

# **British Military Mission (BMM) to Greece, 1942-44**

**A Monograph  
by  
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## Abstract

BRITISH MILITARY MISSION (BMM) TO GREECE, 1942-44 by MAJOR S. Stephen Shrader, U.S. Army, 45 pages.

The study of insurgency and counterinsurgency over the years provides a valuable tool for analysis in the current Global War on Terrorism. Failure to take into account and accurately assess political and military actions in such environments can lead to unintended consequences (potential civil war) affecting the stability of a country. Accurate assessment of the political and military actions does not guarantee success or failure, as every insurgency is a unique case, which requires observation and analysis through the strategic implications particular to each circumstance. One historical example for analysis is the British Military Mission (BMM) to Greece in 1942-44, which begs the question “did the policies utilized by the British in balancing the opposing political and military objectives of rival guerilla forces delay or help bring about the Greek Civil War?” This monograph explores the question by analyzing the historical documentation of actual events that transpired during the mission and whether they delayed or help bring about the Greek Civil War.

The British Military Mission to Greece from 1942-44 originated for the purpose of disrupting German supply lines to North Africa in support of British operations aimed at defeating the Germans at El Alamein. This twelve-man mission inserted into Greece to organize, coordinate and direct Greek guerilla factions against occupying Axis forces and sever crucial supply lines feeding German forces in North Africa. The initial target consisted of a viaduct supporting the single rail line running through the country. The British members of the mission in coordination with two rival guerilla factions successfully destroyed the viaduct and halted German supply flow for several weeks. The mission demonstrated that guerilla forces in conjunction with Allied support could accomplish critical missions tied to Allied strategy and opened the door for more ambitious plans for coordinated guerilla warfare throughout Europe.

The ensuing growth of coordination and support to guerilla factions by the British mission quickly revealed ulterior motives on the part of one guerilla faction dominated and controlled by the Greek Communist Party (KKE). This faction was determined to gain control of resistance operations throughout Greece and ultimately bring Greece under Communist control. The ensuing struggle to balance immediate military objectives for the overall war effort and political goals between the rival guerilla factions dominated the British mission from 1942 until Greece’s liberation in 1944. The British whole-heartedly supported the King of Greece and the government-in-exile while at the same time lending funding and support to guerilla factions that vehemently opposed the return of the king after the war. The dichotomy between British policy and actions on the ground presented difficulties in achieving immediate military objectives and complicated long-term stability for Greece.

In conclusion, the ingredients for civil war existed long before the introduction of the British mission. Events shaped through decisions by Greek leadership and policies in the years leading to World War II are largely responsible for creating rifts between monarchist and anti-monarchist forces and the spark toward civil war. The early introduction of the British Military Mission interjected a small force effectively bringing together two rival guerilla factions and temporarily delaying an inevitable civil war. While elements of British policy complicated the process, the nature of the political situation combined with long existing fault lines within Greek Government presented a strategic situation in which the best the British could hope for was a temporary solution.

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## Introduction

The terror attacks on September 11, 2001, and subsequent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq sparked resurgence in the focus and analysis of insurgency and counterinsurgency. The use of insurgency as a means to achieve an end is clearly not a recently emergent concept as history provides numerous examples. While not a new phenomenon, insurgency is one that has been on the rise in the twenty-first century in various countries across the globe. The majority of current works focusing on insurgency and counterinsurgency center on Afghanistan and Iraq and attempts to provide understanding into the role and ideology of the insurgency and strategies for the counterinsurgent to defeat it.

The study of insurgency and counterinsurgency over the years provides a valuable tool for analysis in the current Global War on Terrorism. Careful study of the formation, ideology, organization, and overall ambitions of the insurgency and any factions provide insight into developing coherent strategies to combat and overcome insurgencies. While the great majority of analysis and study done in recent years focuses on looking at insurgency from the aspect of the counterinsurgent, and the immediate short term and long term efforts that can be taken to defeat the insurgency, analysis and study into the effects of actions taken to accomplish that end is also required. Failure to take into account and accurately assess political and military actions in such environments can lead to unintended consequences (potential civil war) affecting the stability of a country. Accurate assessment of the political and military actions does not guarantee success or failure, as every insurgency is a unique case, which requires observation and analysis through the strategic implications particular to each circumstance.

Insurgency, guerilla warfare, and counterinsurgency contain nuances not seen in traditional major combat operations. Dealing with rival factions and tribes, support among the populace (for the insurgent and counterinsurgent), and bolstering of government institutions play as important a role in the success of counterinsurgency or guerilla operations as any military

action. Balancing the political processes and military action becomes a key step in successfully executing any operation that contributes to overall campaign success. One historical example, which may provide insight to the modern counterinsurgent in the dealings of rival factions during guerilla operations in an occupied country, is that of the British Military Mission (BMM) to Greece in 1942-44.

The BMM to Greece came about as a military option to hinder German operations against the British in North Africa. The majority of German supplies necessary to support Axis operations arrived in Africa via a single railway in occupied Greece. In an effort to stem the flow of supplies from Germany, and lacking sufficient naval or air forces to accomplish the task, Great Britain decided to drop a small party of British officers to link-up and coordinate Greek guerilla efforts to cut the vital railway. This small British contingent spent the next three years attempting to balance political and military objectives of rival guerilla factions in order to accomplish their military mission of disrupting the lines of communication (LOCs) of German forces. By 1946, Greece was embroiled in a civil war that pitted the communist ideals of the *EAM/ELAS* (formerly a guerilla faction supported by the British during the war) against the pre-war government of Greece.

Analysis into the timing and duration of BMM operations and the start of civil war presents an interesting backdrop into answering what ultimately precipitated the civil war. Looking at the situation from the point of view of today's military professional, continually caught in the balancing act between political and military action, the question becomes, "did the policies utilized by the British in balancing the opposing political and military objectives of rival guerilla forces delay or help bring about the Greek Civil War?"

This monograph will explore the likelihood of this question by analyzing the historical documentation of actual events that transpired during the BMM. It will rely heavily on the use of military reports and personal experience of members of the BMM to provide a fresh (although distant) analysis of British actions while drawing linkages between the actions taken (and not



taken), and the resulting second and third order affects that contributed to the outbreak of Civil War in 1946. This study takes a different approach into providing insight into insurgency, guerilla warfare, and counterinsurgency by looking at it from the perspective of a government actively involved in the coordination and execution of guerilla operations on foreign soil against a rival occupying country, rather than the typical counterinsurgent standpoint. In this study, the counterinsurgents are the Axis powers (predominately-German) occupying Greece, and where appropriate, insight will highlight how they attempted to wage the counterinsurgency.

## **Literary Review**

The benefit of studying and writing on the British mission is the fact that now more than sixty-years after it took place there is a great deal of literature that captures quite well the activities and actions that occurred in Greece. Even more beneficial is the release of government and military files and reports compiled during the operation. The wealth of written information available and unclassified for consumption today provides a more detailed and holistic view of the situation in Greece than was available to members of the mission at the time. Produced from firsthand experience or derived directly from actual wireless reports between mission members and their higher headquarters, the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Cairo; these sources provide relevant and detailed information for analysis.

The majority of the works published on the BMM appeared more than three decades ago and are quite comprehensive in their study of the political, military, and societal issues that dominated the landscape of Greece. These works carry the added benefit of capturing the events within Greece while they were still ‘fresh’ in the minds of those involved.

Personal memoirs from the first commander of the mission to Greece highlight problems in controlling guerilla factions, organization of the mission, and guerilla operations. Most beneficial to this study are the candid opinions by the author on the political situation in Greece and his recommendations relayed to the SOE in Cairo on how to handle the political and military

situation in Greece.<sup>1</sup> The work provides insight into the linkages to second and third order effects that potentially contributed to the Civil War.

*Apple of Discord* serves as another primary source critical to the study of the BMM to Greece. This work, written by the second in command of the British intervention, provides more of a political analysis of the situation in Greece more so than a personal memoir.<sup>2</sup> Major Christopher Montague Woodhouse was educated in Modern Greek, and having previously served in Greece prior to the British withdrawal in 1941, provides valuable insight into the Greek political environment.<sup>3</sup> The viewpoints expressed in his work typically support those of his commander but have the added benefit of coming from an individual who spoke the language and was quite versed in the political maneuverings of the country.

Two other members of the mission, J.M. Stevens and D.J. Wallace, provide valuable primary source insight into the political dealings and guerilla activities from two varying perspectives. Stevens provides perspective as the leader of the British Mission in the Peloponnese, while the British Foreign Office (BFO) sent Wallace in to clarify reports from Greece and to serve as a political advisor to Myers.<sup>4</sup>

The memoirs of Sir Reginald Leeper provide historical data needed to plot actual British policy guidance passed to the mission in Greece. These memoirs also provide valuable insight into how the British government viewed recommendations and analysis by Myer's and other BMM members.<sup>5</sup> Initially thought to be an excellent primary source on the political maneuverings of the British during the time were the personal memoirs of Sir Winston

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<sup>1</sup> E.C.W Myers, *Greek Entanglement*. (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955) Et al.

<sup>2</sup> C.M. Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord: A survey of Recent Greek Politics in Their International Setting*. (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1948) Et al.

<sup>3</sup> Woodhouse would later be promoted to Colonel in 1943 after assuming command of the BMM (Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 264)

<sup>4</sup> J.M. Stevens, C.M. Woodhouse, D.J. Wallace, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1982) Et al.

<sup>5</sup> Reginald Leeper, *When Greek meets Greek*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950) Et al.

Churchill.<sup>6</sup> The tendency of his works to be so personally biased necessitated they be examined from the viewpoint as a secondary source.

Stephanos Sarafis provides crucial information and understanding from his perspective as the Commander of the *National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS)*. Sarafis' personal account provides critical insight into the difficulties experienced by the *ELAS* (the dominant guerilla faction) in dealing with the BMM and rival guerilla factions. It provides an excellent counterpoint to the other personal memoirs and serves to confirm and deny potential assumptions made as to how British policy really affected the guerillas.<sup>7</sup>

Numerous secondary sources provide outside analysis of the political situation and dealings during the time of the BMM in Greece. Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg provide much needed insight into the inter-departmental dealings of the British government in regards to policy executed in Greece. The work highlights rivalries between the Special Operations Executive and other wartime departments.<sup>8</sup>

Elisabeth Barker provides additional outside analysis into British policy in Southeast Europe during the time and further insight into long-term British policy of the region. While its focus does not center solely on Greece, the overarching analysis of policy history helps shape the understanding of the political background of the region. Analysis of the information provided in these works helps to firm up linkages to policy disputes and ultimately good or bad policy decisions that may have contributed to the Greek Civil War.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, vols. II, III, IV, VI*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949-1953) Et al.

<sup>7</sup> Stefanos Sarafis, *ELAS: Greek Resistance Army*. (London: Merlin Press, 1980) Et al.

<sup>8</sup> Phyllis Auty, Richard Clogg (eds.), *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*. (London: University of London, 1975) Et al.

<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*. (London: Macmillan, 1976) Et al.

Throughout the literature, there is a great deal of observation given on how the fate of Greece was set in its way prior to the arrival of the BMM to Greece.<sup>10</sup> While it is clear that Germany's occupation and actions within Greece set about a myriad of second and third order effects prior to British arrival, it seems presumptuous to rule out that the actions by the British would be any more or less positive or negative in the long term. Understanding of the political environment is crucial to the analysis of actual operations in Greece in order to trace the linkages from policy formulation and guidance to execution to second and third order affects.

### **Political Underpinnings**

Who are the guerillas? Why did they start? Where are they located? Why are the British aiding and facilitating a Communist guerilla organization? Are the needs of the guerilla factions capable of address by the government? The British mission to organize and coordinate the guerilla effort on Greece did not spontaneously occur, nor did the political, military, economic, and cultural situation that necessitated it. Full appreciation of the situation requires a look into the state of the Greek government from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the German occupation in 1941.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought tumultuous times for the Greek monarchy, which endured no less than seven transitions in political power before the German occupation. The outbreak of World War I pitched King Constantine I and Eleftherios Venizelos, former Greek Prime Minister, into disagreement over Greek policy toward neutrality or support for the Allies. The King favored neutrality while Venizelos' party favored support of the Allies in the hopes that Allied victory would aid desires to gain Constantinople for Greece.<sup>11</sup> The dispute ultimately led to Venizelos establishing his own government in Salonika, which received aid from a French and British expeditionary force. Allied diplomacy forced the government and King to come to terms with

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<sup>10</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*. p. 284

Venizelos in 1917. The action restored Venizelos as the Prime Minister and forced Constantine to relinquish the throne to his second son, Alexander.

Alexander's temperament combined with Greek and Allied success in the war through 1918 helped to quiet the fervor of discontent between Royalist and Venizelist. The calm did not last as Alexander unexpectedly died and Venizelos was unable to secure Constantinople for Greece during the Peace Conference in Paris. Elections in 1920 brought about the defeat of Venizelos and King Constantine I returned to the throne installing friends and supporters into the government.<sup>12</sup>

The Peace Conference in Paris provided concessions for Greece in Asia minor however, the Turkish Insurrectionary Government refused to recognize any partition of Asia Minor to Greece. King Constantine opted to take up the offense against the Turks in hopes of annexing all of Asia Minor. Constantine's decision ultimately led to a Greek defeat and the loss of all claims to Asia Minor in 1922. Because of the defeat and renewed fervor in the Royalist vs. Venizelist debates, King Constantine fled Greece in exile and his eldest son, George II, succeeded the throne.<sup>13</sup>

Constantine's actions against Turkey and ultimate failure left his son, George II, with a popular revolt against the government. Venizelist supporters promoted a revolution against the royal government and asked George II to step down. Greece held new elections in 1923, which resulted in the Royalist party abstaining from the vote thereby allowing the Chamber of Deputies and Greek Cabinet to vote solidly for the establishment of a republican government bringing George II's reign to an end in 1924.

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<sup>11</sup> William Hardy McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma, War and Aftermath*, (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1947), 17

<sup>12</sup> McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma, War and Aftermath*. p. 18

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 25

Greece remained a republic from 1924-1935, and endured numerous coup d'état during the period with the Royalist vs. Republican debate being the primary divisional issue within Greek politics.<sup>14</sup> The onset of the depression in the early thirties hit the Greek economy hard and the Popular Party government did not effectively manage the crisis. The crisis prompted another coup d'état attempt by several hundred republican officers hoping to restore republican power. The failure of the coup attempt brought about reorganization of the Greek government, placing numerous Royalist leaders in power thereby setting the conditions for King George II's return to the throne in 1935.<sup>15</sup>

George II brought a renewed hope to rule Greece as a constitutional monarchy and set about to hold new elections for the country in 1936. The new elections included all political parties and resulted in the selection of a Chamber of Deputies in Parliament equally divided between royalists and republicans with the Greek Communist Party (*KKE*) holding the balance between the two.<sup>16</sup> The resulting Parliamentary deadlock and sudden death of several experienced Greek politicians, to include the Prime Minister, disrupted George II's hopes of ruling as a constitutional monarchy. General Ioannis Metaxas, Deputy Prime Minister, was elevated into the powerful role of Greek's Prime Minister. Metaxas played a crucial role in ousting republican supporters of the attempted coup in 1935 while serving as the Minister of War.<sup>17</sup> His contemptuous view of Parliament and Communists alike would serve to destabilize the Greek government throughout the coming years.

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<sup>14</sup> McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma, War and Aftermath*. p. 26

<sup>15</sup> C.M. Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece 1941-1949*. (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1976), 15

<sup>16</sup> McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma, War and Aftermath*. p. 30

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30

It is important to note that the Greek Communist Party (*KKE*) had been attempting to gain power in Greece since its formation in 1918.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the numerous transitions to power, the party garnered and maintained a considerable base of support leading to their balance between royalist and republicans at the time of the Parliamentary deadlock. Circumstances as they were, the *KKE* tried to seize power by holding discussions between parties of the government. Riots and strikes incited by the *KKE* in the city of Salonika forced George II to declare a state of emergency. Capitalizing on the moment, the *KKE* continued to push for power of the country by calling for a general strike on August 5, 1936.<sup>19</sup>

The state of emergency and potential for a general strike called by the *KKE* provided the justification necessary for Metaxas to convince George II to grant him emergency powers to govern by decree.<sup>20</sup> Metaxas was not keen on Parliamentary procedure and quickly imprisoned or exiled all who opposed the decision, including a majority of the Communist leaders within the government. The opportunity for political opposition during Metaxas' regime was small and very few Communist leaders were able to escape imprisonment over the course of his four and a half years in power.<sup>21</sup>

While Metaxas' handling of the Communist element within the government certainly stemmed the tide of *KKE*'s attempt to seize power, his dislike of the constitutional process of democracy created additional enemies from Democratic politicians in the Populist and Liberal camps alike. Metaxas considered Communists and Democratic politicians to be wasting his time and obstructing his efforts with a rival form of authoritarianism.<sup>22</sup> Metaxas' policies created

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<sup>18</sup> Evangelos Averof-Tossizza, *By Fire and Axe: The Communist Party and the Civil War in Greece, 1944-49*, trans. Sarah Arnold Rigos (New York: Caratzas Brothers Publishers, 1978), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 15

<sup>20</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 104

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105

<sup>22</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord: A Survey of Recent Greek Politics in Their International Setting*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1948), 15

turmoil for the *KKE* and by 1940; there were at least three different Communist factions all claiming to be the Central Committee of the *KKE*.<sup>23</sup> The confusion caused by the situation effectively prevented the *KKE* from doing significant damage however, the time period called for a change in organization and structure in order to operate around and outside Metaxas' policy. Thus, extensive Communist cells organized throughout the country to carry out subversive activity and continue the Communist bid for power.<sup>24</sup>

By October 1940, the Italian invasion threw the country into even more turmoil. The Greeks succeeded in defending their country, but their success prompted Germany to intervene. Metaxas' death in January 1941 brought the appointment of a new Prime Minister that allowed a British Expeditionary Force (Force W) into Greece in early March 1941, to bolster the Macedonian front, an action that proved too little, too late.<sup>25</sup> On 6 April 1941, Germany attacked Greece and Yugoslavia and by the end of May 1941, Axis troops controlled all of Greece and its islands.<sup>26</sup> Greece was quickly broken up and allocated among the Axis powers to control. German forces occupied Western Macedonia and the area of Thrace bordering Turkey along with the Aegean islands nearest to the Turkish coast and three western provinces of Crete. The Bulgarians were apportioned the areas between, with the Italians being assigned the rest of Greece and the islands. The only area jointly occupied was Athens.<sup>27</sup>

Greek politics centered within Athens prior to 1941 however, the German occupation forced the exile of the Greek government into three separate countries under the protection of Great Britain, their only ally at the time. The puppet government established by the Germans

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<sup>23</sup> Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 16

<sup>24</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 106

<sup>25</sup> The British government attempted to send the expeditionary force while Metaxas was Prime Minister. Metaxas, however, declined the offer claiming the force would be too small and provocative. The new prime minister allowed the force to enter in March prior to the German. (Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 17 and McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma*, p. 44)

<sup>26</sup> Condit, *Case Study in Guerilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 35

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23



remained in Athens; the headquarters of the armed forces and part of the legitimate government established in Egypt, while the King and part of his government-in-exile located in London.<sup>28</sup>

George II's decision to empower Metaxas to rule by decree for the last four years had created turmoil for all parties involved, including the King himself. The Communists, naturally disliking any form of monarchy were vehemently opposed to the return of the King to power since they wanted it for themselves, while the Liberals (poorly treated by Metaxas) were quite hostile to the return of the King for his decision to have empowered Metaxas and for having left Greece in exile during the occupation.<sup>29</sup> George II enjoyed a brief respite of popularity during the initial success against the Italian invasion however; the overall political alienation felt by the myriad of groups under Metaxas rule, coupled with the King's exile during the occupation sealed the hostile sentiment. The result was a decidedly anti-monarchist sentiment permeating Greece throughout the years of German occupation.<sup>30</sup>

Even if the King had chosen to stay in Greece rather than follow his loyalty to his British allies, the anti-monarchical sentiment would still have existed. He would have been labeled a collaborator and puppet of the German occupiers (due to his German blood) had he chosen to stay, while his decision to go into exile branded him a deserter and removed him from the plight his people endured for the years of occupation.<sup>31</sup>

## **Resistance Formation**

The formation of resistance within Greece by the Communist Party owes itself greatly to the reorganization and cell structure sought by the *KKE* during Metaxas' regime prior to the German occupation. The necessity to organize efficient Communist cells throughout the country

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<sup>28</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 25

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52

<sup>30</sup> Woodhouse, *Struggle for Greece*, p. 21

<sup>31</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 53

provided plenty of experience and practice for the type of operations that would be required against Greece's German occupiers as well as the remainder of the Greek government. Resistance formation by Republican leaders and other Greek citizens did not have the benefit of experience or the organization of the Communists at the outset of the occupation. While numerous smaller resistance parties were formed off and on throughout the occupation, none were as dominant or integral in guerilla actions against Germany and the ensuing strife that would follow than those created by the Communists and the Republicans.

The *National Republican Greek League (EDES)*, formed by Republican leaders and senior generals on 9 September 1941, and the *National Liberation Front (EAM)*, formed by the Communists on 27 September 1941, eventually become the dominant factions within Greece.<sup>32</sup> The formation of *EDES* is rooted in two primary reasons: the "Democratic" leaning of the Republican leaders and senior generals who founded it, and the dislike of German 'Kultur' being spread within the country.<sup>33</sup> The overarching goals established by *EDES* centered on resisting the Axis occupiers and attempting to impart a balance of republicanism back into the Greek government by the close of the war.<sup>34</sup>

The formation of the *EAM* is firmly rooted to the *KKE*'s desire to guide the Greek government down the path of social revolution, ultimately becoming a Communist state in the postwar world.<sup>35</sup> It is clear that *EAM* shared in *EDES*' desire to rid Greece of its Axis occupiers through resistance, this desire, unlike *EDES* remained secondary to their overall goal of establishing a Communist state. The one true commonality shared by both resistance organizations at their formation was the anti-monarchist sentiment held against the King.

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<sup>32</sup> L.S. Stavrianos, "The Greek National Liberation Front (EAM): A Study in Resistance Organization and Administration," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Mar, 1952): 43

<sup>33</sup> J.M. Stevens, C.M. Woodhouse, and D.J. Wallace, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1982), 4

<sup>34</sup> Condit, *Case Study in Guerilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 41

<sup>35</sup> Sarafis, *ELAS: Greek Resistance Army*, p. lii-liii

Even with the formation of *EDES* and *EAM* in September 1941, active resistance against the Axis remained subversive and centered near towns and population centers. The efforts of groups such as *EDES* focused on getting in touch with Britain in order to acquire supplies and money to further resistance efforts. The efforts of *EAM* focused on strengthening its ranks and internal organization. Influence and support from Moscow during this period was virtually non-existent. The Nazi-Soviet Pact prior to the start of the war severed most Soviet ties to Greece, thus the *KKE* launched into formation and organization of political and military forces without instruction or aid from the Soviets.<sup>36</sup> The first true appearance of ‘armed guerilla bands’ did not occur until the summer of 1942 when *EDES* and *EAM* guerillas took to the field within the mountains of Greece.<sup>37</sup>

The guerilla bands brought to bear by both resistance organizations represented the military component of each political organization. For *EDES*, the military component shared the same name and received direction from the same authority, which ultimately caused coordination issues between the political and military wings. The designated leader of *EDES*, General Nicolas Plastiras, a former Republican General, was located in France.<sup>38</sup> General Napoleon Zervas carried out Plastiras’ duties in the mountains of Greece, while a committee within Athens handled political matters.<sup>39</sup> *EAM*, already having better organizational cells from the start, formed the *National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS)* and coordinated political and military policy between *KKE* Central Committee members in Athens and *ELAS* guerilla leaders in the mountains (the predominant leader being Aris Veloukhiotis).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 23

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24

<sup>38</sup> Plastiras was responsible for organizing and leading a failed coup d’état in 1933 against the Popular Party. The coup failed and Plastiras and his chief followers fled to France. (McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma, War and Aftermath*, p. 28)

<sup>39</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 72

<sup>40</sup> Stavrianos, “The Greek National Liberation Front (EAM)”, p. 46

Unlike many insurgencies or guerilla conflicts, the formation and development of resistance did not take place in the secluded mountain sanctuaries among the peasant population. It started in the cities along the coasts and eventually expanded toward the geographic center of Greece and the mountain sanctuaries of peasants through efforts of organizations such as *EAM*, *EDES*, and eventually the BMM. The political environment coupled with growing dislike of existence under Axis yoke provided fertile ground for development of resistance organizations but did not serve as the only factor leading to resistance. The terrain of Greece combined with the economic situation and the plight of the people provided additional substance for growth.

### **Physical Geography**

Formation of the resistance may have started in cities and towns such as Salonika and Athens, but as activities ceased to be merely subversion and recruitment, guerilla organizations quickly found the mountains and hills of Greece to be fertile, indeed ideal grounds for resistance against Axis occupiers. The mountainous nature of Greece and near absence of navigable roads in the interior created less than ideal conditions for occupying forces to extend influence against Greek guerillas operating in the region.<sup>41</sup> The natural terrain within Greece essentially split the country into ‘Occupied’ and ‘Unoccupied’ areas. The large Pindus mountain range, which dominates central Greece, served as much of the ‘Unoccupied’ area of the country with Greeks establishing their own civil administration during the occupation.<sup>42</sup> The ‘Occupied’ portions of the country were restricted predominately to larger towns and cities closer to the coasts, providing easier defense of Axis lines of communication.

Denys Hamson, a member of the BMM dropped into Greece in 1942, provides a detailed description of the terrain encountered in his book *We Fell Among Greeks*.

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<sup>41</sup> Stevens, *British Reports on Greece, 1943-44*, p. 3

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2

“How wild and undeveloped it was, how barren and forbidding with its steep, sterile ranges of mountains, bare of everything but rock in many places, with occasional grand forests springing on the mountain sides...For the whole country only one single-track railway running north and south, and that was only as far as Athens. In the whole country nothing that a Western European would dare to call even a third class motor road. In the central mountains, where we were, for fifty miles on either side of us, as the crow flies, no track of any description that any wheeled vehicle – jeep, cart, ox-wagon – could use...”<sup>43</sup>

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Following the prerequisites for a successful insurgency espoused by David Galula’s work, *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice*, the Pindus mountain range provided the Greeks an ideal area to carry out resistance efforts against the Axis.<sup>44</sup> The lack of modern roads and penetration from government hampered movement of Axis forces while providing hidden bases of operation for BMM and guerilla forces. This fact is obvious when one considers that the BMM with several hundred villagers and guerilla fighters were able to clear, build, camouflage and conceal a large aircraft landing strip from German observation planes and patrols.<sup>45</sup>

For the Germans, who by 1943 bore the brunt of occupational duties in Greece, the mountainous terrain compounded anti-guerilla efforts due to insufficient forces capable of fully occupying the countryside. German tactics focused on creating strong points along key supply roads, rail lines, and major towns.<sup>46</sup> The lack of sufficient troops combined with vast stretches of terrain left the Germans making economy of force decisions on key terrain leaving large gaps between strong points vulnerable to guerilla attack. General Hans Spiedel, one time Military Commander of Southern Greece, evidences the extent of these guerilla attacks and affects on

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<sup>43</sup> Denys Hamson, *We Fell Among Greeks*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), 75

<sup>44</sup> Galula, who actually spent time in Greece as a NATO observer from 1949-1950, identifies geographic conditions such as the hills and mountains of Greece being beneficial to the development and sustainment of an insurgency. (Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 36)

<sup>45</sup> The landing strip, about 1800 feet in length, was so cleverly camouflaged that photographs taken by RAF aircraft were not able to effectively discern it and German air patrols flew over it unaware. The RAF successfully landed a C-47 Dakota transport plane on the strip to transport Myers and guerilla delegates to Egypt in 1943. (Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 230-234)

<sup>46</sup> Condit, *Case Study in Guerilla War: Greece During World War II*, p. 237

German organization, when he commented, “Partisan warfare paralyzed the territorial organizations of Military Commanders. It is impossible to conduct warfare in a country and at the same time to maintain a pretense of peaceful occupation...”<sup>47</sup>

## Human Geography

The impact and makeup of the human geography of Greece played a decisive role in the political and military events transpiring during the occupation of the country. Life for the average Greek varied depending on what part of the country one looks at. Initially, Greeks in ‘Unoccupied’ Greece experienced little change in their day-to-day existence revolving around an agrarian based lifestyle. Greeks within the ‘Occupied’ towns and cities were not as lucky and could see on a daily basis the intrusion of German, Italian, or Bulgarian occupiers as they set about securing the land. The vast difference between location and realities created unique categories as to the ‘types of Greeks’ and their behavior displayed during occupation.

For ‘Occupied’ Greece, the categorization of Greeks essentially broke into the *Common People*, the *Collaborators*, the *Attentistes*, and the *Underground*.<sup>48</sup> The vast majority of Greeks represented *Common People* who quite simply attempted to continue their lives practicing what amounted to politically passive attitudes in hopes of enduring the occupation until return of the Greek government. The *Collaborators* would bear a more damning role (in the eyes of other Greeks) as they supported and held positions within the puppet Government established by the Germans at the outset of occupation. It is important to note that motivations behind collaborators decisions to support Germany vary from feelings of personal gain, lack of hope for survival, or belief that Germany had already won the war.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Wilhelm Spiedel, “*Report on Greece (1942-1944); My Mission in Greece.*” trans. H. Heitmann. Unpublished ms. P-003 (USAREUR, 1948); 67, quoted in D.M. Condit, *Case Study in Guerilla War: Greece During World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Special Warfare Research Division, 1961), 229.

<sup>48</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p.27-30

<sup>49</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 27

The *Attentistes* walked a thin line between collaborating with Germans and supporting any Allied efforts that may come to Greece during her time of need. *Attentistes* played both sides in hope of reaping whatever rewards or benefits befell the winner, be it Germany or the Allies. Great majorities of these ‘blade-runners’ were comprised of what Woodhouse called the “old world Greek politicians and its semi-political fringe; ex-deputies, businessmen, industrialists, etc....”<sup>50</sup>

The *Underground* categorization essentially pertains to those Greeks who saw occupation as a political affair and the means to political ends. The Communists hold the majority in this category, as their ultimate goal in resistance to German occupation was the insertion of Communist rule whenever Germany withdrew from Greece. Clearly identifying this category in the waning days of occupation became difficult due to obvious political benefits tied to representation as an oppositional figure to German occupation.

Greeks in ‘Unoccupied’ areas fell into the categories of *Plain Greek*, *EAM/ELAS*, *EDES*, or *Minor Resistance Organization*. In essence, the *Plain Greek* makes up all four categories as those falling into *EAM/ELAS*, *EDES*, or other *Minor Resistance Organizations* are simply *Plain Greeks* swayed by some form of leadership, tragedy, or coercion applied by the other categories to join their cause. The desire to resist Axis forces served as a strong attraction among *Plain Greeks* to join organizations capable of providing the opportunity.<sup>51</sup> Determination of whether the *Plain Greek* decided to side with Communist *EAM/ELAS*, Republican *EDES*, or a *Minor Resistance Organization* depended largely on geography and exposure. The *Plain Greek* living in one part of the mountains was more likely to encounter Communist influence first, whereas in another part Republican influence dominated.<sup>52</sup> Choosing to remain neutral quickly guaranteed

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<sup>50</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 28

<sup>51</sup> Bickham Sweet-Escott, *Greece: A Political and Economic Survey 1939-1953*, (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1954), 21

<sup>52</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 57

branding as a *Collaborator* in the eyes of other Greeks. Violence between the two factions was negligible as initial recruitment efforts and exposure by *EDES* and *EAM/ELAS* remained along geographic lines. Thus, life for the *Plain Greek* in the mountains revolved around choosing sides and the hope that the choice made would prove to be the right one in the end.

It is important to note that poverty was the norm rather than the exception for most Greeks living or fleeing to the mountains during the occupation. Economic prosperity for the average Greek within the towns and cities was not much better, but compared to the mountain peasant it was lavish. Typical villages such as Stromni, located on the southern end of the Pindus range, were poor and dirty with communal sewers winding between the houses. All manner of animals to include ox, goats, and chickens lived within the houses, haphazardly built out of unhewn stone or mud walls.<sup>53</sup> Food for the average peasant centered on bread and cheese, with the more affluent being lucky enough to procure meat, eggs, vegetables, and milk through the black market.<sup>54</sup> The majority of Greeks barely had enough food or clothing to provide for their own families, but remained eager to provide all they had to aid members of the British Mission as they traveled through the region directing guerilla activities. The eagerness possessed by Greeks to aid the British in the mountains grew from a desire to resist Axis forces in order to gain back their normal lives. The remoteness of the mountain region effectively separated and created a distinct difference in reality between the Greeks of the mountains and the Greeks of Athens.

The BMM itself makes up the final landscape of human geography in Greece. The soldiers specially recruited to conduct the mission brought their own experience, expertise, and understanding to the situation in Greece. Of the twelve members of the original mission (the mission increased to 25-30 with the insertion of additional British Liaison Officers in 1943) dropped into Greece, only four could speak the language. One of the four, Major C.M.

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<sup>53</sup> Hamson, *We Fell Among Greeks*, p. 69

<sup>54</sup> Stevens, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*, p. 30



Woodhouse, had been classically educated in Modern Greek and was quite aware of many of the political dealings within the country having served a tour in Athens prior to the German occupation.<sup>55</sup> The remainder of the initial BMM brought a mix of commando officers experienced in dealing with resistance organization in countries abroad, the use of explosives, parachute operations, and small unit tactics. The introduction of this small, skilled, and capable British force significantly influenced the lives of Greeks along the Pindus mountain range through their close liaison with leaders of the guerilla factions; and as subsequent analysis will show, did more than just represent England's policy in Greece.

### **British Policy toward Greece**

British interest and influence in Greece is evident long before the BMM's insertion to coordinate and direct guerilla affairs against German occupiers. Political ties and support from the British played an integral role in Greece gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1832 ensuring favorable diplomatic and political relations between Great Britain and Greece into the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> For Great Britain, Greek independence prevented Russia, or any other power, from gaining preponderant authority in that country. It paved the way for continued relations with Greece, which firmly acknowledged that liberation was principally due in part to British influence.

Prior to World War I, Britain enjoyed a long history of good relations with Greece. British policy centered on the strategic nature of the now independent country and access to the Mediterranean.<sup>57</sup> The outbreak of World War I focused British policy toward a search for allies

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<sup>55</sup> Stevens, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*, p. xxv

<sup>56</sup> Sweet-Escott, *Greece: A Political and Economic Survey*, p. 5

<sup>57</sup> David Brewer, *The Greek War of Independence The Struggle for Freedom from Ottoman Oppression and The Birth of the Modern Greek Nations*, (New York: The Overlook Press, 2001), 318

and alternative fronts in order to combat the threat of the Central Powers. This effort naturally led to British attempts to persuade Greece and other Balkan neutrals to join the Triple Entente.<sup>58</sup>

As early as August 1914, the Greek Prime Minister (Venizelos) offered to create a Balkan Confederation to fight with the Entente.<sup>59</sup> Venizelos' offer focused on gaining British recognition of Greek gains made during the Balkan Wars but also showed ties of Greece's thanks for British help since 1827. Churchill, as First Lord of Admiralty, was eager to pursue the Greek offer; unfortunately, long existing national rivalries among Balkan states, Russian concern over Greece having opportunity to gain Constantinople, combined with the question of support within the Greek government led to the failure of a Balkan Confederation. Although the dispute between Venizelos and King Constantine I contributed to the failure of the confederation it did provide a clear message that Venizelos and his supporters had not forgotten Great Britain's help in the establishment of their independence and were willing to go to war to prove it.<sup>60</sup>

Planning stages of the Dardanelles Campaign brought additional offers from Greece to support the Entente by providing three Divisions for the attack on Gallipoli as well as offers to field troops in support of the Entente to satisfy Greece's alliance with Serbia.<sup>61</sup> The continued disagreement in the Greek government prevented any of the offers from becoming a reality, but set the stage for the future of British and Greek relations as Venizelos resigned as Prime Minister and sought to establish a rival government in Salonika in order to reverse the pro-German leanings of King Constantine I.

The French were quick to recognize Venizelos' provisional government, which in turn left the British no other option. British policy would have preferred the entrance of a united pro-

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<sup>58</sup> David French, *British Strategy & War Aims, 1914-1916*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), xiii

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>60</sup> Tuvia Ben-Moshe, *Churchill: Strategy and History*, (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 52

<sup>61</sup> David French, *British Strategy & War Aims, 1914-1916*, p. 141

Entente Greece, but establishment of the provisional government by Venizelos with support from France ended all hopes of it ever happening. Venizelos' establishment of the provisional government brought about the formation of a volunteer army, which combined with the regular Greek Army and fought creditably under Allied command through 1918.<sup>62</sup> The end of the war left Great Britain considering Greece to be of direct interest since it was the key highway to their eastern possessions and dominions, but their actions showed a policy counter to this as they left the French with the task of organizing the area politically. Economic policy toward Greece did not fare much better as British attempts to create a permanent market for Greek tobacco within Great Britain failed.<sup>63</sup> It would take the opening stages of World War II to force British policy toward Greece back to the forefront.

## World War II

The outset of World War II focused Great Britain's attention on Germany's threat to the balance of power in Europe, and Italy's threat on sea routes through the Mediterranean. British policy and attention duly focused on countering this threat and little consideration centered toward Greece or other Balkan counties. Italy's decision to seize Albania in April 1939 prompted Great Britain and France to grant a unilateral guarantee to Greek integrity in the event of a clear threat to the country's independence.<sup>64</sup> Great Britain's decision to guarantee Greek integrity was risky as it bound the country to moral, political, and military obligations that if not met carried serious repercussions. Failure to follow through would discredit the British government politically and militarily threaten sea communications should Germany occupy Greek ports and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 223

<sup>63</sup> The Greek economy was dependent on the export of tobacco to Germany at the time and the British government was unable to 'change' the taste of British smokers toward Greek tobacco and create a market. (Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, p. 6)

<sup>64</sup> Sweet-Escott, *Greece: A Political and Economic Survey 1939-1953*, p. 17

Islands.<sup>65</sup> The sinking of the Greek cruiser *Hella* and intense press campaign launched against Greece by Italy in August 1940 gave testament that Great Britain intended to stand by her guarantee and provide all the support in their power.<sup>66</sup> This nature of British policy toward Greece remains the norm throughout World War II and is an essential component in the analysis of British actions in Greece.

Italy's decision to invade Greece in October 1940 altered the strategic situation and ensured the shift in policy focus from diplomacy to military action. The coming policy shift was obvious since any evidence of a British failure to live up to the Greek guarantee would affect other countries willingness to resist Axis forces. The strategic problem for Great Britain was where to get the military forces to uphold the guarantee. Intelligence leading the British to believe that a German advance through Bulgaria threatened Turkey and the Middle East created a limited force pool to draw troops. Accepting risk and believing aid to Greece to be vital, two RAF squadrons of Blenheim bombers from the Middle East Command (MEC) arrived on station in Greece by November.<sup>67</sup> The Greeks defeated the Italians, but faced with German intervention the Greek government asked for more assistance. Ironically, British military success in Africa combined with Churchill's sentiment to back Greece as much as possible resulted in Force W consisting of two additional RAF squadrons, three Divisions, and one armored Brigade arriving in Greece in March 1941.<sup>68</sup>

The decision for military action by the introduction of Force W did little to stop the German invasion in April. The result was a Greek army surrounded and defeated while the King, the Greek government, and most of the British force evacuated to Crete where less than a month

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<sup>65</sup> Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), 132

<sup>66</sup> Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, p. 128

<sup>67</sup> Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, pp. 100-101

<sup>68</sup> Sweet-Escott, *Greece: A Political and Economic Survey 1939-1953*, p. 18

later they met defeat through a German Airborne invasion. The seizure of Crete completed Germany's hold over Greece and began the four-year Axis occupation. Militarily, the British decision to send troops to Greece had little effect in preventing Germany's occupation of the country. Politically, it affirmed that Great Britain was willing to stand by her guarantees to Greece and served as encouragement for Turkey to refuse all request for passage of Axis troops, ships, or aircraft through or over its land and waters and left hope for the possibility of Turkey's entrance into the war on the Allied side.<sup>69</sup>

The defeat in Greece found the British focusing on operations in North Africa but Prime Minister Churchill never let go of the idea that a Balkan front was a viable option against Germany. Intensification of North Africa operations brought the realization that coordinated subversion and resistance efforts in Greece would serve to weaken German lines of communication for resupply of Rommel's Afrika Korps.<sup>70</sup> Support and coordination of resistance organizations in Greece would provide the foundation and build-up of arms and equipment for insurgent forces that could rally with the introduction of Allied forces back into the area (if it were ever to happen). The policy shift from full-scale military front to guerilla action initiated development of the British Military Mission to coordinate and organize Greek guerilla forces against key German targets in order to aid British efforts in North Africa.

### **British Military Mission in Greece**

The British Military Mission in Greece tied directly to Middle East Command's plan to defeat the Axis in El Alamein.<sup>71</sup> MEC felt it crucial to hinder German efforts to transport supplies from Greece to bases on the North African coast. The majority of supplies transited a single, narrow, standard-gauge railway running from Piraeus to Athens. The line ran directly through

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<sup>69</sup> Sweet-Escott, *A Political and Economic Survey 1939-1953*, p. 18

<sup>70</sup> Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, p. 112

<sup>71</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 17

three large railway viaducts, any one of which if destroyed could halt the flow of German supplies for weeks or months. The intent was to time the destruction of the viaduct to facilitate the British operations in North Africa.

The British (through contact with a Greek agent in Athens) asked small groups of Greek guerilla bands that had been executing small-scale sabotage attacks since the occupation whether they would execute the mission against the viaducts.<sup>72</sup> The guerilla bands were willing to carry out the attacks but in order to be successful a group of British paratroopers with necessary explosives and training should insert sometime between 28 September and 3 October. Thus, the change in British policy did not take long to reach those ultimately tasked to carry it out.

On 20 September 1942, a British SOE representative offered Colonel E.C.W. Myers the opportunity to lead the BMM to Greece.<sup>73</sup> Myers had been serving in Cairo at the Combined Operations Branch of the General Headquarters for the past seven years and was due to rotate back to England. Myers held no special qualifications (other than being a Parachutist) in regards to resistance organization, planning, or commando operations. He considered himself a 'regular soldier' and did not see how the task of heading a military mission to Greece fell into his concern. Myers quickly discovered that a regular soldier was exactly what SOE was looking for, someone that possessed staff officer experience and the capability to inspire and organize guerilla forces. Myers eventually accepted the duty and became the leader and first member of the BMM that was about to play an integral a role in Greek affairs.

Over the course of the next 9 days, Myers and the other 11 members of the BMM received their mission and conducted planning and preparations for their insertion into Greece. The majority of the preparation revolved around study of viaduct plans, organization of the team,

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<sup>72</sup> The British hastily coordinated Greek agents to operate in the country as they withdrew in 1941. The primary agent operating under the name Prometheus maintained contact with Middle East Command through wireless set and was responsible for coordinating the link-up of the small guerilla bands. (Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 18)

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

practice parachute jumps, and equipment organization to include necessary explosives for the viaduct. Essentially, the plan called for the BMM to infiltrate Greece via parachute drop, link-up with guerilla representatives and organize them into a raiding party to execute a concerted attack on one of the three viaducts.

At the completion of the attack, the plan called for Myers and seven other members to evacuate back to MEC in Cairo. The other members (Major Woodhouse, Lieutenant Marinos, and two wireless operators) would remain in Greece to serve as observers with the guerillas and a link to MEC should additional groups require insertion. British plans intended for guerillas to cease all major activity after the viaduct operation and focus only on clandestine sabotage.<sup>74</sup> The plan was entirely born of military necessity toward aiding operations in North Africa and with the exception of leaving ‘observers’ behind to liaise with the guerillas did not address long-term initiatives. The speed with which the plan and personnel were thrown together to conduct the operation did not allow adequate consideration of all military and political factors contributing to the Greek environment.

### **Gorgopotamos (Operation HARLING)**

Greek agents working for SOE Cairo identified three viaducts as potential targets for destruction. The Gorgopotamos, the Asopos, and the Papadia all running from North to South along the Eastern edge of the Pindus Mountain range. Italian guards, lack of cover, narrow approaches and precipitous terrain ultimately ruled out the Asopos and Papadia viaducts, leaving the Gorgopotamos the only viable option for a combined British/guerilla operation that would ensure success.<sup>75</sup> To execute the operation, the British mission coordinated a combined force of 200 guerillas between Zervas’ band of fifty *EDES* guerillas and Aris’ band of *ELAS* guerillas.

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<sup>74</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 20

<sup>75</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 58

The movement and execution of the actual mission (named Operation HARLING) covered a span of forty-eight hours, as the distance to the jump-off point for the attack was nearly a day's journey. Conditions were miserable with heavy clouds and misting rain covering the mountains and obscuring the view of the viaduct. Many of the guerilla fighters did not possess adequate clothing for the winter conditions but trudged on regardless. By 1000 hours on 26 November the attack and destruction of the Gorgopotamos viaduct was a success. Minor difficulty in seizing the larger of the two Italian guard posts and the reconfiguration of the demolition charges in the middle of the attack created tense moments, but the BMM/guerilla force was successful and the attack denied German use of the railway for 6 weeks<sup>76</sup>.

The success of the operation left the British mission and both guerilla forces in high spirits as the groups parted ways in accordance with the original plan. Woodhouse and his party of three would travel back to Zervas' headquarters and continue liaison operations while Myers and the remainder of the British mission would journey across Greece to the Western coast for extraction. The British successfully carried out their mission on the viaduct and their efforts marked the first joint operation between the British military and Greek guerillas.

## **New Orders**

British and Guerilla success during Operation HARLING became a defining moment for resistance efforts in Greece, but it was not because it achieved the overall military purpose intended by MEC. The operation occurred nearly a month after the British victory at El Alamein thus providing very little effect on German supplies.<sup>77</sup> The operation's larger impact lies in the overall military and historical outlook within Greece.

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<sup>76</sup> Condit, *Case Study in Guerilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 32

<sup>77</sup> C.M. Woodhouse, "Turning Points in The Greek Resistance," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 6, (1980): 173



Militarily, Operation HARLING provided solid evidence that guerillas aided by Allied officers and support could execute tactical operations coordinated with strategic plans. This evidence generated new thought in the ability to achieve measurable success against Axis forces throughout the European Theater with properly resourced and coordinated resistance organizations. The success clearly demonstrated the potential for small bands of coordinated resistance efforts to impede lines of communication and divert large numbers of troops away from other operations to secure the lines.

Historically, the operation prevented *EAM/ELAS* from gaining complete control of all resistance movements in Greece.<sup>78</sup> Myers, Woodhouse, Stevens, Wallace, and Hamson – all members of the mission, clearly point out in their published works that had the British not intervened in 1942, Zervas and his *EDES* guerillas would not have withstood *EAM/ELAS* attacks that started in December 1942. Independently, *EDES* lacked the resources, organization, and personnel to counter *EAM/ELAS* aggression from December 1942 forward. The introduction of the British mission and supplies ensured *EDES* remained a viable guerilla faction and prevented *EAM/ELAS* from gaining control.

The fact that Operation HARLING failed to achieve its purpose, did not stymie thinking in MEC and SOE for additional, more ambitious plans to develop resistance in Greece and other parts of occupied Europe. It was with this new thinking that the original plan to evacuate the British mission lost favor to plans toward expansion of resistance in support of further strategic aims. Plans to expand the mission in Greece stemmed entirely from the military success of Operation HARLING and possessed little prior planning or thought toward the overall endstate other than continued support to the war effort. Political considerations given toward expansion suffered since contribution to the war effort ranked higher in priority.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 26

<sup>79</sup> Woodhouse, *Struggle for Greece*, p. 36

The instructions from SOE Cairo for the change of mission reached Myers in late December while waiting for evacuation from the Western Coast and prompted a long and arduous journey across half of Greece to link-up with the rest of the BMM. Instructions from SOE Cairo directed Myers to keep the mission in Greece for the purpose of expanding and centralizing guerilla operations throughout Greece. The plan called for Myers to head the mission as a Brigadier and would require the appointment of several British Liaison Officers (BLOs) to coordinate efforts with the various guerilla bands. The new instructions mark another reversal in British policy originally held for the use of guerilla forces in Greece.

The task of expanding and centralizing all guerilla activities on Greece would not be easy. The British mission had interacted with the guerilla forces enough to realize that Aris and Zervas' groups did not get along. Myer's trek to the coast for evacuation exposed him to numerous *ELAS* bands and the presence of *EAM* (National Liberation Front) representation in nearly every village, which he correctly surmised as the parent political organization to *ELAS*. Woodhouse's experience mediating between Aris' jealousy of Zervas receiving British support and supplies provided ample evidence that the most the two factions could agree on was not to attack each other.<sup>80</sup>

The political affiliations and intentions of Zervas (leader of *EDES*) and Aris' (leader of *ELAS*) band of guerillas began to appear clearer by the time of SOE Cairo's new instructions. Through contact with locals and in private discussion with Zervas, Myers and Woodhouse discovered close ties between *EAM* and the Greek Communist Party (*KKE*). *EAM/ELAS* ties to the *KKE* effectively complicated efforts by the British to unite the guerilla factions. For *EDES*, Zervas and many of his officers (most of them regular soldiers or reservists) did not trust the political aims of *EAM/ELAS* and resented the 'command by a committee of three' philosophy

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<sup>80</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 100

practiced by *EAM/ELAS*.<sup>81</sup> It was clear however, that both guerilla factions were in favor of a free plebiscite at the end of the war to determine the fate of the King and the government in exile. A fact that Myers felt was an advantage in British favor provided SOE and the British government concurred.

SOE's instructions contained information for a potential course of action in uniting and directing guerilla actions in Greece through a group of six Greek Colonels in Athens who had supposedly established a committee for this purpose. SOE postulated that the six Colonels working with Myers as head of the Allied Mission could work under direction of the Anglo-Greek Committee in Cairo to organize and direct resistance efforts in the mountains.<sup>82</sup> All indications to political motivations and back-story in development of guerilla bands led Myers to believe the likelihood of *EAM/ELAS* falling under control of the so-called six Colonels was doubtful but required investigation. Myers sent Woodhouse to Athens in order to ascertain the intentions of the six Colonels.

For the British in Greece things were quickly becoming more complicated than the relatively simple military mission originally assigned. Political motivations and entanglements initially identified by Myers and Woodhouse proved to require constant balancing to gain effective contribution by guerillas to the war effort. With this thought in mind, Myers and Woodhouse drafted a detailed message to Cairo on 13 January 1943.

The message served as acknowledgement of SOE's new orders and more importantly highlighted the political factors between *EDES* and *EAM/ELAS*, and the fact that if the British Government would provide tangible evidence to ensure a free plebiscite at the end of the war then

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102

<sup>82</sup> The Anglo-Greek Committee established in Cairo in order to coordinate British activities in Greece in the absence of the government and King which were still located in London at the time. (Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 98)

potential to unite guerilla factions and avert civil war existed.<sup>83</sup> The message further highlighted that the majority of potential sabotage targets existed in *ELAS* controlled areas and in order to contribute to interests of the war effort no alternative to using *ELAS* existed. This message marked the first correspondence between the BMM and SOE in regards to *EAM/ELAS*'s political affiliation with the Communist Party and widened the gap between short-term military objectives and long-term political stability within Greece.

## Organizing the Guerillas

Regardless of political motivations and objectives, BMM's primary purpose for being in Greece revolved around disrupting German operations and required support from guerillas. Myers dilemma of centralizing control of the guerillas was largely unanswered until he met Colonel Stephanos Sarafis in February 1943. Sarafis was a republican officer seeking cooperation with Myers and MEC for supplies and arms to organize his own independent guerilla band further north in Thessaly. The idea of another independent guerilla organization did not match Myers' intent for guerillas to be of a non-political nature working under direction of MEC.<sup>84</sup> Continued discussion between Sarafis, Zervas, and Myers on formation of guerilla bands and the impact of *ELAS* yielded the idea of forming *National Bands* of guerillas to support resistance.<sup>85</sup>

The idea consisted of creating *National Bands* of non-political affiliation that the BMM and MEC could supply and direct throughout Greece. Sarafis felt, and recommended that General Plastiras, still in exile in France, would serve as an ideal leader to unify the *National Bands*.<sup>86</sup> Myers agreed, and assumed that once the *National Bands* reached sufficient strength *EAM/ELAS* may be enticed to join the national guerilla movement finally unifying guerilla efforts.

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<sup>83</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 108

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115

<sup>86</sup> Sarafis, *ELAS: Greek Resistance Army*, p. 66

*EAM/ELAS* strength at this point was such that they could afford to deny attempts to unify with other guerilla bands. Zervas and Sarafis agreed to the arrangement and pledged to make their organizations non-political. For the British mission the *National Bands* idea provided an ideal opportunity to organize the growing number of independent guerilla bands within Greece and SOE fully agreed with the plan except for General Plastiras being the unifying leader. SOE was concerned that Plastiras' role as a Republican officer in past coup attempts would be a detriment to the cause and preferred all bands to act under military orders from MEC.<sup>87</sup>

Major Woodhouse's return from Athens provided a more detailed and gloomy look at prospects of controlling guerilla factions. Meetings with two of the six Colonels led Woodhouse to believe they knew little of guerilla movement and organization in the mountains and were in no hurry to do so. The gap in reality between those in Athens and those in the mountains was obvious and clearly negated any thoughts from SOE of liaising and running resistance from Athens. Woodhouse's journey enabled him to meet with members of the Central Committee of *EAM*, which he confirmed as being Communist. The meeting provided insight into *EAM* intentions to cooperate with the British provided they control all resistance movements. This of course did not fit with MEC directives and Woodhouse felt that *EAM/ELAS* were merely placating British desires for fear of British potential to exercise too much power in *EAM*'s post-war plans for Greece.<sup>88</sup> It seemed the National Band idea served the only possible route capable of eventually pulling *EAM/ELAS* fully under British control.

Updated communications with SOE brought new instructions tied to Allied intent to focus operations toward Sicily. MEC would focus operations on the Dodecanese in order to open approaches to Southern Greece and divert Axis troops away from Southern Italy for the Allied

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<sup>87</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 116

<sup>88</sup> Stevens, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*, p. 54

attack.<sup>89</sup> SOE categorized BMM's role in three areas: organize and prepare for a potential invasion of Greece, attack and harass any Axis withdrawal, and be prepared to coordinate a revolt should neither of the first two occur.<sup>90</sup> SOE authorized all necessary support to train and equip guerilla organizations to support Allied strategy. In light of the instructions, Myers formulated a plan dividing Greece into four regions (Epirus, Roumeli, Olympus, and Macedonia), each falling under control of a Senior BLO to coordinate training and activities of various guerilla bands toward interference with Axis reinforcements and sabotage of chrome and nickel production facilities.

The updated communication provided clear focus and goals toward actions in Greece, but the goals were clearly limited to short-term objectives of supporting the overall war effort and did not fully consider the potential long-term pitfalls of supporting all guerilla bands scattered through Greece. The policy advocated by SOE highlights the lack of appreciation of the political nature within Greece over the military gains. This lack of appreciation for the political nature was acceptable at the time, as the need to win the war remained paramount to all other considerations. Political affiliations and intentions of guerilla factions was a secondary concern as long as those factions were willing to ally with British efforts to defeat Axis forces. Similar circumstances existed between the United States and China in 1969 as the US decided to relax trade restrictions against China in the hopes that improved relations would help US efforts in Vietnam.<sup>91</sup> The US was willing to open relations with a known Communist country in hopes of contributing to the war effort in Vietnam. While the efforts did not have the affect desired it highlights another case of maximum contribution to the war effort being higher in priority than political affiliations.

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<sup>89</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 121

<sup>90</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 122

<sup>91</sup> Yuwu Song (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese-American Relations*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 122

## Resistance Power Struggle

March 1943 introduced bold efforts by *EAM/ELAS* to wrestle control of guerilla bands from the British. *EAM/ELAS* captured and disarmed Sarafis' independent band of 150 guerillas operating in Thessaly and made threats to other guerilla bands not owing allegiance to *EAM* and essentially sparked a proto-civil war among guerilla factions.<sup>92</sup> Up to now, *EAM/ELAS* enjoyed British supply drops to support operations but *EAM* actions prompted Myers to suspend drops until SOE directed him to maintain contact. SOE's decision to maintain contact with *EAM/ELAS* stemmed from favorable reports received from a BLO operating outside of Myers command with *EAM/ELAS* bands in the North.<sup>93</sup> Militarily, SOE's decision hinged off the fact that most German targets were located within *EAM/ELAS* controlled territory. Any attempts by the BMM to break relations would significantly affect British ability to conduct sabotage.<sup>94</sup>

The capture of Sarafis brought additional complications to the British as Sarafis decided to support *EAM/ELAS* and accepted their offer to become military commander of *ELAS*.<sup>95</sup> Sarafis had been the originator or at least inspiration for the *National Bands* idea and his move to support *EAM/ELAS* served as a nail in the coffin for the idea. Regardless of Sarafis' position, the *National Bands* agreement as drafted for signature did not align with *EAM/ELAS* goals. *EAM/ELAS* refused to sign the agreement due to British influence over command and their insistence on establishing a Joint General Headquarters (JGHQ) in which they requested three of the five seats.<sup>96</sup> SOE

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 126

<sup>93</sup> Myers and Woodhouse requested SOE Cairo not to insert any military personnel or forces without their knowledge and prior coordination. The addition of a BLO officer in the North outside of Myers control sent mixed signals to *EAM/ELAS* that they had the full support of British policy. (Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 116)

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 148

<sup>95</sup> Sarafis' decision to accept *EAM*'s proposal rested on his belief that the resistance organization needed to fall under the control of one entity instead of 'independent capetans'. He believed *EAM* being nationwide and well organized was the best option for Greece. (Sarafis, *ELAS: Greek Resistance Army*, p. 89)

<sup>96</sup> Condit, *Case Study in Guerilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 56

refused concession to *EAM/ELAS* demands for the establishment of the JGHQ and the ensuing changes between the agreements complicated Myers ability to coordinate sabotage for Operation ANIMALS in *EAM* controlled portions of Greece.<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, the British had to concede the seats of the JGHQ in order to get *EAM/ELAS* agreement.<sup>98</sup>

The focus on maximum effort toward overall war effort served to compound British problems to balance and control *EAM/ELAS*'s goal of controlling Greece as liberation drew closer. The focus necessitated concessions by the British government to *EAM/ELAS* in order to carry out successful sabotage operations in territory mostly dominated by *EAM/ELAS* bands. While concessions aided overall war effort, the political outcome and stability of Greece seemed questionable and serves as another link between the British and the outbreak of civil war.

## The Cairo Delegation

Successful Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943 brought directive from SOE to cease widespread sabotage throughout Greece. British and guerilla activities during Operation ANIMALS served in successfully drawing German units away from Italy in belief that the Allied invasion focused on Greece. Political affairs with *EAM/ELAS* within the JGHQ plagued Myers to the point that he requested to visit Cairo to discuss future operations in Greece.<sup>99</sup> Myers trip to Cairo quickly ballooned into a guerilla delegation as he informed the various leaders of his plans. The various guerilla leaders from *EAM*, *EDES*, and *EKKA* saw a prime opportunity to engage the government in exile and the King on issues within Greece. Myers saw it as an opportunity to prevent civil war and set out to formulate an agenda that could logically approach the main problems between guerilla factions as liberation drew near. The problems and phases of

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<sup>97</sup> ANIMALS, code-name for the series of attacks on German and Italian communications between 21 June and 11 July 1943. It was part of a much larger deception plan leading the Germans to believe Greece was the intended target for the Allied invasion. In order to ensure the operation took place all over Greece, *EAM* cooperation was essential. (Stevens, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*, p. 174)

<sup>98</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 200



approach, as identified by Myers were threefold: securing recognition of the guerillas by the exiled government, addressing the issue of no clear line between military and civil functions in regards to resistance, and the question of the return of the Greek government.<sup>100</sup>

Myers and the guerilla delegates agreed on the phased approach to the situation prior to departing Greece on 9 August 1943, but adherence to the approach complicated the Greek problem. *EAM* did not intend to follow the agenda and quickly forced an ultimatum on King George II that he should not return to Greece before a plebiscite could determine the popular choice of the people. *EAM* skipped the first two issues and turned the visit solely into the question of the King's legitimacy. Myers believed, and personally told the King that aversion of civil war tied directly to his pledge to allow a free plebiscite upon Greece's liberation.<sup>101</sup> The King refused Myer's suggestion feeling it was his duty to return to Greece and that the guerilla delegation did not represent the majority feeling among Greeks. Nor did the idea of conceding the King's legitimacy follow in accordance with British policy espoused by Churchill in 1943 who felt 'a special obligation' to the Greek monarchy for their role as a British Ally in 1941.<sup>102</sup>

In the end, the guerilla delegation returned to Greece with the knowledge that the existing condition of a predominately-republican government with a legitimate monarch would be the immediate future for Greece. For *EAM*, the decision verified their need to bolster efforts to resistance primacy and signaled an increase in their conflicts with other guerilla organizations and the outbreak of civil war.<sup>103</sup> For Myers, the trip to Cairo would mark the end of his command of the British mission, as political objections within the British government would prevent him from

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<sup>99</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 151-152

<sup>100</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 240

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249

<sup>102</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. III, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 535

<sup>103</sup> Stevens, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*, p. 51

returning.<sup>104</sup> Woodhouse would assume command of the BMM, now changed to the Allied Military Mission (AAM), as American officers inserted into the Greek theater ensured an American component in Greece.<sup>105</sup>

The events transpiring during the delegation to Cairo clearly highlight variances in British policy toward Greece. The British government completely supported the Greek Government-in-exile and the King of Greece while at the same time sending the BMM into Greece to support and coordinate efforts of anti-monarchical guerilla bands for the purpose of military objectives.

### **The Plaka Armistice**

Controlling and mediating actions between the rival factions increased significantly for the AAM after return of the Cairo Delegation in September 1943. *EAM/ELAS* seeing another opportunity to seize power stepped up attacks on other guerilla bands and efforts to increase their size and firepower by taking advantage of Italy's surrender and attempting to seize control of the Greek mountains by attacking *EDES*. They were convinced that German occupation was about to end and that British policy intended to disrupt political efforts through force to allow the King's return.<sup>106</sup>

Operations from October 1943 – February 1944 consisted of guerillas engaged in intra-guerilla war as well as fighting the Germans. The extent of guerilla infighting allowed German forces to regain control of critical lines of communication but their actions did not fully thwart *EDES* or *EAM/ELAS*.<sup>107</sup> *EAM/ELAS* and *EDES* conflict continued after German counter-attacks to the point that the AAM cut supplies to *ELAS* in hopes of stemming violence. *EDES* efforts to

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<sup>104</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 264

<sup>105</sup> Condit, *Case Study in Guerilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 71

<sup>106</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 166

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170

regain lost ground from *EAM/ELAS* delayed efforts by the AAM to mediate terms between the factions. *EAM/ELAS* ultimately drove *EDES* forces back and again asked for mediation. The mediation for terms took place at Plaka, an area that divided *EDES* and *EAM/ELAS* territory, on 29 February 1944. The ‘Plaka Armistice’ as it became known called for guerilla forces to remain in place with a distinct *EDES-EAM* boundary. Further agreements pertained to cooperation for activity against German forces, release of political prisoners, and provisions to support future Allied operations.<sup>108</sup>

In reality, the Plaka Armistice was little more than a truce to the proto-civil war waged by the two guerilla factions. Guerilla factions were able to maintain arms and equipment in their respective portion of the *EDES-EAM* boundary, which ensured that *EAM/ELAS* would continue their bid for power over Greece. The remainder of 1944 through Greece’s liberation found *EDES* and *EAM/ELAS* as viable guerilla organizations that continued (through much persuasion) to work with the AAM against German targets with *EAM/ELAS* continuing their push for control. AAM measures to counter *EAM/ELAS* centered on bolstering support to *EDES*, increasing Allied military presence, and diplomacy through the Lebanon Conference and Caserta Conference.<sup>109</sup> Greece’s liberation in September 1944 would bring a close to German occupation and the need for the Allied Military Mission to Greece. While *EAM/ELAS*’s struggle to wrestle control over Greece from the returning government would continue and lead to re-opening civil war in 1946.

## Conclusion

The ingredients for civil war existed long before introduction of the British mission. Events shaped through decisions by Greek leadership and policies in the years leading to World War II are largely responsible for creating the rifts between monarchist and anti-monarchist forces and the spark toward civil war. The early introduction of the British Military Mission

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<sup>108</sup> D.M. Condit provides a complete reproduction of the Plaka Armistice in his case study of the guerilla war. (Condit, *Case Study in Guerilla War: Greece during World War II*, p. 78 and Appendix D)

interjected a small force effectively bringing together two rival guerilla factions to execute a successful military operation tied to Allied strategic goals against a common enemy. The success of Operation HARLING clearly affected German supply lines, although not to the extent hoped. The more beneficial impact (not evident immediately) of introducing the British mission is the fact that it prevented an already strong and capable Communist resistance force from monopolizing resistance efforts in Greece. The guerilla forces of *EDES* did not possess the personnel, equipment, or overall organization to resist *EAM/ELAS* threats before the introduction of the British Military Mission and support.<sup>110</sup>

While the introduction of the British mission served to delay the outbreak of a countrywide civil war through the Plaka Armistice, it does not negate three key dichotomies in British policy that contributed to difficulties in balancing and controlling the actions of rival guerilla factions. The dichotomies in British policy reside with the haste of development of the British Military Mission, British tendency to focus on short-term military objectives over long-term stability, and the overall conflict between British policies to support the Greek monarchy while actively supporting anti-monarchical guerilla forces. A cursory look at these dichotomies leads one to believe that British actions contributed more to outbreak of civil war than delaying it however, detailed examination and explanation reveals the British made best use of the options available considering the strategic situation.

The haste, which the British Military Mission developed, prevented an effective analysis of the overall environment within Greece. The pending British operation to defeat Axis forces at El Alamein afforded the British mission only 11 days preparation for their mission. Hardly enough time to fully appreciate the political environment with which the resistance organizations they were about to coordinate and support were formed. Situational updates provided by SOE

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<sup>109</sup> Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord*, p. 203

<sup>110</sup> Stevens, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*, p. 51

from British contacts in Athens provided details on likely guerilla bands and potential ‘key leaders’ (Zervas and Aris) that the mission would encounter, but details as to motivation and allegiances were few. The overall lack of information is best summed up by Denys Hamson, a member of the mission, when he stated, “Apart from this, nothing at all was known of conditions inside Greece. Admittedly, the information was meager, but I had now realized that we were being sent on a pioneering job. We would have to do our best.”<sup>111</sup>

SOE’s decision to select some personnel educated and having firsthand experience in Greece served to clarify questions on the ground, but clarification came only after detailed dealings with guerilla forces. The lack of overall analysis into the layered and complex problem squarely placed the members of the BMM in the middle of political turmoil without training and appreciation for its nuances. Perceived military necessity drove the haste of the operation, ultimately contributing to a focus on short-term military objectives and operations.

The focus on short-term military objectives initially dominating British policy in dealings with guerilla factions contributed to great difficulties in balancing guerilla actions and failed to realize the impact of long-term support to a guerilla faction focused on gaining control of Greece. The value of cutting German lines of communications through Greece to support the British Eighth Army’s operations in North Africa prioritized short-term military success over the question of long-term political objectives and stability within Greece. This prioritization, seen clearly in the aims of the British government, focused first, to obtain the greatest military effort toward the fight against Axis forces, and second, to strive for a stable Greek government friendly to Great Britain in the post-war era.<sup>112</sup>

The initial plans for the British Military Mission were so hasty that no detailed plans were made for the involvement of British forces after Operation HARLING (Gorgopotamos

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<sup>111</sup> Hamson, *We Fell Among Greeks*, p. 20

<sup>112</sup> Stevens, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*, p. 41

viaduct) beyond leaving a handful of British Liaison Officer's behind to maintain a link with guerilla forces in case of future operations. After success in destroying the Gorgopotamos viaduct, and reports from Myers and Woodhouse revealed the Communist Party controlled *EAM/ELAS* and that their aim was clearly to take over all resistance and control of the country, British policy remained focused on contributing all efforts toward future military operations. SOE stated to Myers "post-war considerations were not to be allowed to prejudice the success of future operations, for which maximum effort would be required".<sup>113</sup>

This statement clearly shows the short-term military focus of operations in Greece in light of knowledge alluding to the outbreak of civil war. In essence, the long-term political stability of Greece lay in the hands of Myers, the leader of the BMM, as he daily attempted to make concessions and balance the political and military goals of Great Britain against those of the *EAM/ELAS* rather than the political leaders with whom such duties fall. Major Woodhouse carries the same burden from late 1943 until the end of the British mission upon Greece's liberation. The continual focus on immediate objectives ensured BMM coordination and support to *EAM/ELAS* since the majority of viable targets to achieve British objectives lay in *EAM/ELAS* territory. The BMM could not halt support to *EAM/ELAS* as it depended upon their support to reach targets. The best the British were able to do was use the threat of cutting supplies to coerce *EAM/ELAS* support for missions against the Germans, but it was not sufficient a threat as to stop *EAM/ELAS* attempts to seize control of Greece, only delay them.

The conflict existing between the British government policies to support the Greek Monarchy while at the same time providing personnel, equipment, and funding to anti-monarchical forces inside Greece hindered BMM ability to balance political and military goals of the rival guerilla factions. British policy support to King George II and his Government-in-exile is clear from the beginning of the German occupation as the Greeks sought refuge in Cairo and London.

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<sup>113</sup> Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, p. 230

Churchill even highlighted the fact that he felt a certain obligation to support the Greek Monarchy due to their willingness to ally with Great Britain at the end of World War I.<sup>114</sup>

This feeling of obligation never dissipated throughout BMM operations even after learning of the distinctly anti-monarchical sentiment that clearly served as the one true unifying principle among all guerilla factions as highlighted by Myers and Woodhouse. How does policy to support the Greek Monarchy and maximum effort toward resistance of German occupation forces achieve the endstate when the very forces that British policy intends to equip and supply are vehemently opposed to the return of the King? It seems as though this question, if asked by British planners, lost favor to more immediate military objectives as highlighted above.

Statements by Myer's and Woodhouse were quite clear that they felt that the post-war condition of Greece was not their business, but only to report factually the conditions that existed so those who were responsible could use the information.<sup>115</sup> Wireless signals and message traffic from the BMM to SOE transmitted this information, but change in British policy to focus more clearly on the political outcome of the resistance did not come as the Joint Planning Staff of the Commander's in Chief in Cairo considered that operational matters were more important than political matters.<sup>116</sup>

The hindrance to balance between political and military objectives stems again from the conflicting guidance of support to the King while supporting anti-monarchical forces in the achievement of military objectives. Woodhouse points out that certain elements in SOE felt that civil war in Greece was inevitable, explaining why directives sent to the BMM were to support all guerilla factions in order to maximize resistance effort toward Axis forces.<sup>117</sup> Myers and the BMM did not share the opinion of the inevitability of civil war and felt that unification of guerilla

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<sup>114</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, vol. III*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 535

<sup>115</sup> Stevens, *British Reports on Greece 1943-44*, p. 92

<sup>116</sup> Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece*, p. 38

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38

forces and aversion of civil war hinged solely with the King's decision not to return to Greece until determined through a free plebiscite.

The conflict in British policy toward support for the Greek Monarchy and support to guerilla forces came to a head as Myers and guerilla leaders converged on Cairo in the summer of 1943. *EAM/ELAS* prompted an ultimatum to the King not to return to Greece until determined by a plebiscite. King George II refused to submit to such an ultimatum and consulted Churchill on the matter. Churchill stood firm on the British guarantee to support the monarchy and the guerilla delegation headed back to Greece with *EAM/ELAS* determined now, more than ever that domination of the resistance movement was key to placing themselves in position to seize power of Greece upon liberation. British ability to go back on the promise of support to the King would have placed British intentions to stand by their pledges at jeopardy and therefore left little option for the BMM but to continue attempts to balance *EAM/ELAS* seizure for power for military value against Axis forces. While British policy to support the monarchy never subsided, attempts made to prioritize political concerns and stability of Greece over military success did not effectively prevent the outbreak of civil war, it only served to delay it.

The pattern of allying with and supporting elements known to carry rival political affiliations is certainly not limited to British policy in Greece during World War II as evidenced by United States relations with China during the Vietnam War referenced earlier in this work. The necessity to achieve victory at all cost against the Axis forces combined with the unique political situation within Greece created a complex problem for the small British force inserted into the mountains. The presence of ingredients toward civil war in Greece prior to the arrival of the British mission left little option for British actions to do more than delay the inevitable tide of civil war, which struck the country in 1946.

The fault lines and tensions between rival political factions in Greece prior to the British Military Mission's arrival are an ongoing legacy. The nature of the political situation, the dichotomy of British policy and the long existing fault lines within Greek government created a



strategic situation in which the best the British could hope for was a temporary solution. Similar fault lines appear in today's operational environment with ingredients and tensions toward the possibility of civil war in Iraq with Arab and Kurd tension, a large Al-Qaida presence, and the struggle for oil revenue between militia groups.<sup>118</sup> The presence of coalition forces works against these tensions, but the question remains whether the removal of those forces will allow the tensions to swell into civil war as it did with Greece in 1946. The overall implication lies in the fact that military planners may see that a temporary solution, such as the British experienced in Greece, is the only solution possible.

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<sup>118</sup> Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, interview by David Gregory on Meet the Press, March 1, 2009, Department of Defense News Transcript

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