

# The Upheaval of Middle East Greek

IT WAS a 'mutiny' that gave birth to the Middle East shortlived — April 1941/April 1944 — 'free' Greek Forces. It was another 'mutiny' that led to their disbandment.

These mutinies have been considered as diametrically different from each other. The former respectable: the latter criminal. Both, however, were helplessly *unconventional* in that neither of them was, as a matter of principle, directed against the military hierarchy as such, or had anything to do with the inner conditions of military life and discipline. Both stood up for options lying, as such, on the highest national level, however sincere and 'respectable' or fallacious and 'criminal' these might be, and, although one could find in the former a lesser participation of the top ranks than in the latter, the dividing line was, in both and at least generally, vertical, not horizontal.

## No parallel

On the other hand, both of them were triggered off by the same political party or faction and, as far as the latter, that of April 1944, is concerned, this mutiny, if it was indeed one, was clearly not a mutiny *in* the army, but a mutiny *of* the army, since something like 90% of all active Greek troops — army, navy and air force altogether — were eventually disarmed, put into concentration camps and left there down to the end of the war. This is the only reason why I put the word 'mutiny' within inverted commas.

As such, these mutinies, especially the second one, that of April 1944, could have no parallel in the collective memory of the British military staff which had to deal with them and were intellectually unmanageable even for such a giant as Winston Churchill. One cannot otherwise explain the striking shallowness of the analysis he devoted to the matter in his *Memoirs* — he centred it on the flat theory of an excessive congenital propensity of the Greeks to indulge in politics and to divide into a host of tiny factions — let alone a crude inaccuracy in his report of the facts.

I will briefly relate here the most elementary and most typical of these facts.

## First act — April 1941

On 17th April 1941, German troops were drawing near Athens and the resistance of the Greek Army had practically

ceased. The cruiser 'Averoff' was at its usual anchorage near Piraeus and its captain was ashore. Suddenly, at midnight or so, he turned up, entered the ship and ordered a general muster of the crew and officers on the afterdeck.

'Gentlemen', he said, 'there is only one alternative for us. Either we sail off or we scuttle the ship. I suggest we scuttle'.

A dead silence. Then, Sub-Lieutenant Iliomarkakis stepped forward and shouted: 'Stand by for sailing'. The buglers obeyed Iliomarkakis and turned down a tentative counter-order by the captain. 'Averoff' eventually *did* sail off and Captain Papavasiliou, accompanied by a few senior officers, had just time to jump over the railing and leave the ship.

When in front of the boom of Psitalia, the following message hit the cruiser: 'Order of the Admiralty; "Averoff" is to be brought to anchor.'

Reply of 'Averoff': 'The crew wishes to sail forward.'

New message from Psitalia Fort: 'This is an order of the Admiralty; "Averoff" is to be brought to anchor. Friend or Foe will sink you.'

'Averoff' sends no other message. She simply turns her guns towards the Fort, shears the chain of the boom and passes through. A last ironical message then arrives from Psitalia: 'Farewell, free Greeks!'

Small variants in the details apart, the same scenario was repeated on another ten naval units, seven destroyers and three submarines.

## Tiny fleet

Arrived at Alexandria 21st April 1941, it was this tiny fleet — plus nine training aircraft and one sea-plane — that constituted the first nucleus of the Greek Royal Forces of the Middle East. One month later (23rd May 1941), the King and Prime Minister Tsouderos arrived there too, fleeing from Crete before the surrender and accompanied by a small team of officers, petty officers and privates.

From then on, a constant flow of refugees plus a limited mobilisation among Greek residents in Egypt and the Sudan fed the Greek effectives. These steadily grew and, after the setting-up of the 2nd Brigade, in April 1942, attained about 30,000 men, land, sea and air force altogether. Among them, the number of officers was so disproportionate that the Greek Government found no other way

to dispose of them than to let them form a *sui generis* battalion, named the 'sacred battalion', which, except for cooks, was exclusively composed of officers.

## Motives

Now, the motives of the latter, coming to Egypt in such great numbers, were not so clear. Sometimes, sailing like everybody else on chance boats and crossing the channels separating the border islands of the Aegean sea from the Turkish coast and then coming south by land to Palestine, sometimes, using more sophisticated means, direct from occupied Greece to Egypt, some of them leaving on their own initiative, others just dispatched by political groups, anxious to inflate the presence of their followers within the armed forces and counterbalance each other's influence, their stake in the Middle East enterprise varied from pure patriotism to professional (and even financial) interest, and from high-level ideology to what I would call micro-politics.

Although integrated with the Middle East Allied Forces under the British High Command and logistics, these forces were, nevertheless and except for war operations, subordinate to the exiled Greek Government and especially so to the part of it which stayed permanently in Egypt, namely the three war ministries.

## Last act — April 1944

In the early spring of 1944, the war had obviously taken a decisive turn. Not only was the battle of Stalingrad far behind (February 1943), but Soviet armies had recaptured Smolensk, Kiev, the Crimea, and, already before the end of 1943, had recrossed the Dniepr. For a whole year, no German or Italian soldier, unless dead or a prisoner, remained in Africa. The Allies had landed in Sicily, and at Anzio and Salerno.

These events had upset the order of priorities. Victory being henceforth taken for granted, strategic goals lost some of their preponderance over political afterthoughts. The post-war balance of power in Eastern Europe and especially in its most sensitive part, the Balkans, was becoming more and more the prime concern of British policy. Bargaining with the Russians about 'who will play the hand' in each one of these countries after their forthcoming liberation was already being carried on, more or less behind Roose-



# Forces in April 1944

by Arghiri Emmanuel

velt's back, and was shortly to result in the well-known precise percentages of respective influence agreed upon between Stalin and Churchill in the Moscow Conference some months later. Field-Marshal Smuts urged Churchill (August 1944) not to 'let strategy absorb . . . (his) attention to the damage of the greater issue now looming up . . . the future settlement of Europe.' (1)

In this context and contrary to the situation which had prevailed at the time of their formation, in 1941-42, the tiny Greek Forces in the Middle East counted now less and less as a military asset against the Axis and more and more as a praetorian cover for the King's return home and of providing a prop to his tottering throne after the now close-at-hand departure of the German invader.

## Opposite way

One year earlier, another mini-'mutiny' against right-wing officers in the 2nd Brigade was dealt with by the British in exactly the opposite way. In spite of the Greek authorities' request to march against the 'mutineers', the Commander in Chief of the Ninth Army, General Holmes, assessing, in purely military terms, the warlike mood of the left and the defeatism of the right-wing officers, arrested 200 of the latter, according to a list handed over to him by the Eamites, and, without further ceremony, sent them to the Merdjeyoum concentration camp in Syria.

The tide of the war was then uncertain, every rifle counted and ideological motives made left-wing rifles more reliable than right-wing ones. In April 1944, on the contrary, the same ideological reasons made 'good' rifles extremely dangerous, whereas 'bad' ones were becoming the only ones that could be relied upon politically.

Meanwhile, the unconditional surrender of Italy, in September 1943, had had the double effect of opening a second front against Germany within the European continent, however minor this might be, and of strengthening considerably the Greek and Yugoslav guerillas, thanks to

(1) This was not the first warning of the kind from Field-Marshal Smuts. Already, on 20th August 1943, he was urging Churchill to beware of the bolshevisation of a broken and ruined Europe, which, he said, was a danger in Italy, but certainly also in Greece and the Balkans.

the tremendous amount of armaments that the disbanding Italian armies of occupation in both countries deliberately chose to hand over to them rather than to the Germans. (In the Greek case, this windfall loot had the additional effect of furthering the already considerable superiority of the left-wing guerillas (ELAS) over their rivals (EDES and EKKA) and so exasperating the spite of the latter.)

## Real representatives

Whether or not this circumstance contributed in some degree to accentuate the tendency of EAM leaders to consider themselves the only real representatives of the national resistance — which, in terms of comparative material strength, was not very far from reality — is open to question. Be that as it may, on 10th March 1944 they decided to cross the Rubicon and, like their Yugoslav counterparts three months earlier, to set up within the free areas of the Greek hinterland a partisan government under the title of PEEA, that is Political Committee of National Liberation. Contrary, however, to the Yugoslav AVNOJ which stripped the Government in exile in London of its power and placed a ban on King Peter II, the PEEA cabled at once to the Greek Government in Cairo that their main goal was the formation of a Government of general national unity. Whereupon, Tsouderos did not fail to catch the ball on the bounce, replying that 'the broadening of his Government has always been his most constant aim.' On 27th March, he even further qualified the above statement by declaring that the formation of a Government of national unity was conditional upon the previous reconciliation of the partisans and adding that he considered his exchanges of views at this time with the PEEA, desirable as they might be, as unilateral steps.

## New factor

But a new factor came in. Venizelos, the centrist Minister of the Navy, followed by the liberal, old anti-royalist party, saw in all that the opportunity of paying off old scores with Tsouderos and the royalist right. 'We should,' he declared, 'let no obstacle thwart this unification, even if this implied that certain persons were to be set aside.'

It was against this background that the clandestine military organisations, ASO,



AON and AOA, respectively for the army, the navy and the aviation, took the floor. Faced with the choice either to act openly and unreservedly with the ultimate risk of the disbandment of the armed forces, or to content themselves with petitioning through the usual service channels, they opted for the tougher course.

## Famous paper

A so-called Committee for National Union of the Greek Armed Forces in the Middle East was elected, composed of three generals, seven senior and three junior officers and called on Tsouderos in order to remit to him the famous paper bearing some 22,000 all-rank signatures, something between 90% and 95% of the entire armed forces. In this paper, it was boldly declared that these forces backed the PEEA in its struggle to attain national unity and wished to urge the Cairo Greek Government to cease its dilatory tactics and agree to negotiate on the basis of the PEEA proposals.

At the same time, a message from the Greek Naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Alexandris, hit Tsouderos's desk.

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Its terms, although more technical, were no less peremptory: '... after the formation in the interior of our country of a Committee representing the military resistance there, I had the pleasure to notice the unanimous wish of our Navy, from the highest commander to the last sailor... for collaboration with the aforementioned Committee, with a view to co-ordinating the continuation of our struggle against the enemy...'

From then on, events evolved quickly. For one thing, Tsouderos tried to deal with the matter in the authoritarian way. Refusing any debate, he simply called in the guards and put his visitors under arrest. But when, in the afternoon of the same day, a group of democratic officers invested the headquarters and liberated the prisoners, Tsouderos realised that the situation was well out of hand and cabled his resignation to the King in London (3rd April), proposing Venizelos as his successor.

## Negative reply

Everything looked then like calming down, when the negative reply of the King put everything back into the melting-pot. The King would not, under the prevailing critical circumstances, accept the resignation of his Prime Minister. He reminded him that the prime duty of any Government was to secure law and order and for that purpose Mr Tsouderos could count on such assistance from the allied forces as would be necessary.

The message was clear. Resign? What for? Because he lacked the backing of the Greek army? Nonsense! The entire British army was out there for him to call upon.

The liberals, Venizelos, Carapanayotis, Voulgaris and Sofoulis were frustrated. They had hoped to profit from the unrest of the left, indeed to manipulate it, in order to get rid of Tsouderos and get the better of their traditional adversaries, the royalist faction. Venizelos flared up. He himself resigned and, during a dramatic discussion over the phone, he compelled Admiral Alexandris to despatch to all naval units the most unconventional 'order of the day' that had ever been read on the afterdeck. By this, he informed the crews that following the refusal of the King to understand the critical situation of the nation and accept the proposed Cabinet reshuffle, he could not remain in office any longer.

In the wake of Venizelos, other liberal ministers resigned too. As a result, when in the morning of 6th April the EAM organisations decided to act openly and take command of the ships and military units, one could say that, for all practical purposes, the Greek Government in exile had ceased to exist.

Churchill made, however, a last attempt to save Tsouderos and cabled him not to insist on his resignation. When this failed, the King was finally obliged to accept the resignation and charge Venizelos with forming a new Cabinet. This was done not later than 7th April, but it was already too late. The only field in which a Government in exile could ever exercise activity was the affairs of the armed forces. All links, however, between the latter and the Government had meanwhile been severed.

From without, the Greek armed forces had, already on 7th April, been formally put under the direct jurisdiction of the British C-in-C. From within, although the overwhelming majority of the officers had remained in their places and, for all technical purposes, the traditional hierarchy and military discipline was maintained, indeed reinforced, all high-level (political) decisions were, in each separate unit, being taken by the EAM committees, a sort of political commissariats. It was these that were deciding *what* to do; the officers were deciding only *how* to do it.

No Greek unit, barracks or ship, from Gibraltar to Bombay, passing through Alexandria and Port Said, where the bulk of the navy was harboured, and from Palestine to Tobruk, where land and air forces were stationed, had escaped the EAM takeover. In each place separately, the officers were asked to remain in their posts and perform their duties as usual. Some of them — very few — reputed to be pro-German or pro-Metaxas, the two epithets sounding synonymous, were put under arrest in their quarters. The whole achievement cost fewer than ten casualties, dead and wounded, out of about 25,000 troops involved.

## Immediate response

The immediate response of the British troops was to surround each one of the Greek units, wherever they were, and cut off their victualling. Negotiations for the continuation of war operations were then being held. The 1st Brigade was, when the events broke out, due to move to the Italian front. The British were demanding that the Brigade be first disarmed, then reconstituted and sent to Italy. The Greeks said they were ready and anxious to move as they were. They agreed that the few deposed officers be replaced, but they definitely refused a prior surrendering of their arms.

In the Navy, the terms were essentially different. The British said that they were not interested in the inner organisation of the ships. We could keep our Committees, for all they cared. If we considered that we had enough officers to sail, that was our problem. If not, they were pre-

pared to provide facilities to bring on board as many officers of our choice as we desired to replace the deposed ones. The only thing they wanted to know was whether or not we agreed to sail for current operations. As chance would have it, the presence of a German submarine was just being reported off Alexandria port. Did we agree to sail off to deal with it or not?

## Condition satisfied

The destroyers 'Miaoulis' and 'Pindos', challenged in that way, replied that they would sail immediately, if the British troops evacuated the Greek Admiralty premises in Alexandria, which they had stormed and occupied since the outbreak of the events. This condition was promptly satisfied and the two ships did actually sail on 8th April. But when, the next day, the British troops re-invested the Greek Admiralty building, the destroyer 'Kriti' considered it as a breach of faith and refused to sail in its turn.

As long, however, as some chance of political settlement remained or was alleged to remain by the Greek Government, the British refrained from attacking the Greek forces, although besieging them closely, and, for a fortnight, besiegers and besieged stayed immobile, facing each other.

One of these chances seemed to be the arrival of George Papandreou in Egypt on 15th April. Greek officials came to see us. A Government of National Unity we had asked for and a Government of National Unity we had got. Opponents of the unity, the reactionary Tsouderos and his clique, were eliminated and so genuine a democrat as Papandreou was right there. Our movement was henceforth pointless.

## 'Silly asses'

Our reply was that they took us for a pack of silly asses, if they believed that we had carried out such a tremendous upheaval, just to have Tsouderos replaced by Venizelos or the latter by Papandreou.

From then on, the liberals and the Eamites drew away from each other while a sort of *modus vivendi* was arrived at among all bourgeois factions against the Eamites and the clash with the British forces became inevitable.

This did actually take place during the 22nd and 23rd April in the port of Alexandria against the ships and in Burg-el-Arab against the First Brigade. The casualties were relatively light. About a hundred dead and wounded altogether on either side, but as a result some 20,000 Greek troops were interned in various concentration camps in Egypt, Libya, Sudan and Eritrea. The career of the 'free' Greek forces in the Middle East was over.

## A piece of analysis

For the decision makers, on the side of the anti-Axis alliance, both before and

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after the entry of the Soviet Union, the last war was, like any other war, a coalition of States against another coalition of States. Contrary to the Munich doctrine, for which the Soviet Union was but the leading wing of world Communist revolution, with which no possibility therefore existed for a bourgeois state to come to terms, Hitler becoming henceforth the lesser evil, Churchill and De Gaulle had, as early as then, the genial awareness of the existence of what today is a conspicuous fact of life, so-called *national Communism*. This consists in each single Communist State being at any moment prepared to play the international game according to its rules, that is with no regard whatsoever for class-struggle requirements. (2) It is this conception, later called the Yalta spirit, that eventually prevailed and dominated the inter-Allied relationships throughout the war and after the victory, until the outbreak of the 'cold war'.

This implied essentially that, as regards internal situations, each partner should be able to have his *status quo ante* respected by the others, nobody being allowed to profit by the opportunities derived from the common military effort or from the fall-outs of the military operations in order to advance his pawns in the field of inter-allied contradictions.

## Two questions

Two questions were especially involved therewith: (a) the special links of the Government of the Soviet Union with the Western Communist Parties, and (b) the traditional aim of the USA at an open-door adjustment in the British Empire.

The former was in principle settled by the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, wanted by the Western democracies in order to deprive the Soviets of a vehicle for exporting the revolution, and, to some extent, welcomed by the latter too, because of the excuse the absence of such a vehicle provided them for resisting their partners' requests to export the counter-revolution. (3)

(2) 'This is no class war', declared Churchill the day Hitler attacked Russia. (Cf. Isaak Deutscher, 'Stalin', p. 475)

(3) Imagine that the Comintern had been in function in April 1944. It could by no means have refrained from adopting a definite position in a matter like the Greek uprising in the Middle East, in which a Communist member Party was so deeply involved and which affected the war effort and the future of the alliance of the USSR with the Western Powers. It could not publicly approve either, what the USSR, in its diplomatic contacts with the British had repeatedly disapproved. Given the controlling position of the Russian Communist Party within the Comintern, such behaviour would have been considered as unacceptable duplicity. On the other hand, any disapproval by the Comintern would, for the Greek Communists, have been tantamount to an order to stop dead.

The latter was answered in the same conventional direction by Churchill's statement of 9th September 1941, in the House of Commons, when he qualified Article 3 of the Atlantic Charter — '... self-government to those who have been forcibly deprived of it' — specifically excluding India and Burma and explaining that it applied only to European countries.

## Political assets

Had he made his statement some months later, that is after Pearl Harbour, he would surely have formulated the restriction in temporal rather than geographical terms. In fact, the golden rule of this Realpolitik was that each one of the Allies should preserve his vested interests and political assets as they existed on the eve of the war. Not indeed as they existed in September 1939, but, for each Allied country taken separately, as they existed at the moment it itself entered the war. Thus the British and Americans had, though reluctantly, to recognise the June 1941 Soviet frontiers with Poland, that is the Curzon line, and to make the best of the exclusive recognition by the USSR of the Lublin Committee as the only representative of Poland, as well as of its adamant refusal of the slightest contact with the London Polish officials. Symmetrically, the Soviet Government was so much the more obliged to reciprocate in the case of the British sticking to the royal Greek Government in exile as the latter's legalist lineage from a pre-war internationally undisputed Government was obviously far better established than that of the Lublin Committee. As a matter of fact, the Soviet Government indeed never failed to abide by this rule, and in a way so systematic as to impress and somewhat surprise Winston Churchill as he himself repeatedly pointed out. (4)

Many a militant of the progressist popular movements in small 'Allied' countries thought that they were not to be concerned by the dealings of the super-powers. They considered that winning the war against external Fascists would be purposeless if they had to find themselves afterwards under the yoke of their local ones. They would go so far in this logic as to let, in some particularly decisive issues, their political aspirations take precedence over the war effort.

(4) Cf., for instance, his letter to Eden, 11th December 1944: 'I am increasingly impressed, up to date, with the loyalty with which, under much temptation and very likely pressure, Stalin has kept off Greece, in accordance with our agreement...' Also, letter to Roosevelt, 11th June 1944: 'The Russians are ready to let us take the lead in the Greek business...' To Mackenzie King, 15th December 1944: 'Although, communists are at the root of the business, Stalin has not so far made any public reflection on our action.' It is also noteworthy that, in Yalta, Churchill did not fail to express to Stalin his thanks for his neutrality in the Greek affair.

The position of Communists was more uncomfortable than that, in that they were quite well and directly concerned by the international commitments of the Soviet Union. One should remember that, contrary to what happens today, the revolutionary left was, by that time, and with the only exception of the tiny Trotskyist groups, strictly identified with the Communist Parties, and, for the latter, the first 'workers' state' was the supreme asset of world proletariat. (5) It followed that it would have been senseless, nay suicidal, to take power in Greece or in Yugoslavia, or even in France, if such an action was liable to imperil, or even to weaken, the Soviet Union in its global competition with world capitalism.

Now, it so happened, that of all countries belonging to the western bloc, the aforementioned three were the only ones where the Communist Parties had a chance to avail themselves of the war upsets and seize political power, after the departure of the Germans. Russia enjoined them to do nothing of the sort and only prepare to have access to bourgeois democratic legality in their respective countries as a reward for their contribution through genuine nationalistic behaviour to the common victory. (6)

The French Communists wholeheartedly complied with this policy. They faithfully collaborated during the occupation with the non-Communist resistance organisations, readily handed in their arms after liberation and participated in the first post-war De Gaulle Government.

The Yugoslavs took the diametrically opposite course: they waged a total war against Michailovitch, repudiated all 'emigres' and eventually established a 100% Communist regime after the war. (7)

Greek Communists, on the other hand, wavered between the French and the Yugoslav model and got deeply entangled

(5) Moreover, the non-Communist left was, even when critical, generally sympathetic to the USSR, whereas doctrinal anti-Sovietism was identifiable with the extreme right, indeed with Fascist tendencies.

(6) In 1939, the Political Bureau of the Comintern addressed the Greek Communist Party as follows: 'The first duty of the GCP is the defence of the independence of the country. As long as the Metaxas government fights against the same danger, there is no reason to attempt its overthrow. Of course, your party should continue its action for furthering the internal freedom of the Greek people, for this strengthens the defensive capacity of your country.'

Incidentally, after the Italian aggression, in his appeal to defend the country addressed from its prison, 31st October 1940, Zachariadis only slightly and vaguely, if at all, outpaced the Comintern line, when adding: '... the prize of all that will be a new Greece of work and freedom ...'

(7) In that instance, the USSR showed once again its scrupulous fidelity to the golden rule mentioned above. Not only had Stalin warned the Yugoslav Communists against the formation of any kind of partisan government, but out-Heroding Herod, he declared, after this formation *did* take place in November 1943, that he wished to keep contact with all guerillas, including Michailovitch, at the very moment the British withdrew their liaison officers from him.



in inextricable contradictions. Nobody among them questioned, of course, the dogma, namely that what is good for the Soviet Union is also good for the world proletariat, and what is bad for the former is also bad for the latter. Nobody disputed, either, that for the Soviet Union, in the spring of 1944, the claim for a 'second front' was more crucial than the formation of a Greek Government of National Unity, or that the danger of a separate peace between the Western powers and Germany was immensely more dreadful for the cause of world revolution than the reinstatement of George II of Greece on his throne, even if the latter was to be accompanied by the 'epigones' of Metaxas's dictatorship. They were even prepared to accept the same parallelism between the fate of the Soviet Union and that of each national proletariat taken separately. For it was self-evident that, if, following a communisation of Greece or Yugoslavia, the alliance with the Western powers was broken off and the Soviet Union defeated, either by Germany alone or by any imperialist coalition whatsoever, the victor, after having destroyed Communism in the 'one-sixth-of-the-earth', would surely not spare and let survive a Communist Greece or a Communist Yugoslavia. The solidarity was thus not only ideological but material.

No! what those who preached revolutionary uncompromisingness *did* dispute was the idea itself that national revolutionary transformations would indeed entail all these international catastrophes. They thought, on the contrary, that, the war against Germany being an anti-Fascist and not an anti-German war, we should fight off Fascists wherever they happened to be, inside and outside, and that any intra-national victory against them would tend to strengthen, not to weaken, the common international front, this being achieved and maintained not *with* Churchill and Roosevelt but *in spite* of them, with the democratic and anti-Fascist American and British masses, whose pressure alone could eventually obtain the opening of a second front and prevent a 'renversement des alliances' and an anti-Soviet crusade. (8)

This was, in fact, the same mistake as that made by Lenin, in the first years after the Bolshevik revolution: miscalculation of the objective relationship of power, refusal to play the game with the established governments and appealing over their heads directly to their peoples. The results of this policy are well known. The relationship of power having been overwhelmingly unfavourable for the 'workers' state', instead of mobilising the peoples against their respective governments, it had the effect of alienating them, and the young Soviet state, not only

(8) Yet it was significant that, at the beginning of the war, the shibboleth of Moscow broadcasts was: 'Death to the Fascists'. Soon after that, it became: 'Death to the Hitlerites', and, after the dissolution of the 3rd International: 'Death to the German invaders'.

lost the opportunity of participating in the Versailles treaty as a full-fledged winner of the war, but suffered, on the contrary, territorial losses and had to undergo a long series of devastating foreign interventions.

One of the components of the Stalinist philosophy was to avoid the same mistake in the Second World War. For all their Stalinism, however, the Communist Parties in the bourgeois states had never got rid of the illusion of international class solidarity, and it is this illusion that, in the last analysis, explains the events of the Middle East in 1944. The author of this paper admits that he himself largely shared this illusion.

It would perhaps be necessary to qualify the Greek case further. Abstracting from the political and ideological issues, Greece, as a nation, could hardly be considered as having a stake in the war. As Tsouderos put it: 'We entered the war without any prior discussion with the Allies about either our obligations in the war or our gains from the victory.' (9)

If the war was not an anti-Fascist (or class, pro-workers' state) war, what was it? As far as Greece was concerned, it could hardly be described as anti-German. The Greeks had no direct difference to settle with the Germans. The broadly used epithet of 'national-liberation' was utterly irrelevant. The Germans had no intention of colonising or annexing Greece. They just *occupied* Greece to make sure that British forces would not land on it and threaten their right flank during their coming operations against Russia. They would have much preferred that the Greeks themselves assumed the job of holding the British off, and some pourparlers in that direction had actually taken place during the Greco-Italian war. (10) When reading Churchill's again and again repeated references in his Memoirs to the British military aid to Greece and the 40,000 British casualties there, in 1941, as a justification for the British intervention in 1944, one cannot help thinking that he entirely turns the tables. In 1941, it was *their* war, not that of Greece, that the British were fighting on the Greek front and it was, therefore, the Greek army which was aiding the British and not the other way round. As far as inter-state give-and-take is concerned, it is Greek, not British, casualties that must be entered into the other party's debit.

(9) E. Tsouderos: 'Backstairs Diplomacy 1941-1944', Athens, 1949. In the same book, p. 200, the author adds: 'We found ourselves also in a de facto war situation with Japan, after our fleet got tangled up in the far-east battle when our destroyer Aetos sank a Japanese submarine.'

(10) Not only in Athens, after the death of Metaxas (29th January 1941), between the German Embassy and the Prime Minister Coryzis, through the intermediary of Mercouris, but also in Nice (France), where a high-ranking SS personality visited Plastiras and asked him to interpose for putting an end to the Greco-Italian war on that basis. It was probably following these secret pourparlers that, in March 1941, *The Times* expressed hints at some symptoms of defeatism and untrustworthiness of the Greek Government.

Things are a bit different if the approach is made in political terms. Then, and only then, Greece — at least the majority of its people — had indeed a stake in the war: get rid of Metaxas's dictatorship and recover democracy. As a matter of fact, of all the Western Allies, Greece was the only one to have had, at the outbreak of the war, a Fascist or quasi-Fascist regime, in that this had not only outlawed the Communist Party, as the French counterpart had, immediately after the outbreak of the war, equally done, but suppressed all bourgeois parties as well.

On the one hand, this specificity considerably widened the social basis of the EAM, and, unlike the French case, rendered pleonastic any rival bourgeois guerilla organisation, relegating the pure right-wing conservatives in general and Metaxas's followers in particular into the collaborationist camp. On the other hand, however, it placed the Communist leadership in the additional awkward obligation to cease all ideological strife, after the Metaxas regime was solemnly and legally repudiated, in February 1942, by an act of the Government in exile itself, let alone the fact that the King (guilty of having put Metaxas to power in 1936) agreed to submit the monarchical institution itself to a referendum after the liberation. As a result, the policy of the Greek Communist Party was entangled in a mess of contradictions and ambiguities.

1. On the one hand, the EAM's constitutive programme of September 1941 focused on the 'national' goals, declaring explicitly that it was prepared to cooperate with the monarchists and even with bona fide followers of Metaxas. (11) On the other hand, however, they did not hesitate to include in the same programme the revolutionary claim of a constituent assembly, to be called immediately after the liberation in order to revise the institutions, without any reference to the existing Greek Government in exile. (12)

2. On the one hand, ELAS (the military section of EAM) claimed recognition as an integral part of the allied forces, under

(11) It proved nevertheless unable to cooperate with groups as little monarchist and Metaxist as the EDES and the EKKA.

(12) Identifying national and ideological targets was a widespread tendency among left-wing militants throughout the war. As Psiroukis (History of Modern Greece, 1940-1967, p. 73) put it: 'The movements of national resistance, as movements of revolutionary struggle, were not out to take over the job of the destroyed bourgeois armies.'

In explicit terms, however, the programmes of the bourgeois EDES and EKKA paradoxically sounded more radical than that of the EAM: 'The war flames are destroying the old regime. The entire oligarchical structure . . . tumbles down . . . for the suppression of the exploitation of man by man', proclaimed the former. 'National and social liberation, for an "integral people's republic"', specifically claimed the latter. This 'anti-Fascist' overbidding was not unusual withing the emigre cabinet itself. Canellopoulos, when in charge of the three war ministries, declared in his speech of 3rd August 1942: 'No soldier of freedom can join the present war, unless he is a conscious carrier of the anti-Fascist ideal.'

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# Middle East Upeaval

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the orders of the British High Command, normally in charge of military operations in the area, and got it, first informally, as the British had to integrate the guerilla action in the Balkans in their global plans, and, now and again, sent, for that purpose, liaison officers into the occupied territories, then formally, by the Sarafis/Eddy agreement in June 1943. But, on the other hand, Eamite underground organisations were set up within another integral part of the allied armed forces, the Greek Middle East Forces. (13)

## Overseas branch

Incidentally, while these organisations labelled themselves an overseas branch of the EAM, the latter neither disavowed nor authenticated them. Had it disavowed them, the 1944 'mutiny' would not have been attempted, or, if attempted, it would have failed; had it authenticated them, the stupid post-factum condemnation of this mutiny would not have taken place. (14) Either way, the outcome would have been less bad than what actually happened, namely, let it take place and then condemn it.

3. On the one hand, the Eamites in Greece ended up by forming a national Government, which, by definition, has to claim authority over all nationals wherever they happen to be. On the other hand, far from being happy that the Greek Middle East Forces proclaimed allegiance to *their* Government, they felt obliged to apologise for that crime to the chief of a foreign power.

4. On the one hand, they ruthlessly attacked rival guerilla groups within Greece, refusing any compromise with them. On the other hand, they went to do

(13) Moreover, these organisations were named ASO, AON, AOA, Greek initials for anti-Fascist military organisation, anti-Fascist organisation of the navy, anti-Fascist organisation of the air force, anti-Fascist this, anti-Fascist that, as if the 'Metaxas's bona fide followers', whom the EAM in Greece urged to join the ranks, were not Fascists.

Incidentally, it is noteworthy that the Eamite *civil* organisation, within the Greek colony in Egypt, was paradoxically less sectarian than the military ones, instead of the other way round, and was named EAS, that is national-liberation association.

Now this contradiction between military and political targets was not absent in the British camp either. In 'Eight Years Overseas', General Wilson relates the antagonism between the British military services seeking contact with the Greek guerillas and the British diplomats who were rather reluctant.

(14) This was the most servile thing a national-liberation movement could ever do. Addressing (16th May 1944) Winston Churchill as if he were the supreme referee of Greek differences they begged him not to charge them with '... the insane acts of irresponsible persons'. It was signed by Svolos for the PEEA, Porfyrogenis for the EAM and Roussos for the Communist Party, the same Roussos who, in August 1943, was suggesting to Salas that, when a partisan government was formed in Greece, the Middle East Forces should move forward without letting themselves be deterred by the risk of their dissolution.

penance at the Lebanon conference and humbly accepted some flap-seats in a Papandreou puppet Government, whose only substance, the armed forces, had just disappeared, those outside the country by the acts of EAM followers and those at home by the blows of EAM itself.

## Better terms

Assuming that the road for a social revolution was barred and EAM was only in a position to make the best of a post-war bourgeois democracy, the only logical way out would have been the opposite: come to terms with the bourgeois leaders in the most favourable environment for the EAM, that of the interior of Greece, then, on the authority of such a consensus send the emigre Government about its business. In other words, take advantage of the windfall disbandment of its armed forces which deprived that Government of any possibility of a forcible landing in Greece, and use the conciliation of the home resistance and political groups to deprive it of any possibility of a 'pacific' landing either. It is clear that the EAM could obtain much better terms from Zervas, Pyromaglou and Cartallis in the expense of Papandreou, than from Papandreou to the expense of Zervas, Pyromaglou and Cartallis. (15) In other words, the alternative for the EAM was: either a common front in the Greek mountains against the British and their 'proteges', or monopolising the Greek mountains and bargaining with the British as an exclusive representative of fighting Greece. It chose the worst solution, the second one.

A last question arises. How was it at all possible for an underground organisation to take hold like that, in a trice, of an entire bourgeois army scattered over so vast a geographical space? The answer is rooted in the same basic considerations as those outlined above. The initial rallying of the liberal officers (Venizelists, anti-Tsouderos, anti-royalists and *tutti quanti*), irrespective of their numerical importance, provided a respectability to the pro-PEEA movement, and this proved sufficient, not only to neutralise the right-wing officers, but, what was much more crucial, to cripple the non-politically minded staff and especially the mass of regular petty officers, who, in their majority, did not well understand what exactly was going on, stood aside and let the whole hierarchical structure tumble down. When, some days later, the liberals considered themselves satisfied with the resignation of Tsouderos and parted company, things were thoroughly changed. At that moment, we were faced with the alternative:

(15) Churchill duly noticed that Zervas had neither contact with nor sympathy for the Greek Government abroad.

either adopt the French solution and share the victory of the liberals, as they urged us to do, however unequal the apportionment of its fruits was due to be, or attempt the Yugoslavian solution up to and including the winding up of the Middle East Forces. Either solution could make sense, depending on what the strategy of the EAM at home was. Had they, in Greece, definitely chosen the Yugoslavian solution, obviously the best thing to do within an army, as presumably interventionist as the royal Middle East Greek Forces, was to put it out of the way. The very formation of the PEEA and the sweeping military operations against all non-Eamite guerilla groups in occupied Greece induced us to presume that this was actually the strategy adopted over there. Incidentally, the Communist Petros Roussos, EAM delegate at the first meeting in Cairo, in August 1943, between EAM, EDES and EKKA on the one hand and the Greek Government on the other, explicitly suggested to Yannis Salas, the leader of all underground organisations within the Middle East armed forces, that when a Government was set up in the mountains of occupied Greece, the army in the Middle East must take a definite position and so much the better if, following this, it was disbanded. 'That would be a 100% gain, he concluded. (16)

If, on the contrary, the EAM had already decided to adopt the French solution, and, besides that, to capitulate, as it eventually did later on in Lebanon, obviously, our dissidence was the most foolish of all conceivable acts.

Unfortunately, in that glorious spring of 1944, it seems that we, EAM-in-Middle-East, were not the only ones to be unaware of what exactly the EAM-in-Greece wanted to do; the EAM-in-Greece itself was unaware of it. □

(16) Other delegates had, to be sure, a quite different way of talking. Tzimas, for instance, declared that 'the only good policy for the army was that which secured its coming back to Greece. All the rest is extremism.' Tsirimokos was more categorical: 'Even if they put the knife at your throats, you will not move.'

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