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## Communist Insurgency in Greece

Karl L. Rankin

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## COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN GREECE

A lecture delivered  
at the Naval War College  
6 June 1962

by

Ambassador Karl L. Rankin

I do not recall hearing the word *insurgency* applied during the Greek uprisings of 1941-1949, but it would have been an accurate term. They were directed against constituted authority in every case. First, there was revolt against the Axis forces of occupation; then, after liberation, against the only recognized Greek Government. Insurgency in Greece during that period, however, took on international significance because it was so largely Communist directed. Widespread delay in recognizing this fact, notably in Britain and the United States, brought Greece close to irretrievable disaster. Had it not been for two men who could take decisions promptly, Prime Minister Churchill in 1944 and President Truman in 1947, Greece today would be a Communist satellite. Doubtless most of the other Eastern Mediterranean countries would have gone the same way, and who knows how many others?

Now that the scales have fallen from most eyes, it sometimes is said that prewar Greek history had little or no bearing on what occurred later. But I believe that some consideration of earlier events is necessary to an understanding of what happened after 1941. Greece has been a parliamentary democracy since 1864. In the subsequent 98 years it has been a constitutional monarchy most of the time, with intervals under presidents and dictators. During the greater part of a century, however, Greece has enjoyed governments which, whatever their faults, were basically democratic and derived from the consent of the governed. Of no other Balkan country can this be said. Moreover, the Western Allies bear a heavy responsibility for the upsets in Greek politics during World War I, and the subsequent disastrous campaign in Asia Minor, which overturned two Greek regimes.

My first visit to Greece was during this turbulent period, in 1920. I recall Constitution Square in Athens, with a pile of captured Turkish guns surrounded by tables where the Athenians were enjoying their late afternoon coffee. A short distance down Stadium Street, in front of Parliament, an equestrian statue of Kolokotronis, hero of the Greek War of Independence, was pointing toward Constantinople. Of course, some irreverent

Greeks observed that he was also pointing to the royal stables, where members of Parliament might feel more at home than in the legislative halls. Today, Turkey and Greece are allies, the old stables are no more, and Kolokotronis is pointing at an office building which houses various American Government agencies.

By the late 1920's Greece was making good progress in absorbing nearly two million refugees from other countries, and in developing the territory acquired in the Balkan Wars. In this process new political alignments arose, which had the effect of creating what have been called *Old Greece* and *New Greece*. The country is fortunate in having only small racial minorities; the population is over 90 per cent Greek. But those living in Greece as it existed prior to 1911 were for the most part conservative and royalist. The population of the territory gained subsequently from the Ottoman Empire, plus the refugees who also came largely from Turkey, considered themselves liberal and republican. As a former minority under the Sultan, this was only natural.

A result of the situation just described was the emergence of two major political groups: the Liberal Party, led by the elder Venizelos; and the Popular Party, headed by the elder Tsaldaris. In general, the Liberals represented New Greece and were considered republican, while the Populists were from Old Greece and favored a monarchy. Among a people so individualistic as the Greeks, of course, party lines were not always clearly drawn. Venizelos did not regard himself as anti-Royalist, except as he found King Constantine to be autocratic. Nor were all members of the Popular Party necessarily opposed to a Republic. But if there was one major political issue which the simplest peasant could understand, it was that of the Monarchy.

Greece had a republican form of government from 1924 to 1935, although during more than a third of this period the country was ruled by military dictators. Venizelos and his Liberals were in power from 1928 to 1932, but lost the election to the Populists in the latter year. The two parties were nearly equal in parliamentary strength, and new elections in 1935 confirmed this unstable situation. The Popular Party won 143 seats and the Liberals 142. The remaining 15 were gathered in by the Communist Party of Greece, which gave it the balance of power.

Greek history for the period of World War I and the years up to 1935 were not without instances of insurgency. Abetted by the Allies, Venizelos led a movement which brought Greece into the war against the Central Powers, with no obvious benefit either to his own country or to the Allied cause. Other insurrections followed. The first one I witnessed personally was the abortive Plastiras revolt of 1933, promoted by

Venizelos after his defeat at the polls. I remember watching events from the roof of the American Legation. Leaflets, signed by General Plastiras, had been scattered over the city from a plane. The people were called upon to join him in throwing out the Government. An armored car passed the Legation shooting live ammunition in the air; bullets whined over my head. A taxi reached the corner at the same moment, from a cross street. Stepping on the gas, blowing his horn, and holding up his hand, the taxi driver made the armored car stop while he raced across in front of it. Athens taxi drivers are not to be trifled with.

Insurgency in Greece before World War II resembled the traditional Latin-American Revolution. No one was supposed to get killed, and in due course a general amnesty benefited the losers. The elder Venizelos' final bid for power in 1935 was rather more serious. Several scores were killed, and two army officers were subsequently tried and shot, while Greece's ablest statesmen of his generation died in voluntary exile the following spring.

General Kondylis as Defense Minister had the primary responsibility for putting down the 1935 revolt, and took advantage of his success to promote a plebiscite, which brought King George II back from exile. There were the usual complaints that the voting had been rigged. But in all probability, the King would have received a good majority in any case. The Populists, his supporters, had won the previous election fairly enough, and the Liberals were further, if only temporarily, discredited by the failure of their subsequent revolt and the flight of their leader.

Unfortunately, the return of the King failed to help the unstable parliamentary situation. Within a few months several prominent leaders of both major political parties had died. Sophoulis, who succeeded Venizelos as head of the Liberal Party, indulged in some flirtation with the Communists, apparently hoping with their support to upset the Populist Government. Seizing an opportunity to exploit what appeared to them a *revolutionary situation*, the Communist Party called for a general strike. On August 4, 1936, General Metaxas, who had become Prime Minister, persuaded the King to suspend certain articles of the Constitution and to dissolve Parliament. Thereafter, until his death in January 1941, Metaxas ruled Greece with comparative efficiency and benevolence, but with dictatorial powers.

The Communist Party had overreached itself in its first open bid to play a major role in Greek politics. The Party was founded in 1918, and eventually gained limited support in so-called intellectual circles, as well as with some of the refugees from Asia Minor, and among industrial workers, particularly in the tobacco industry. In 1935, the Party's



numerical strength was measured more or less accurately by its occupancy of 5 per cent of the seats in Parliament. The leadership was Russian trained. Under Metaxas the Communist Party was outlawed and went underground. There it prepared to exploit the advent of the next revolutionary situation.

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I have dealt with the pre-World War II period in some detail to help explain the subsequent success of the Communists in gaining physical control of a large part of Greece, in preventing the King's return with the recognized Government in 1944, in obtaining cabinet portfolios in that Government and, finally, in all but capturing the city of Athens and bringing the entire country into the Communist camp. Their successes were political, not military. Of course, the military organization, ELAS, or National Liberation Army, was an essential factor in the program. But it was used primarily to eliminate rival resistance groups and to cow the populace, rather than for significant operations against the Axis Forces. On a smaller scale, the Greek Communist Party was employing the same methods as Tito in Yugoslavia. The primary purpose was not the defeat of the Axis Powers, toward which their contribution would have been almost negligible in any case, but to gain such control in their own country as to assure an eventual Communist takeover.

Starting with no more than 5 per cent of the Greek people actually in Communist ranks, the Popular Front technique was adopted. The Greek Communist Party founded EAM, or National Liberation Front, in September 1941. Its first year was devoted to organizing a system of cells throughout Greece, in the usual Communist pattern. Not until the summer of 1942 did the first guerrilla bands of ELAS appear in the field. Their initial activities were devoted to sweeping out of the way or absorbing rival bands. At the same time, EAM was welcoming other parties, groups, or individuals who wished to join them. Only two minor political parties did so, the Political Democratic Union and the Socialist Party of Greece, but many non-Communist individuals joined, either under EAM pressure or because they saw no other way to demonstrate patriotic resistance to the Axis occupation. But if many members of EAM were not Communist, the ultimate control remained exclusively so.

While perfecting their organization throughout most of Greece, the Communists had the advantage of several ready-made political issues. King George and his Government were first in London and later in Cairo; they suffered from the handicaps of all governments-in-exile. While avoiding any actual break with what was, after all, the recognized Government of Greece, the Communists lost no opportunity to undermine and discredit the King and

his Ministers. By implication, at least, this appealed to many of republican sympathies, particularly in the traditionally republican areas of Northern Greece where geography favored resistance activities. Everyone also was reminded repeatedly that King George had been responsible for bringing the dictatorial Metaxas regime into power. On the more tangible side, EAM agents promoted unrest among the Greek military forces operating under British command in the Middle East. The mutinies of 1943 and early 1944 were the result.

British officers who parachuted into Greece from 1942 to 1944 quickly recognized EAM as a Communist front. They reported in detail their efforts to rescue other resistance groups from Communist ruthlessness, and to persuade ELAS to undertake operations against the Axis military forces. Some operations were indeed undertaken, notably the destruction of two railway bridges in Central Greece, which cut the Germans' only through rail link to the port of Piraeus whence supplies were shipped to North Africa. But these and similar operations were carried out largely by British personnel, aided later by a few Americans.

ELAS did kill Germans and Italians from time to time, but in general for no compelling military reasons. Rather, it was part of their systematic development of an atmosphere of terror so essential to Communist enterprise. The Germans took increasingly horrible reprisals on the Greek populace, who were thus driven into the arms of ELAS as the only visible alternative to collaboration with the enemy.

The collapse of Italy in 1943 provided opportunities for more effective military operations inside Greece. One entire Italian division in Thessaly, with its officers and full equipment, joined ELAS in fighting a successful action against a large-scale and determined German attack. But obeying the invariable Communist rule to eliminate actual or potential rivals wherever possible, systematic steps were taken to break up the cohesion of this important addition to anti-German strength. Desertions were encouraged by Communist propaganda, Italian equipment was *borrowed* by ELAS and never returned, and in October the Communists ordered the disarming of every co-belligerent Italian unit in Greece, ostensibly to *forestall a Fascist plot*.

The large amount of Italian arms and equipment which fell into ELAS hands in 1943 facilitated an immediate attack on the forces of General Zervas, the most important non-Communist resistance leader. The Germans took quick advantage, and began a drive into guerrilla territory. In a few days, the military effectiveness of the resistance movements in Central Greece was reduced almost to zero. But beaten as they were in the field, the Communists emerged stronger than any of their Greek

rivals, and with hidden arms and equipment to be used for more decisive purposes than fighting Germans.

EAM did not deceive many Greek politicians as to its true intentions. Foreigners were more gullible. Any resistance group that made a show of fighting was hailed in Washington and London, where the ultimate political and military consequences were widely ignored. We must remember, of course, that the Russians were highly popular at that time as they drove the German armies westward. There was no significant adverse reaction, therefore, when in March 1944 EAM set up a shadow government in the Greek mountains, with the acclaim of the Soviet press. At the same time Russia began to denounce the Greek government-in-exile as *reactionary*. It was the same pattern as in Yugoslavia.

Of course, the Greek Communists took care to appear reasonable in some of their major pretensions. As the largest resistance group in Greece, they wanted representation in the recognized Greek Government. As to the Monarchy, they asked only that King George announce his intention not to return to the country until invited by a plebiscite. Both demands were accepted in the West as entirely proper. There was as yet no general appreciation of what a few Communists in key governmental posts could accomplish. Nor was it understood that EAM planned to be in full control of Greece before any plebiscite or election could be held. The result at the polls would have been no more in doubt than in the elections held under Tito's auspices in Yugoslavia. In retrospect, without questioning anyone's good intentions, it seems fair to say that Western opinion was governed largely by short-term military considerations, wishful political thinking, and failure to recognize Communists for what they were.

In September 1944 EAM won another point, with British support, by the inclusion of six Communist-selected ministers in the Greek Government. This had resulted from meetings in Lebanon and in Cairo, attended by EAM representatives flown out of Greece by the British. The six ministers included two avowed Communists; all were completely under Communist orders. They were sworn in by Crown Prince Paul in Cairo. Shortly afterward, an agreement was signed by all concerned which, among other provisions, placed all guerrilla forces in Greece under nominal British command.

King George hoped to return to Greece with the liberating forces. He had spent much time with troops, particularly during the Metaxas regime when he stood aside from politics, and possessed not inconsiderable military qualifications. Undoubtedly, he had contributed to the effectiveness of the Greek Army, which gave such a good account of itself against the Italians in 1940. Whether the King's presence in Athens would have helped or

hindered during the dark days of December 1944, no one can be certain. British opposition, added to that of many non-Communist Greeks, kept him from Greece at that time, and at the end of 1944 he finally announced from London that he would not return unless *summoned by a free and fair expression of the national will*.

The British forces which came to Greece in October and November 1944 have been described as a *corporal's guard*. The Germans were withdrawing northward, with negligible interference from ELAS, and no actual contact with the enemy was foreseen for British troops. For several weeks after the initial landings, the British were greatly outnumbered by the Germans still in Greece. But the latter were chiefly on a few islands, where they remained isolated until the end of the war. The British Ambassador and the British officers who had been in Greece with ELAS were unhappy about this situation. The possibility of civil war had been pointed out by the commander of the British Military Mission to Greece and by others. But the Allied Command would spare only enough troops to conduct what was regarded as a relief operation to get food to the Greek civil population. The United States contributed no military personnel beyond a few for liaison duties.

The Communists were taken by surprise at the arrival of so few British troops. They apparently had not intended to take military action at that time. With their men installed in key positions in the Greek cabinet in Athens, and with EAM organs already in physical control of most of the countryside, collecting taxes and dispensing their own brand of justice, an eventual take-over by quasi-legal means seemed promising enough. Now, however, they saw a chance to gain power immediately. We cannot be sure what orders came from Moscow, but Stalin doubtless could have stopped his Greek minions had he so desired. On the contrary, everything EAM did was fully approved and supported by Soviet propaganda.

EAM began to show its hand again soon after the arrival of British forces in Greece. Despite the formal agreement that all resistance units would be subject to the orders of the British Commander, acts of terrorism and victimization continued on an increasing scale. The Greek Government, including the Communist ministers, unanimously agreed that the EAM *police* would hand over their arms, but they refused to do so. This was on December 1, 1944. General Scobie at once issued a statement that he would stand firmly behind the constitutional Government until a Greek State could be established with a legally armed force, and free elections could be held. This warning was backed up immediately by a statement from No. 10 Downing Street that the British Commander's action was taken with the knowledge and entire approval of the British Government. But the Communists had decided to go ahead.

I had returned to Greece in mid-November 1944, and recall very clearly what could be seen from the American Embassy of the December 3 demonstrations. The Communists were using their old techniques. Crowds, made up largely of young people and others who looked like factory workers, were being shepherded toward the center of Athens by men wearing armbands. Police tried to disperse them and, in any case, to steer them away from Constitution Square, where EAM had ordered a monster demonstration. The Government, acting without the six EAM ministers, had forbidden the gathering, which quite evidently was organized for provocative purposes. Despite the efforts of the police, a large crowd eventually assembled in Constitution Square. A scuffle started in which some of the crowd disarmed a few policemen. Shots were fired and several people were killed. The foreign news correspondents, in the Hotel Grande Bretagne on the Square, had ringside seats. They were able to report to the world in sensational style that they had watched 'Greek police fire on an unarmed crowd.' This was the first Communist victory in the postliberation series; it was not a military one.

ELAS forces had been ordered to converge on Athens, and on the morning following the December 3 demonstration, a battalion of 800 arrived from Thebes. The British disarmed them. Meanwhile, ELAS units began taking over outlying police stations in Athens and Piraeus, and as we learned later, sending the policemen on duty to torture and death. General Scobie ordered ELAS Headquarters to stop all such acts. He gave ELAS until midnight of December 6 to be clear of the Athens area. On the contrary, ELAS units continued to arrive from various quarters, and before the time limit expired there was fighting in earnest.

I do not know that the British ever admitted officially how few troops they had assigned to the Greek operation. But whatever mistakes had been made in planning were made up for by brave and effective action during that unfortunate month of December. One Greek unit loyal to the Government, the Rimini Brigade, arrived from Italy and acquitted itself with great credit. But this unit and the British were outnumbered many times over by ELAS forces. Ironically, the Soviets never had been called upon to supply their agents in Greece; arms and money had come from the Allies and the Italians.

Militarily, the ELAS effort as a whole was a poor show, despite much dogged fighting. The British were widely scattered, and their road communications were often interrupted; yet the Communists never succeeded in getting control of the harbor, the airport, or the central business district of Athens where British Headquarters was located. They did capture a hotel in a distant suburb, where Royal Air Force personnel surrendered after a brave defense.

Word came that personnel of the United States Air Transport Command were threatened in a small hotel which they occupied on the northwestern fringe of the British perimeter. I went there to see what the trouble was. ELAS had notified them that their hotel was to be dynamited for a road-block, as had been done to other corner buildings in the neighborhood. They had no place to go. I invited them to bring their bedding rolls and cots, and sleep in the Embassy Chancery, which some 60 of them did. Under trying conditions, we were delighted at their discipline and good humor. When they finally left the Embassy, everything was in perfect order.

ELAS wreaked its vengeance on the Greek civil population and captured police. Literally thousands of hostages were taken in the Athens area, including many prominent individuals, elderly men and women, and children. They were marched off into the country in bitter weather. Hundreds were shot; others were killed on the way when they were unable to keep up. In the immediate vicinity of Athens, new refinements in torture were employed on the police and on many civilians who fell into ELAS hands. Similar events, if on a smaller scale, took place in other parts of the country. No one will ever know how many Greeks died in this tragic period, but the usual estimate is 50,000 for the number who were, quite simply, murdered.

British reinforcements were flown in from Italy, and Athens was gradually cleared in house-to-house combat. British officers said that the fighting was as tough as anything they had seen. By December 18, ELAS began to pull back. Peace feelers arrived, with offers to withdraw from Athens and Piraeus, but coupled with unacceptable political conditions. On Christmas Eve, Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden arrived in Athens. The continuation of a determined policy toward the Communists was approved. In the succeeding weeks ELAS gradually accepted defeat, and on February 12 an agreement was signed which resulted in the eventual surrender to the British of 41,500 rifles, 2,015 machine guns, and other arms, as well as the release of British prisoners.

Greeks of nearly all political schools were dazed by what had happened. Many refused to believe that their fellow Greeks could have pursued a deliberate policy of terror to such extremes. Stories about Slav-speaking members of ELAS being primarily responsible for the atrocities were seized upon eagerly as evidence that Greeks would not do such things. No doubt the ELAS forces included men from the small minority in Northern Greece who spoke a Slav dialect (call them Macedonians, Bulgars or Greeks, as you will). But the great majority and the leaders were Greeks—Greek Communists. One result of this

period of terror—so much worse than what had happened during the occupation—was to make the Greek people all but forget the earlier German atrocities.

Altogether, the Winter of 1944-45 was the most difficult period of the war in my experience. I had seen the Germans bomb and occupy Brussels. I was at Dunkirk shortly after the evacuation, next in Belgrade during the German bombing and occupation, then in Manila when the Japanese bombed and later interned us. But all of this was more or less orthodox warfare. In Athens, snipers were the worst pests. They seemed to be everywhere, including the areas controlled by the British. For weeks we had no electricity, no water supply, no telephone service, and refuse was piled high in the streets.

Every day a Vice Consul and I walked to our Embassy, to keep the Chancery open for callers who needed assistance. The Naval Attaché slept there, and the three of us, with some of his staff and two or three Greek employees, kept things going after a fashion. It was most disagreeable going back and forth with snipers' bullets singing overhead. One never could be sure what they were shooting at. In due course, the British saved the situation and kept us fed with field rations in the process.

I could wish that the American part in all of these happenings had been less inglorious. Washington's official position was one of neutrality, although how we could justify being neutral under such circumstances, I shall never know. Officially, however, we were not much of a burden to the British with our course of *masterly inaction*. The same could not be said of the American press. About ten American correspondents were in Athens at the time. With the notable exception of Sedgwick of the *New York Times*, who reported accurately and ably throughout, they earned the right to be on the Communist payroll at generous if varying salaries. I am confident that not more than one at most was truly a Communist, but they supported the EAM case fervently. The British correspondents were no better.

Prime Minister Churchill put the matter fairly in a speech during the ensuing debate on Greece in the House of Commons:

There is no case in my experience, certainly not in my wartime experience, where a British Government has been so maligned and its motives so traduced in our own country by organs of the press or among our own people. That this should be done amid the perils of this war, now at its climax, bodes ill for the future.

Turning to the American press, Churchill went on to say:

How can we wonder at, still less complain of, the attitude of hostile or indifferent newspapers in the United States, when we have here in this country witnessed such melancholy exhibitions as are provided by some of our most time-honored and responsible journals?

Our task, hard as it has been and is still, has been rendered vastly more difficult by the spirit of gay, reckless, unbridled partisanship which has been let loose on the Greek question.

The Greek Communists lost the battle of Athens militarily, but they won a propaganda victory which was to plague us in the years to come. How can we explain the fact that so many intelligent and sincere Americans, and British, were so wrong on the Greek question in 1944? There are various partial explanations. First, our press and public had been oversold on resistance movements in general. EAM was, indeed, the largest Greek resistance group; its sins were overlooked and its patriotic professions accepted at face value. Then there was the current enthusiasm for our Soviet allies. Stalin had become 'Uncle Joe'; many Americans thought that in the future we should have no trouble in getting along with the 'old buzzard.' And Uncle Joe's propaganda supported EAM. Finally, there was the latent American prejudice against kings, and the Greek government-in-exile was headed by King George II.

But all of the factors just cited are insufficient to explain the confusion in American opinion. It seemed to me at the time that the average well-informed American was reasonably objective on most international issues, except sometimes about the enemies with whom we were at war. But let anyone mention Greece, or Spain, or China, and emotions would rise! Whether or not they had any special knowledge, most Americans of my acquaintance had long since made up their minds one way or the other. Emotions had taken charge, and there was no reasoning with them. Perhaps the long-continued smear campaigns by the Communists against those three countries, fostered by American fellow-travelers, had been a decisive influence. A negative factor in December 1944, of course, was that American attention was centered on the Battle of the Bulge on the western front.

I have devoted some time to what might be called the American public opinion aspect of the Greek situation in order to stress its importance. In recent years, various cases of insurgency in other countries eventually have involved the United States. There will be more in the future. Particularly in the early stages, issues may not be clearly drawn, and the



American public may be misled by propaganda and by superficial or unwarrantedly sensational press reports. As a result, our Government may be hampered in dealing with a situation promptly and effectively. I see no other simple explanation for our initial neutrality in Greek affairs in 1944, which later involved us so heavily. At that time, of course, it was great fun for our correspondents and editors to blame the Greeks and British for everything. Probably most of them were unaware that the United States not only had avoided military participation in the liberation of Greece, but had vetoed the larger Balkan operation envisaged by Churchill. We had military reasons for our position, but we also missed a chance to save Greece from civil war, and perhaps as many as four neighboring countries from the Communist rule which still enslaves them today.

The military defeat of ELAS was followed by strenuous efforts to bring relief to the sorely tried people of Greece, and to start economic reconstruction. The physical damage in a few weeks of the Communist conflict was greater than the country had suffered in the previous four years of war and occupation. The political picture was equally chaotic. True, a line had been drawn between Communists and non-Communists. There would be no more experiments, for the foreseeable future, with 'broadening the base of the Government' by the inclusion of Communists and/or fellow-travelers. But the old-line parties had lost much of their significance. For the time being, there was only one issue—Communism. Nearly everyone by now hated it. But it was not enough to be *against* something; people needed to be *for* something.

It was no surprise that Greece suffered from ineffective government during the year following liberation and the Communist revolt. King George remained in London, but had appointed the Archbishop of Athens as Regent. Archbishop Damaskinos, for whom I had a high regard, introduced an element of stability. But one Prime Minister succeeded another, and none was able to accomplish what he set out to do. Inflation was rampant, and presented all but insoluble problems in Greece's exhausted state. Moreover, in the absence of an elected Parliament, it was not easy to say what each politician represented. Finally, a cabinet was formed under the aged Liberal leader, Sophoulis, which lasted until the internationally supervised parliamentary elections of March 1946.

After long argument, it had been agreed that the elections for Parliament would precede a plebiscite on the issue of the Monarchy. It was not difficult to predict the outcome of the first postwar voting in Greece. An overwhelming majority would vote *against* Communism, and they would do this by voting *for* the most conservative element, which was the Popular Party supporting the Monarchy. Other political parties, notably the Liberals and the Communists, had paid lip service to the idea of early

elections, but actually wanted to see an indefinite postponement in view of their own unfavorable prospects. Predictions were circulated that if the elections were held in March 1946, as scheduled, there would be bloodshed; a longer cooling-off period was urged. These reports were not without effect in Washington and London. It was one of those occasions when a diplomatic representative abroad may feel forced to make a grave decision on his own.

The British Ambassador continued to urge that the elections be held on the agreed date. I perhaps exceeded my instructions in taking a firm line with Sophoulis, and leaving with him a *Note Verbale* opposing delay. With any encouragement from either of us, he might well have put off the elections indefinitely. As it happened, the voting took place on March 31, 1946, and there was a minimum of disorder, mostly promoted by the Communists. Their supporters had been ordered to abstain, but the Allied Mission to Observe the Greek Elections, after careful analysis of the results, determined that Communist voting strength was less than 10 per cent of the electorate. The Popular Party won a decisive victory, and after an interval of ten years Greece again had a Government based upon the expressed will of the people.

With the elections out of the way, the Populists naturally wanted an early plebiscite on the King's return. Again, there was no doubt but that the outcome would be favorable. Washington and London were in no hurry. I believe that both Governments were genuinely impartial, but there was concern over inevitable criticism that we were 'forcing' the King on the Greek people. Delay was favored in both capitals, but the British Embassy in Athens disagreed, as did I. This problem was one that the Greeks simply had to get out of their systems, for a time at least, and we felt that delay was unfair and unhelpful. Of course, the Greek Government could have gone ahead without our consent, but agreement was preferable. After repeated urging, objections in Washington and London were withdrawn in May, and the plebiscite was set for September 1, 1946.

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I left Greece in July 1946 with the hope that a period of peace and progress lay ahead. It was not to be. The King returned to Athens on September 27, after a decisive victory in the plebiscite. About the same time there was a resumption of guerrilla activity, more or less openly supported by Greece's Communist neighbors to the north. The insurgency of the succeeding three years assumed a more important military aspect than before. The purely Communist character of the revolt was in no doubt this time, and the political issues were correspondingly clear. Only a few American correspondents came to the aid of the Greek rebels by exaggerated and sensational criticism of the Government in Athens.

The Greek Communists and their masters in the Kremlin realized how badly they had done in a military sense in 1944. This time it was to be different. One of the old-line Greek Communists, Markos Vafiades, was placed in command. Training for his men in guerrilla warfare was carried on to the north of Greece's frontier, and arms were provided on a systematic basis. In clashes with Greek Army units, the insurgents often enjoyed superior firepower, thanks to a higher percentage of automatic weapons. In December 1946 Greece formally complained to the Security Council that the rebels were being trained and armed on foreign soil, and that Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria were giving asylum to fugitive guerrillas, and allowing the use of their territory for operations against Greece. The complaint included a request that these charges be investigated by the United Nations. The Soviets reversed their earlier position of opposing such an inquiry, and on December 19 it was agreed that the United Nations should investigate. Nine teams were organized to collect evidence, and by the end of January 1947 they were at work in Greece. The subsequent reports of UNSCOB, or Balkan Commission, provide voluminous confirmation of Greece's charges against its northern neighbors. Other evidence established that thousands of Greek children had been abducted and taken to Communist countries. (The League of Red Cross Societies at Geneva placed the total at 23,700 by the end of 1948.)

Early in 1947 the British Government informed Washington that its economic commitments in Greece must come to an end on March 31. President Truman at once sent a special message to Congress, asking \$400 million for aid to Greece and Turkey. He stated that 'totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States.' The formal recognition of this fact, and the proposal that the United States take the necessary steps to deal with it, specially in the cases of Greece and Turkey, became known as the Truman Doctrine. The money was appropriated, and soon afterward the American Mission for Aid to Greece (AMAG) was functioning in Athens, one branch dealing with military matters and the other with economic affairs. The Truman Doctrine was operational by July 1947.

In the new round of insurgency started by the Communists in 1946, their activities were limited for some time to relatively small operations, chiefly near Greece's 600 mile northern frontier. Villages were harassed, and communications interrupted. Sophoulis, who had first negotiated with the Communists in 1936, tried again in the first part of 1947, on the theory that a policy of conciliation and moderation would bring the guerrillas down from the hills. As the principal opposition leader, his right to deal with those in armed revolt against the Government may be questioned, but eventually he recognized that the rebels would accept no reasonable compromise. Negotiations were broken off. The Communists apparently

regarded further political maneuvering as useless; they were now prepared to fight in any case. Hostilities on a larger scale coincided with the establishment of AMAG in the Summer of 1947.

At the beginning of August, Albanian, Yugoslav and Bulgarian military representatives met in Bled, Yugoslavia, to plan the Communist operation in Greece. Arms, supplies and instructors were to be furnished. The three participants reportedly foresaw the intervention of their own troops if this should promise to be decisive. They would also station military representatives at the seat of the 'Greek Democratic Government' as soon as it was established. Meanwhile, a foreign legion, or international force, was to be organized to enter Greece and assist in the revolt there.

Several efforts were made by the Communists during 1947 to capture towns in Northern Greece, but the Greek Army showed that it too had been preparing. None of these attacks was successful. At Christmas time, the Communists mounted a large-scale assault on the town of Konitsa, intending to make it their temporary capital. Their foreign legion was supposed to attack the town of Florina at the same time. The Konitsa operation was well prepared and well led. The Communists fought with skill and resolution. With the capture of this town, and the establishment of a government there, recognition of the 'Greek Democratic Government' by the Soviet Union and other Communist states apparently had been promised. The attackers were totally defeated, the assault on Florina failed to materialize, and the whole Communist plan underwent drastic modification. It was decided to revert to traditional guerrilla warfare.

In November 1947 our Ambassador to Greece was seriously ill and his Minister-Counselor was not in good health. Much to my surprise, I received orders to leave Vienna, where I had been for only a year, and to return to Athens. I made a quick trip to Greece, flew to Washington for consultation, and returned to Athens only to find many of my fellow countrymen almost in despair. The victory at Konitsa gave us all a lift, but Greece was faced with the prospect of guerrilla warfare for an indefinite period. There was no physical possibility of closing the long northern frontier. The guerrillas were well armed and well trained by this time. They had revived all of the techniques of terror: abductions, tortures, murders, and reprisals. Even if they could not capture a well-garrisoned town, they could roam the countryside at will, while the Greek Army was tied down to defense duties. And there was always the possibility of an incursion by foreign troops from the north.

In January, I called a meeting in my office of all the senior American officials, civilian and military, and invited discussion. The consensus

was depressing. Some believed that there was no hope unless we could bring over two American divisions to Greece. Others thought that perhaps Greece was no longer important to American security; the range of our bombers had so increased that Russia could be reached from bases at the Suez Canal and in Libya, making Greek facilities unnecessary.

After everyone who wished to do so had had his say, I disagreed with most of the opinions expressed. I pointed out that the Truman Doctrine was only ten months old and was still our official policy. Greece, therefore, was still important. Its loss to the Communists would, in my opinion, have disastrous effects in nearby countries. As to the military situation, I thought that the Greek Army and militia of 200,000 men should be able to take care of 25,000 guerrillas in the absence of intervention by foreign troops. I saw no need for American forces, and did not believe that they would be available in any case. A tremendous asset on our side, I said, was that the overwhelming majority of the Greek people stood with us. General Van Fleet had just arrived in Greece to head the military branch of AMAG. He attended the meeting, but as the newest arrival took no part in the discussion. Afterward he told me that he agreed with my views.

Under the guidance of a British Police Mission, the various police forces of Greece were reaching a high state of efficiency. I remember the British officer in charge telling me that if he had been given the authority and facilities to organize and equip the constabulary as he saw fit, the new guerrilla war in 1946 could never have started. In any event, the police proved their effectiveness in dealing with a campaign of murder organized by the Communists in the same year. A few murders were, indeed, successfully carried out, but they were by no means so numerous as had been intended. The Communist newspaper *Eleftheri Ellada* called for the killing of Zervas, Gonatas, and Papandreou, three prominent Greek political figures. Only an abortive attempt on the life of Gonatas resulted. In May 1947, however, the Minister of Justice, Ladas, was murdered by a Communist agent, and in the following month George Polk, an American newspaper correspondent, met his death under mysterious circumstances. The Communist press claimed that he had been murdered by agents of the Greek Government for his rather critical stories. It was later proved to have been a Communist job.

I recall a long conversation with General Zervas about this time. He maintained that the Greek Army was not properly organized and equipped to fight guerrillas. In his view, a self-contained battalion of 500 men was the ideal unit. It should be highly mobile, well equipped with automatic weapons, trained to move and fight at night, and should keep continually on the offensive. In brief it should operate like the guerrillas, only better. He went on to expound the widely held view that success in

guerrilla warfare depended 20 per cent on combat and 80 per cent on intelligence. And, of course, intelligence depended largely on the co-operation of the civilian population.

Van Fleet was thinking along much the same lines as Zervas. But evidently there was no time to start a reorganization of the Greek Army. Instead, he persuaded the Greeks to pry loose from garrison duties first one and then two infantry divisions. By the early Summer of 1948 the Greek Army was on the offensive in a manner which led to the final defeat of the Communists in the following year. A large guerrilla-infested region would be surrounded. The Army, advancing in two or more concentric circles, would clear the area. There was much hard fighting, and the extensive use of mines by the guerrillas caused many casualties, both to troops and to the returning civilians.

Often it was difficult to persuade the peasants to return to a ruined village, for fear of new guerrilla depredations or reprisals. It was found useful to help at least a few villagers, who were known to be reliable, to rebuild their houses in such a substantial fashion that they could be defended against a small band of attackers. Rifles were then issued to a limited number of inhabitants. It was the Army's duty to keep the guerrilla bands small. The shift of troops from defensive to offensive tactics, however, was not accomplished without injury to some of the smaller centers they had been protecting. Communist raids on a number of towns were accompanied by the usual destruction, murders and abductions. There were several reports of actual crucifixions, in one case of a priest. But once the Greek Army undertook what was to be a sustained offensive, the outcome was never seriously in doubt.

Meanwhile aid came from an unexpected and unintentional quarter—Moscow. The creation of a Macedonian state, to include what is now Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia, with the cities of Salonika and Skoplje, was an old Marxist project. This reconstituted Macedonia was to be a member of a Communist Balkan Federation. Apparently Tito of Yugoslavia and Dimitrov of Bulgaria were working on a new version of the scheme, presumably in connection with the aid they were giving to the Greek Communists and the territorial concessions which might be obtained at Greece's expense in return for this aid. Stalin learned of these plans, and called Tito and Dimitrov to heel. Dimitrov came.

We cannot be positive about everything that was going on behind the Iron Curtain, and under such circumstances it is not always easy to distinguish between cause and effect. It seems probable, however, that Stalin realized the dangers of the Macedonian project under the auspices of a dynamic personality like Tito. Under the Truman Doctrine, the United States was showing that it meant business. Moreover, there was

still a token British military force of about 3,000 men near Salonika. They had taken no part in the guerrilla warfare which resumed in 1946, but had been kept in Greece as a stabilizing influence. The United States had urged that they stay on. Any incursion of troops from the north almost certainly would have headed for Salonika, and would have faced this British force. Stalin was not ready for his Balkan satellites to go to war with Greece, the United States, and the United Kingdom all at once. That would have been something quite different from the localized guerrilla conflict which he had approved for Greece.

It often has been said that Tito's breach with Stalin saved Greece. As a matter of fact, our Greek friends were well on the road to success before internal frictions to the north could affect the situation. Those frictions developed, to an important degree, as a result of the successful implementation of the Truman Doctrine. While the Macedonian affair was not the only point of difference between Tito and Stalin, it is quite likely that they would never have come to an open break otherwise. Their differences often have been described as ideological, which is nonsense. It was and continues to be a power struggle.

On June 28, 1948, Stalin had the Cominform denounce Tito as a deviationist. The effect on the guerrilla war in Greece was not immediate. The Greek Communists wanted aid from both parties, and delayed taking a position as long as possible. Finally, they declared for the Cominform. Not until 1949 did Tito close the Yugoslav border to the guerrillas. The Bulgarian frontier was too far away to be of much help by itself, and the Albanian border area thus became the strategic center.

Bowing to instructions, the Greek Communists on March 1, 1949, with tacit approval, broadcast the new Cominform resolution in favor of Macedonia 'independence.' This was now little more than an empty gesture, probably to humor Bulgaria, but once again the Greek cause was helped by its enemies. Many Greek soldiers were tiring of the long and painful struggle against the guerrillas. This pointed threat to Greek Macedonia gave them something new and tangible to fight for.

In its final stages the Communist insurgency centered in Greece's Grammos Mountains, near the Albanian frontier. I recall a trip to inspect the front lines with General Van Fleet. It was savage country, and small-scale guerrilla warfare might have continued indefinitely, with help from the Albanian side. Some 10,000 Communist troops were almost surrounded there. Most of them eventually were captured or killed; about 3,000 withdrew into Albania. But even in the last months, there were sporadic outbreaks in other parts of Greece, supplied by air drops or by small boats coming from Albania. Then someone in Moscow pressed a button and the

fighting stopped as suddenly as it had in 1945. Trouble could be started again at any time along that 600 rugged miles of frontier, by pushing another button in Moscow.

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Without going into technical military matters, I think that we may draw useful conclusions from experience with Communist insurgency in Greece. Conditions vary from country to country, and from one period to another. But a common problem is that of dealing with a situation where the insurgents receive support from a nearby or contiguous country. A second question is the handling of the civilian population in guerrilla territory so as to keep them on the right side. Third, we have the use of token military forces to consider. Finally, there are the propaganda aspects of insurgency. Public support in the United States and elsewhere is essential to carrying through any serious operation in which we are involved.

During and since my experience in Greece, I have questioned our rigid American policy of avoiding direct action against a third country which supports insurgents. Of course, any such action should be taken only after all factors have been considered. But hot pursuit into Albanian territory, and a blockade of Albanian ports, might well have shortened the Communist struggle in Greece. Establishment of a blockade has an ancillary advantage, in that its continuation or termination can be used for bargaining purposes.

As to the danger of 'provoking' someone, I would say that Communists are difficult to provoke. Their actions are not lightly undertaken, and they are prepared for all eventualities that can be foreseen. I may quote Mao Tse-tung on the subject. He wrote that when one meets a man-eating tiger, either one kills him or gets eaten; it does not matter whether the tiger is provoked. It would be prudence on our part to consider Communists in the same class as man-eating tigers.

In dealing with civilian populations in insurgent territory, the Communists may seem to enjoy important advantages. They commonly introduce a reign of terror to compel the population to collaborate with them, or at least to discourage assistance to their opponents. Cruel reprisals face those who disobey. Then the Communists may also enjoy a virtual monopoly of news and propaganda dissemination in guerrilla territory. Since they do not bother about telling the truth, public opinion often can be swayed in such areas. Obviously we cannot engage in reprisals against civilians, except in the most limited fashion, nor can we tolerate such action by foreign forces which we support. Yet if we cannot get the people behind the cause we are aiding, final success will elude us. Military victory is not enough, as France has learned in Algeria.



When our adversaries are Communists, we should be able to gain the support of the civilian population if we try. The Communists can be counted on to make themselves hated in due course. By showing proper consideration for their safety and welfare, we and our allies usually can retain the sympathy and support of civilians. Keeping them informed is an important factor, although ideologies as such normally mean little to people in areas where guerrillas usually operate. In all of this it is essential that, by word and deed, we and our allies convince all concerned that we expect to win.

The use of token military forces in exposed positions is anathema to many military men. But particularly in the post-World War II period, we have found that such forces can be invaluable. Of course, there are risks involved, but nothing demonstrates our intentions quite so definitely as the presence of American military units, even if small, in the path of an aggressor. The British force at Salonika served such a purpose, and we should not hesitate to use American forces wherever they promise to have a similar effect.

On the home front, in the United States, we continue to be plagued by irresponsible journalism. I have indulged today in several strictures about news correspondents. Under no circumstances do I wish to be understood as opposing freedom of the press, nor do I defer to anyone in my respect for the remarkable job that many able and conscientious editors and correspondents are doing. But in the often complex and obscure conditions surrounding insurgency, we should not simply leave it to chance whether the American public is properly informed. By judicious official statements and otherwise, our Government must bear the responsibility for insuring that a balanced picture is presented.

I remember early in 1948 we were particularly annoyed by the stories being sent in from Athens by a well-known American correspondent. I called him in for a talk. I said that his reports were well written, and I did not question his facts. But in almost every case he had interlarded facts with slanted editorializing. The net result was to give an unfair and unduly sensational picture. This was damaging to what we were trying to do in Greece. He took it well, but obviously felt no remorse. After all, his stories had just made the front pages of one of our leading newspapers for five days in succession! No, we cannot leave this to chance. The Communists have won too many propaganda victories in the past.

If, in a given situation, the American public can be persuaded that our Government is following the right course, and intends to pursue that course until our goal is attained, most of our real friends in other countries of the Free World will support us. That accomplished, we need not

worry overmuch about opinion behind the Iron Curtain, which is a synthetic product at best. And having convinced ourselves and our friends that we are determined to win, we shall be on the road to victory.

## BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Ambassador Karl L. Rankin

### SCHOOLS:

California Institute of Technology  
Federal Polytechnic Zurich  
Princeton University

### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1918 - Active duty, U.S. Navy (LCDR)
- 1922-25 - Construction superintendent, Near East Relief, Russian  
Caucasus
- 1925-27 - Manager, real estate development company, New Jersey
- 1927 - Assistant trade commissioner, Prague
- 1929 - Commercial attaché, Prague
- 1932 - Commercial attaché, Athens and Tirana
- 1939 - Commercial attaché, Brussels and Luxemburg
- 1940 - Commercial attaché and consul, Belgrade
- 1941 - Assigned as commercial attaché, Cairo, but interned by  
Japanese in Manila prior to arrival
- 1944 - Commercial attaché, Cairo
- 1944 - Counselor of embassy for economic affairs, Athens and Belgrade
- 1946 - Charge d'affairs, Athens
- 1946-47 - Counselor of legation, Vienna
- 1947 - Counselor of Embassy, Athens
- 1947-48 - Charge d'affairs, Athens
- 1949 - Consul general, Canton, Hong Kong, Macao
- 1950-53 - Minister and charge d'affairs, Taipei
- 1953-57 - Ambassador to China
- 1957-61 - Ambassador to Yugoslavia
- Retired