs Norton that she felt like crying (tears were always part of the emotional armament of Anglo-Hellenism). "It was felt," Ambassador Norton reported, not able to squash altogether a negative vibration, "that this was the end of a chapter, and though the immediate future of Greece looks rosy so long as American help

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[57] Visit by Mr Reilly to Central Macedonia and Salonica, 27 September 1948 FO371/72327, TNA.

[58] E. Peck minute, 3 March 1949 FO371/78481, TNA.

[59] "Departure of British troops from Greece", Norton to Bevin, 2 December 1949 FO371/78485, TNA.

continues on the present scale, this solemn and memorable celebration has caused a good deal of heart-searching, coinciding as it does with ... social and economic problems, not to mention the clouds on the northern horizon" (the latter being an allusion to Greece's exposed northern borders).[60] But the final British military withdrawal came in a freezing cold Salonica on 5 February 1950 when the 1st Battalion Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment similarly departed; several Greek women were said to have collapsed at the saluting base on the occasion.[61] Taken together, these events might be said to have encapsulated the authentic end of the Anglo-Hellenic phenomenon with all its accompanying rituals and symbols.

This, however, did not mean the end of a British Mission to Greece entirely. It could be, and was, argued that the real challenge of institutional modernization in the still crippled country was only just beginning. This had particular relevance for the Police and Prisons Mission, whilst as usual the British Naval Mission sought to position itself as having a long-term role immune from other developments.[62] Yet although the Greek Government was not going to turf these foreign agencies out, its own enthusiasm for their continuance was underwhelming, and expressed itself in growing resistance to meeting the bulk of their local costs.[63] For some while too there had been a growing feeling that the Missions were themselves pointless if the Greek Government consistently refused to follow any advice tendered to them.[64] In the end, after several extensions the Police Mission was terminated, somewhat reluctantly in some quarters, in June 1951. The British Naval Mission hung on till September 1955 but fell into dormancy after the disastrous Tripartite Conference on Cyprus in that month. The effective end of a permanent British naval pres-

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[60] Ibid.
[61] H. Wolstan-Weld to Norton, 3 February 1950 FO371/187754, TNA.
[62] See the discussions on the future of the Naval Mission in ADM116/6330, TNA.
[63] D. Murray minute, 15 August 1951 FO371/95141, TNA.
[64] J. McCourt minute, 16 February 1949 FO371/78495, TNA.

ence was taken as a blow to Britain's special position in Greece, but if Admiral Selby, the commander stayed, it was felt "he would be exposed to non-cooperation and even insults".[65] Selby was brought home, allowing Prime Minister Eden to comment with what had become his habitual spite towards Greece, "... we don't want to spend money on unwilling Greeks".[66] Still, vestiges of an old naval tie continued even into the era of the Greek Colonels after 1967. The Greek regime was by no means happy, for example, to see the end of a permanent British naval presence in the Mediterranean in 1968,[67] whilst subsequent visits by Royal Navy ships to Greek ports was one facet of the residual official links thereafter maintained between London and Athens. The cancellation of the visits to Greece by Her Majesty's Ships Tiger and Charybdis in March 1974 following the formation of a new Labour Government in Britain was one minor indication of the wider crisis in the eastern Mediterranean shortly to lead to the implosion surrounding Cyprus a few months later.[68]

Writing to his friend, George Seferis, in May 1956 Patrick Leigh Fermor stated that the first volume of his projected trilogy, that on the Mani, would soon be in the press. "Although it is an extremely pro-Greek book as you can imagine," he said, "I tremble to think of the sneers and jeering and hatred that lie in wait for me in the columns of the Εστία, the Ακρόπολις and the Απογευματινή. ... I could write them myself. I know it so well", adding that the cheap English press was no better.[69] "One of the many gloomy aspects of the present bloody situation," Leigh Fermor went on, "is that it seems to have turned both Greece and

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[65] Foreign Office to UK Delegation at United Nations, 28 September 1955 ADM116/6330, TNA.

[66] Minute by Prime Minister, 24 October 1955 PREM11/914, TNA.

[67] Holland, *Blue-Water Empire*, p. 334.

[68] Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon (eds.), *The Southern Flank in Crisis, 1973-1976* [Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Vol. V] (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2006), p. 25

[69] Fotis Dimitrakopoulos and Vasiliki D. Lambropoulou (eds.), *Γιώργος Σεφέρης, P. L[eigh] Fermor & J. Rayner: Αλληλογραφία (1948-1971)* (Nicosia: Kentro Epistimonikon Erevnon 2007), pp. 94-5.

England into enlarged caricatures of everything that their worst enemies have always pretended they were and both seem at the moment odious."[70] These caricatures were set to become even sharper over time. But perhaps part of the problem was that what in 1956 Patrick Leigh Fermor thought was pro-Greek was, in Greek perceptions, only pro-Greek in a very old-fashioned, fuzzy and largely unhelpful sort of way; certainly reading Mani, readable though it remains, conveys something of that sense today. The truth was that by the mid-1950s neither Britain nor Greece had anything special to offer each other, and the gradual dawning of this fact was characterized by a disillusion that anyway had never been entirely absent from their interaction.

Cyprus indeed was to offer a medium through which this process worked itself out. Here, however, we arrive at a basic conclusion of our discussion. The conventional version is that it was the Cyprus issue after 1955 which progressively destroyed – to use Venizelos' old phrase – "the traditional framework of Anglo-Hellenic friendship". This seems to put the cart before the horse. Cyprus itself was never the determining factor in that relationship. What happened is that the Anglo-Greek relationship itself went into a sort of reverse by about 1950, giving the subsidiary Cyprus issue the room to breathe it had never hitherto possessed. It is important to get the sequence in perspective. For their part, Greek-Cypriot radical protagonists of *enosis* after about 1950, watching other events in and around the Mediterranean, saw only a gathering British weakness, and thought that events were playing into their own hands. Thereafter they disdained negotiation that compromised their ideals. In this regard they fatally misjudged the leverage that they possessed.

This discussion, however, should end with Greece itself. It is impossible, in going back over the story of the 1940s, with a weakened and partially un-sovereign Greece, not to be struck in some respects by echoes of Greece's position today. Reading the official British records dealing with the years of civil war, one is

[70] Ibid., p. 95.

struck by tics of analysis and commentary recurring much later. Underlying that analysis was the perceived statelessness of Greece. But perhaps most striking of all was the observation made by Ambassador Norton in December 1948 when things still looked decidedly bleak. He dismissed widespread talk of defeatism surrounding the Greek Government. A much greater danger, Norton felt, however, was the "feeling of hopelessness" amongst all Greeks as they confronted a seemingly unending stream of difficulties. This despair threatened to overcome the natural resilience of the people. No doubt, Norton said, Greeks could do more to help themselves; but it was also up to Britain and America not to let them down when it mattered most. Today Britain has become irrelevant to the future of Greece. But many of the same dilemmas and pitfalls in that country's relationship with the United Kingdom, often in dire circumstances, are still at play in altered contexts; and lack of hope remains the deadliest enemy in overcoming contemporary challenges, including its capacity to divide Greek from Greek.