

**The Special Operations Executive (SOE)
and British policy towards wartime resistance
in Albania and Kosovo, 1940-44**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) in the evolution of British policy towards wartime resistance in Axis-occupied Albania and Kosovo. It shows how and why Britain came to support communist elements of the Albanian resistance to the extent that it did, and challenges a theory that holds British communists and leftists at SOE headquarters responsible for effecting that support.

The principal sources for this study are former SOE personnel, recently declassified SOE files and other hitherto untapped records. Together they illuminate SOE's operating methods and influence on policy-makers to a greater extent than existing literature on the subject. They suggest that attempts may have been made inside SOE headquarters to manipulate the flow of information from the field to higher authority. Yet they confirm, too, that the conduct and politics of SOE staff officers had little effect on policy. The key decisions that favoured the Albanian communists were taken above the heads of SOE and to meet short-term strategic requirements and were based on an accurate assessment of the military situation on the ground.

This thesis contends that Britain's support for Albania's communists is best understood when placed in the broader context of Allied wartime strategy and British foreign policy. From 1940, the course and direction of SOE operations in Albania were fashioned by military requirements and constrained by the priorities of British diplomats. These factors helped ensure that, once committed to working with the Albanian resistance, Britain never pursued anything other than an impartial policy of arming all Albanians, regardless of their politics, who were genuinely engaged in action against the Axis. The communist-led 'Partisans' received the bulk of British support because few other Albanians, despite prolonged efforts by SOE to persuade them to come out to fight, proved willing or able to put up resistance.

Declarations

- 1 This thesis has been composed by the candidate.
- 2 The work presented in this thesis is the candidate's own.
- 3 The work contained within this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. Sections of Chapters Four, Five and Six develop research conducted by the candidate while at Cambridge University in 1997-98 for the MPhil degree in Historical Studies.
- 4 Material included in Chapters Five and Six has been published by the candidate prior to submission of this thesis. Articles based on material included in Chapters Two and Six await publication.

Signed:

Christopher Roderick Bailey

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Special Operations Executive (SOE)

Albanian Country Section: Corporal John Davis; Major Jack Dumoulin MBE; Captain Reginald Hibbert (died 2002); Major Marcus Lyon; Captain Bryan McSwiney; Lieutenant Hugh Munro; Captain Jon Naar; Captain Tony Northrop (died 2000); Major Richard Riddell; Bombardier Bob Rogers; Major David Smiley MC; Sergeant Willie Williamson. Yugoslav Country Section: Major Basil Davidson MC; Lieutenant Colonel Bill Deakin DSO. Italian Country Section: Sergeant Ted Fry. Security Section: Major Peter Lee. First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and civilian administrators: Mrs Lynette Croudace (nee Jooste); Mrs Peggy Kraay (nee Prince); Mrs Ruby Oakley-Hill (nee Kier); Mrs Margaret Pawley (nee Herbertson); Ms Laura Pope; Mrs Annette Street.

Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)

Albanian Section: Lieutenant Peter Payne (died 2003). Greek Section: Captain Nigel Clive MC (died 2001).

Office of Strategic Services (OSS)

Albanian Section: Captain Jim Hudson; Second Lieutenant Nick Kukich.

Other

Naval Intelligence Division, Royal Navy: Lieutenant Commander Alexander Glen DSC. Allied Military Liaison (Albania): Captain Denys Salt. British Embassy, Cairo, and UNRRA, Yugoslavia: Major Kenneth Sinclair-Loutit. National Liberation Army, Albania: Mr Nuca Bida; Mr Theofan Andrea Foto; Mr Spiro Gaqi Kola; Mr Koca

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SOE

Albanian Country Section: Major George Cowie; Brigadier E.F. 'Trotsky' Davies DSO MC; Corporal Paul Gray; Squadron-Leader Andy Hands DSO; Major John Hibberdine; Major Philip Leake; Sergeant Robert Melrose; Captain Ian Merrett; Wing Commander Tony Neel; Colonel Arthur Nicholls GC; Major Dayrell Oakley-Hill; Major-General Sir Jocelyn Percy DSO; Major Anthony Quayle; Lieutenant Tommy Renfree; Major Tony Simcox; Major Eliot Watrous.

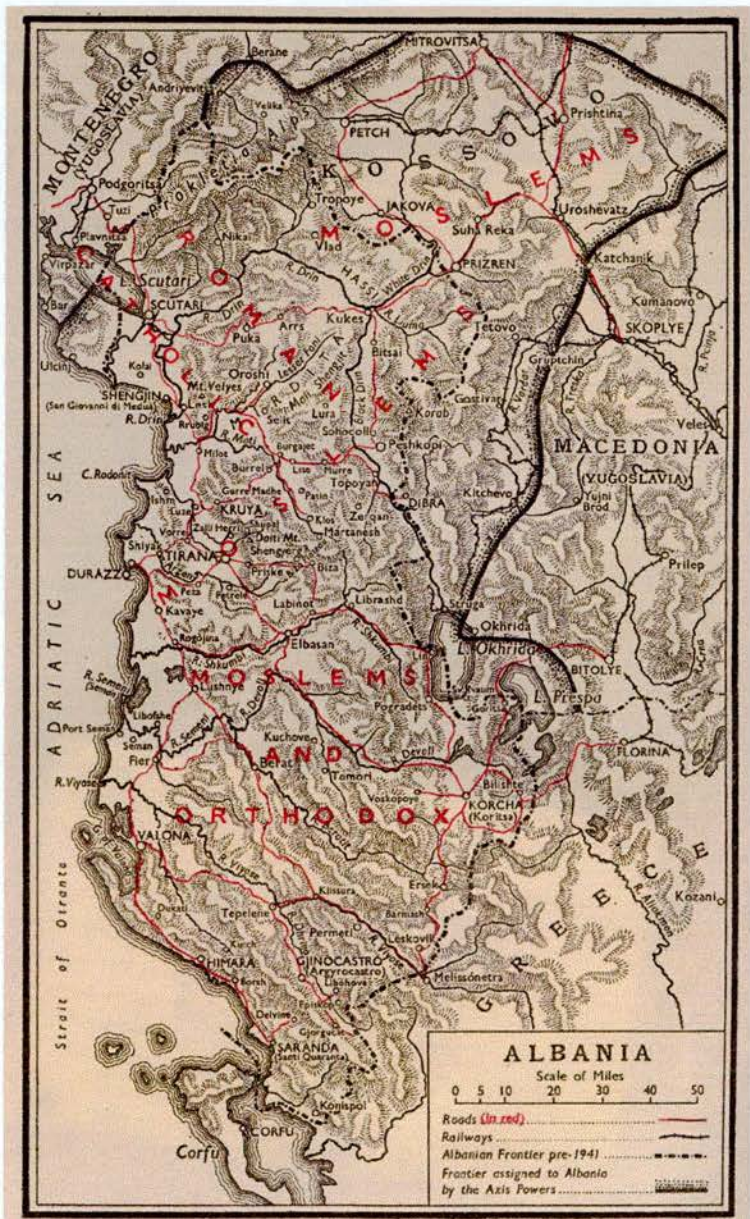
Other

Abwehrtrupp 207: Obergefreiter Fred Brandt. Naval Intelligence Division, Royal Navy: Lieutenant Commander Homer Thompson. The Kryeziu family of Gjakova, Kosovo.

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Abbreviations

AFHQ	Allied Forces Headquarters
ALO	Allied Liaison Officer
ANLA	Albanian National Liberation Army
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
BAF	Balkan Air Force
BK	<i>Balli Kombëtar</i> (National Front)
BLO	British Liaison Officer
BSA	British School of Athens
C-in-C	Commander in Chief
CPA	Communist Party of Albania
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPY	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
DDMI	Deputy Director of Military Intelligence
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
EAM	<i>Ethnikon Apeleftherotikon Metopon</i> (National Liberation Front [Greece])
EDES	<i>Ellenikos Demokratikos Ethnikos Syndesmos</i> (Greek Republican Liberation League)
ELAS	<i>Ethnikos Laïkos Apeleftherotikos Stratos</i> (National Popular Liberation Army [EAM's military wing])
FEPD	Far Eastern Publicity Detachment
FNC	<i>Fronti Nacional Clirimtarë</i> (National Liberation Front, formerly LNC [Albania])
FRPS	Foreign Research and Press Service
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HMG	His Majesty's Government
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
LNC	<i>Levicija Nacional Clirimtarë</i> (National Liberation Movement, later FNC [Albania])
LRDG	Long Range Desert Group
MC	Military Cross
MI(R)	Military Intelligence (Research)
NKVD	<i>Narodny Kommissariat Vnutrennich Dyel</i> (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, USSR)
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PWD	Psychological Warfare Division
PWE	Political Warfare Executive
SBS	Special Boat Service
SOC	Special Operations Committee
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SOM	Special Operations Mediterranean
w/t	wireless telegraphy



Albania, 1940-1944
(J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle*)

Introduction

The causes and consequences of several of the activities of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE), the secret organisation set up in the summer of 1940 to carry out sabotage and support resistance in Axis-occupied Europe, are the subject of considerable debate among historians and one-time participants. This study re-examines one area of controversy in the light of recently declassified SOE files and a range of other sources. Clarifying SOE's operating methods and influence on higher authority, it explores the organisation's role in the evolution of British policy in wartime Albania and Kosovo. It seeks to show how and why Britain came to support communist elements of the Albanian resistance to the extent that it did, and challenges a theory that holds British communists and leftists at SOE headquarters responsible for effecting that policy.¹

Between April 1943 and late 1944, SOE despatched to Albania by air and sea nearly sixty British liaison officers and twice that number of Other Ranks. The latter worked as paramilitary specialists or operated the wireless telegraphy (w/t) sets that allowed officers to report to SOE headquarters, receive direction and call in drops and shipments of arms and ammunition. Spread out across Albania in individual missions, these men encouraged and armed groups of local guerillas until the Germans withdrew, in line with their general retreat from the Balkans, at the end of 1944. By then the resistance was fragmented along political and ideological lines, a brief civil war was coming to an end and the communist-led 'Partisans' had established control over most of the country.

For Albania's million inhabitants, the effect of the communist rise to power was profound and long lasting. The traditional social elite was one of regional, local and tribal chiefs, mostly in the highlands and mountains of the north, and of merchants and landed individuals in the towns and in the south. It was quickly consigned to the past. King Zog, a chief who had crowned himself Albania's first monarch in 1924, had fled the country when Italian forces invaded in 1939. Of the pre-war leaders that stayed behind, most survived Albania's occupation by the Axis. By 1945, however, they found themselves liquidated or imprisoned or otherwise stripped of their assets and influence by the communists. Albania endured a ruthless communist dictatorship for the next forty-five years. At its head for four decades was Enver Hoxha, the former

schoolteacher who helped found the Communist Party of Albania in 1941 and commanded the Albanian Partisans throughout the war.

No Allied power had been involved more deeply than Britain in supporting the wartime Albanian resistance. A 1942 agreement over global spheres of influence had given Britain primacy over the United States in operations in the occupied Balkans. Thus, while a handful of officers and men of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) were infiltrated into Albania in 1943-44 to collect intelligence, the United States had no active role in arming Albanians or any ability to decide which ones to support. No such agreement existed with the Soviet Union, but the only mission – a single officer – that the Soviets sent to Albania before 1945 arrived too late to help the resistance. No Soviet supplies were sent in and no other Soviet troops entered the country before the Germans left.

In post-war memoirs, several former SOE officers argue that British policy-makers had erred in backing the Albanian Partisans as extensively as they did. By arming the Partisans to the exclusion of other groups, the memoirists claim, British policy helped the communists seize power. This argument began to emerge in Julian Amery's memoir *Sons of the Eagle*, published in 1948. Son of the then Secretary of State for India and a future Conservative MP and minister himself, Amery had parachuted into Albania in the spring of 1944 with a mission led by Lieutenant Colonel Billy McLean. The mission had been sent to persuade certain 'nationalists' (the term commonly applied by SOE to non-communist groups) in northern Albania to come out to fight the Germans. In *Sons of the Eagle*, Amery recounts how the mission made a particular effort with Abas Kupi, a chief who proclaimed loyalty to the exiled King Zog, and describes at length how Kupi fought a few actions but was pre-occupied primarily by the growing communist threat. Amery also makes clear his mission's disappointment with the way British policy in Albania developed in 1944. He argues that the Partisans received excessive supplies of arms and ammunition, while policy-makers never accorded Kupi and leaders like him the sympathy and support they deserved. Britain's treatment of the nationalists, Amery writes, was dishonourable and wrong, for 'we knew that to support only the Partisans was to surrender Albania to the Russians. They were our allies; but this surrender was none the less a defeat for the British Empire, and the cause of it lay in some defect either of

understanding on the part of our statesmen or of vital strength in the imperial body politic'.²

Other former SOE officers who had worked in wartime Albania echo Amery's sentiments in their own subsequent memoirs. In *No Colours or Crest*, for example, published in 1958, Peter Kemp describes Albania as 'a totally unnecessary sacrifice to Soviet imperialism. It was British initiative, British arms and money that nurtured Albanian resistance in 1943; just as it was British policy in 1944 that surrendered to a hostile power, our influence, our honour and our friends'.³ In *Albanian Assignment*, published in 1984, David Smiley claims that the decision to drop more arms to the Partisans had been the crucial factor in bringing them to power. Writing a year before Hoxha's death and six before Albania finally threw off communism, Smiley concludes: 'Had British aid gone the other way, Albania would be a pro-western democracy today'.⁴

To help explain why policy took the course that it did, some authors turn to one of the most contentious themes in SOE's history: that of mismanagement at its overseas headquarters in Cairo and the Italian port of Bari. First expressed in memoirs and widely reprinted since, this is the idea that certain SOE staff officers, with strong leftwing and communist sympathies, deliberately undermined the efforts of SOE missions working with Balkan nationalists. These officers are held to have manipulated policy, by massaging reports from the field before passing them on to higher authority, for example, to ensure that Yugoslav and Albanian communists received greater recognition and support than nationalist groups.⁵ David Smiley alleges that staff officers in Bari suppressed messages from Albania addressed personally to Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary.⁶ Alexander Glen, a Royal Navy intelligence officer who worked in Albania in 1943-44, goes further. 'Loyal' Albanians like Abas Kupa were unnecessarily 'defeated and some... betrayed' he writes. 'Kim Philby already had his colleagues well enough placed in some of the organisations concerned'.⁷

No hard evidence to support or dispute such charges is put forward by these authors. Yet speculation that some staff officers may have been Soviet agents is reproduced as fact even by one of SOE's official historians, Professor M.R.D. Foot. In *SOE*, a popular history first published in 1984, Foot reasserts several claims found in earlier memoirs, including speculation over the possible impact on policy-making of

the death in 1944 of Major Philip Leake, the well-regarded Head of SOE's Albanian Section. Foot writes of SOE's record in Albania:

What happened can be put brutally briefly. There were several missions to the northern Albanians, which took up with such local chieftans as Abas Kupa... There were several more missions to the southern Albanians, who were dragooned strictly under the command of Enver Hoxha, leader of the communist party...

Repeated promises of arms were made to the north; practically none came through. To the south considerable quantities of arms were sent, which were used to dispose of all the bands the southerners could catch in the north... When the Germans pulled out – unattacked – the southern communists seized... power...

Why this was done will not be known until SOE's papers are released; and might not be clear even then. It can hardly have been by the wish of local SOE commanders, let alone by the wish of Lord Selborne [SOE's Minister] or of [Major-General Colin] Gubbins [SOE's Chief]; nor by the wish of... Philip Leake, who insisted on going into Albania on operations and was soon thereafter killed.

Clearly suspecting staff officers in Bari of excessive influence, Foot adds of Leake: 'He had been head of the Albanian section; who succeeded him?'⁸ In an article in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, Foot even wonders about the possible influence of James Klugmann, a communist officer on the staff of SOE's Yugoslav Section, 'on the complexities of SOE's policies in Albania'. He points again to the 'lavish promises to two divergent resistance groups, the communist one of which was provided with warlike stores used to destroy the other, which got nothing'.⁹ Foot is not alone in his negative assessment of SOE's work in Albania. 'Failure here was complete' writes historian Henri Michel, for example, in another popular tome, *The Shadow War*.¹⁰

The claim that Albania fell to communism by default was never seriously challenged in print until the 1990s. Then, former SOE officer and diplomat Sir Reginald Hibbert and historian Bernd Fischer presented separate, fresh studies of Albania's wartime history. Hibbert had spent ten months in Albania with SOE in 1943-44; he ended his post-war career as British Ambassador in Paris. Retirement, and the declassification of wartime War and Foreign Office archives, allowed him to publish the first detailed account by a former SOE officer to argue the case for supporting the Albanian Partisans. Both Hibbert and Fischer, who had also identified a

need to revise earlier interpretations of British involvement and policy in wartime Albania, allow that the Partisans turned some of the weapons supplied by the British against their domestic enemies. They also agree that, though the weapons and warlike stores captured from the Axis by the Partisans were far more numerous than those supplied by the British, the arms, funds and training provided by SOE proved valuable to the early organisation of the Partisans in the summer of 1943. After Italy's surrender that autumn, that support also bolstered the Partisans' ability to survive joint German and nationalist attacks during the winter of 1943-44. But both authors analyse in detail the dynamics of Albanian society and politics and the circumstances imposed on the country by Italy and Germany, and show convincingly that British policy had not handed Albania to the communists.¹¹

More decisive in assisting the communists to power, argue Hibbert and Fischer, were the conditions that made any group other than the Partisans ill disposed and ill suited to waging sustained resistance to the Italians and Germans. It was no accident that the Communist Party of Albania, which was tiny in size and unsteady in ideology but guided by skilled emissaries from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, was able to take the lead in organising antifascist activity. It was true that a few prominent non-communists for a time made common cause with the communists, but most came to believe they had too much to lose by taking up arms against their occupiers. The power and influence of Albania's traditional leaders rested principally on the localised support of the individual tribes and communities from which they came. Opening a campaign of any significance against a modern, mechanised occupying army, and placing at risk the continued existence of those communities, was not something to be considered lightly. 'They felt that they could only pursue military operations as long as they could insure adequate protection for their society from enemy reprisals' writes Fischer of Abas Kupa and other chiefs. 'Failure to insure this protection would have led to the rejection of these leaders by their own society'.¹² By 1944, writes Hibbert, 'nationalist chieftans knew that the destruction spread by the Germans was threatening to spell the end of the social system by which the chieftans existed. That was the fundamental reason for their failure to move against the Germans: they could not contemplate the destruction which would ensue and which would sweep them away'.¹³

To further secure its interests, much of the old order felt compelled to turn to the Axis camp for help in countering the communist threat. This was particularly the case after German forces moved in to Albania on the heels of the Italian collapse. While Mussolini had sought to absorb Albania into Italy's empire, the German occupation was primarily a defensive move to safeguard Germany's Adriatic interests and flank. From the start the Germans pursued a policy of divide-and-rule to minimise resistance. To exploit the nationalists' fears, Albania's new occupiers went out of their way to promote the war against the Partisans as one against communism. Few elements of the traditional elite were aligned ideologically with Nazism; some were clearly pro-Ally. But once offered a level of self-rule not experienced under the Italians, and hoping to secure military assistance against the communists, significant numbers and prominent individuals were quickly won over. A puppet government was set up; soon nationalist and German forces were in action together against the Partisans.

By collaborating outright or refusing to resist the Germans, Fischer writes, one by one the nationalist leaders and groups 'lost political credibility' and were 'removed from serious contention for power in the postwar setting'.¹⁴ The pressures that saw those nationalists stay neutral or work with the Axis had allowed the communists to hold out the Partisans as the only organisation in Albania that was genuinely, unconditionally and patriotically antifascist. Propaganda spread by the communists found it easy to exploit the nationalist position, especially when set against the destruction spread in southern Albania by joint nationalist and German forces on anti-Partisan operations. Eager to join the fight against the Germans and all 'traitors' and attracted by promises of future change and reform, thousands of young, disaffected Albanians joined the Partisans in the spring and summer of 1944. Few were convinced communists, but they swelled the Partisan ranks and provided Enver Hoxha and his lieutenants with the manpower and popular support with which to seize power. As Hibbert concludes: '[i]t is very likely that the men and women of Albania became deeply disillusioned with the brave new society from 1945 onwards, but there can be no doubt about the popular enthusiasm for it for several months in the middle of 1944 throughout south Albania and in all the areas to which the Partisan units penetrated. A revolutionary force was released in Albania in 1944 and that was the primary force which swept Enver Hoxha to power'.¹⁵

Hibbert and Fischer also argue that the alleged incompetence or treachery of SOE staff officers did not lead British policy-makers astray. Since the 1970s, the release of wartime Foreign and War Office files has enabled the record of British policy-making in the Balkans to come under closer scrutiny than previously possible. As Hibbert, Fischer and the historians Elisabeth Barker and David Stafford show from work on these files, the key decisions that favoured the Albanian Partisans were taken above the heads of SOE and to meet short-term strategic requirements.¹⁶ Neither the Foreign Office nor the Chiefs of Staff nor any of the local commands that directed its activities ever called on SOE to discriminate against resisters in Albania on the grounds of politics or ideology. Until the end of the war, policy in Albania was always impartial: provided he was committed to fighting Axis forces, any Albanian could be supported with arms and ammunition. Hibbert and Fischer also argue that the decisions taken in the Partisans' favour reflected the reality of the military situation on the ground. The Partisans were the only Albanians fighting genuinely and meaningfully against the Germans during the spring and summer of 1944. Moreover, because the Partisans were the only ones capable of fighting that way, the policy of supporting the Partisans to the exclusion of the nationalists should, on military grounds, have been adopted much earlier. Hibbert and Fischer agree that the effort to work with Abas Kupa in 1944 was doomed to fail and should never have been attempted.

Indeed, Hibbert especially is scathing about what he terms the 'conspiracy theory' propagated by Amery, Kemp et al. It is, he says, 'a myth, a fiction': an illusion 'invented' after the war to explain how and why Kupa and other nationalists came to be defeated at the hands of Hoxha's communists. It not merely distorts the truth, he feels, but wholly replaces it with unscrupulous and slanderous claims that for over forty years went unchallenged. According to Hibbert, the writer Nicholas Bethell relates the theory in 'its crudest form... recording what Billy McLean, Smiley, Amery and Kemp have been prepared to say privately about fellow officers while themselves remaining cautious about naming names in print'.¹⁷ In the opening chapter of *The Great Betrayal*, his account of the joint CIA and MI6 effort of 1949-53 to destabilise Hoxha's regime, Bethell describes McLean, Smiley, Amery and another SOE officer, Alan Hare, as the 'four musketeers'. 'They did not share the general British wartime reverence of Stalin and the great Soviet ally' Bethell writes in a brief survey of SOE's

activities in wartime Albania. 'It was their duty, they felt, not only to fight Hitler's Germany, but also to oppose the spread of communist doctrine with which they expected to find themselves in conflict as soon as the war was won'. Bethell contrasts the 'musketeers' to certain other SOE officers, who, he says, had supported the Albanian Partisans on ideological grounds and had influence on policy. Those he names include John Eyre and Eliot Watrous, both of whom worked on the headquarters staff of SOE's Albanian Section, and Hibbert himself. 'It was left to the "musketeers" and a handful of others... to form an anti-Stalinist minority in the Balkan section of SOE, for which they found themselves labelled by the rest as "the fascist spies"'.¹⁸ Hibbert rejects completely this picture of an 'anti-Stalinist' bloc inside SOE lined up against a pro-Stalinist or otherwise procommunist one. 'The British officers who found themselves supporting a losing side ought not to feel it necessary to launch vague charges of treachery in order to puff themselves up as latter-day Leonidas bravely holding the pass with a tiny band against the hordes of communism... Those who supported Kupa and the nationalists may wrap themselves now in the cloak of anti-communism: it was not an item of British Army issue in 1944'.¹⁹

Hibbert suggests that the specific charge, leveled by the likes of Smiley and Glen, that members of the SOE staff in Bari were actively hostile to officers working with the nationalists is all part of the postwar illusion. 'I never heard any of them described by fellow officers as "the fascist spies"' he writes. Hibbert himself was a twenty-two-year-old lieutenant when SOE dropped him into Albania to work with the guerillas in December 1943. He never worked on the SOE staff and describes himself as 'politically unformed' at the time. He feels that Bethell vilifies him merely for having been a junior member of a mission that worked with the Partisans, and for becoming 'uniquely articulate' in putting the case for supporting them.²⁰

Fischer is less dismissive of claims of 'sabotage' in Bari, which, he concedes, 'may have been true'.²¹ Yet neither he nor Hibbert addresses in any detail the allegations made against the SOE staff. They do not clarify the mentalities, politics and duties of individual staff officers. Nor do they illuminate the extent to which SOE kept higher authority informed and up-to-date with developments in Albania as reported by missions in the field. The result is that important questions about SOE's influence and integrity remain unanswered. Did staff officers seek to undermine the

efforts of missions attached to the nationalists? Were reports from those missions that were meant for higher authority suppressed, as has been alleged? Were other reports massaged to exaggerate Partisan claims to exclusive support? If so, why, and with what effect on policy?²²

This study seeks to examine these strands of the conspiracy theory more closely and with reference to a variety of sources, including SOE's own Balkan files. The records of the War and Foreign Offices, the Cabinet Office and Prime Minister's Office illuminate the concerns and deliberations of policy-making bodies. SOE's surviving records, which have been gradually released at the Public Record Office from 1997, clarify SOE's interaction with those bodies and shed light for the first time on the workings of its Albanian Section in Cairo and Bari. These files contain a wide selection of previously unseen material. This material includes, for example, the Section's day-to-day correspondence with superiors and other departments and commands, copies of captured enemy documents, the texts of w/t messages sent to and received from missions in the field and the debriefing reports of SOE officers returned from working with the guerillas.

Work on these records has been supplemented by interviews and correspondence with surviving SOE and OSS personnel and work on their papers, diaries and, in several cases, unpublished memoirs. Personnel include officers and administrators on the staff of SOE's Albanian Section and officers and NCOs attached to Partisan and nationalist groups in the field. Additionally, the papers of individuals who were involved in operations and policy-making but are now deceased have been utilized. Some of the latter papers are held in public collections; family members have provided others.

Through the results of this research, this study sets out to confirm the grounds on which British policy was made. It explores whether those grounds reflected the situation as experienced by officers in Albania and whether those officers' reports were suppressed and policy manipulated at SOE's Headquarters. It will be shown here that SOE retained input throughout the war into discussions among decision-makers over which Albanians to support: it passed advice and reports from the field to military commanders and other policy-makers, including the Foreign Office in London. It will also be demonstrated that SOE's Albanian Section in Bari became increasingly 'pro-Partisan' in its policy proposals to higher authority during the

summer of 1944. This was the very period when staff officers are accused of subverting the efforts of SOE missions attached to the nationalists. Indeed, the files suggest that attempts may well have been made by staff officers in Bari to manipulate the flow of information to decision-makers in London.

However, SOE's records also help confirm that the conduct of its Albanian Section in 1944 had little effect on policy. A central contention of this thesis is that SOE's operations in Albania are best understood when placed in the broader context of Allied wartime strategy and British foreign policy. From the outset, the course and direction of SOE's efforts were fashioned by military requirements and constrained by the priorities of British diplomats. These factors helped ensure that, once committed to working with the Albanian resistance, Britain never departed from an impartial policy of promising support to all Albanians, regardless of their politics or ideology, who were genuinely engaged in action against the Axis. A policy of arming any Albanian on anything other than convincing military grounds was never likely to be forthcoming. By the summer of 1944, the Partisans qualified incontrovertibly for arms on those grounds and were the only Albanian group capable of continuing to inflict substantial damage on the Germans.

The opening chapter to this thesis presents a fresh assessment of British plans to foster resistance in Albania in 1940-41. Postwar accounts by officers involved in the planning argue that their efforts were frustrated and foiled largely by obstacles imposed unnecessarily by others: had more support been forthcoming from senior British military commanders or the Germans not attacked Yugoslavia, they suggest, greater success might have been had.²³ These interpretations, however, exhibit weaknesses common to published recollections of SOE's later Albanian operations in 1943-44. These weaknesses include an exaggerated belief in the ability of Albanian nationalists to wage meaningful resistance, a lack of appreciation of wider British strategic and diplomatic interests in the Balkans and a readiness to speculate rather too freely about why Albanian nationalists received little British support.

Through a study of Margaret Hasluck, an ethnographer whom SOE recruited in 1942 to work on new plans for Albania, Chapter Two confirms that concerns about the political consequences of SOE's work in Albania were expressed by British observers at the time. Hasluck had lived in Albania for twenty years before the war and identified herself closely with the traditional order. SOE records and the

recollections of former SOE officers suggest she was not well suited to the role SOE intended her to fill, but did see clearly that the war created dilemmas that compelled nationalists to move into the Axis camp. Illuminating how closely SOE's Albanian operations were harnessed to Allied short-term strategy, this chapter seeks to show why, despite Hasluck's unease, SOE continued to send arms to a movement it could see was coming increasingly under communist domination.

Chapter Three throws fresh light on SOE's work in Kosovo and Britain's handling of conflicting Albanian and Yugoslav claims to the province. Clarifying some of the priorities that defined British policy in Albania in 1943-44, it re-examines why the only mission sent to encourage resistance among Albanians in Kosovo was withdrawn by SOE despite a promising start. Peter Kemp, the mission's commander, claims in print that he was recalled by British policy-makers keen to appease Tito, the communist leader of the Yugoslav Partisan movement. Tito, Kemp believes, had demanded that the British sever contact with Albanian nationalists in Kosovo.²⁴ Yet SOE files suggest that Tito made no such demand. Kemp's withdrawal, it is argued here, cannot be seen simply as a mark of Britain's growing political commitment to Tito's Partisans. British diplomats had long given primacy to appeasing Yugoslav claims to the province. That primacy, and a desire not to inflame the situation, goes a long way to explaining why British policy-makers offered all Albanians only impartial, non-conditional military help against the Germans. The fact that Kemp was ever sent to Kosovo illustrates how a general lack of knowledge forced the British to feel their way around wartime Albania and learn the priorities of Albanians – including their wish for an Allied statement on Kosovo's future – by experience. Indeed, it now seems his withdrawal was precipitated partly by his own alarming reports of local tension.

Chapters Four and Five re-examine the postwar claim that a change in leadership of SOE's Albanian Section in the summer of 1944 marked a turning point in the Section's conduct. In June, Philip Leake was killed by enemy action on a brief visit to missions in the field. Julian Amery and David Smiley suggest his death crucially deprived their mission's efforts and the Albanian nationalists of a sympathetic ear at SOE Headquarters. 'We had confidence in his judgement, which we lacked in the other members of his staff' Smiley writes; 'later events were to prove how significant was his loss'.²⁵

Chapter Four illuminates Leake's views in the months prior to his death. It demonstrates that, in fact, Leake was much less impressed by the qualities and fighting potential of nationalists like Kupa than Smiley and others imply. It also shows that Leake was convinced that Britain should pursue an impartial policy of promising support only to Albanians genuinely resisting. On the eve of his death, he was similarly convinced that the Partisans, though evidently communist-led and set on securing postwar power, deserved British support in their efforts against the Germans. This chapter also suggests that Leake's assessment reflected an accurate analysis of the military situation in the field.

Chapter Five addresses the claim that junior officers on the Albanian Section staff, motivated to misbehave by an unwarranted sympathy for the communist cause, influenced the pro-Partisan policy that emerged after Leake's death. It is shown here that while some attempts to manipulate the flow of information to London from the field may have occurred in the summer of 1944, they had no impact on policy. But this chapter also seeks to advance a fresh framework for understanding the Section's views and actions. Contemporary diaries and reports confirm that officers arriving in Bari from working with Albanian nationalists recorded genuine concerns about the conduct and mentalities of staff officers they found in the SOE office. The conspiracy theorists, however, exaggerate the extent to which the Section operated without regard both to its directives and to the reality of the situation in the field. By the summer of 1944, SOE staff officers in Bari possessed a more accurate picture of events in Albania – one that fits well with recent scholarly assessments of the contrasting capabilities of Partisans and nationalists – earlier than decision-makers in London with whom it corresponded. The most likely explanation for the Section's apparent attempts, for example, at delaying the onward transmission to London of certain messages received from the field, is that staff officers were anxious to ensure that higher authority possessed a similarly accurate picture of how best to maximise the Albanian war effort.

The final chapter of this thesis explores the allegations leveled against Captain John Eyre, the officer on the staff of SOE's Albanian Section who is held to have been a communist and Soviet spy. Doubt is cast here on the likelihood that he worked covertly for the Soviets or even tried to influence policy through deft subterfuge. However, this chapter also seeks to underline the care that must be taken not to

dismiss all the rumour and circumstantial evidence put forward by the conspiracy theorists. A memoir Eyre wrote after the war and which has escaped the attention of all other writers on SOE suggests he may well have been aligned ideologically with the Partisan cause and prepared to manipulate policy in their favour. And with reference to SOE and MI5 files that shed new light on similar charges long leveled against certain other staff officers in SOE's Balkan Sections, this chapter highlights the seriousness of those against Eyre. In the final analysis, Eyre's case underlines further the isolation of officers in the field from the factors at work on policy; but it also suggests that not all of those officers' concerns about Bari were a postwar invention.

¹ For critiques of British policy in wartime Albania and the conduct of SOE's Albanian Section headquarters, see, for example: J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Macmillan, 1948); P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* (London: Cassell, 1958); A. Glen, *Footholds against a Whirlwind* (London: Hutchinson, 1975); D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984) and foreword by Patrick Leigh-Fermor; D. Smiley, *Irregular Regular* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994); X. Fielding, *One Man in His Time: The Life of Lieutenant Colonel N.L.D. 'Billy' McLean* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

² J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* p.298

³ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* pp.231-2

⁴ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.134

⁵ For speculation over the activities and mentalities of SOE's Albanian Section, see Note 1. For similar speculation about the conduct of SOE's Yugoslav Section and the politics of its staff, see, for example: D. Martin, Introductory Essay in *Patriot or Traitor: The Case of General Mihailovich: Proceedings and Report of the Commission of Inquiry of the Committee for a Fair Trial of Draja Mihailovich* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979); D. Martin, *The Web of Disinformation: Churchill's Yugoslav Blunder* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990); D. Martin, 'James Klugmann, SOE-Cairo and the Mihailovich Deception' in D. Charters and M. Tugwell, *Deception Operations: Studies in the East-West Context* (Oxford: Brassey's, 1990); M. Lees, *The Rape of Serbia*; C. Pincher, *Too Secret Too Long: The Great Betrayal of Britain's Crucial Secrets and the Cover-up* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984); R. Deacon, *The British Connection: Russia's Manipulation of British Individuals and Institutions* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979).

⁶ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.152-3, 134; see also X. Fielding, *One Man in His Time* p.51

⁷ A. Glen, *Footholds Against a Whirlwind* p.157. See also Patrick Leigh Fermor's foreword to Smiley's *Albanian Assignment*. Leigh Fermor draws the reader's attention to 'a moment of true horror' in Smiley's account, 'far worse than all the dangers on the spot; the sudden awareness that persons in their own section at GHQ were working against them. As we know, our secret wartime apparatus was a kind of unknowing nurse, now and then, to figures tiptoeing blandly along the Philby path to ribbons and high office and chairs of learning whose real rewards should be the Red Banner and a comfortable *dacha*'. Foreword by P. Leigh Fermor in D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.xi. See also Leigh Fermor's obituary of Billy McLean in *The Spectator*, 29 November 1986.

⁸ M.R.D. Foot, *SOE: An Outline History of the Special Operations Executive* (London: BBC, 1984) pp. 146, 240-1

⁹ M.R.D. Foot, 'Was SOE Any Good?' in *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol.16, 1981 pp.175-6

¹⁰ H. Michel, *The Shadow War: Resistance in Europe 1939-1945* (London: André Deutsch, 1972) p.124. See also J. Beevor, *SOE: Recollections and Reflections 1940-45* (London: The Bodley Head, 1981) p.105.

¹¹ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle: The Bitter Victory* (London: Pinter, 1991); B. Fischer, *Albania at War 1939-1945* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue UP, 1999). See also: B. Fischer, 'Resistance in Albania during the Second World War: Partisans, Nationalists and the SOE' in *East*

European Quarterly 25/1, March 1991, and B. Fischer, 'Abas Kupa and British Intelligence in Albania, 1943-4' in J. Morison (ed.) *Eastern Europe and the West: Selected Papers from the 4th World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate, 1990* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

¹² B. Fischer, 'Resistance in Albania' p.34

¹³ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.239

¹⁴ B. Fischer, *Albania at War* p.267

¹⁵ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.239

¹⁶ E. Barker, *British Policy in South East Europe in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1976) p.181; D. Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance 1940-1945: a survey of the Special Operations Executive* (London: Macmillan, 1983) pp.170-2

¹⁷ R. Hibbert, 'The War in Albania and the Conspiracy Theory' in *Albania Life* 57, Spring 1995 pp.3-5

¹⁸ N. Bethell, *The Great Betrayal: the Untold Story of Kim Philby's Biggest Coup* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984) p.16

¹⁹ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.238

²⁰ R. Hibbert, 'The War in Albania and the Conspiracy Theory' pp.4-5

²¹ B. Fischer, 'Abas Kupa and British Intelligence in Albania' p.136

²² These questions are still raised periodically in the British national press. In 1991, for example, the fall of communism in Albania allowed Julian Amery, David Smiley and Alan Hare to return to the country and retrace their wartime steps. Two articles about the visit were published in British newspapers. Each sketches SOE's work in Albania principally from the view of missions attached to nationalist forces; each repeats some of the charges of mismanagement levelled against certain staff officers since the war. The journalist Simon Courtauld asks 'how it was that this British military mission [of McLean, Amery and Smiley's] came to fall foul not only of Hoxha's communist partisans, but also of his fervent supporters at SOE in Bari'. To Courtauld, the conclusion 'seems inescapable' that the 'Left-wing sympathies' of SOE staff officers 'influenced the nature and degree of support given to Tito and Hoxha'. S. Courtauld, 'Three Honourable Englishmen', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 15 September 1991. See also N. Shakespeare, 'Return to the Land of Zog', *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 1991. In 1997, when the catastrophic effect of a collapsing pyramid investment scheme thrust Albania again on to the pages of the press, some of the issues were revived and, for the first time, publicly debated, when Sir Reginald Hibbert joined the fray in published interviews and letters. See M. Glenny, 'Now it's war among the British friends of Albania', *The Sunday Times*, 23 March 1997; R. Norton-Taylor, 'Champions go to War', *The Guardian*, 10 March 1997; letters, *The Independent*, 5 March 1997; letters, *Sunday Times*, 6 April 1997.

²³ J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* pp. 23-44; W.F. Stirling, *Safety Last* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1953) pp. 192-211

²⁴ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* 215-6

²⁵ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.98

Chapter One

Britain and Albanian resistance 1940-41

In the spring of 1940, Albania became the target of Britain's first attempt of the Second World War to foster guerilla resistance in occupied southeast Europe. British diplomats and intelligence officers began to lay plans for a revolt against the Italians who had ruled the country since invading in April 1939. The climax of a year's covert preparation came on an April night in 1941. From the safety of still-neutral Yugoslavia, a party consisting of several dozen Albanians, one British officer and a baggage-train of mules crossed the border and picked its way into the mountains of northern Albania. 'It was April 7th, the second anniversary of Mussolini's invasion of Albania, so at least we were doing our little bit to celebrate the day' the lone Briton, SOE officer Dayrell Oakley-Hill, wrote later. 'Soon some firing started ahead of us... and some bullets smacked past'.¹ Within days, however, the party dispersed. No revolt took place. Two years were to pass before British officers returned to Albania and began working with the locals again.

Britons who took part in this initial period of planning maintain in post-war memoirs that its ignominious end was unworthy of the venture's grand design. Their efforts were brought to ruin, they say, only by the negative moral and material impact of Germany's victorious sweep through the Balkans in the spring of 1941, or by the failure of British military commanders in the theatre to accord the plans timely and adequate support.² The implication is that the essential concept of fostering resistance among traditional leaders in northern Albania was sound.

This chapter re-examines this episode in the light of official records, many of them released only recently, and privately held papers. It confirms that the plans received only limited military and diplomatic backing. It also seeks to clarify and emphasise the weight of the factors at play that ensured that that support was limited. It is suggested here that those Britons who had laid plans for resistance in Albania in 1940-41 overstate in their memoirs the ability of Albanian tribesmen and chiefs to have waged and sustained significant resistance. Indeed, since the necessary preconditions for a successful revolt may never have been in place, it is possible that the concept may have been fundamentally flawed as well as out of step with wider

British strategy. To set this fresh examination of why Britain failed to foster resistance in Albania in 1940-41 in context, however, it is instructive first to clarify how the plans came to be laid, what was hoped for from their successful execution and why, according to the planners, they came to little.

The fact that serious planning for Albania began only in April 1940, seven months into Britain's war with Germany, was deliberate. Desperate to avoid upsetting or offending Mussolini or otherwise provoking him into a conflict they were not yet prepared to fight, British strategists and statesmen had worked hard since the early 1930s to avoid driving him into Hitler's arms. When Britain and Italy concluded the so-called Gentleman's Agreement in 1938, by which both countries agreed to respect the status quo in the Mediterranean, Britain made little mention of Italy's activities in Spain. When Mussolini effectively tore up the agreement with his invasion of Albania the following year, Chamberlain's government made little objection. Certainly, British intelligence officers, agents and code-breakers closely monitored Italian intentions and continued to do so despite Italy's declaration of neutrality on the outbreak of the European war in September 1939. But to maintain that neutrality for as long as possible the Chiefs of Staff and War Cabinet maintained a strict ban on Britain's military and intelligence services from preparing any counter-offensive or other anti-Italian activity. The great fear was that, if they were discovered, such activities might precipitate an Italian entry into the war on Germany's side with serious implications for Britain's ability to defend itself and its host of worldwide commitments. 'On Italy's inactivity depended... the free use of the Mediterranean and, it was believed, the Red Sea for our shipping', J.R.M. Butler writes in his official history of Britain's wartime strategy. 'An Italian attack against Egypt and the Canal from Libya would also be a serious matter. For these reasons the British Government deliberately avoided giving Italy provocation'.³ In October 1939 a new British Consul to Albania was appointed, giving a degree of recognition to the Italian occupation. The same month, the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff told the War Cabinet that the only plan for stirring up trouble for the Italians in Albania was to leave the task to Turkey, which might encourage resistance through Albania's muslim population.⁴

An additional concern was to keep the war out of the Balkans for as long as possible, which again reflected the weakness of Britain's strategic position. 'All the countries in the Balkans, except Turkey, are liable to be over-run by the Germans...

before we could do anything to help them' was the conclusion drawn by the Chiefs of Staff on 18 September 1939. 'It would be preferable to have the whole of the Balkans and Italy neutral'.⁵ In December, General Sir Edmund Ironside, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, reminded the Chiefs that policy was still 'that we should not irritate Italy... [and] should, if possible, prevent the war spreading to the Balkans'.⁶ Later that month the British high command told their French opposite numbers that Britain was 'in complete agreement as to the importance of keeping ajar the door in South Eastern Europe' but 'apprehensive of the consequences of opening* that door, and passing through it, at the present time'. The British, the French were informed, remained convinced that 'for the moment our activities should be confined to unostentatious preparations'.⁷

Only in April 1940, with intelligence reports suggesting that conflict with Italy was imminent, did the British Chiefs of Staff lift the ban on subversive planning. Intercepted Italian signals revealed worrying 'evidence of unusual... movements' by the Italian military and navy, while 'agents and visitors to Italy' told of widespread preparations for war.⁸ In London orders were issued finally for 'preliminary steps' to be taken to prepare for a war against Italy. On 27 March, the Commanders-in-Chief of the Royal Navy were told that a large naval force might have to be assembled, at short notice, in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Admiralty ordered ten submarines to leave China and the East Indies for Europe at once.⁹ And on 6 April the Chiefs of Staff approved a paper on British policy in the event of war with Italy.¹⁰ The paper recommended that, although its forces and policy would have to be on the defensive initially, Britain should then seek to 'render untenable the Italian position in Libya, and eventually in East Africa'.¹¹ Before April was out, the Chiefs also recommended to the Cabinet that any Italian aggression in the Balkans must be resisted.¹²

Official British records suggest that it was the growing uncertainty over Italian intentions that led the British Chiefs of Staff to look to Albania as a potential field for future operations. On 8 April, a year and a day since the Italian invasion of Albania, Captain Tommy Davies of the War Office asked the Foreign Office for the whereabouts of a Dr Malcolm Burr, 'last heard of working under the auspices of the FO'. Davies explained that Burr was wanted to put together an 'up-to-date appreciation on Albania' as 'the General Staff' was currently 'investigating projects'

* Underlining in original

for 'irregular activities in Italy or her colonies'.¹³ Tommy Davies worked for Military Intelligence (Research), or MI(R), a small, secret department of the War Office created in 1938 under Lieutenant Colonel Jo Holland to undertake sabotage and promote guerilla warfare in enemy-occupied countries. Another of its tasks was to conduct research into that kind of work and draft papers for planning and advisory bodies like the Joint Planning Committee and Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). These, in turn, advised the Cabinet, the Chiefs of Staff and other decision-makers. Most of MI(R)'s records are lost or unavailable and it is impossible to establish precisely from its surviving files when and from where the demand for information on Albania came, but it is likely that the appreciation Davies wanted from Burr was destined for the JIC. Although Albania was never discussed explicitly at any JIC meeting in 1939 or 1940, MI(R)'s working relationship with the JIC was close. Davies and Holland often attended its meetings, and, as the in-house history of SOE confirms, MI(R) 'had a large hand' in the spring and summer of 1940 in producing papers for the JIC on the possibilities of subversive warfare in occupied territories.¹⁴

By the end of April 1940, MI(R) had been formally 'charged with the preparation of plans for the carrying on of guerilla warfare in Albania'.¹⁵ As those plans began to evolve, however, their form became dictated less by the character of MI(R) than by that of Section D, an internal section of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), which MI(R) enlisted to do its preliminary work. Section D, to quote from M.R.D. Foot's official SOE history, had been set up in 1938 to 'investigate every possibility of attacking potential enemies by means other than the operations of military forces'.¹⁶ According to Section D's anonymous in-house historian, this was to be achieved chiefly through establishing 'lines of communication for covert... propaganda in Neutral countries' and by directing and harnessing 'the effects of the various anti-Nazi [sic] organisations working in Europe'.¹⁷ After discussions in London between George Taylor, the head of Section D's Balkan Section, and Lieutenant Colonel Jo Holland, head of MI(R), the two organisations agreed to co-operate in the preparation of guerilla resistance in Albania 'based upon those elements in Albania and Yugoslavia and Greece who are still hostile to the Italian occupation'.¹⁸ Since Italy was not yet in the war, Section D, as the organisation tasked with working into still-neutral countries, duly took on the bulk of the preparation work and the centre of planning on Albania shifted from London to Belgrade.

Section D's other Balkan activities were being directed already by its field office in Belgrade, and Taylor, an Australian businessman with long experience of the Balkans, apparently knew of a community of Albanian exiles and émigrés there.¹⁹ He also had faith in the abilities of Julius Hanau, Section D's main representative in Belgrade, a South African arms dealer who had lived in the Balkans since the end of the First World War and had worked for Section D since June 1939.²⁰ On 29 April 1940, in a letter that effectively constituted Hanau's directive, Taylor outlined the new policy change towards Italy and stressed the 'most urgent' need for 'immediate action... before the balloon goes up'. Section D, Taylor explained, would act 'as a sort of Advance Guard' for MI(R) by establishing and exploiting anti-Italian contacts specifically with a view to starting guerilla warfare inside Albania. It would seek out Albanians willing to co-operate, send in warlike supplies across the Greek and Yugoslav borders, extract intelligence and generally prepare the ground 'for military action proper' by MI(R) if and when Italy entered the war. Taylor left to Hanau the specifics of how to do all this.²¹ Although well acquainted with the murky worlds of Balkan business and politics, however, Hanau knew little of Albania or Albanians and had fewer contacts and assets than Taylor had hoped. He was also busy, indispensable in his commanding role and too well known in Belgrade to be able to participate very actively in the venture. Hanau was thus forced to enlist the help of junior members of Section D and the British Legation staff. One of the latter was Julian Amery, son of the wartime Secretary of State for India (and later himself a Conservative MP and minister), who was working at that time as Assistant Press Attaché.²² For the next three months, Amery and other Section D men in Belgrade, none of whom had much prior knowledge of Albania either, built contacts in Yugoslavia with Albanians who had fled or been expelled from their country by the Italians or earlier by King Zog, Albania's pre-war monarch.

In 1948, Amery produced the first published account of British plans to encourage resistance in Albania in 1940-41. In *Sons of the Eagle*, he writes that British planners in Belgrade felt the key to a successful revolt lay in harnessing the support of Albanians in Kosovo, the southern Yugoslav province adjacent to northern Albania. He describes how Section D accordingly established contact with the powerful Kryeziu clan from the town of Gjakova in southern Kosovo, close to Albania's mountainous northern border. The Kryezius had considerable influence and

interests in Albania, which Section D thought ideal, Amery writes, for allowing it run arms and agents from the relative safety of neutral Yugoslavia. Gani Bey Kryeziu, the family's head and a former officer in the Yugoslav Army, was also highly regarded on both sides of the border as a military and political leader. Indeed, the family was of a rare breed of Kosovar Albanians that was respected and feted by the Yugoslavs, which ensured a degree of further support from the Yugoslav authorities for Section D's efforts. Impressed by Gani's influence and willingness to help, Section D placed him and his family at the centre of its plans. The British sent wagons of corn over the border to win friends, trafficked a few arms across and brought more émigrés and exiles on board. 'Thus, bit by bit', Amery writes, 'the ground was prepared for revolt'.²³

Since a good number of Section D's files survive, the work on Albania of its Belgrade representatives is reasonably well documented from the start. These records confirm Amery's suggestion that planners in Belgrade were pleased with the progress they had made by the summer of 1940. May, to quote from Section D's War Diary, had been spent mostly 'sifting through names of various exiles with a view to finding potential leaders and points of resistance'. But by mid-June, according to a report sent to London by Bill Bailey, a mining engineer who had replaced the recently expelled Julius Hanau as Section D's Belgrade head, three local organisations were being supported to work into Albania from Yugoslavia, including Gani Bey Kryeziu's out of Kosovo. A monthly subsidy of £1,500 was funding each of them and gunrunning might start once they had proved themselves 'satisfactory'.²⁴ At the end of June, confident that 'the prospects of both "incidents" and a fairly general rising against the Italians [in border areas]... were good', Section D asked London for help in securing five thousand rifles. If the arms could be found, officers in Belgrade 'had no doubt that an effective diversion would result'.²⁵ On 19 July, Section D in Belgrade then submitted a detailed plan for a revolt. Gani Bey Kryeziu, by now Section D's principal Albanian contact, had asked for £3,000 in gold to distribute amongst northern Albanian chieftans; once the 'revolution' had started he wanted a further £40,000 to be paid. An offer had also been made by 'the highest military authorities in Yugoslavia' to supply Section D with 5,000 rifles all 'complete with slings and bayonets', ten million rounds of ammunition, and twenty-five light machine-guns 'with drums and ammunition'. Conditions of supply were that the supplier would take

his wares as far as the Yugoslav frontier and only receive payment once they had disappeared into Albania. The paper concluded: 'It is clear that an Albanian revolt, at any rate in certain frontier areas, can be produced, should we want to do so'.²⁶

In July 1940, Section D and MI(R) were wound up and most of their personnel and Balkan plans absorbed into a new organisation, the Special Operations Executive (SOE). In this way the groundwork and contacts made with Albanian exiles survived, although, the same month, Amery left the company of those planning operations in Albania. The absence was temporary: in 1944 he parachuted into the country and worked again with some of the Albanians he had known four years before. *Sons of the Eagle* recounts mainly those later experiences. Yet Amery also endeavours in his memoir to fill in details of the latter stages of the earlier enterprise, of which he had no first-hand knowledge but learnt, presumably, from discussions with SOE officers and Albanians who had taken part. He sets out, too, why he believes the plans came to little.

German successes in northern and northwest Europe and Italy's entry into the war, Amery writes, had given the enterprise a new sense of urgency and pertinence during the summer of 1940. SOE found and channeled a few more arms into northern Albania; money was also sent. It also encountered some problems: the arms supply dried up; the Yugoslav authorities were compelled under Italian pressure to restrict the movements of the Kryezius and other Albanians recruited to the cause. But when Italy invaded Greece from its Albanian bases in late October, to the planners, according to Amery, there seemed a good chance of fashioning a successful revolt. The Greeks fought well and forced the Italians to retreat into Albania; SOE's Albanians in Yugoslavia appeared eager for action; it seemed that the British high command might make available to the guerillas a sizeable number of rifles. Plans to proceed received approval in London. But when the British ran the plans past the Greeks, Amery writes, the Greek government, coveting the territory in southern Albania its armies held after pushing the Italians back, objected strongly. British commanders, unwilling to override those objections, shelved SOE's plans. Amery remarks ruefully that when the Italian line finally held, 'there were British military observers who believed that it might well have been carried if [Albanian] guerillas could have impeded its supply in the critical moments of the battle'.²⁷

By the spring of 1941, according to Amery, the conditions appeared conducive once again to a successful Albanian rising. In March a coup in Belgrade brought to power a new government whose military advisers, he writes, 'set great hopes on an Albanian revolt'. And as Germany manoeuvred to remove this new, pro-British regime and assist Mussolini in his efforts against the Greeks, the plans for a revolt went ahead. Unfortunately, the general atmosphere of the day of confusion, insecurity and impending conflict with Germany hampered the Kryezius and their allies as they assembled in Gjakova and prepared to move into Albania. The Yugoslav authorities arrested some, suspecting them to be fifth column, while many of Gani's own men 'who were to form the spearhead of the revolt' found themselves drafted into the Yugoslav Army.²⁸

But what really ensured SOE's plans came to naught, Amery claims, was Germany's conquest of Yugoslavia. In early April, Gani and a force numbered by Amery at three hundred men crossed from Kosovo into Albania. Major Dayrell Oakley-Hill, a retired British Army officer who had worked for a decade in pre-war Albania as an inspector of Zog's gendarmerie and been recruited by SOE in 1940, went with them. 'They met no initial resistance' according to Amery, 'and were well received by the local population'. Hundreds of locals, he claims, rallied to join Gani's force. Subsequently, two 'strong Italian patrols' were met and 'defeated'. Apparently with close to a thousand men, Gani marched on through the mountains towards Shkodra, northern Albania's principal port and town. In the hills to the north of the town he and Oakley-Hill experienced their first reverse when local Catholic tribes refused to support them. Unable to attack Shkodra alone, the party resolved to return into Moslem territory close to Kosovo, establish a base and communications with Yugoslavia and begin to harass the roads. But then news came through of the disasters overtaking the Yugoslav armies to the north. The German *blitzkrieg* had opened on the morning of 6 April with the bombing of Belgrade from the air; German armour on the ground had made rapid progress since and seemed on the verge of victory. 'Overnight', Amery claims, Gani, Oakley-Hill and the rest of the party 'ceased to be the vanguard of a powerful army and were transformed into a band of fugitives, trapped in the mountains of North Albania'. Seeing 'the writing on the wall', Gani dispersed his men. Oakley-Hill made his way back to Belgrade where eventually he gave himself up to the Germans.²⁹

Dayrell Oakley-Hill wrote his own memoirs after the war. These focus chiefly on his pre-war years in Albania but also describe in some detail his time as an SOE officer in 1940-41. Unpublished until 2002, his recollections include the only available eyewitness account of Gani Bey Kryeziu's 1941 expedition; they also contradict several aspects of Julian Amery's account of those final stages of the enterprise. Oakley-Hill suggests Gani set out from Gjakova with much less than three hundred men: perhaps a few dozen at most. And while he mentions that the occupants of an Italian border post fired a few shots and then ran away, nothing in Oakley-Hill's writings suggests that two 'strong Italian patrols' were met and defeated. Nor does Oakley-Hill echo Amery's grand tone of a valiant 'United Front' of a thousand men marching on hopefully through the snow towards Shkodra.³⁰

Instead, Oakley-Hill presents a picture of an unhappy rabble of hungry, cold and ill-equipped men whose leader, Gani Bey Kryeziu, was seemingly troubled by doubts about their chances of success even before they left Gjakova. Once across the frontier they attracted less support than they had hoped and found their meager supplies too inadequate to sustain them for long. Indeed, while a few hundred men did rally to Gani on the Albanian side of the border, pressure on resources forced him a day or two later to 'cut the numbers down to a hundred'.³¹ But the most conspicuous inconsistency between Oakley-Hill and Amery's accounts concerns the Yugoslav troops that advanced into Albania alongside Gani's men. Of all the published memoirs and histories that relate the story of the expedition, only Oakley-Hill's account mentions these troops. Yet he considers their presence crucial in explaining why Gani's party was forced finally to break up.

According to Oakley-Hill, he and Gani discovered only at the very last moment that 'Yugoslav troops were also bound for Albania'. This, he writes, was not good news:

We had planned to enter Albania as a small group and find shelter with the highland chiefs. We would then sound the local feelings and try to initiate sabotage and local minor actions. If the situation was ripe and circumstances were suitable we would work towards a general rising which, with a neutral Yugoslavia at our backs, was far from impossible... But now we were to be involved with Yugoslav troops, who would never be welcome in Albania owing to the many centuries of hostility between Albanian and Slav. So what would be our role now?

The Yugoslav move was presumably part of a military plan to meet the contingency of a Nazi invasion, a sort of counter-stroke against the Italians, so our people were unlikely to have been informed... But the Yugoslavs must have known they would antagonise the Albanian people, and they certainly did.

Oakley-Hill feels that it was likely to have been word of this development that explains why, when he joined him in Gjakova, Gani was 'subdued and not very forthcoming and gave me the impression of being worried'. He also believes that it was 'precisely' the presence of Yugoslav troops 'which created the hostility' and explained the deserted villages Gani's party found in the Catholic heart-lands of northwest Albania. 'These Catholics feared the Slavs and not for the first time they had been won over by the Italians... [But] I am quite sure that if there had been no Yugoslavs on the march these villagers would not have gone'.³²

Oakley-Hill accepts that German successes in the Balkans created a 'general feeling of panic or paralysis [that]... was evident even in that part of Albania' and 'undermined all chance we had of staying in the mountains and secretly working against the Fascists'. Nevertheless, he writes, 'I still believe that it was the Yugoslav entry into Albania that did the greater harm to us. Without that we might still have crawled quietly into the hills and found shelter with no publicity, the local highlanders dispersing to their homes. As it was, the whole of the north knew of our presence and some might think of us as tools of the Yugoslavs. This was the fatal blow'.³³

In a third set of memoirs, another British planner argues that a revolt may have succeeded had it been permitted to take place at a more timely moment. Colonel W.F. Stirling had been recruited by Section D and took overall charge of the Albanian project during the summer of 1940. A man of action, forceful in his views and with a wide circle of important contacts and friends, he had brought to the project influence and determination and personal experience of both Albania and guerilla war. He had won his first DSO against the Boers at the age of twenty.³⁴ During the First World War he became 'Stirling the suave': T.E. Lawrence's 'skilled staff officer, tactful and wise'; the pair drove into Damascus together in 1918.³⁵ After three years as Governor of southern Palestine, he spent a further eight years from 1923 advising Albania's government and president, Ahmed Zogu, who crowned himself King Zog I in 1925.³⁶ In late May 1940, so records now reveal, Section D found Stirling working, much to

his frustration, in telephone censorship and only too happy to help with its Albanian plans.³⁷

Published in 1953, *Safety Last* is Stirling's account of his long and eventful life. In the pages devoted to his Second World War experiences he laments the lack of British military support for the Albanian venture after Italy's attack on Greece in October 1940. Stirling claims to have been confident at the time that 'a revolution in Albania... would paralyse the Italian communications and enable the Greeks to push forward with the minimum of opposition'. He also claims that General Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces operating in the Middle East and Greece and an old friend, 'had promised me fifteen thousand rifles for my Albanians from the Italian arms he had captured in North Africa'. But this opportunity was promptly lost, Stirling writes, owing to lack of support for the venture from the British Military Mission in Greece. After pressing the plan on the head of the Mission 'I was practically forbidden to carry out the plan and every obstacle was put in my way. When the rifles from Egypt arrived they were deflected to the Greek forces'.³⁸

It seems likely that Stirling was one of the 'observers' who, according to Amery, believed in the potential of a revolt in late 1940 and regretted that it had not been allowed to go ahead. But while Amery points to Greek objections as responsible for the revolt not receiving the green light, Stirling believes the general in charge of the British Military Mission in Greece was at fault personally in not giving the venture the necessary support. He describes this officer, whom he does not name, as 'a charming man, but insufficiently tough; he had spent most of his career as a military attaché in diplomatic circles'. Stirling was 'amazed by his reaction' when in Athens he laid out to him SOE's plans. "'But", the general objected, "you're gambling with men's lives!"' Stirling implies that it was this officer and his command that placed 'every obstacle' in the way of a successful Albanian revolt.³⁹

In their memoirs, then, Amery, Oakley-Hill and Stirling all agree that the basic idea of fostering a revolt in Albania in 1940-41 was sound. For Amery it was brought to ruin in April 1941 only by the German conquest of Yugoslavia. For Oakley-Hill, the German advance undermined the enterprise but it was the presence, alongside Gani Bey Kryeziu's band of irregulars, of Yugoslav troops that proved decisive. For Stirling, had the plans received greater support from the British forces in Greece, and the British commander of those forces displayed greater resolve, a successful revolt

could have been effected months earlier, in the weeks following the Italian invasion of Greece. It will now be suggested, however, with reference to contemporary records, that Amery, Oakley-Hill and Stirling understate in their memoirs how ambitious were their plans, and fail to acknowledge the full range of preconditions that planners thought at the time were essential for a successful revolt.

These records do confirm that Stirling, for one, was genuinely displeased in 1940-41 with the head of the British Military Mission in Greece, who can be identified today as Major General T.G.G. Heywood, a former Military Attaché in Paris.⁴⁰ In late November 1940, Dayrell Oakley-Hill, with Stirling's assent, tabled a plan for an Albanian revolt that required support from the Mission in the form of arms and a means of supplying them to the guerrillas.⁴¹ At that moment Italian forces were still struggling to hold the Greek advance. But five weeks later, according to the SOE War Diary (which was compiled in London from telegrams received from its representatives overseas), the plan was still 'hanging fire owing to the lack of support from Military and Air authorities. A telegram [of 5 January 1941] was received from Colonel Stirling in which he recorded that he and Major Oakley Hill were of the opinion that General Heywood's opposition was due more to a political bias in favour of the Greeks than to the actual lack of supplies'.⁴²

Stirling was also unimpressed by the result of a meeting held in Cairo in mid-January 1941 at Wavell's headquarters, General Headquarters Middle East (GHQ Middle East), at which Oakley-Hill's plan had been discussed. Heywood, Wavell's two senior intelligence advisers, Brigadiers John Shearer and Iltyd Clayton, and SOE's Cairo representative, R.G. Searight, all attended and agreed that the revolt idea should be 'given up'. Neither Stirling, who was co-ordinating the project from Istanbul where he was working with Albanian exiles, nor Oakley-Hill, who was working with other Albanians in Belgrade, had been present.⁴³ Stirling protested that the decision reached was 'too sweeping and that the way should still be left open for the preparation of, and effective assistance to, a political and properly coordinated uprising to embrace all the Albanians of the North and East'.⁴⁴ Later in January, Heywood appears to have been responsible for cutting the number of rifles Wavell had found for Stirling's Albanians from 5,000 to 2,000 (there is no record of Wavell ever having promised 15,000, as Stirling claims). 'Gen Heywood had said he was unable to handle more than 2,000' the Diary records.⁴⁵

Yet records also suggest that Stirling failed to appreciate adequately at the time the degree to which Heywood's standpoint reflected wider diplomatic and strategic concerns and the paucity of resources the British had to hand. The authority for deciding whether SOE's plans for Albania should be executed lay not in London, as Amery suggests, but in Cairo, in the hands of Stirling's friend, Archibald Wavell, at GHQ Middle East. Records confirm that Wavell kept a close eye on Section D and SOE and never directed Heywood to support plans for a full-scale Albanian revolt. In July 1940, when British strategy was to keep the war out of the Balkans for as long as possible, Wavell had instructed Section D to tone down its plans on the grounds that its preparations threatened to provide Italy with an excuse for invading Greece.⁴⁶ In August Wavell did authorise Stirling to resume planning operations in Albania and prepare the ground for a general revolt, but it was laid down that the outbreak of any revolt would remain closely dependent on Wavell's Balkan and Middle Eastern strategy.⁴⁷ In late October, at the time of Italy's invasion of Greece, Wavell then instructed Stirling to encourage his Albanians to begin small-scale guerilla operations. A handful of small bands duly crossed into Albania from Greece and Yugoslavia and a few small actions took place.⁴⁸ But the subsequent release of 5,000 rifles from stocks captured in North Africa was as far as Wavell was willing and able to go. SOE was never authorised to proceed with the full revolt. The Chiefs of Staff in London did agree in principle to Oakley-Hill's plan when it was submitted to them in December, but they then referred the matter to Cairo where Wavell promptly dismissed it.⁴⁹ As R.G. Searight informed SOE London on 25 December, the 'gist' of the 'views of the Commander in Chief' was that 'more good can be done in Albania by continuance of guerilla warfare against Italian lines of communication than by [a] general revolt which would lead to requests for substantial... aid which he cannot afford to give... As regards food and clothing priority must be given to the Greeks'.⁵⁰

The premium placed by British diplomats and military commanders on sustaining the Greek war effort also explains why SOE failed to illicit either a Foreign Office statement about Albania's post-war independence or permission to involve King Zog in its plans. In the autumn of 1940, soon after taking charge of SOE's Albanian plans, Stirling had travelled to Istanbul to begin work on forming a representative committee from the Albanian exiles and émigrés living in Turkey. He soon began urging SOE's main headquarters in London (SOE London) to have Zog

approached to act as a figurehead around whom the exiles and resistance might develop.⁵¹ On Stirling's behalf, SOE London pressed the Foreign Office to permit the king's involvement.⁵² The Foreign Office was not enthusiastic, however. Already it took a poor view of Zog. In August, unimpressed by Zog's rapid flight from Albania and his ongoing and ostentatious occupation of an entire floor of the Ritz, Lord Halifax, the then Foreign Secretary, had considered banishing him to the United States.⁵³ But diplomats were also increasingly conscious of, and sensitive to, strong strategic and diplomatic grounds on which to oppose SOE's appeal. As war clouds began to form over the Balkans in 1940, and aware that the Greeks had long laid claim to large parts of southern Albania, the Foreign Office appreciated that Britain had little to gain at that time by giving the Greeks cause for concern over Albania's future.

Thus a statement issued in October by Churchill to Stirling's Istanbul committee was carefully worded by the Foreign Office to avoid any kind of commitment to Albania's territorial integrity. It was confined to saying simply: 'HMG have the cause of Albania very much at heart'.⁵⁴ And when both Zog and SOE proposed, after the Italian attack on Greece, that the king fly to the Balkans and rally the Albanians there, that plan promptly foundered when the Foreign Office refused to support it. Zog had not helped his case when he subsequently refused to be flown out to Cairo at the end of November. But after bouncing the proposal off its representatives in Greece, the Foreign Office soon appreciated how much the Greeks, concerned for the future of their traditional claims in southern Albania, opposed anything that suggested a British commitment to Zog or Albanian nationalist aspirations. Metaxas, the Greek Prime Minister, opposed the plan completely, claiming that Zog was so unpopular that his presence in the Balkans could only help the Italians. Greek territorial aspirations explain Metaxas's absolute refusal to consider anything that might lead to the restoration and recognition of an independent Albania under Zog. Yet British diplomats across the Balkans also urged against the plan and the final word came from Wavell, who shared concerns that Zog's presence in the Middle East would be unwelcome.⁵⁵ As SOE's R.G. Searight observed in January 1941, 'the governing factor in [the] minds of [the] authorities' in Cairo was that 'nothing should be done to prejudice the Greek will to win'.⁵⁶ SOE's War Diarist, recording Stirling's opinion that Heywood was biased politically in favour of the Greeks, expressed sympathy for the general's position. 'One might comment that

General Heywood must, at present, be in a delicate position, as he can hardly do otherwise than support, or appear to support, the claims of the Greeks with whom he is co-operating, and who have served the Allied cause so well'.⁵⁷

Stirling, Amery and Oakley-Hill also fail to mention in their memoirs how serious were the physical difficulties that prevented Heywood and the British Military Mission in Greece from delivering arms and other supplies to guerillas in northern Albania. Oakley-Hill's plan envisaged a rapid march by Gani Bey Kryeziu and his men to the northern town of Kukes; they would then have to receive supplies there by air.⁵⁸ As one of SOE's men in Athens wrote to London in December 1940, however, the forces Britain had dispatched to help the Greeks were wholly incapable of delivering that kind of extra assistance to the Albanians. After discussions with RAF and Foreign Office representatives in Greece, he reported:

The dropping of arms, supplies, clothing and money by parachute from RAF planes is out of the question for the following reasons:

- (a) There are not enough planes to spare.
- (b) There is no reserve clothing or food to spare in Greece
- (c) Italian rifles and ammunition cannot be brought from Egypt for at least 3 weeks.
- (d) The RAF have not got the equipment for dropping supplies from the air and would have to get it from England.
- (e) The unreliability of the weather, and particularly the sudden and unpredictable formation of cloud over the Albanian mountains makes it impossible to arrange a rendezvous with the object of dropping supplies with any certainty of being able to keep it.

The SOE representative noted that the RAF liaison officer in Greece 'emphasised that it was not his wish to be uncooperative, but that under present circumstances it was quite impossible for the RAF to fall in with the proposals made by [SOE in] Belgrade'.⁵⁹ Even when Wavell's rifles appeared to be en route from Egypt, there had been little change to this basic problem of finding the means of delivering them to the guerillas. By the end of the year, SOE's representatives were resigned to trying to send the rifles into Albania overland, via Yugoslavia.⁶⁰ By the end of the first week of

January 1941, Stirling had agreed with Heywood that the revolt should be 'postponed until conditions [are] more favourable'.⁶¹

It appears from SOE files that GHQ Middle East and more senior observers were also conscious of the possible repercussions of a failed revolt. In late January 1941, Heywood informed Ian Pirie, one of SOE's principal men in Athens, 'that higher authorities' considered it 'essential' that an Albanian revolt 'should not be attempted without an at least 80% chance of success'. GHQ Middle East, Heywood had explained, felt that 'the only time for such a revolt is simultaneously with a major Greek advance'. Of such a development, however, there was 'no indication whatsoever'. In fact, the Greeks seemed to have become 'completely bogged' against the Italians after their early run of success. For this reason, and because the RAF was patently unable to provide support, Pirie reported, GHQ Middle East, 'with their professional confidence in the superiority of regular over irregular troops, feel that the revolt would be crushed. The deterrent effect of a crushed revolt upon the spirits of the people in occupied territory is exactly what higher authorities even than Mideast [GHQ Middle East] are supremely anxious to avoid'.⁶²

Seen, then, in the context of British strategy and diplomacy and problems of logistics and lack of resources, Heywood's opposition to Stirling's revolt may be easier to understand. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that Heywood was as squeamish about encouraging Albanian resistance as Stirling makes out. 'I hope you do not feel that Heywood is being obstructive' Ian Pirie reported to SOE's planners in Belgrade in early 1941. 'It is quite clear... that his instructions are very definite. As an example of his anxiety to help us he tried to get us 30 squirts [sub-machine guns] out of the thousand delivered here for the Greeks, and tell the Greeks that these had been short delivered'.⁶³

Although Amery and Oakley-Hill claim that the situation was conducive to a successful revolt in the spring of 1941, no significant development had occurred by then that could have allowed the British Military Mission in Greece to offer SOE's planners greater assistance. Down to April, Heywood and the RAF remained unable to surmount the problem of delivering substantial amounts of material to guerillas in northern Albania; nor was any instruction forthcoming from Wavell to allow SOE to proceed with its planned revolt. Nor, indeed, was there any alteration to the British government's refusal to make any statement on Albania's independence or future

frontiers. SOE records reveal that in February a limited 'plan' was 'prepared and approved in principle by General Heywood for the co-ordinated operations of bands of Albanian irregulars in several districts in Northern Albania, under the leadership of the exiled chiefs who are working under our direction in Yugoslavia... These bands would be of anything from several hundreds to a thousand men, and the objectives would be the continuous cutting of telephone communications, the blocking of roads, the destruction of bridges, attacks on police and military posts and the capture of material'.⁶⁴ It was thought, however, that 'much depended on whether or not they were supplied with the requisite arms and ammunition'.⁶⁵ When the time came to move, Gani's party still lacked direction, had no chance of supply from the air or political support from London and carried only as much food, weaponry, ammunition and explosives as could be loaded on to the backs of a handful of mules. 'We had no formal or detailed orders', Oakley-Hill recalls, 'just a general brief to raise as much wind against the Italians as possible all over the north'.⁶⁶

Contemporary records confirm that SOE's planners considered a major revolt, rather than a series of minor acts of resistance, to be the only effective way of harnessing northern Albania to the Allied war effort. Yet records also demonstrate that neither Stirling nor Oakley-Hill acknowledge in their memoirs what both had stressed to higher authority at the time: that northern Albanians were not suited to sustaining any kind of significant resistance without substantial outside help and convincing grounds on which to come out to fight. That analysis is well set out in the plan drawn up by Oakley-Hill with Stirling's support in late 1940 and shelved in January. The essential 'pre-requisites' for a successful revolt, as laid down by Oakley-Hill, were as follows:

- (a) The presence in Albania of a leader or leaders in whom the Northerners would have confidence.
- (b) The moral support of Britain, to whom they look, and have always looked, as to no other Power, for the eventual satisfaction of their claims to just treatment.
- (c) Linked with (b) some proof of the friendly intentions of Greece towards the country as a whole.
- (d) The provision of some arms, and particularly rifles and ammunition.

In the preamble to his plan, Oakley-Hill stressed that the 'Northern Albanian does not take readily to mere brigandage for pay. He is very attached to his own home and his own part of the country and requires a sufficient stimulus to make him leave it and take up arms'. In addition, 'owing to his feudal background and clan system he is dependent on the chiefs of his clan and obedient to them. To convince the chiefs is to obtain the support of the people, but the chiefs are similarly dependent on higher leaders in whom they have confidence'. Oakley-Hill considered that the necessary stimulus 'could best be provided by the prospect of a successful struggle for the independence of Albania'. Only 'the big stakes, which are their only real interest', would induce important leaders outside the country to return and lead the revolt. In short, if there was to be a successful Albanian revolt, Britain had to provide the necessary moral, material and political support to convince northern Albanians, both inside and outside the country, that it was worth their while taking part.⁶⁷

Other old Albania hands, when tapped for their thoughts by Section D and SOE in 1940-41, echoed this assessment. One was Stirling. In a long paper drawn up in August 1940, after a lightning tour of SOE's Balkan outposts in Athens and Belgrade, he pointed out that the 'actual fighting must be done' by the 'mountaineers of the north-east and centre' of Albania. These, he observed, were 'divided into distinct clans who will only fight under their own chieftans'. The only way of uniting them, he considered, was by securing Zog's 'approval and general blessing' for their efforts. 'In spite of the blood feuds with which King Zog is entrammelled, in spite of the unpopularity of his later administration, he is the only pivot around which all classes and creeds can centre'.⁶⁸

Another Briton with Albanian experience was Lieutenant Colonel Edmund de Renzy Martin. As another inspector of Zog's gendarmerie, he had worked with Dayrell Oakley-Hill in Albania for many years before the war; in 1940 he began work in SOE's Spanish Section.⁶⁹ In a report on Albania he wrote that year for SOE he noted the 'prestige of the Englishman in Albania' and that Zog, he suspected, was 'the only man who can unite all classes and tribes of Albanians, in spite of his previous misrule'. But he also felt that while many Albanians 'would revolt against the Italians if they knew Great Britain was behind them... they would not do so for their own leaders alone'. He concluded: 'I doubt whether a general revolt can be brought about

unless the Albanian, who is no fool, is promised that Great Britain will see to it that as a consequence he will some day regain his independence... [The Albanians] argue that to remain quiet they are fairly safe whoever wins, whereas to revolt means certain death to those caught and to many others also'.⁷⁰

This cautious assessment of the conditions required for a successful revolt was not, it may be noted, of the kind made by Section D's men in Belgrade during the spring and early summer of 1940. Before Stirling joined the project in July, Section D's planners had consisted almost exclusively of Amery, Sandy Glen, John Bennett, Fred Lawrence and Ralph Parker. Glen, the assistant naval attaché in Belgrade, was in his late twenties and a lieutenant commander in the Royal Navy; Bennett was a young civilian lawyer; Lawrence was a captain in the Royal Tank Regiment who, according to Amery, had once been on holiday to Albania. Parker, Belgrade correspondent for *The Times*, could claim a little more knowledge of the place and had, it seems, been responsible for placing Section D in touch with the Kryezius.⁷¹ Overall, however, Section D knew little of Albania before the likes of Stirling and Oakley-Hill were brought on board, by when the plans had built up a certain momentum.

That lack of knowledge, combined with the demand from London for 'urgent... immediate action', undoubtedly helps explain the early planners' apparent lack of interest in the political implications of what they were doing and the consequences of failure or success. Certainly the planners were not oblivious to the conflicting political views of the Albanians with whom they were in touch. On 10 May, Julius Hanau informed London of the good news that Section D was now in touch with several exiled Albanian leaders in Yugoslavia; the bad news, he added, was that they divided themselves into three rival political groups: Zogist (pro-monarchist), anti-Zogist, and communist.⁷² But beyond uniting as many Albanians as possible against the Italians, Section D considered the long-term resolution of the divisions between them a task of little importance. Until Stirling arrived to take charge, no consideration was given to the formation of any kind of committee of exiled representatives that might have broadened the resisters' appeal and given them a degree of political legitimacy.

It is possible that Stirling's hopes for Zog as a unifying factor may have been misplaced, however. Certainly it seems possible that Gani Bey Kryeziu, the Albanian exile whom Section D and SOE came to place at the centre of their plans, was

motivated to participate by a passionate desire to seize power in Albania for himself. According to Julian Amery, Gani and his family were 'moved by a common hatred to the Italians' and thus 'welcomed the prospect of British support in their struggle against the Italians'.⁷³ Yet, from the outset, British planners may have misread Gani's interest in what they were trying to achieve and grievously underestimated his ambition. Gani's desire to overthrow Zog is now well documented. In fact, it was precisely that desire that had seen Gani and his family exiled in 1927 in the first place, after they were revealed to be plotting Zog's downfall. Shortly afterwards, Ceno Bey Kryeziu, Gani's elder brother and head of the family, was assassinated in a Prague café. Possibly Zog's agents were to blame; undoubtedly that was the feeling at the time.⁷⁴ In 1931, as Bernd Fischer shows in his study of Zog, Gani was then revealed to be 'undoubtedly making preparations' for the assassination of Zog and demise of his government. From his home in Gjakova he had assembled 'several hundred Albanians on the frontier... two heavy guns and a number of machine guns, [and] hoped to use the chaos which would undoubtedly have followed Zog's death to overthrow the Tirana government'. It is likely that Gani's preparations had been made with Yugoslav assent; as Fischer notes, it is evident 'that he had spent time in Belgrade and that he was receiving money from that government'.⁷⁵ The enterprise never went ahead. Nine years later, in May 1940, Amery mused hopefully in a memorandum for Julius Hanau that Gani's professed willingness to seek a 'reconciliation with Zogu... suggests for the first time in 1,200 years that there may be a possibility of obtaining co-operation among the Albanian chieftans'.⁷⁶ In his memoirs, Amery stresses again that Gani proclaimed to the British that he had dropped his opposition to Zog and supported the idea of a broad-based resistance movement.⁷⁷ But Gani's hatchet-burying line may simply have been for show. In December 1940 the Foreign Office heard 'indirectly' from a Yugoslav official in Belgrade that Gani was receiving 'a subsidy of 10,000 Dinars a month paid out of secret funds of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs'. The Yugoslavs apparently felt that Gani had 'greater popularity' than Zog and had 'earmarked' him as 'candidate for the Albanian crown, in the event of the liberation of that country. The Yugoslavs were not in favour of ex-King Zog, who had adopted an unfriendly attitude towards Yugoslavia during the latter part of his reign'.⁷⁸ The possibility that Albanians like Gani were not driven by a patriotic desire to help their exiled king was appreciated in London and contributed to scepticism

there about Zog's worth. The same month that the Foreign Office heard of Gani's financial arrangement with Belgrade, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, the FO appointee who chaired the JIC, in a casual conversation with one of SOE's officials 'said jokingly that he thought it most desirable that we should leave King Zog at the Ritz. I replied that our information was "that all Albanians, whether they liked Zog or not, agreed that he was a unifying force, and should be got as near to Albania as possible as soon as possible". His answer was that he did not agree with the argument, as a lot of little chiefs now fighting in the hope that they might become Zogs would lose heart if Zog himself appeared, and it became clear that in the event of an Albanian victory Zog would be restored to his throne'.⁷⁹

Bernd Fischer suggests that, in the Foreign Office's refusal to use Zog to encourage resistance in Albania in 1940-41, '[i]t is possible that an important opportunity was missed'.

Although Zog's flight and the character of his family and regime made him unpopular in many circles in Albania... [he] could certainly still command considerable support. It is true that few in the Orthodox community in the south and in the Catholic community in the north, and few of the Kosovars, would have resisted the Italians for Zog. Still, to the Moslem majority – of which Zog was a member – he remained the only figure of national stature.

Fischer claims that there were 'indications... that an active resistance posture on Zog's part would have encouraged resistance in Albania' (although he does not specify what these indications were). 'As it was', Fischer concludes, 'all the British planning and negotiation to encourage Albanian resistance at this stage came down to one rather pathetic operation in April 1941'.⁸⁰ Yet SOE's plans, it may be argued, would have come undone even if the venture had been accorded greater political purpose and support, Germany not over-run Yugoslavia and Gani Bey Kryeziu's expedition not been accompanied by advancing Yugoslav troops. In a paper of December 1940, Edmund de Renzy Martin suggested several obstacles that might stand in the way of a successful revolt. One, he considered, was the problem of maintaining and moving large numbers of men around northern Albania.

In spite of the Italian training of the Albanian army for 12 to 15 years, there is not nearly enough knowledge or discipline to enable large masses of men to be moved about with precision. Food and munition supplies for large numbers would provide almost insuperable difficulties. The good targets provided by ill-disciplined masses would be a heaven-sent opportunity for the Italian Air Force... For the Albanians to unite in large bodies incapable of living on the country or of hiding by day would be to court disaster.

De Renzy Martin concluded his paper by underlining the importance of securing a 'food supply' for the guerillas. 'It might be possible,' he suggested, 'to arrange for maize (the mountaineers' staple diet is maize bread and cheese) to be sent in from Yugoslavia'.⁸¹ But in drawing attention to the problem of 'food supply', De Renzy Martin's paper highlights perhaps the most fundamental problem that SOE would face throughout the war when trying to encourage large-scale resistance in northern Albania. The assumption that tribal Albania, one of Europe's poorest and most isolated communities and most basic subsistence economies, was willing and able to withstand damaging reprisals inflicted by its occupiers and maintain hundreds, if not thousands, of armed rebels was a major miscalculation.

In the plans he drew up in late 1940 for an Albanian revolt, Oakley-Hill noted that food in northern Albania was 'reported to be short owing to Italian requisitioning'. He also considered that, should a revolt be put in motion, a 'supply of maize and wheat flour, in particular, from outside would be of the greatest value, at any rate in the early stages'. It is also apparent, however, that he did not consider 'outside' help as an essential and long-term solution to the problem. 'Food supplies would be provided by the country where the forces are operating and by the capture of Italian army stores' he believed. Indeed, given de Renzy Martin's suggestion that food might be channeled across from neighbouring Yugoslavia, it is interesting to note that Oakley-Hill assumed the Italians would close Albania's border with Yugoslavia once it became clear to them what Gani and his men were trying to do. His plan thus envisaged RAF support as the only method by which the guerillas could receive 'outside' assistance.⁸² As SOE's War Diarist observed, 'an essential feature of the plan was the dropping of arms, clothing, food and gold by parachute, as it was anticipated that as soon as Gani crossed from Yugoslavia into Albania the frontier would be closed'.⁸³

Yet without a major effort to channel food to them from outside, probably in the form of a very substantial and sustained airlift by the RAF, guerillas taking part in a major revolt in northern Albania could not have committed themselves for long. 'The poverty of the people is unbelievable' noted de Renzy Martin. 'The majority exist [sic] on the border of starvation. Infant mortality is high'.⁸⁴ Given these barren conditions, observed a report of May 1940 obtained by Section D in Belgrade from a Colonel Simic, a former officer in the Albanian section of Yugoslav military intelligence, a sizeable mass of men moving about northern Albania would be faced with very serious difficulties. One section of Simic's report commented on the hazards that would accompany any military operation across the Albanian-Yugoslav border. Such an operation, he wrote, would necessitate movement

along what are little more than goat tracks, which could be used only for small bodies of mountain troops. Even these could not advance at any speed, since the troops could obtain no food supplies on the way...

Historical proof of this is furnished by the wars of 1912 and 1915. When, in 1912, the Serbian army took the route Djakovi Prilep [i.e. southwards from south-western Kosovo into Albania: the same route taken by Oakley-Hill and Gani Bey Kryeziu in April 1941] with a view to capturing [the northern Albanian towns of] Ljesh [Lesh] and Skutari [Shkodra] the troops had to cover the entire distance practically without food, and their losses on account of starvation were very great by the time they reached the sea coast.

Another example is the retreat of the Serbian army in 1915 [from southern Serbia, through Montenegro and northern Albania, to the coast].

'Albania', Simic emphasised, 'is a very poor country, and... besides small livestock there is no food to be got there'.⁸⁵

SOE's failure to take account of such sparseness merely invited the problems Oakley-Hill and Gani Bey Kryeziu experienced later. Within days of crossing the border and being joined by some local chiefs and their supporters, Oakley-Hill recalls in his memoirs, 'the commissariat problem... began to stick out a mile. If several hundred men moved from place to place they could not be fed by the villagers, who had only just enough [food] of their own. There was only one answer – to reduce the numbers of our moving body to a minimum'.⁸⁶ Gani's failure to raise the Catholic tribes may also illustrate the precariousness of life in the region. Oakley-Hill notes

accurately both the widespread fear in northern Albania of anything Yugoslav and that these particular tribes had long been pro-Italian. Still, hostility to the Slavs, persecution under Zog and affinity with fellow Catholics may not be the only explanations for why the tribes sided with the Italians.⁸⁷ SOE records reveal that its men in Belgrade had received reports months earlier that the Italians were winning over the Catholics with cash. 'I know from personal experience that in this poverty-stricken part [between Gjakova and Shkodra] money plays a big role' noted Colonel Simic in his May 1940 report. 'For them, poor devils' he added of Albanians in general, 'even a piece of underwear represents great value'.⁸⁸

It is likely that the presence of hated Yugoslav troops alongside him in April 1941 lost Gani Bey Kryeziu some friends in northern Albania. It is probable, too, that Yugoslavia's swift collapse to the Germans that month dealt a blow to the will of many in the region to resist. Yet the scepticism expressed beforehand by General Heywood and GHQ Middle East about a revolt's chances of success appears a more realistic appraisal of SOE's plans than the post-war assessments found in the memoirs of the planners. Those engaged in the planning had stressed at the time that, without adequate arms, ammunition and some food and a very significant degree of political recognition and support from Britain, a revolt in northern Albania would fail. For a combination of reasons of wider diplomacy, strategy and logistics, not one of those essential 'pre-requisites' was ever, or likely to be, in place. Moreover, since a neutral Yugoslavia and a steady flow of supplies across the border were never considered by the planners as essential, it may be wondered whether the events of April 1941 can really be said to have robbed SOE's plans of success. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, a flawed appreciation of why higher authority took the decisions that it did, and an exaggerated belief in the wisdom of their own thoughts on policy and operations, extends to the memoirs of SOE officers engaged in later operations in Albania.

¹ D. Oakley-Hill, *An Englishman in Albania: Memoirs of a British Officer 1929-1955* (London: The Centre for Albanian Studies, 2002) p.123

² J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* pp.23-44 and *Approach March* pp.158-165; W.F. Stirling, *Safety Last* pp.192-211; A. Glen, *Footholds Against a Whirlwind* pp.58-60; D. Oakley-Hill, *An Englishman in Albania* pp.112-33

³ J.R.M. Butler, *History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy. Volume II: September 1939 to June 1941* (London: HMSO, 1957) p.12, 295

⁴ E. Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe* pp.47-48

⁵ COS (39) 21st Meeting, 18 September 1939, PRO CAB 79/1

⁶ COS (39) 96th Meeting, 4 December 1939, PRO CAB 79/1

⁷ 'Record of a meeting at the headquarters of General Gamelin, 11 December 1939', PRO CAB 80/104

⁸ F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations Volume 1* (London: HMSO, 1979) p.201

⁹ I.S.O. Playfair, *History of the Second World War: The Mediterranean and Middle East. Volume I: The Early Success Against Italy (to May 1941)* (London: HMSO, 1954) p.82

¹⁰ COS (40) 66th Meeting, 6 April 1940, PRO CAB 79/1

¹¹ 'Allied Military Policy in the Mediterranean and Middle East in the event of Italy entering the war on the side of Germany', paper COS (40) 282 (S), 6 April 1940, PRO CAB 80/105

¹² J.R.M. Butler, *Grand Strategy* p.299

¹³ Captain F.T. Davies to P. Broad, 8 April 1940, PRO FO 371/24866. Tommy Davies's search for Malcolm Burr illustrates the paucity of information on Albania that MI(R) then had to hand. Burr was sixty-two and widely published as a travel-writer, translator of Russian and expert on earwigs and grasshoppers, but was no expert on Albania. In 1900, aged twenty-two, he had followed up his first book, *British Orthoptera*, with a short book on Montenegro after two brief visits while on holiday from Oxford. In 1935 he published *Slouch Hat*, a memoir mostly of his military service in Macedonia and Montenegro around the time of the Salonika campaign but also of his travels in the Balkans before 1914. It included a chapter, of little substance, on three brief visits to the northern Albanian town of Shkodra. (Malcolm Burr, *Slouch Hat* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935) pp.87-103.) This appears to be the extent of his first-hand experience of the country. Aside from *Slouch Hat*, Burr's last three books prior to 1940 had been *A Fossicker in Angola* (1933), *British Grasshoppers and their Allies: a Stimulus to their Study* (1936), and a translation of V.K. Arseniev's *Dersu the Trapper* (1939).

¹⁴ W.J.M. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE: The Special Operations Executive 1940-45* (London: St Ermin's Press, 2000) p.42

¹⁵ G. Taylor to J. Hanau, 29 April 1940, PRO HS 5/60

¹⁶ M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France* (London: HMSO, rev. ed. 1976) p.2

¹⁷ 'D Section: Early History to September 1940', PRO HS 7/3

¹⁸ G. Taylor to J. Hanau, 29 April 1940, PRO HS 5/60

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ W.J.M. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE* p.24

²¹ G. Taylor to J. Hanau, 29 April 1940, PRO HS 5/60

²² Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO)

²³ J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* pp.28-37

²⁴ Section D War Diary (1940), PRO HS 7/4

²⁵ 'Albania', memorandum by Section D, 25 August 1940, PRO HS 5/60

²⁶ 'Political Policy in Albania and Istria', memorandum by A. Goodwill to Brigadier E.J. Shearer, 19 July 1940, PRO HS 5/60

²⁷ J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* pp.38-40

²⁸ *Ibid.* pp.41-2

²⁹ *Ibid.* pp.42-3. Oakley-Hill was taken to Germany and imprisoned for two and a half years. He was repatriated in 1943. On his return to Britain, SOE promptly recruited him again to work on its Albanian desk in London.

³⁰ D. Oakley-Hill, *An Englishman in Albania* pp.121-31. I am grateful to Robin and David Oakley-Hill for allowing me access to the original MS of their father's memoir. Some sections of the MS have been cut or otherwise edited for publication. The published account of his time with SOE in 1940-41, however, remains unchanged from the original.

³¹ *Ibid.* p.125

³² *Ibid.* p.121-2, 127

³³ *Ibid.* pp.131-2

³⁴ W.F. Stirling, *Safety Last* pp.18-21

³⁵ T.E. Lawrence, *Revolt in the Desert* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927) p.434, 327

³⁶ W.F. Stirling, *Safety Last* pp.112-57

³⁷ 'Report on Conversation with Col. W. Stirling', memorandum by A.W. Lawrence to G. Taylor, 24 May 1940, PRO HS 5/60

³⁸ W.F. Stirling, *Safety Last* pp.199-200

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.200

⁴⁰ A. Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance* (London: Penguin, 1992) p.8

- ⁴¹ SOE War Diary, 1940, PRO HS 7/211
- ⁴² SOE War Diary, January 1941, PRO HS 7/212
- ⁴³ 'Albania', memorandum by I. Pirie to T. Masterson and D. Oakley-Hill, 24 January 1941, PRO HS 5/63
- ⁴⁴ Lieutenant Colonel W.F. Stirling to G. Pollock, 1 February 1941, PRO HS 5/62
- ⁴⁵ SOE War Diary, January 1941, PRO HS 7/212. Although no evidence has been found to suggest Wavell ever offered to provide 15,000 rifles, SOE's representatives in Belgrade believed in July 1940 that the Yugoslav military might sell them 5,000 ('Political Policy in Albania and Istria', memorandum by A. Goodwill to Brigadier E.J. Shearer, 19 July 1940, PRO HS 5/60). Although that sale was not made, by November it seemed that the Yugoslavs might sell SOE as many 10,000. That month, SOE in London, on SOE Belgrade's behalf, appealed to the Treasury for funds with which to purchase those 10,000 rifles; the Treasury approved a sum of £200,000 ('Albanian Sanction', memorandum by SOE London, 26 November 1940, PRO HS 5/62). Later in November, however, the Yugoslav Government withdrew the offer. In mid-December, SOE Belgrade was negotiating a supply of 8,000 Italian 6.5mm rifles from a 'local arms smuggler' (cipher telegram, SOE Belgrade to SOE London, 15 December 1940, PRO HS 5/63; G. Taylor to G. Jebb, 16 December 1940, PRO HS 5/78). Those negotiations also came to naught. On 15 January 1941, SOE Belgrade telegraphed SOE London: 'Purchase of rifles this country is complicated. At present we have nothing positive and judging from lack of seriousness attending previous offers I do not feel hopeful of any purchases near future' (cipher telegram, T. Masterson to SOE London, 15 January 1941, PRO HS 5/63). No evidence has come to light either to support Stirling's claim that Heywood channeled to the Greeks the balance of the arms that Wavell had promised.
- ⁴⁶ 'Albania', memorandum by Section D, 25 August 1940, PRO HS 5/60
- ⁴⁷ 'Albania', memorandum by Section D to Dr Hugh Dalton, 30 October 1940, PRO HS 5/62
- ⁴⁸ SOE War Diary, 1940, PRO HS 7/211
- ⁴⁹ 'SOE Activities in Greece 1940-42', report by Major I. Pirie, PRO HS 7/150
- ⁵⁰ Cipher telegram, R.G. Searight to SOE London, 25 December 1940, PRO HS 5/61
- ⁵¹ 'Albania', memorandum from Lieutenant Colonel W.F. Stirling to A. Goodwill, 19 August 1940, PRO HS 5/60; Lieutenant Colonel W.F. Stirling to G. Pollock, 8 September 1940, PRO HS 5/60
- ⁵² R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.44
- ⁵³ B. Fischer, *Albania at War* p.106
- ⁵⁴ E. Barker, *British Policy in South East Europe in the Second World War* p.49
- ⁵⁵ B. Fischer, *Albania at War* pp.106-9
- ⁵⁶ Cipher telegram, R.G. Searight to I. Pirie, 10 January 1941, PRO HS 5/61
- ⁵⁷ SOE War Diary, January 1941, PRO HS 7/212
- ⁵⁸ Cipher telegrams, T. Masterson and D. Oakley-Hill to SOE London, 18 December 1940, PRO HS 5/61
- ⁵⁹ H.G. Watts to SOE London, 21 December 1940, PRO HS 5/61
- ⁶⁰ SOE London to G. Pollock, 21 December 1940, PRO HS 5/63
- ⁶¹ Cipher telegram, Lieutenant Colonel W.F. Stirling to SOE London, 8 January 1941, PRO HS 5/61
- ⁶² 'Albania', memorandum by I. Pirie to T. Masterson and D. Oakley-Hill, 24 January 1941, PRO HS 5/63
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ 'Report on SO Organisation and Plans in the Balkans', G. Taylor to Sir Frank Nelson (Head of SOE), 26 February 1941, PRO HS 5/166
- ⁶⁵ SOE War Diary, March 1941, PRO HS 7/214
- ⁶⁶ D. Oakley Hill, *An Englishman in Albania* p.124
- ⁶⁷ Cipher telegrams, T. Masterson and D. Oakley-Hill to SOE London, 18 December 1940, PRO HS 5/61; 'Plan for Revolt in Northern Albania' by D. Oakley-Hill, January 1941, PRO HS 5/63
- ⁶⁸ Untitled, undated memorandum by Lieutenant Colonel W.F. Stirling, August-September 1940, PRO HS 5/60
- ⁶⁹ J. Pearson to G. Taylor, 3 December 1940, PRO HS 5/63
- ⁷⁰ 'Albania', memorandum by Lieutenant Colonel E.C. de Renzy Martin, c. December 1940, PRO HS 5/61
- ⁷¹ Information from the SOE Adviser to the FCO; J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* pp.24-27
- ⁷² J. Hanau to G. Taylor, 10 May 1940, PRO HS 5/60
- ⁷³ J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* p.29

⁷⁴ B. Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania* (Boulder, Co.: East European Monographs, 1984) pp.114-115. Ceno's death was avenged in dramatic scenes during the trial of his murderer in Prague. Gani Bey Kryeziu and his personal servant, one Aziya Vuciterna, were in attendance. The defendant had just admitted his guilt when Vuciterna leapt forward and shot him. Gani later professed innocence of any plot and horror at his servant's actions. Vuciterna, for his part, claimed he had been so overcome by the defendant's 'insolent and provocative behaviour' during his examination that his own action had been impulsive. The fact that the examination was conducted in Italian, which Vuciterna did not speak, and that his revolver was loaded with dum-dum bullets might suggest a pre-meditated attack. As Bernd Fischer writes, 'no clear motives for either murder were ever established, leaving room for endless rumours and speculation'. Fischer himself is unconvinced that Ceno's murder was carried out on Zog's orders. A more likely scenario, he considers, was an Italian-backed plot aimed at severing the links between the pro-Yugoslav Ceno and Belgrade. B. Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania* p.115. The Kryeziu family, however, is convinced that Zog was to blame; likewise, that Gani had ordered the murder of his brother's assassin. Conversation, M. Kryeziu and L. Kryeziu to author, 11 November 2000.

⁷⁵ B. Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania* pp. 186-90

⁷⁶ 'Possibilities of Action in Albania, based on a conversation with Gani Beg [sic]', memorandum by J. Amery, 4 May 1940, PRO HS 5/60; see also J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* p.36

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.29

⁷⁸ Cipher telegram, Foreign Office (Southern Department) to War Office, 28 January 1941, PRO HS 5/7

⁷⁹ Note by L. Sheridan of SOE London, 8 December 1940, PRO HS 5/63

⁸⁰ B. Fischer, *Albania at War* p.110

⁸¹ 'Albanian Revolt', memorandum by Lieutenant Colonel E.C. de Renzy Martin to SOE London, 29 December 1940, PRO HS 5/61

⁸² 'Plan for Revolt in Northern Albania' by D. Oakley-Hill, January 1941, PRO HS 5/63

⁸³ SOE War Diary, 1940, PRO HS 7/211

⁸⁴ 'Albania', memorandum by Lieutenant Colonel E.C. de Renzy Martin, c. December 1940, PRO HS 5/61

⁸⁵ Report by Colonel Simic, 17 May 1940, passed by J. Hanau to SOE London on 21 May 1940, PRO HS 5/60

⁸⁶ D. Oakley-Hill, *An Englishman in Albania* pp.124-5

⁸⁷ For more on the friction between Zog and the Catholic church in pre-war Albania, see B. Fischer, *Albania at War* pp.53-5

⁸⁸ Report by Colonel Simic, 17 May 1940, passed by J. Hanau to SOE London on 21 May 1940, PRO HS 5/60

Chapter Two

Margaret Hasluck, SOE and Albania

1942-44

Margaret Hasluck is best known as an ethnographer. Her *Unwritten Law in Albania*, published posthumously by Cambridge University Press in 1954, is still the authoritative tract on the phenomenon of the Albanian blood feud in the first half of the twentieth century.¹ But memoirs and histories of SOE tell of her service in a different field: her two years' work from February 1942 for SOE's Albanian Section. For over a year she was the only person in the organisation focused full-time on the country. Sent to Istanbul 'under an assumed name with disguised appearance and dyed hair', she liased with Albanian exiles and émigrés, collected intelligence and recruited Albanians for SOE employment against Axis forces in occupied Albania.² At SOE Headquarters in Cairo (SOE Cairo), as the Section grew in size and importance, she continued to gather intelligence and briefed British officers before they left to assist the Albanian resistance. In 1944 she received an MBE for her efforts.

Drawing on SOE's files and the memories of some of its officers, this chapter presents the first detailed account of this brief but eventful period of Margaret Hasluck's life. Officers whom she taught have written since, and fondly, of a strong-willed woman who applied herself to the tasks at hand with great industry and devotion. David Smiley, second-in-command of the first SOE mission to Albania, recalled that this 'elderly lady... with greying hair swept back into a bun and a pink complexion with bright blue eyes' reminded him 'of an old-fashioned English nanny. Full of energy and enthusiasm, she was totally dedicated to her beloved Albania'.³ Yet officers with whom she worked at SOE headquarters found such total dedication difficult to deal with; Jon Naar, the Albanian Section's military intelligence officer, compared her more to characters played by 'the film actress Margaret Rutherford... that kind of school mistress type, both physically and mentally'.⁴ SOE's papers now confirm that Hasluck was so vocal in predicting that Albania's Partisan movement spelt doom for the country's future that SOE staff officers, less concerned by the Partisan threat, feared her emotional and forthright views were more of a hindrance to their work than a help. Her career with SOE and battles with its staff illuminate some

of the factors at work on British wartime policy towards Albania, and the intensity of feeling and disagreement, especially over whether communist guerillas deserved support, that that policy could induce. They also illustrate the kinds of problem encountered when secret organisations find themselves stumbling through new and confusing worlds, then discover the experts selected to guide them have limits – and minds – of their own.

By February 1944, when Hasluck resigned from SOE, its staff officers knew well that she opposed any policy that favoured Albania's Partisans over anticommunist groups. That opposition may have been less evident had Hasluck not, when replaced as Head of the Albanian Section in the spring of 1943 by Major Philip Leake, retained responsibility for sifting and summarising intelligence for SOE's main headquarters in London and other decision-makers. This offered her an important platform on which to put over her own views. As shall be seen, she used it freely to express her conviction that, on political grounds, the Allies should be less eager to support those fighting the Germans and more sympathetic towards those refusing to do so. 'You will know already that I have little sympathy with the [Partisan movement]', she informed London on 1 January 1944, 'because it lets itself be led by the nose by the Communist section'.⁵

In February 1942, when John Bennett, then of its Yugoslav Section in Cairo, brought her into the organisation, SOE knew little enough of Albania and would have been hard-pressed to predict the conflict of interests that emerged nearly two years later.⁶ By 1942, SOE had identified from the pattern of Axis influence and expansion a number of countries potentially suited to its unique brand of underground warfare. It had also identified a need within SOE for expert advice, such as that which Bennett expected from Hasluck, on many of those countries. She had then been living in Cairo for nearly a year, having fled Athens ahead of Germany's triumphant sweep through the Balkans in the spring of 1941. Cairo was also from where SOE's Balkan operations were then launched and directed, although these were still early days: that same German sweep had carried away all of SOE's earlier Balkan plans and severed most of its contacts. Greece and Yugoslavia were now under German control; and the Greek defeat had allowed Italy to consolidate its occupation of Albania. By 1942, however, rumours and reports of resistance throughout the Balkans were beginning to grow and with them SOE's interest in its value and potential. In late January, SOE

London asked SOE Cairo to verify ‘a long story of unrest and rising in Albania’ obtained from the Allied Press correspondent in Jerusalem. SOE had had no one focused on Albania since the previous spring and Bennett’s approach to Hasluck came a few days later.⁷ In early March, London cabled Cairo again, this time about the possibility of encouraging that unrest. On 25 March, Hasluck left for Istanbul to open up lines into Albania and find volunteers from Turkey’s Albanian community to be specially trained, with a view to SOE returning them one day to their homeland.⁸

The credentials of this accomplished and studious woman, who had spent nearly two decades in Albania between the wars, may well have appeared strong to Bennett and SOE Cairo. Born Margaret Masson Hardie on 18 June 1885, she was a farmer’s daughter from Drumblade, in Moray, Scotland. Educated at Elgin Academy, she then took first class degrees in classics from Aberdeen University and Newnham College, Cambridge. In 1911, she arrived in Anatolia as the first woman to be nominated for a studentship at the British School at Athens (BSA), joining her first dig under Aberdeen’s eminent archaeologist and classical scholar, Sir William Ramsay.

In Athens she met Frederick William Hasluck, Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge, and leading light at the BSA; they married at her home in Scotland in 1912. During the First World War, alongside her husband and other members of the BSA, she worked in Athens for British Intelligence (albeit in a minor role, although Compton Mackenzie would write of her working along similar lines in London in the autumn of 1915 and she herself would later boast, as she had a tendency to do, of having smuggled messages between Athens and London in her garters).⁹ Tragedy followed: in 1916 Frederick’s ailing health took the couple to Switzerland, where they lived in a series of sanatoria until he died in 1920 at the age of forty-two.¹⁰ Returning to Britain, she devoted herself to assembling and editing his notes for posthumous publication, most notably those that became *Athos and its Monasteries* and the acclaimed *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*.¹¹

Only when most of that work was done did Hasluck return to her own career and interests and develop the specialised knowledge for which SOE recruited her. In 1921, with a travelling fellowship from Aberdeen University and the ‘zeal for folklore studies’ that R.M. Dawkins, writing her obituary, would attribute to her collaboration with Frederick, she threw herself into fieldwork in Macedonia and Albania where her

husband had studied the Bektashi, a Dervish sect.¹² In the opinion of Marc Clark, she became ‘the first west European scholar, female or male, to do systematic, sustained, ethnographic work’ in large parts of the region.¹³ Clark’s short essay, a recent contribution to a collection on women scholars and travellers in the Balkans, is the only published biography of Hasluck available of any kind, other than Dawkins’s obituary. It is penetrating about her personality and pre-war life and work. From 1923 she lived in Albania and it is clear from Clark’s research that she journeyed all over the country, alone, in all weathers and by all modes of transport, spending whole seasons in the mountains. Collecting folktales and songs was a constant passion but her extensive notes and data covered a wide variety of topics: from local dialects, coinage and customs, to witches, blood feuds and botany. She sent dozens of artefacts to Aberdeen’s Marischal Museum. Had she only published more and for a wider audience it is possible that she would have become as well known as her contemporary, Edith Durham, Edwardian author of *High Albania* and *The Burden of the Balkans*.¹⁴ Indeed in methodology and commitment she far surpassed Durham, who never learnt the language and spent just a fraction of Hasluck’s sixteen years in Albania.

If Hasluck’s academic background and her years in Albania were clear in 1942 to SOE Cairo, less so might have been the strength and intimacy of her bond to Albania and its people and of her personal interest in their fate at the hands of the warring powers. By the time of the Italian invasion in April 1939, Albania was effectively Hasluck’s adopted home. For nearly twenty years she had watched it become a place of relative peace, monarchy and established order, and, though she did not think that order perfect and had no special affection for King Zog, counted close friends among the establishment. The closest was Lef Nosi, a distinguished Albanian patriot and one-time minister in Albania’s first government. He shared her interests in antiquity and folklore and lived in the town of Elbasan, where Hasluck settled in 1935 and built a house the following year.¹⁵ Whether Hasluck was Nosi’s ‘mistress’, as insinuated by Albanian communist writers after the war, is impossible to say.¹⁶ What is certain is that the couple’s pre-war relationship remained significant for Hasluck throughout her time with SOE. In August 1942, news – ‘sad news for me personally’ – would reach her that Nosi, now aged over seventy, had been interned by the Italians in Italy. ‘[S]uspect to them first as a patriot and again as belonging to the Orthodox

faith' he had apparently been imprisoned when the Italians attacked Greece in October 1940, spending 'six weeks in a common jail in Elbasan' and then 'several more' in Shkodra.¹⁷ Worse was to follow. In October 1943 Nosi became a member of the so-called Council of Regents, the puppet Albanian rulers set up by the Germans. Hasluck's efforts to protect the Regents from Allied condemnation as collaborators proved fruitless and only worried SOE about where her loyalties lay. In 1946, Albania's new communist rulers tried Nosi as a traitor and shot him.

Hasluck's relationship with Nosi might help explain why she was expelled from Albania in April 1939: an incident that also reveals something of the difficult personality SOE encountered later. According to Hasluck, the Italians, on the eve of their invasion and suspecting her of being a spy, had demanded that Zog expel her.¹⁸ Albanian communist historiography is more certain on the matter. Enver Hoxha, the country's post-war communist dictator, accuses both Hasluck – 'this long-term British agent' – and Nosi – '[who] must have been an agent of the Intelligence Service, because he lived and collaborated with an Englishwoman' – of having spied for Britain.¹⁹ Typically, neither Hoxha nor any other communist writer provides any evidence to support the charge. For their part, SOE's papers only confirm that in April she left for Athens.²⁰ But as Clark writes, though she was probably not a spy in any official sense,

Hasluck would not have helped her case by claiming, as she often did, to have high-level contacts and influence, or by telling people of her earlier work with British Intelligence. Given her travels, she was indeed well positioned to spy. There is, however, no evidence that the Foreign Office formally employed her as such. There was probably no need. She liked to gossip, and she had an obvious interest in staying on good terms with British officials. During their occasional meetings she probably told them everything she knew.

Moreover, if the Italians wanted her to leave, 'Zog may have been happy to oblige. Lef Nosi was not in his favour, as evidenced by restrictions on Nosi's travel, and Hasluck was quite capable of making her own enemies. Barely a year before her expulsion she had described Zog as "an enigmatic personality given... to politely deluding his visitors"²¹

Clark's study of Hasluck's two years in Athens, from 1939 until 1941, reveals more of this brisk, abrasive persona. The BSA, to which she returned, provided Clark

later with ‘a mine of anecdotes; everyone with the school has a Hasluck story’.²² But he found the most vivid, if unflattering, picture of Hasluck in Olivia Manning’s novel *Friends and Heroes*, the third and final volume of Manning’s Balkan Trilogy, set in Athens in 1940-41.²³ Clark reveals that Hasluck, who crossed paths briefly with Manning whilst in Athens during the war, was the inspiration for Manning’s character of Mrs Brett, who ‘bustles through the book organising social events, talking loudly and rudely, gossiping and expounding, denouncing her enemies and celebrating her friends... Brett’s courage and vitality, her taste for adventure, her eagerness to tell the tale, her fascination with ‘wild’ people, her vanity and flirtatiousness, her aggressive curiosity and determination to probe others’ lives – these qualities are routinely attributed to Hasluck by family and colleagues’.²⁴

Grounds now exist on which to challenge the claim, found in Julian Amery’s account of his own wartime activities with SOE, that Hasluck had played a notable role in Athens in 1940-41 for Section D and SOE during the earlier period of planning on Albania. In *Sons of the Eagle*, Amery states that Section D’s Athens office recruited her in the spring of 1940 to be an ‘adviser’ on the country.²⁵ In SOE’s files, a memorandum of Hasluck’s from 1943 suggests she ‘briefed’ Albanians in Athens as early as August 1939.²⁶ And in a post-war letter to the archaeologist and historian Sir John Myres, Hasluck even claimed she began that work almost immediately after arriving in Athens in the spring of 1939: a year before MI(R) and Section D hatched their plans for encouraging resistance in Albania.²⁷ Perhaps her activities in Athens were and have been exaggerated, for nothing in SOE’s extensive Albanian files suggests she ever worked for Section D or, before Bennett approached her in 1942, for SOE. Even the confidential Personal File kept on her by SOE gives no indication of any earlier Section D or SOE role, confining itself to stating that she was employed in the British Legation’s Press Office for the duration of her Athens stay.²⁸

There is another possibility. Hasluck may well have worked in Athens (and perhaps earlier, despite Clark’s scepticism) in some shape or form for Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, known more familiarly as MI6). SOE’s files reveal that, in Athens in May 1940, SIS’s ‘principal contact for Albania’ was ‘a lady’ whom Section D’s London headquarters felt its Athens office might approach through SIS for ‘expert advice’ on the country. Unfortunately the censor has carefully blacked out the woman’s name and it will remain hidden until the day the wartime records of SIS are

released.²⁹ Further evidence to support the SIS theory may be the indication that SIS later warned SOE in London against Hasluck's recruitment.³⁰

Quite how SIS knew of Hasluck or their grounds for caution are not stated. It was not long, however, before SOE officers expressed regret over having brought her on board. Neither the concern of those officers, nor much in fact of Hasluck's first year's work for SOE, has been evident before now, although Julian Amery's brief assessment, that she 'worked tirelessly to glean information' from Albanians in Istanbul and despatched to Cairo 'a continuous series of reports, memoranda, and telegrams', is certainly correct.³¹ That correspondence now lies open for public inspection in SOE's files, details all aspects of her work in 1942-43 and confirms that she threw herself into the task with spirit.

These papers shed further light on her abilities; they also reveal that her efforts met only with mixed success and soon drew criticism from her superiors in London. By the end of May 1942, Hasluck had found four young Albanians willing to be put through training at the British parachute and sabotage school in Palestine. Two more were brought on board by the time the party left for the school in July. Yet two other volunteers had backed out at the first mention of parachuting, while even those who wanted to go were under pressure to stay behind from elders among the exile community less keen to work with the British. Trustworthy couriers willing to carry messages to and from Albania were as hard to obtain. The first Hasluck despatched was 'an old man of Dibra, one-way only', at the end of April.³² Over the next few months, a few more couriers followed. Some went to contact guerilla leaders believed to be active, among them Muharrem Bajraktar, a northern Albanian chieftain reputed to be in occasional touch with General Draža Mihailović, the Chetnik leader in southern Serbia. Six hundred gold sovereigns were also sent. It was a slow, dangerous business: by November, only two couriers had succeeded in making the return journey; at least one other had been caught and imprisoned.³³ It was also largely reliant on the good will and patronage of prominent exiled and émigré Albanians: only in February 1943, and from Cairo, would Hasluck at last send out an Albanian courier prepared to do only SOE's work.³⁴

SOE officers in London held Hasluck at least partly responsible for this apparent lack of progress. Letters and notes circulated inside SOE London reveal that, by June 1942, Major Peter Boughey, of SOE's Balkan and Middle East desk and a

chief recipient of Hasluck's correspondence until late 1943, already feared she was 'not the right person for contacting agents and recruiting men to return to Albania'. In fact he considered her 'incapable of the job'. He had not been pleased to hear from SIS that the Italians were aware of SOE's work with Albanians in Istanbul (Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Ciano, apparently refers to it in his diaries).³⁵ Nor was Boughey much impressed by the sound of the two Istanbul moneychangers to whom Hasluck had paid a substantial commission (a third of the first four hundred sovereigns had gone straight into the moneychangers' pockets) to help send her couriers and the rest of SOE's money to Albania, or by the methods by which she professed to have won over her Albanian volunteers for specialist training in Palestine. 'According to her own correspondence', he wrote on 24 June to Lt Col James Pearson, Head of the Balkan and Middle East desk,

these recruits were in an almost starving condition, with a large number of debts. She approached them with a gift of money, new clothes and promised that their debts would be paid and that they should go and have a happy time in Palestine. It would appear almost unreasonable for these people to refuse such a glowing vista in front of them, even though in the end it would lead them to the mountainous hills of Albania! This form of recruiting does not enhance my confidence, either in the recruiting officer or in the recruits themselves'.

Boughey was especially concerned that news of poor security and the use of money 'in a way not calculated to obtain respect' might jeopardise SOE's hopes of a Treasury grant to fund future work in Albania.³⁶

Not all of Boughey's criticisms are fair, as Hasluck's contact and intelligence work was hampered by several factors out of her control. For one thing, she could do little about the poor availability of accurate, up-to-date information, and observed as early as April 1942 that Istanbul was unlikely to provide the torrent of useful intelligence that SOE had hoped it would:

The sources are scanty and not always reliable. Trade between Albania and Turkey has completely ceased so that Albanian merchants no longer come through, bringing solid news. A few sick people come with their attendant relatives, who bring scraps of information, but these make erratic couriers. "Tomori", the Fascist paper published at Tirana, half in Albanian and half in Italian, has

not arrived lately and is unlikely to arrive any more. Letters come through fairly quickly...

She added that most news stories necessarily came from 'the Balkan Press Translation Bureau, AP, United Press and Reuters'.³⁷ Not until after the first British officers sent into Albania in 1943 began transmitting and carrying documents out of the country direct was SOE to see a significant improvement in the quality of intelligence available.

Her contacts in Istanbul were of similar poor quality. As Hasluck explained to Cairo, three types of Albanian lived in the city: those that had emigrated for good and become Turkish subjects, those that were living as members of the Albanian colony, and those that had fled Albania as refugees at the time of the Italian invasion or since. Even those that were now Turkish subjects were impeded in their ability to visit Albania by Italy's controlling hand over the issue of visas, while the 'poverty and humble position' of those that made up the colony ruled them out of any useful employment by SOE. Among the refugees were a good number of army officers and men of political standing, but even when dealing with them Hasluck was hindered by the fact that, since their arrival in Istanbul, 'the exiles have all lost their tempers and quarrelled among themselves. They have separated into little groups, the members of one group not being on speaking terms with any other'.³⁸ Most Albanians she approached refused or proved too busy squabbling to help, or tried to make their assistance conditional on British compliance with their own demands. Others informed the Italians of Hasluck's activities.

Her efforts were also handicapped by having little to offer, other than money, to prospective informers, intermediaries or recruits. In March 1942, on leaving for Istanbul, Hasluck had been 'instructed [by SOE] that she must not give any political undertaking and... must aim at getting in touch with people who in the interests of Albania's future would work against the Axis forces'.³⁹ But finding Albanians prepared to fight blindly for the Allies, without any assurance as to what the Allies might have in store for Albania's future should they win the war, was easier said than done, as other SOE officers discovered. More anxious to allay the concerns of Greece and Yugoslavia, both of which laid claim to swathes of Albanian territory, the Foreign Office heard SOE's appeals for some form of guarantee of Albania's post-war independence and/or frontiers effectively with deaf ears, rewarding them at best with

statements worded so carefully that SOE's work scarcely benefited and left Britain prey to frustrated Albanians willing to play it off against others.⁴⁰ This may well explain stories of Hasluck's alleged 'ruthlessness' when dealing with Albanians, as told to Dale McAdoo of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) – broadly speaking the American equivalent of SOE – in the autumn of 1943. McAdoo, who was in Cairo at the time busily setting up an Albanian desk for OSS, had contacted several of the Albanians with whom Hasluck had been in touch. As he wrote to his superior in October 1943:

She has apparently approached every important Albanian in the Middle East with various half-baked schemes... [Many] claim to despise her. [Qemal] Butka, who seems to have been her chief victim, claims that she is crazy and takes a truly sadistic pleasure in pointing out that Albania is finished, that the Greeks are going to be given new territory because they are more adroit at dealing with the all-powerful British, and that the will of Great Britain is not to be questioned by mere Albanians.⁴¹

Hasluck was not the most tactful or patient of people, while it is quite probable that she resorted to warning Albanians in the strongest terms of the repercussions for their country should they refuse to help the Allies win the war. Indeed, SOE officers later in Albania would adopt that very approach to exert leverage. Butka, meanwhile, was an awkward customer, an 'ex-Mayor of Tirana, politician and intellectual' living in Palestine and described by SOE as 'very loth to accept money, and... continually agitating to be allowed to go his own way and follow his profession of architect in Turkey or Egypt'.⁴² Hasluck herself wrote of her dealings with him: 'after an eight hours' day I just have not got the physical strength to see somebody who is so touchy that you have to watch, not merely every word you say, but even every breath you draw, in case he takes offence'.⁴³ SOE had once toyed with, but ultimately been unable to support, an idea of Butka's for a recognised Albanian committee-in-exile. The stories told to McAdoo may say more about Butka, his friends, and their grudges against and lack of faith in the British, than they do about Hasluck. McAdoo himself would later regret having spent so long 'courting the Nostalgic Exile Faction in a sterile campaign for recruits'.⁴⁴

Indeed, the style and content of her reporting, which was discursive, often opinionated and heavy with conjecture and anecdote, appears to have been enough to

cause SOE officers in London to lose patience with Hasluck and confidence in her abilities. It certainly may explain some of the looser criticisms made of her by an increasingly irritated Peter Boughey. One early report from Istanbul merely told 'a queer story' of an Albanian who had recently arrived in Vienna from Turkey to be confronted by the Viennese authorities with the fragments of a confidential letter he thought he had torn up on the train. 'At first sight this seems a traveller's tale', Hasluck warned. 'On reflection one notes that any one who wished to destroy a compromising letter in a train would go to the lavatory to do so unseen and would most probably drop the pieces down the pan. It may be, then, that... the Germans have arrangements slung under the lavatory pans for catching incriminating papers'.⁴⁵

But Hasluck was not a trained intelligence officer. While working for SOE she undoubtedly displayed a loss of objectivity through intense and intimate immersion in her chosen subject. Some of her techniques in the selection, analysis and presentation of data were better suited, perhaps, to ethnographical research. But her audience expected fact that was hard, fast and to the point, with an indication that her work on establishing lines into Albania was secure, making progress and professionally done. Mildly diverting travellers' tales and lists of the difficulties she faced were not so welcome. Nor, for that matter, was Hasluck's unsettling response in June 1942 to news that the Turkish authorities knew of SOE's recruitment of 'Albanians to be parachuted back into Albania'. When informing London, Hasluck evidently hit the wrong note by making light of the leak and arguing that the Turks had no right to complain as such recruitment had precedents. 'Childish', scribbled Boughey next to one passage of Hasluck's letter that struck him as particularly flippant. ('Besides', she had written, 'who spoke of parachuting? There is no documentary evidence of it. Several of us have started making fun of the idea, saying that the Palestine party [i.e. the Albanians earmarked for training in Palestine] were [sic] only asked about it to test their courage'.) 'I give up' noted Pearson at the top of the page.⁴⁶ Eighteen months later, reactions inside SOE London to Hasluck's incoming correspondence remained much the same. 'The usual waffle', wrote Boughey across a letter of Hasluck's of late November 1943.⁴⁷

Despite Boughey's belief that 'anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of the Balkans, and of our work, could undertake the preliminary stages of our work back into Albania far better', Hasluck was not replaced.⁴⁸ He had identified something of

her erratic, irregular and emotional nature, but underestimated the value perceived by SOE Cairo of having recourse to first-hand knowledge and experience of Albania. Indeed, her retention may serve as a measure of the paucity of experts on Albania that SOE Cairo had to hand. When laying its earlier plans in 1940-41, SOE had relied heavily on the advice of W.F. Stirling, the former adviser to Zog, and Dayrell Oakley-Hill, the former inspector of Zog's gendarmerie. By 1942, however, Stirling was in Syria with a British Military Mission, Oakley-Hill in Germany in a prisoner-of-war camp and there was no one else available, other than Hasluck, whom SOE Cairo felt had the right qualities and was in the right place at the right time. As Cairo wrote in her defence in April 1943: 'She is the only person in the Middle East with a knowledge of the Albanian language, Albania and Albanians'. Without that 'intimate knowledge... it is quite impossible for us to obtain either the information necessary to plan operations or to be able to direct the operations of parties inside the country'.⁴⁹

That month SOE Cairo despatched its first mission to Albania, Hasluck having contributed much to its preparation, if little to the decision to send it. After returning, via Palestine, to Cairo the previous summer, she had continued to collect and collate intelligence and draw attention to Albania by passing reports to SOE London of growing resistance to the Italians, together with suggestions that the Allies somehow send the resisters help. But the decision to aid and encourage that resistance owed most to the general move in Allied strategy towards providing greater assistance to Balkan guerrillas everywhere. As the Chiefs of Staff instructed SOE in March 1943:

An intensified campaign of sabotage and guerrilla [sic] activities in the Balkans during the spring and summer is of the first strategic importance in order to impede the concentration and consolidation of German forces on the Eastern Front. Apart from direct assistance to Russia in this way, SOE operations must also be directed towards interrupting the despatch of oil, chrome and copper to Germany. At a later stage, they must also be co-ordinated with Allied plans. After the elimination of Italy, we must be ready to develop the maximum pressure on Germany's vital interests in the Balkans.⁵⁰

The mission's departure also owed a little to the enthusiasm of its twenty-four year old commander, Major Billy McLean, for exploring a country that SOE still considered, more or less, unknown territory. But Hasluck did play a significant role in briefing McLean about what SOE knew, which admittedly was not a lot, of which Albanians

might be contacted and trusted and where in Albania they might be found.⁵¹ She also identified what targets, such as chrome mines, there were to attack. And she persuaded McLean not to parachute into western Macedonia and head west to contact Muharrem Bajraktar, as he had initially proposed, but instead drop to northern Greece and lead his mission into southern Albania where he might find other guerilla bands. Though little was known of them, these bands seemed to occupy a less dangerous and more accessible region. McLean duly dropped into Greece, crossed into southern Albania and, in May 1943, found a Partisan army in the making. But if the switch led, unintentionally, to SOE's first contact with Albanian resistors being made with communist-led guerillas, it may have saved the lives of McLean and his team. Days before McLean left North Africa to parachute into Greece, another SOE mission, under Major Cliff Morgan, dropped to the spot McLean had first proposed. Morgan and his w/t operator, hoping to contact Mihailović's Chetniks, disappeared on arrival.⁵²

Shortly after McLean's mission went in, SOE Cairo began to address a few of the limitations of its one-woman Albanian Section by appointing trained staff officers to appropriate posts in planning and organisation and by replacing Hasluck, in May 1943, with Philip Leake as Section Head. Though Cairo would come to share some of Peter Boughey's concerns, at this stage these changes merely reflected the growing demand for more action in the Balkans and, with more missions in the pipeline, the corresponding need for a larger Section run on more regular operational lines. Leake, for his part, was thirty-seven years old, Oxford-educated and a former schoolmaster, and knew little of Albania. But he was descended from the intrepid Lieutenant Colonel William Martin Leake, who travelled widely and wrote much about the region in the early nineteenth century, and had several years' experience of SOE staff work and a fine reputation as an intelligent and likeable man of balanced and careful judgement. He assumed overall responsibility for the day-to-day functioning of the Section and for ensuring its operations reflected Allied policy and plans, as communicated to SOE by bodies like GHQ Middle East, the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff.

From May 1943 until she left the Section, Hasluck remained in Cairo working as Leake's assistant in a variety of roles. One of these was to brief and teach the rudiments of the Albanian language to young SOE officers destined to be sent into the

country. Those officers, few of them then even half her age, would recall Hasluck with fondness, albeit mixed with a certain benevolent amusement. In Cairo they came to know her affectionately as 'Fanny', a reference to the many younger women known by the initials of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) who worked for SOE in a variety of coding, mapping and other administrative jobs. Some of the FANYs themselves found Hasluck intimidating.⁵³ Even Hugh Munro, a Gordon Highlander and fellow Scot, who 'got on famously with her' before leaving for Albania in 1944, also 'got one hell of a bollocking off her once for barging into her room without knocking'.⁵⁴ But if she could lack a certain warmth, the fuss and motherly interest she tried to take of her officers is clear. Peter Kemp, who spent over six months in Albania with SOE, remembered 'a grey, birdlike woman in middle age whose frail appearance concealed extraordinary energy and determination... Her love for Albania gave her a special affection for us... we were "her boys" and in the field we would sometimes receive signals from her, giving us the map co-ordinates of some beauty spot nearby, where we could enjoy a picnic'.⁵⁵ Marcus Lyon, who spent nearly two years in Albania with SOE and the later Allied Military Mission, recalls Hasluck sending him and the rest of his mission out of their language lesson and into another room 'while she talked to [the mission's medical officer, Captain] Jack Dumoulin. When we came out she... was saying [to him] earnestly: "Now you must keep them away from the women. Syphilis you know"'.⁵⁶

Despite Hasluck's efforts, it still seems most officers felt much as Peter Kemp has written: 'that it was into an utterly unknown country that we were about to launch ourselves'.⁵⁷ And though missions were often assembled and sent off with such haste that there was simply not enough time to give anything more than the briefest of briefings, Hasluck did not always conceive of the exigencies of guerilla warfare. This is especially evident from her attempts to teach officers the language. 'An enchanting old lady', wrote the actor Anthony Quayle, who spent the first three-and-a-half months of 1944 in Albania with SOE, and 'a great authority on the ancient laws and language of the Albanians... but gave us little instruction in the kinds of questions we were most likely to need – questions such as: How deep is the river? Can the mules get across? Where are the enemy? How many of them are there?'.⁵⁸ Instead, her choice of phrases, topics and teaching methods was rather eccentric. Sitting before her in Cairo, in the hour-long language lessons they just had time to attend, her bemused

pupils found themselves translating texts from the small *Albanian-English Reader* she had had published in 1932. The texts consisted entirely of nursery rhymes and folktales Hasluck had herself collected from adults and children in Elbasan. As she argued in the *Reader*, folktales justified their selection as texts ‘because Albanian literature is still very scanty and folk-tales are accepted as one of the best mediums for learning to speak a language with a scanty literature’.⁵⁹ For Reginald Hibbert, who dropped into Albania in December 1943, ‘it was a bit like having Enid Blyton in charge’.⁶⁰ One particular tale, entitled ‘Kocamici’ (pronounced ‘Kotsa-mitsi’) and authored by Lef Nosi, she apparently had officers learn by heart. It told of an elderly, childless couple who adopted a mouse as their son, called him Kocamici, and then one day were distraught to discover he had fallen into a cooking pot boiling on the stove and had died. Several lines of the story are then repeated:

Kocamici ra në vorbet,
Plaka shkuli flokët,
Plaku shkuli mjrekrën

Which mean:

Kocamici fell in the pot,
The old woman tore out her hair,
The old man tore out his beard.⁶¹

The exercise had bizarre consequences for more than one British officer whose memory, at a later moment of crisis, seized on what little of Hasluck’s Albanian had managed to sink in. Marcus Lyon, who parachuted into the country in December 1943, recounts of his arrival:

Albania was approaching fast and... I came down with a crash into a high bush... [then] heard... a man running towards me in the snow. A bearded character covered with bandoliers and wearing a goatskin coat came towards me... I tried to remember some Albanian but the only thing I could think of was “Kocamici ra në vorbet” – the nursery rhyme Fanny Hasluck had taught us in our one Albanian lesson.⁶²

Anthony Quayle defused a heated council of war between rival guerilla leaders, at the moment one of them began to loosen his revolver in its holster, by breaking in suddenly to recite the same line.⁶³

Despite Peter Boughey's belief that anything Hasluck had to say was fairly useless or irrelevant, Reginald Hibbert has suggested that she could have answered 'any number of questions' on Albania had the SOE officers at her feet only known the right questions to ask.⁶⁴ And it is now clear that Leake and his staff did find her a mine of useful information when she was handled the right way and pressed on the right topic. Jon Naar, the Albanian Section's military intelligence officer, worked closely with Hasluck in the winter of 1943-44 and 'spent long hours going over maps and other documents in her flat'.⁶⁵ He recalls that she proved 'enormously helpful' in his allotted task of planning and plotting SOE operations in Albania.⁶⁶ 'Leake and others said get all you can because she is one of our few resources... But she was generous with her information, and I got in some really specific discussions about terrain because we were looking for the kind of roads where ambushes might be carried out... She'd ramble on saying "Oh yes, we had a marvellous picnic around that area", but I could get fairly specific information about not only the terrain but [also] what kind of people might be living [there]'.⁶⁷

Naar adds, however, that Leake 'did kind of warn me that, number one, she was a bit eccentric and, number two, her bias was certainly very heavily right-wing'. It was to be that 'right-wing bias', reflected in her stance on which Albanians the Allies should support and which should be condemned as collaborators, that SOE came to deem an intolerable threat to its ability to execute Allied plans. This was a matter that appeared to Allied observers and policy-makers to be coming to a head by the end of 1943. Until then, British policy towards Albania had been largely non-committal. In line with a 1942 agreement over global spheres of influence, Britain had primacy over the Americans when it came to Balkan strategy and, accordingly, took the lead in developing Allied operations in Albania and the policy that guided them. But since Britain refused to recognise any exiled Albanian monarch, government or committee on the grounds that none were respected or united enough, the first SOE mission sent to Albania was able to pledge support to any Albanian willing to fight the common enemy. Indeed, little was known about Albanian guerillas or what divisions might exist between them until that mission stumbled upon the Albanian Movement of

National Liberation (the *Levicija Nacional Clirimtarë* or LNC: the so-called 'Partisans').

This was the movement to which Hasluck, by the end of 1943, had become unashamedly hostile. Set up largely on the initiative of Enver Hoxha's new Communist Party of Albania in September 1942, the Movement of National Liberation had proclaimed itself open to all Albanians, regardless of religion, ethnicity or politics, who wished to fight all Fascist invaders and traitors and set up a free, democratic and independent Albania. And to begin with, combined resistance had grown. SOE officers reported to their Cairo headquarters that, although unease and occasional clashes were evident between certain sections, the cohesion of the Partisans seemed fairly strong. Intelligence summaries compiled in Cairo by Hasluck expressed surprise at 'the pro-Russian sympathies' of some of the Partisans but demonstrated little concern.⁶⁸ 'Communism of an apparently innocuous kind has recently made headway but it has not disturbed the unity of the guerilla elements' read an SOE 'Appreciation' on Albania, drawn up very probably by Hasluck, of June 1943. 'As a concession to the Communists all guerillas give the clenched fist salute, and in return the Communists wear the eagle of Albania in addition to the red star. The Communists represent only about 20% of the Movement of National Liberation, but make up for their lack of numbers by their activity'.⁶⁹

Yet the collapse of the Italians in September 1943, followed by the immediate German occupation of Albania instead of the hoped-for Allied invasion, saw this coalition fall apart and civil war break out. Sensing that their immediate fate might lie now in their own hands, Albanians across the country turned their attention to seizing or securing post-occupation power. With the influence of communists among the Partisan leadership growing steadily, supporters of the exiled King Zog (Zogists) stopped fighting and split from the movement. Soon they opened talks with the anti-Zogist but fiercely anticommunist *Balli Kombëtar* (BK). Set up in November 1942 as a direct response to the rise of the Movement of National Liberation, broadly speaking the BK was a moderate, liberal party that sought to safeguard what it saw as Albania's true borders and pre-war social, economic and political structure (except for King Zog). Though the BK had taken part in some early attacks on the Italians it had stopped fighting too, anxious to conserve its strength for the coming struggle against those it felt posed the greatest threat: the Partisans. At the end of October 1943, the

BK's central council reached an accommodation with the Germans; by December, much of the movement had slipped into open collaboration and joint German-BK bands were in action against the Partisans. Keen to fan the flames of civil war and so minimise resistance, the Germans also set up a puppet government, united against communism, under a collection of respected elder statesmen known as the Council of Regents. Other 'Nationalists' (to use SOE's collective term for most Albanians unsympathetic to communism), including the Zogists, preferred to remain aloof: maintaining contact with Germans, outright collaborators and SOE officers, but staying neutral until concrete grounds convinced them of the best way to jump.

With personnel now attached to guerilla bands the length of the country – by mid-September 1943 there were eight British officers and fifteen NCOs in various missions around Albania – SOE was faced with the problem of how to respond. In October, SOE infiltrated Brigadier E.F. 'Trotsky' Davies to command those missions and clarify this confusing picture for the benefit of Allied policy-makers. His nickname notwithstanding, Davies was a regular, military-minded and mostly conventional officer of the Royal Ulster Rifles who had joined SOE in August.⁷⁰ Initially earmarked for Yugoslavia but switched to Albania, he parachuted into the country on 12 October. By mid-December, he had met leaders from all three principal groups – the Partisans, BK and Zogists – and had reached a decision on which Albanians to support, based on an assessment of the short-term military gain to be had from giving help to those that deserved it. On 17 December 1943, in a message transmitted to SOE Cairo, Davies urged the Allies to condemn the BK and Zogists as well as the Regents as collaborators and give all-out support to the Partisans, the only Albanians still fighting the Germans. Both the BK and Zogists, Davies stressed, had failed to fight the Germans despite repeated promises and opportunities to do so and were employing Britain's failure to denounce even the Regency government as evidence of Allied sympathy, while mixed German and BK forces were now attacking the Partisans.

On hearing in Cairo of Davies's proposals, however, Hasluck took against them at once. As she wrote to SOE in London in early February 1944:

On 17.12.43 Trotsky signalled that we must denounce certain Albanians by name. On receipt of this signal Major Leake paid me one of his rare visits and said that it only remained for us to obey

Trotsky loyally. I replied that I was a civilian and owed my loyalty to common sense; that Trotsky had not been long enough in the country to judge fairly, and that I should fight his signal [of 17 December] until more support came in for his view.⁷¹

This reaction was in keeping with the vigorous defence she had mounted of the Regency government since October.

Both Hasluck's views on the issue and her ability to voice them can be illustrated by her Fortnightly Intelligence Summary of 15 December 1943, circulated as far as the Foreign Office in London and described by Reginald Hibbert as an 'eloquent apologia for the Regency government'.⁷² Writing two days before Davies advised all-out support for the Partisans, Hasluck argued that the government's decision to work with the Germans deserved to be seen not as reflecting any political or ideological alignment with the German cause, but as a patriotic attempt to ensure the protection of order and stability in Albania. She concluded:

The lines of the government's policy would meet with our warm approval if we were not at war with the country whose armed forces now occupy Albania... They have further appealed to the youthful to avoid civil war and to preserve intact the Albania with which they, the elderly men in the government, have done but which they, the young, are to inherit tomorrow. Indeed, these elderly men must be greatly pained as they watch the chaos into which the guerilla movement has plunged the country... They grew up to struggle for independence, many... by guerilla war... a few like Lef Nosi... by years of imprisonment, internment and exile. Independence achieved, they set their faces, Moslems as much as Christians, towards the West and they won for themselves and helped the younger generation to win a certain degree of western civilisation... Now they see the clock put back to 1920 or earlier, arms again in every man's hand, human life counted as naught, and anarchy rampant.

They would be less than human if they did not ask if the benefit to the Allied war effort which accrues from the run-away tactics of the guerillas is worth the political and economic damage to the country which they cause.⁷³

In other of her correspondence and to SOE staff officers with whom she worked, Hasluck was less implicit in acknowledging the stated desire of the Regents to defend Albania from communism. To SOE London she warned openly that the Partisans were not to be trusted as they clearly had more on their minds than a patriotic desire to

simply rid the country of Germans. As evidence, she pointed to recent Partisan propaganda directed against the Regents that contained, as she wrote in January 1944, unfounded 'personal abuse of the character and patriotism of men who have been known to me for 20 years... It is now plain as a pikestaff to me that we can never satisfy the LNC... Personally speaking, I can never believe another word they say'.⁷⁴ She also drew attention to a secret Partisan circular, brought out of Albania at the end of November 1943, that indicated the Partisan leadership had instructed its units to 'eliminate' the BK and impress on the people that the BK had compelled the Partisans to take that step. She wrote on 6 December: 'I maintain that, if we align ourselves with the men who produced this LNC circular, we shall do grievous mischief to our own war effort. The only policy for us is quiescence'.⁷⁵

But however much Hasluck tried to vouch for the Regents and excuse their behaviour, all that was irrelevant for SOE. As Philip Leake's answers to an internal questionnaire, circulated amongst the Cairo Country Sections by their new commander in December, make clear, SOE's job was to support any Albanians committed to fighting the Germans and not to worry about anything else:

Q.1. *What is your military object?*

Answer. The military object of [the] Allied Military Mission, Albania, as defined by [the Commander-in-Chief, GHQ Middle East], is to kill Germans.

Q.2. *What political assumptions are you at present working on?*

Answer. That HMG is not interested in Albanian internal politics and that the Mission is free to afford assistance to whatever elements it considers are resisting or are likely to resist the Germans irrespective of their politics.

Q.3. *What political and military questions do you require a firm directive on in order to function without continual reference to higher authority?*

Answer. None. The present position is that the Head of the Mission [i.e. Davies]'s political views have been accepted by the Foreign Office who do not propose to change their policy unless he should so recommend.⁷⁶

Transmitted three days later, Davies's proposals to break with the BK and Zogists, condemn the Regents and only support the Partisans were wholly in line with this brief. That the Partisans, as Davies himself suspected, may have deliberately precipitated the outbreak of civil war mattered little. No one but the Partisans were fighting the Germans; the Germans were being aided by BK and government forces: those were the facts on which Davies felt compelled to act. Hibbert writes that Hasluck's 15 December summary 'puts the anti-LNC [i.e. anti-Partisan] case admirably, better and more convincingly than we usually heard it put in Albania. But of course it was the Germans who had put the process of political and economic damage in train, not the guerillas and Partisans, and the only purpose in sending British officers to Albania was to step up the fight against Germany'.⁷⁷

On receipt of Davies's recommended policy, Hasluck's defence became desperate. On 19 December 1943 she wrote to London disagreeing 'profoundly' with the proposal to censure the Regents, 'not because two of them [Lef Nosi and Mehdi Frasheri] have been for so long my friends, but because I think it would be the highest unwisdom to take such a step'. Again she portrayed those two as patriots and men of honour, but this time added she was certain they must have been 'threatened with a German concentration camp' to have agreed to sit on the Council. No evidence existed then (or exists now) to suggest that they had ever been threatened in this way; indeed, no rumours of any sort of coercion appear to have reached Cairo. (Bernd Fischer's recent work on captured German documents does suggest that the Regents were threatened with a full military occupation of the country if they proved obstructive or reluctant to help, although the extent to which this explains the Regents' willingness to collaborate is unclear.)⁷⁸ Hasluck, however, was adamant: 'The Germans are simply fiends incarnate. They have taken the best men in the country and forced them into the last possible position they would have chosen except under some dire compulsion'. She concluded: 'Germans or no Germans, I am sticking by my friends in their hour of trial'. On receiving Hasluck's letter, Major Eddie Boxshall, of SOE London's Balkan desk, highlighted that sentence and, summing up the essence of SOE's position, commented against it in pencil: 'But does this really help our war effort!?' Passing the letter to his superior Lt Col David Talbot-Rice, Boxshall added in a short covering note: 'I am afraid that Mrs Hasluck's many years of residence in Albania render her unable to take a dispassionate and detached view of the problems arising out of the

present position Albania finds herself in'. Talbot-Rice agreed: 'I think we must abide by Brig. Davies' ideas rather than these'.⁷⁹

In a final attempt to shore up her case, Hasluck contrived to argue that, since the Partisan resistance seemed all but finished owing to recent and successful German drives, the Allies should stop encouraging it and thereby keep the Nationalists on-side. She first tried this tack in late November 1943, when, making rather selective use of genuine reports of heavy Partisan losses, she wrote to Boxshall: 'So here go the partisans of Peza, Berat, Valona and Kicevo. It does not look good, does it? I feel more strongly than ever, and hope you will agree, that non-intervention on our part is the only card to play now. Otherwise we get the Balkom [i.e. BK] and all the frightened people in the country against us'.⁸⁰ The Partisans were certainly hard-pressed, but by January 1944 Hasluck had taken to massaging the intelligence picture to drive her point home. After exaggerating the plight of the Partisans to suggest they were truly doomed, her Fortnightly Intelligence Summary of 9 January concluded: 'The Albanian Civil War is ending, healing from within. Its disappearance leaves the Albanians free to think once more of the invader. Soon most of the country will go Balkom... We must, consequently, reckon with the Balkom for our war effort... we need not fear this issue'.⁸¹ The overseas head of the OSS Albanian Section, Harry T. Fultz, a civilian who had spent many years managing the American Technical School in Tirana before the war, read his copy of Hasluck's summary with amazement and alarm. On 18 January, to the overseas commander of all OSS Balkan sections, Major Robert Koch, Fultz carefully pointed out how the summary was 'directly at variance with reports' sent out of Albania by Allied officers and warned:

Whoever wrote the summary seems to have overlooked facts and come out strongly for Zogists and Balkom. Some of the alleged facts are based, it would seem, definitely on propaganda leaflets rather than on sober unbiased reporting of bits of evidence as it is collected... Almost the entire presentation seems to have been distorted in an attempt to make out a case for individuals and factions who do not have a very good case to date.

The next day Koch raised the matter with Lieutenant Colonel Bill Harcourt, Philip Leake's superior. Harcourt 'agreed with Mr Fultz'.⁸²

In fact, moves were already underway to limit Hasluck's influence and intelligence duties inside SOE, where it is apparent that she and Leake did not see eye-to-eye. As Jon Naar recalls, 'she was very emotional and... hostile to anyone such as Leake who would even consider working with "those people" – i.e. the Partisans'.⁸³ On 18 January 1944, Leake wrote to the commander of SOE's Balkan Sections in Cairo: 'The present situation is that Mrs Hasluck functions independently of the Section Head and is responsible without reference to him for compiling the fortnightly Appreciation and handling all matters concerned with propaganda, a state of affairs which is obviously absurd'. He recommended that he (Leake) take over control of propaganda and compilation of the Appreciations, leaving Hasluck as 'general advisor on Albanian affairs'.⁸⁴

Hasluck put up a brief resistance, complaining to Eddie Boxshall on 9 February that she was not prepared to give 'unthinking or "shut-eye" loyalty such as subordination to [Major Leake] would require. He does not suffer correction easily, and I think he needs a little. I am afraid I think stubbornly that, if there is to be one voice in [SOE's Albanian Section], it had better be mine'.⁸⁵ But the outlook was bleak. Naar recalls of Hasluck's despair – and of a flash of wry humour – when he visited her home:

She had a most incredible apartment: wonderful Victorian décor, full of bric-a-brac, I remember; wonderful art deco lamps; a real mishmash of stuff. She also had a parrot, which was very articulate, called Winston [and] always kind of butting-in... I asked "Why did you call him Winston?" and she replied "It's the only time I ever get any kind of feedback from the Prime Minister".⁸⁶

By mid-February she had decided to resign. In a final note to Boxshall she wrote: 'our association has ended... I could not reconcile my conscience to doing what was asked of me, so there was nothing to be done except to go'.⁸⁷

Although Hasluck failed to save the Regency government from being condemned, SOE and the Foreign Office in London decided in January 1944 not to follow Davies's advice and denounce other Nationalists. The decision owed less to any sympathy for the Nationalists' stance than to a belief that the political and resistance picture was simply too confused to justify all-out support for the Partisans. It also owed something to a hope that the Nationalists would somehow see the error of

their ways and fight the Germans. That hope proved vain. Throughout 1944 the Zogists remained on the fence and the Regents, BK and other Nationalists continued to collaborate, while the misjudged policy of prolonging the presence of SOE missions with Nationalist groups heightened the innate distrust in Partisan minds of Allied motives. In November, when the Germans finally left Albania, the Partisan-Nationalist civil war was coming to a close and a communist regime seized power. In spite of the help the Partisans had received from SOE, anti-British fears were embedded in the communists' outlook. Hostile to the west, the regime then ruled Albania with a terrible hand for over forty years.

Given the nature of that regime, with hindsight it may be tempting to see Hasluck's warnings as justified. It was clear during the winter of 1943-44 that the Partisans hoped to overthrow the old order and that they did, to quote Hibbert, 'employ a selective terror designed to divide the ordinary villagers from those of their local leaders who could be classified as Ballist, nationalist or simply "reactionary"'. Secret circulars, like the one Hasluck latched onto in December 1943, which suggested the Partisan leadership was deliberately heightening the stakes by launching an offensive against the BK, were genuine. And though, as Hibbert shows, the total quantity of British arms sent to the Partisans throughout the war was small, the weapons, funds and training provided by SOE did prove valuable to the early organisation of the Partisans and their ability to survive German and BK attacks that winter. As is now generally accepted, once they had survived, the Partisans underwent such astonishing growth the following spring that their seizure of power was made all but inevitable.⁸⁸

Should Allied policy-makers have heeded Hasluck's advice, ceased supplying the Partisans the previous winter and stood aloof, on the grounds that sending arms to Albania heightened civil war? The question is academic: by concentrating on the war against Germany rather than on any future conflict with communism, by promising help to those fighting the Germans and by committing SOE missions to Albania, British policy towards the Balkans had largely precluded Hasluck's plea for non-intervention. At Tehran in December 1943, the three Great Powers had agreed that Tito's Yugoslav Partisans should be supported to the greatest possible extent; Albania was not mentioned, but the agreement reflected Britain's professed policy of helping any Balkan guerilla, regardless of his politics, to kill Germans.

Yet care should be taken not to see Hasluck as especially prescient of what a successful Partisan movement had in store for Albania. During the winter of 1943-44 it was far from clear even to British officers in Albania that the Partisans were set on establishing such a hideous regime as the one that eventually took power. Well into 1944, as Reginald Hibbert remembers, few SOE officers there considered communism in Albania 'to be very serious':

The Partisans wore the red star and spouted communist slogans, but it was rare to encounter even a senior Partisan who could talk intelligently about communism or any other political theory. Until the spring of 1944 it was impossible to believe that the Partisans could win control of the country or that, if they did, the country would find itself under a communist dictatorship. The Albanian Communist Party was clandestine and very small. What we found ourselves dealing with was the National Movement of Liberation... We could see that the top-most positions tended to be held by professed communists; but quite a few of these were unconvincing communists, and they were well diluted in the hierarchy by men whose communist loyalty was paper-thin, or non-existent. And the young men and women who provided the bulk of the [rank-and-file] were simple peasants or townees who saw themselves as patriots, working for the overthrow of a bad old order and the introduction of a new progressive regime.⁸⁹

Hasluck was unlikely to have been ignorant of the meaning and implications of communism. But it may be wondered if her intense and stated opposition to the Partisans, on the grounds that they were all communists, was more a symptom than a cause of her desire to invoke sympathy for her friends and the pre-war Albania she cherished. As Jon Naar recalls, 'she did know a lot of Albanians... all what she called "the right people" and they were indeed rightwing. She was obsessive in her anti-communism and warned vehemently against our having anything to do with the [Partisans], all of whom, she said, were agents of Moscow'.⁹⁰

Hasluck's 'plague on both houses' scenario also implies that, on political grounds, the Partisans should have received no more than the same Allied treatment accorded that winter to the Regents, BK and other Nationalists. Most Allied observers, however, asked the question: on what grounds were the BK and other Nationalists entitled to the same Allied treatment as the Partisans? Despite strong rumours that suggested Partisans everywhere had been ordered by their leaders to turn on the BK, it

was clear that the BK and other Nationalists responded readily and worked willingly with the Germans to remove the Partisan threat during the winter of 1943-44. Indeed, Nationalist resistance was virtually at an end long before the BK's central council issued orders to its own members on 7 October 1943 to cease hostilities against the Germans.⁹¹ It was true that some Nationalists had once fought Axis troops, and might have done so again had their leaders not removed them from the battle to refocus against the Partisans. But it was also true that, though the Nationalists knew the Allies' proclaimed war aims, virtually none protested publicly against the Germans or even the puppet government.⁹² Instead, as anxious as the Partisans to be in a position of dominance after the war, they sought German help to safeguard the old order, knowingly putting their own interests before those of the Allies. 'They are thus declaring themselves openly anti-ally and must be considered as quislings' wrote an anonymous observer in SOE London in early 1944 of Balli Kombëtar forces collaborating with the Germans. 'It would seem to be time that we disillusioned the gentlemen who direct Balkom [i.e. BK] of the idea that they can sow quislingism today and reap bouquets from the Allies tomorrow when the Germans withdraw'.⁹³

The Partisans, by contrast, were openly anti-German and there was no doubt that the Germans were as hostile towards them as they were towards the Allied powers. As Harry Fultz of OSS wrote in February 1944 of the idea of withholding arms from the Partisans, at least until their leaders agreed not to fight the BK:

Were the policy placed into effect... it would result in the LNC Partisans being denied arms and ammunition by the Allies while the Ballists [i.e. BK] would be operating under no such handicap. The Balkom [i.e. BK] receive arms and ammunition from the Germans. They would continue to receive arms and ammunition as well as technical assistance and training. If hard-pressed, undoubtedly they would receive the support of German troops. The Partisans on the other hand could expect to operate with steadily diminishing supplies of ammunition and of other essentials. In certain specific instances and areas there have been occasions when well-armed and well-supplied Ballists aided by German troops have swept over hungry, ragged Partisans reduced to their last few rounds of ammunition.

Fultz added that, were the BK, Zogists and other Nationalists resisting the Germans instead of helping them or staying neutral, more German troops would have to

garrison the country to keep order. Instead, 'perhaps [the German troops] who are not in Albania are today over at the Anzio Bridgehead killing Americans and British while we try to figure out ways to teach recalcitrant Partisans "a sharp lesson"'.⁹⁴ Many SOE officers attached to Partisan units in the field expressed similar sentiments. The words of Captain Brian Ensor, on Britain's failure in early 1944 to condemn collaborators, can suffice as an example. 'When, during the dark days of last winter, the enemy was most active [and] conditions at their worst' he reported later, 'it was Albanians who, by their knowledge of the country and their help as soldiers, made the job of the Germans fighting us so much easier... The fact that these Albanians belonged to the *Balli Kombëtar* party, who were being treated as harmless naughty boys by the British, made us ashamed'.⁹⁵

Margaret Hasluck never applauded the Nationalists' policy of collaboration. When 'Trotsky' Davies pressed British policy-makers to denounce all collaborators and aid only the Partisans, however, she sympathised instinctively with the Nationalists' plight and proved unable to maintain the detachment desired of her by SOE. As a confidential note found in her Personal File reads, 'her very intimate acquaintance with Albania led her to follow, perhaps somewhat too closely, her own ideas when they did not happen to coincide with HMG's policy'. Another note in that file records her recommendation for an MBE which concludes of her two years' work for SOE: 'Throughout, Mrs Hasluck has shown the most remarkable energy for her years and has devoted her gifts in intellect and knowledge unsparingly without regard to hours of work'. That assessment seems accurate also. Indeed, when she resigned, already seriously ill with advanced leukaemia, SOE considered privately that overwork might have exacerbated the condition.⁹⁶ After spells on health grounds in Switzerland, Cyprus, London and Scotland she finally moved to Dublin, where she died on 18 October 1948, maintaining her sympathy for Albania's Nationalists at the hands of Britain's wartime policy until the end.⁹⁷ It is hard to avoid concluding that that sympathy stemmed more from an emotional attachment to the Albania she had known before the war, than from a balanced appreciation of Allied war aims and the Albania of 1943-44.

¹ M. Hasluck, *The Unwritten Law in Albania* (Cambridge: CUP 1954)

² Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO

³ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* pp.8-9

⁴ Interview, J. Naar to author, 12 December 2000

⁵ 'Albanian Guerillas', memorandum by M. Hasluck to Major E. Boxshall, 1 January 1944, PRO HS 5/68

⁶ Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO

⁷ SOE War Diary, PRO HS 7/227

⁸ SOE War Diary, PRO HS 7/229

⁹ C. Mackenzie, *First Athenian Memories* (London: Cassell 1931) p. 198; M. Clark, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck' in J. Allcock and A. Young (eds) *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travellers in the Balkans* (Bradford: Berghahn Books, revised edition 2000) p.128. I am grateful to Marc Clark for his additional help and advice in the preparation of this chapter.

¹⁰ Convinced that the tuberculosis that slowly killed him had been contracted on a trip to Konina in 1913, she would apparently blame herself for his early death. The trip had been his wedding present to her; the destination had been her choice. M. Clark, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck' p.130

¹¹ F. Hasluck, *Athos and its Monasteries* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner 1924) and *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1929)

¹² R. Dawkins, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck', *Folklore* 60/2 (June 1949) p.291

¹³ M. Clark, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck' p.128

¹⁴ M.E. Durham, *High Albania* (London: 1909) and *The Burden of the Balkans* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons 1906)

¹⁵ The 12-room house still stands, though more recent building has encroached on the extensive rose and fruit gardens Hasluck had carefully laid out. Under communism the house became a maternity home; after 1991 it was run as an orphanage by a British couple. During the troubles of 1997 it featured briefly in the British press when the orphans were airlifted to safety by an SAS troop.

¹⁶ See, for example, E. Hoxha, *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori 1982) p.72

¹⁷ M. Hasluck to N. Davis, 7 August 1942, PRO HS 5/86

¹⁸ M. Clark, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck' p.137. In September 2000, as the author and Dr T. Winnifrith stood outside Hasluck's former home in Elbasan, a 90 year-old neighbour confided that the 'tall Englishwoman with the fruit garden' had been 'some sort of spy' until forced to flee the country when King Zog ordered her death.

¹⁹ E. Hoxha, *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania* pp.71-72

²⁰ Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO

²¹ M. Clark, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck' p.137; p.137n

²² *Ibid.* p.137 See also H. Waterhouse, *The British School at Athens: The First Hundred Years* (London: BSA, 1986) pp.142-3

²³ O. Manning, *Friends and Heroes* (London: Heinemann 1965)

²⁴ M. Clark, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck' pp.138-9

²⁵ J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* p.27

²⁶ 'SOE in Albania', memorandum from M. Hasluck to Lord Glenconner (Head of SOE Cairo), 17 May 1943, PRO HS 5/87

²⁷ M. Clark, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck' p.138n

²⁸ Information made available by the SOE Adviser

²⁹ G. Taylor to Sinclair, 25 May 1940, quoted in 'Ian Pirie on Greece 1940-42', PRO HS 7/150

³⁰ 'Albania', memorandum from Major P. Boughey to Lieutenant Colonel J. Pearson, 24 June 1942, PRO HS 5/102

³¹ Julian Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* pp.48-9

³² 'Albanian Situation', memorandum by SOE Cairo, 20 June 1942, PRO, HS 5/86

³³ SOE Albanian Section 'Fortnightly Appreciation', 29 November 1942, PRO HS 5/96

³⁴ 'Albania', memorandum by N. Davis to Lord Glenconner, 28 April 1943, PRO HS 5/87

³⁵ 'Albania', memorandum by Major P. Boughey to Lieutenant Colonel J. Pearson, 24 June 1942, PRO HS 5/102; G. Ciano, *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, ed. M. Muggeridge (London: Heinemann 1947) p.500

³⁶ 'Albania', memorandum by Major P. Boughey to Lieutenant Colonel J. Pearson, 24 June 1942, PRO HS 5/102

³⁷ M. Hasluck to SOE Cairo, 11 April 1942, PRO HS 5/86

³⁸ 'The Albanians in Istanbul', memorandum by M. Hasluck to SOE Cairo, 14 April 1942, PRO HS 5/107

³⁹ SOE War Diary, PRO HS 7/229

⁴⁰ See, for example, R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* pp.29-41, p.136

- ⁴¹ 'Proposals of Qemal Butka and others for an Albanian Committee', memorandum from D. McAdoo to E. Brennan and P. Adams, 13 October 1943, NARA RG 226 Entry 190 Box 178 Folio 1383. For more on OSS and Albania, see: R. Bailey, 'OSS-SOE relations, Albania 1943-44' in *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.15, No.2, Summer 2000 pp.20-35
- ⁴² 'Albanian Situation', memorandum by SOE Cairo, 20 June 1942, PRO HS 5/86
- ⁴³ 'Stavro Skendi', memorandum from M. Hasluck to N. Davis, 22 July 1943, PRO HS 5/65
- ⁴⁴ D. McAdoo to H. Fultz, 28 February 1944, NARA RG 226 Entry 190 Box 567 Folio 306
- ⁴⁵ 'On the Austro-Hungarian Frontier', memorandum from M. Hasluck to SOE Cairo, 4 April 1942, PRO HS 5/86
- ⁴⁶ 'Leakages', memorandum from M. Hasluck to SOE Cairo, 27 June 1942, PRO HS 5/107
- ⁴⁷ M. Hasluck to Major E. Boxshall, 21 November 1943, PRO HS 5/26
- ⁴⁸ 'Albania', memorandum from Major P. Boughey to Lieutenant Colonel J. Pearson, 24 June 1942, PRO HS 5/102
- ⁴⁹ Information made available by the SOE Adviser to the FCO
- ⁵⁰ 'Special Operations Executive Directive for 1943', Chiefs of Staff Memorandum COS(43)142(0), 20 March 1943, CAB 80/68, reproduced in D. Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance 1940-1945* p.252
- ⁵¹ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.8
- ⁵² 'Macedonia', memorandum by M. Hasluck to Lieutenant Colonel G. Tamplin, 25 May 1943, PRO HS 5/66
- ⁵³ Conversation, Mrs P. Kraay to author, 14 June 2001
- ⁵⁴ Interview, H. Munro to author, November 1999
- ⁵⁵ P. Kemp, *The Thorns of Memory* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson 1990) pp.178-9
- ⁵⁶ M. Lyon, unpublished memoir. I am grateful to him for his permission to quote from this document.
- ⁵⁷ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.89
- ⁵⁸ A. Quayle, *A Time to Speak* (London: Barrie and Jenkins 1990) p.260
- ⁵⁹ M. Hasluck, *Këndime English-Shqip or Albanian-English Reader: Sixteen Albanian Folk-Stories Collected and Translated, with Two Grammars and Vocabularies* (Cambridge: CUP 1932) p.xi
- ⁶⁰ Conversation, Sir Reginald Hibbert to author, 4 February 1998
- ⁶¹ M. Hasluck, *Këndime English-Shqip* pp.46-7
- ⁶² M. Lyon, unpublished memoir
- ⁶³ A. Quayle, *A Time to Speak* p.288
- ⁶⁴ M. Clark, 'Margaret Masson Hasluck' p.139
- ⁶⁵ Correspondence, J. Naar to author, 5 September 2000
- ⁶⁶ Interview, J. Naar to author, 8 December 2000
- ⁶⁷ Interview, J. Naar to author, 12 December 2000
- ⁶⁸ 'Albania', memorandum passed under letter from Lieutenant Colonel J. Pearson of SOE London to P. Dixon of the Foreign Office, 16 July 1943, PRO HS 5/10
- ⁶⁹ 'Albania: Appreciation', memorandum passed under letter from Lieutenant Colonel B. Sweet-Escott to Major-General C. Gubbins, 30 June 1943, PRO HS 5/82
- ⁷⁰ Edmund Frank Davies gained his nickname whilst a cadet at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. As one Sandhurst instructor, an officer of Davies's regiment, recalled: 'He displayed even then the characteristics which we in the Regiment came to know so well: independence, intolerance, robustness, a keen sense of humour and a kind of disciplined bolshevism which earned him the nickname of Trotsky' (*Quis Separabit*, (regimental journal of the Royal Ulster Rifles), 1952, p.64). Few, even of his closest friends, would ever learn his Christian names.
- ⁷¹ M. Hasluck to Brigadier W. Stawell, 8 February 1944, PRO HS 5/67
- ⁷² R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.64
- ⁷³ SOE Albanian Section 'Fortnightly Intelligence Summary', 15 December 1943, PRO WO 204/9527
- ⁷⁴ 'LNC and BBC', memorandum by M. Hasluck to Major E. Boxshall, 15 January 1944, PRO HS 5/68
- ⁷⁵ 'PWE Fortnightly Intelligence Summary', memorandum by M. Hasluck to Major E. Boxshall, 6 December 1943, PRO HS 5/26
- ⁷⁶ Major P. Leake to Brig. K. Barker-Benfield, 14 December 1943, PRO HS 5/66
- ⁷⁷ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* pp.64-5
- ⁷⁸ B. Fischer, *Albania at War 1939-1945* p.169
- ⁷⁹ 'Council of Regents', memorandum from M. Hasluck to Major E. Boxshall, 19 December 1943, and undated covering note, Major E. Boxshall to Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice, PRO HS 5/26
- ⁸⁰ M. Hasluck to Major E. Boxshall, 21 November 1943, PRO HS 5/26
- ⁸¹ SOE Albanian Section 'Fortnightly Intelligence Summary', 9 January 1944, PRO HS 5/67

⁸² 'Policies and Recommendations Relative to Albania', memorandum by H. Fultz to Major Koch, 18 January 1944, NARA RG 226 Entry 154, Box 14, Folio 181

⁸³ Correspondence, J. Naar to author, 21 September 1999

⁸⁴ 'Status of Mrs Hasluck', memorandum by Major P. Leake to Brigadier W. Stawell, 18 January 1944, PRO, HS 5/66

⁸⁵ 'The Crisis', memorandum by M. Hasluck to Major E. Boxshall, 9 February 1944, PRO HS 5/68

⁸⁶ Interview, J. Naar to author, 12 December 2000

⁸⁷ M. Hasluck to Major E. Boxshall, February 1944, PRO HS 5/68

⁸⁸ R. Hibbert *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* pp. 115, 120-1, 238-9; B. Fischer *Albania at War* pp.205-6, 265-7. As Hibbert and Fischer demonstrate, the tonnage and type of supplies infiltrated by the British, though not unimportant, were not decisive in determining the Partisans' ability to wage war. By the time of the German withdrawal, many Partisans in Albania still wielded weapons taken from Italian troops disarmed at the time of Italy's collapse. They had also fought alongside units of Italian infantry, artillery and Alpini that had joined them willingly in September 1943. More weapons and equipment had been taken from German and quisling forces in subsequent fighting. Had British arms not been available in 1944, stocks of material captured from the Italians and stored away during the winter would probably have been used instead. Still, Allied arms did continue to go to Partisan units throughout 1944, albeit on the solid grounds that the Partisans were inflicting substantial damage on the Germans, and of these some were certainly turned against the communists' domestic political enemies.

⁸⁹ Correspondence, R. Hibbert to author, 21 September 1999

⁹⁰ Correspondence, J. Naar to author, 5 September 2000

⁹¹ B. Fischer, *Albania at War* p.191

⁹² R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.64. A notable exception was Skënder Muço, a dynamic and pro-Allied young lawyer and leading BK representative from Valona (today's Vlorë) whom Bernd Fischer identifies as the probable author of a BK pamphlet, dated 21 November 1943, that roundly condemned the Germans and all collaborators (B. Fischer, *Albania at War* p.191). SOE officers in touch with Muço in the spring of 1944 were much impressed by him, his realism and genuine willingness to fight the Germans under direct British orders if only Britain would control the Partisans. But British policy, which pledged support only to those Albanians prepared to fight unconditionally, precluded any such deal. An example of some of the individuals making up the BK who were united by anti-communism but uncomfortable with the BK's policy of collaboration, Muço was murdered by the Germans in the autumn of 1944.

⁹³ 'Appreciation of [M. Hasluck's letter] of January 17th [1944]', PRO HS 5/68

⁹⁴ H. Fultz to P. Adams, 24 February 1944, NARA RG 226 Entry 154, Box 14, Folio 181

⁹⁵ Report by Captain B. Ensor, 1944, PRO HS 5/136

⁹⁶ Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO

⁹⁷ She also remained in touch with officers she had known during the war. They, in turn, maintained their affection for her. In 1948 several paid money anonymously into her bank account when they discovered she was in financial difficulties. Letters, 28 January and 11 February 1948, C. Brocklehurst to N. McLean, The Papers of Lt Col N.L.D. McLean, Department of Documents, Imperial War Museum (hereafter, 'McLean papers, IWM')

Chapter Three

SOE and British policy towards resistance in Kosovo¹

1943-44

For over forty years, Major Peter Kemp's wartime memoirs have remained the principal primary published source recording British attempts to foster resistance in German-occupied Kosovo in 1943-44.² Dropped by SOE into Albania in August 1943, Kemp had received orders to make his way north to Kosovo. There, that December, he established contact with representatives of the strongly anti-Serb and anticommunist Albanian majority. In *No Colours or Crest*, published in 1958, he describes how impressed he had been by those Albanians' pro-Allied attitude and by the potential, in particular, of Gani Bey Kryeziu, with whom SOE had last worked in 1941. But Kemp also recalls his shock and dismay at receiving further instructions from SOE headquarters in January 1944 to break all his contacts and keep out of Kosovo. He claims that British policy-makers, anxious to maintain good relations with Tito's Yugoslav Partisans, had ordered that break after Tito protested against his activities. This explanation for Kemp's withdrawal is reproduced without question in Noel Malcolm's acclaimed *Kosovo: A Short History*. Neither Reginald Hibbert nor Bernd Fischer dispute or address it in their equally well-received studies of wartime Albania.³

Illuminating Britain's wartime handling of one of Europe's most internecine territorial disputes, this chapter re-examines how and why Kemp's contacts in Kosovo came to be made and severed. It argues that his withdrawal cannot be seen as a measure of Britain's commitment to Tito by January 1944. By clarifying the priorities that defined Britain's contrasting policies in Albania and Yugoslavia by 1944, it also illustrates the limited view from the field that SOE officers often had of the policy-making process. Kemp's approach to Albanians in Kosovo, which the Axis had annexed to Albania from Yugoslavia in 1941, had been in line with SOE's task of discovering the resistance potential of any Albanian, whatever their ideology or ethnicity, within the new 'Greater' Albania. His withdrawal from the province, however, was neither precipitated by any protest from Tito nor reflective of any overriding policy favourable to the Partisans. Aware of more deeply entrenched diplomatic

grounds on which to avoid becoming embroiled in the issue of Kosovo's future, and alarmed by fresh reports of ethnic and ideological tension in the province, British decision-makers had seen that no-one would gain very much by SOE taking sides.

Certainly Britain's commitment to Tito was substantial by 1944. When the first SOE mission to Yugoslavia was put ashore on the Montenegrin coast in September 1941, the plan had been to cultivate Draza Mihailovic, the royalist general and guerilla leader about whom SOE had received encouraging reports. But from 1942, as Britain sought to adjust to the emergence of Tito's powerful partisan movement, that policy changed dramatically. Partisan efforts against the occupying Axis forces grew as Mihailovic's 'Chetniks' became increasingly pre-occupied with fighting the Partisans. At Tehran in December 1943, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin agreed that 'the Partisans in Yugoslavia should be supported by supplies and equipment to the greatest possible extent'. On 8 January 1944 Churchill penned a letter to Tito informing him that Britain was drawing to a close its contact with Mihailovic and would, from now on, help only the Partisans.⁴ Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, commander of the British Military Mission to Tito, delivered the letter in person. On 20 January he parachuted to Tito's headquarters at Bosanski Petrovac in western Bosnia and handed over the letter, 'written on Downing Street paper and complete with a signed photograph', in which the Prime Minister assured Tito that 'we British have no desire to dictate the future government of Yugoslavia... I am resolved that the British Government shall give no further military support to Mihailovic and will only give help to you'.⁵

In *No Colours or Crest*, Kemp implies that the scale of this commitment explains why British policy-makers appeased Tito's sudden protest against his activities in Kosovo. And SOE was certainly unaware until January 1944 of any cardinal need, diplomatic or otherwise, not to work with Albanians in Kosovo. Indeed, Kemp's very arrival in the province illustrates how closely he was working to the policy guiding SOE of fostering resistance among all Albanians wherever they were and whatever their politics.

That policy had changed little since Major Billy McLean led the first SOE mission (code-named CONSENSUS) into Albania that spring, with instructions that reflected the Chiefs of Staff's desire for greater resistance in the Balkans and how

little anyone knew of the situation McLean would find. As McLean noted on 29 March, the five tasks of his mission were:

- (a) To transmit regular information on the military and general situation in Albania to Cairo by w/t [wireless telegraphy];
- (b) To contact existing local guerilla organisations and to “lay on” the disruption of the chrome and Trans-Balkan routes;
- (c) To organise an “area system” with dropping places, and also to recruit mobile guerrilla bands for immediate operations, and later large scale operations;
- (d) To work up “contacts” between Greece, Yugoslavia, and Macedonia, with a view to British liaison in the Balkans;
- (e) To arrange a method of getting people out from Albania, and reception committees for further infiltration parties.

The ‘focal area’, as regards targets and guerilla operations, was laid down as central Albania. That was where most of the mines were located, the principal towns and lines of communication lay and the most useful contacts were thought to be. It was also considered ‘strategically well placed for liaison with British officers in Macedonia and Southern Serbia’.⁶

Although exploring and encouraging resistance there was not made explicit in McLean’s brief, those instructions contained the immediate origins of SOE’s subsequent work in Kosovo. McLean was left free to investigate targets and the possibilities of fostering resistance apparently anywhere within the borders of the enlarged Albania: that is, the entity created by the Axis in 1941 that included most of Kosovo and parts of Macedonia and Montenegro. On arriving in southern Albania he duly drew up a plan for more officers to be sent in to open up the country and work with real or potential resistance groups wherever they might be found. Transmitting details to SOE Headquarters in Cairo on 29 July, McLean stressed that, as part of the plan, a ‘mission to go to the Kossova area’ was ‘most urgently required’.⁷ When four new SOE missions dropped to him on the night of 9-10 August, he earmarked Kemp’s STEPMOTHER mission for Kosovo at once.⁸

Although the idea to send someone there was apparently McLean’s, Kemp accepted the job eagerly. Indeed, his initiative and enthusiasm played their own part in

driving him on to the province and seeing him work hard to ensure his mission was a success. He writes in *No Colours or Crest* that in Cairo he had seen McLean's signal suggesting that a mission be sent to Kosovo. On arriving in Albania he had told McLean: "[t]hat's where I should like to go – it's bound to be interesting, that frontier".⁹ Kemp's memoirs paint a picture of a swashbuckling romantic more interested in adventure than politics. In 1936, aged twenty-one, he had come down from Cambridge to read for the bar but instead left for Spain to join the Carlist cavalry. He claimed later that, while his conservatism had dictated his choice of sides, it was really the promise of danger and excitement that impelled him to join in the conflict; nevertheless, he became a convinced anticommunist. Transferring to the elite Spanish Foreign Legion, in which he served as an officer, a rare distinction for a non-Spaniard, Kemp was decorated for gallantry and several times wounded, finally being put out of action in the summer of 1938 by a mortar bomb that almost killed him. During the Second World War he served almost continuously in SOE. In 1942, as a member of SOE's Small-Scale Raiding Force, he took part in night raids on the Channel Islands and continental coast; after Albania he parachuted into Poland and Siam. These exploits are recounted in his memoirs with modesty and wit but others who knew him have stressed his qualities as a courageous and experienced soldier and an intelligent and perceptive man. Andy Hands, an RAF officer who spent twelve months in Albania with SOE in 1943-44, considered Kemp 'undoubtedly the best officer in the field', noted his 'keen brain' and admired the 'sound knowledge of both Albania and Albanians' Kemp developed after arriving in the country.¹⁰

But in August 1943 neither McLean nor Kemp knew very much about Kosovo. Early that month, SOE Cairo passed to McLean rumours of some kind of Kosovar resistance and a report that two regiments of the Albanian Army stationed in the province might be persuaded to desert. The source of that information was not specified but may have been an SOE mission in Serbia. McLean replied that he thought the resistance sounded communist-led while two deserting regiments might make a useful 'striking force' against specific targets. He freely admitted, however, that he had heard nothing from his sources in Albania: 'I do not rpt not know anything of situation in Kossova area'.¹¹ But before leaving Cairo both he and Kemp were likely to have been briefed on the success Section D and SOE had had in securing a base of pro-Allied support in Kosovo in 1940-41. They would have learnt, too, about

the location of chrome mines both there and just over the Albanian side of the old border. Exports of chrome from Albania alone were reputed to be sufficient to meet 'all of Italy's war requirements'.¹² To this promising picture of important targets (for chrome was a rare but essential component in the production of high-grade steels and armour plate) may have been added the hope of establishing links through Kosovo with SOE's missions in Serbia.

Kemp's instructions were reaffirmed in late October at a meeting with Brigadier 'Trotsky' Davies, who had parachuted in to take overall charge of SOE's presence in Albania. Davies' presence in the Balkans, as one of three brigadiers sent out there that autumn, stands as a measure of the growing importance being attached by the British to raising the level of their missions in that theatre. But as the Foreign Office-approved directive issued to Davies confirms, although there was now an added emphasis on urging rival guerilla bands to unite and co-operate, British policy in Albania was still to encourage all Albanians to resist the occupying Axis forces:

1. You have been appointed as Officer Commanding the Allied Mission in Albania with the function of promoting and organising resistance to the Axis in the country...
2. The policy of His Majesty's Government for promoting and organising resistance to the Axis in Albania is to support all anti-Axis elements, wherever they may be, subject to the availability of aircraft and other resources, provided always that they continue to combat the Axis actively and wholeheartedly...
3. It is the ultimate aim of HMG to endeavour to reconcile all resistance groups to each other and persuade them to subordinate the racial, religious and ideological differences which separate them, so that all political and constitutional problems may be settled by the free will of the people when the country has been liberated.¹³

Davies's orders to Kemp were in line with this brief. "As you know", Kemp recalls Davies telling him, "my parish includes not only the old frontiers of Albania, but the new regions incorporated into the country by the Axis; that is, the whole of Kossovo, the western fringe of Macedonia from the Vardar valley to Lake Ohrid, and a small corner of Montenegro. I'm going to send you to make a reconnaissance of those areas. I want you to be my eyes and ears. I want to know all about the political situation,

with particular reference to the chances of starting resistance among the Albanian irredentists".¹⁴

The 'irredentists' were passionate supporters of Kosovo's permanent secession from Yugoslavia to Albania. They were, therefore, anathema to all Serbs who saw Kosovo as the cradle of modern Serbia. And, as will be seen, concern among British observers about the nationalism of those Albanians did contribute greatly to the decision to pull Kemp out of Kosovo, although not quite in the way Kemp suggests in his memoirs. But it is debatable whether Davies or anyone else in SOE really knew enough in October 1943 to have identified the irredentists as a distinct group with which Kemp could deal. In the long debriefing report he wrote in Bari the following spring, Kemp remarked simply that Davies 'told me that he would be sending me up to Kossovo... to make a recce of the whole area'.¹⁵ In his own memoir, *Illyrian Venture*, Davies does not mention the irredentists either, writing only that he sent Kemp to Kosovo 'to increase our influence in that area and give me information of what was happening there'.¹⁶

In the event, Kemp's contacts were to be almost exclusively with the irredentists. Based on the headquarters of Flight Lieutenant Andy Hands' SPINSTER mission, in the village of Degë in the extreme northeast of Albania, he made two trips into Kosovo. The first, and shortest, he did alone. It lasted four days: from 14 to 17 December 1943. The second, on which Lieutenant John Hibberdine, a young Scot who had dropped at Degë on 19-20 December, accompanied Kemp, lasted three weeks: from 1 to 22 January 1944. On both occasions Kemp stayed in the German-garrisoned town of Gjakova in southwestern Kosovo, a few miles from the old Albanian border. And both trips were made under the protection of Hasan Bey Kryeziu, with whom Muharrem Bajraktar, a northern Albanian nationalist leader, had placed Kemp in touch in early December. Hasan's brother was Gani Bey Kryeziu. After Germany's conquest of Yugoslavia in 1941, Gani and a third brother, Said, had retired to Belgrade where they had lived for a time under German protection before being handed over to the Italians and imprisoned. Hasan was allowed to stay in Gjakova. Consequently, in the winter of 1943-44, he was able to shelter his guests and introduce them to various local notables.

The Kryezius and these notables were the contacts that Kemp claims in his memoirs had proved intolerable to Tito, after Partisans in Kosovo brought them to his

attention. Mostly collected around Hands' base at Degë, the Partisans had made no secret of their hostility towards Kemp's work with non-communist Albanians in Kosovo. By January 1944 he already suspected the Partisans of trying to sabotage his first trip to Gjakova by betraying his presence there to the Germans. On the occasion of his second trip, Kemp states, they sent a report on his activities to Tito. The report was then passed 'with a strong protest' by Tito to the 'headquarters' of the British Military Mission working with him in Bosnia, thus bringing about the decision from a 'higher quarter' that Kemp should keep out of Kosovo. Kemp received word of that decision on 24 January. It arrived two days after he and Hibberdine had held talks with Gani Bey Kryeziu, who had escaped from Italy in late 1943 and made his way back home. That meeting had elated the two SOE officers: Gani had promised to help them in any way he could. Kemp recalls his and Hibberdine's subsequent consternation when the order to withdraw came through:

The signal that shattered all my hopes came over the evening wireless 'sked' from Cairo. Its opening words are fixed forever on my memory. 'Kemp to break tactfully all contact with Kryezius and Irredentists'. The message went on to explain that my activities in Kossovo were causing an 'unfavourable impression' among Tito's Partisans and ended with the sentence, 'Our relations with Yugoslav Partisans are of overriding importance'...

With horror and incredulity Hibberdine and I read and re-read the decoded words on that dirty bit of paper... [T]o desert the Kryezius now at the very moment when, exhorted by Cairo and ourselves, they had taken up arms for the Allies, was not only base but foolish.

'And so,' I stormed to Hibberdine, 'we are to ditch Gani Beg, the one man in this part of Albania who really means to fight the Germans and has got the guts and ability to do it; the one man who can rouse the Kossovars to fight...'

'If Cairo's relations with the Jug Partisans are really so important,' added Hibberdine, 'why the hell didn't they warn us off before...?'

Kemp adds that he 'drafted a "Most Urgent" signal, begging at least to be allowed to keep in touch with Gani Beg now that he was in arms against the Germans; the answer was a categorical No'.¹⁷

But Kemp was far removed from the policy-making process in January 1944, and recently released records do not support his post-war account of how and why his

mission came to be withdrawn. In the first place, it seems unlikely that Tito had any personal involvement in compelling British policy-makers to bring Kemp's activities in Kosovo to a close. Tito would not have been in very close contact with Partisan units in and around Kosovo in January 1944. Not only was he nearly a hundred and fifty miles away in Bosnia but also, for most of the month, on the run, in harsh winter conditions that would have made it very difficult for him to maintain contact with anyone. According to Milovan Djilas, then a member of Tito's Supreme Staff, a German offensive from 7 January had scattered Tito and his staff, forcing them to spend two weeks marching 'through the forests and across the mountains' the forty or so miles from Jajce to Drvar.¹⁸ When Fitzroy Maclean found him on 20 January at Bosanski Petrovac, ten miles on from Drvar, Tito had only just arrived there from Jajce.¹⁹

More significantly, the 'in' signals log of SOE's Yugoslav Section in Cairo contains no 'strong protest' from Tito or any other message sent by the headquarters of the British Military Mission in Bosnia complaining about Kemp. What the log does record, however, is a short and slightly corrupt message from Major Anthony Hunter's SOE mission that was working that January with Yugoslav Partisans at Berane in southern Montenegro. Berane was just forty miles to the north of Andy Hands and the Partisans at Degë in northeast Albania. Transmitting on 17 January, Hunter referred to complaints made by an 'Albanian delegation here' and asked for 'information ref. British mission said to be intriguing with both sides' in Kosovo. He wanted to know, too, about a certain 'Captain David': a British officer said to be working with Albanians 'co-operating with Fascists'.²⁰

Hunter's message made no mention of Tito. Indeed, no news appears to have reached the British of any statement by Tito about SOE's activities in Kosovo, or of any indication that he even wanted to reclaim the province for Yugoslavia. At Jajce in November 1943, Tito and the Anti-Fascist Council for National Liberation had proclaimed a new federal Yugoslavia, assumed sovereign rights to ruling the country and denounced the exiled king and government.²¹ But Tito had also declared that the new Yugoslavia was to be founded 'on the basis of the right of every people to self-determination, including the right to secede or unite with other peoples, and in conformity with the true aspirations of all the peoples of Yugoslavia'.²² In what seems to have been a deliberate ploy by the Yugoslav partisans to skirt round what was a

potentially very divisive issue, Kosovo's position in that federation was to remain vague, even to the Albanian and Kosovo partisans, for many months.²³

Hunter's thin appeal for information about SOE's work in Kosovo certainly caused alarm among observers in Cairo. It seems very likely that this was the 'protest' Kemp claimed later had come from Tito. SOE's Yugoslav Section at once sent a copy of Hunter's message to its Albanian opposite number asking to know what it was all about: who was the British officer reported as 'co-operating with Fascists' in Kosovo? The Albanian Section knew from reports received from Kemp and Hands that the Kosovo partisans at Degë were in touch with Berane. Major Philip Leake, Section Head, drew the appropriate conclusion. He explained that the officer was Peter Kemp and in touch with nationalist elements in Kosovo.²⁴ Kemp himself was later informed: '[Yugoslav] partisans [at] BERANE have been receiving unfavourable accounts [of] your activities – presumably from [the] Kos[ovo partisans]'.²⁵ But Hunter's message was not itself responsible for provoking the order for Kemp to withdraw. A greater impact on observers in Cairo was made by Kemp's own reports. These laid down his conviction that, given the ethnic balance and tensions in the province, widespread resistance could be waged only by the Albanian irredentists and achieved only if an Allied declaration could be issued about Kosovo's future.

Before demonstrating that impact, however, it is instructive to clarify how and why Kemp came to make that assessment. And SOE records and other papers in private hands confirm that he and Hibberdine had quickly become aware how hated were the Serbs and Partisans by the majority of Albanians in Kosovo. '[T]he scene of another Serb atrocity' wrote Hibberdine in his diary of the home of the Dobrushki family, with whom he and Kemp stayed in the village of Rogovë (Rogovo) from 14 to 17 January. 'In 1941 when they were withdrawing north a Serb band of regulars called in here and forced the owner of the house (the elder brother of the present owner) to give them food and clothing. When they had eaten, in gratitude for his hospitality, they took him outside and shot him in front of his wife and children'.²⁶ Kemp, while in Gjakova, was apparently shown an 'original Serb document, dated 1938, advocating wholesale deportation of Albanians from Kossovo and replacement with Serbs'.²⁷

The two officers also saw how fear and ethnic hatred bred distrust of everything communist. This was illustrated clearly by the situation at Degë, where

Andy Hands was supplying the few ragged bands of Albanian Partisans that heralded from Kosovo. Unpopular among their own people, who feared that their activities and ideology posed a serious threat to the more agreeable status quo, these bands had been forced to seek shelter over the old border. But they were not very welcome in northern Albania either, as Hibberdine noted. 'The partisans here are not local people and are in fact disliked by them. Communism is not popular as communism means Tito and Tito means Yugoslav interference'.²⁸ (Anti-Serb feeling also explains why Mihailovic and SOE missions attached to him made little progress in fostering resistance in Kosovo. The predominantly Serb Chetniks were loathed and feared by the majority of the population in the region.)²⁹

Kemp and Hibberdine also saw how Germany had managed successfully to minimise resistance by incorporating most of Kosovo into Albania in 1941 and by recognising 'Greater' Albania as an independent country in 1943. 'The majority of Kosovars preferred a German occupation to a Serb' Kemp reported later. 'The Axis powers had at least united them with their fellow Albanians, whereas an Allied victory would, they feared, return them to Yugoslav rule'.³⁰

Such sentiments explained the willingness of many Kosovo Albanians to collaborate with the occupying Axis forces.³¹ In September 1943, for example, several prominent Kosovar Albanian officials formed the so-called Second League of Prizren, named after another group of leading Albanians who had met in 1878 at the time of the Congress of Berlin to press their national interests on the great powers. This new Second League attracted perhaps as many as 15,000 members; many of its leaders had worked closely with the Italians and continued to work with the Germans after the Italian collapse. As Noel Malcolm writes, the League's appeal, however, 'was primarily to Albanian nationalism (and, as a by-product of that, to anti-Communism, given that the Communists were seen as aiming at the restoration of Yugoslav rule), and not to pro-German sentiment as such'. Statutes were drafted proclaiming the League's chief intention as 'the defence of the liberated areas [i.e. from Yugoslavia] and of other areas of the former Yugoslavia'. An armed force was raised (which, some of the League's apologists claim, was used only against the Chetniks; others have argued that it was engaged in cleansing Kosovo of Serbs and Montenegrins). And an executive committee was created with the Kosovo Albanian politician Rexhep Mitrovica appointed chairman.³² A leading figure on the central committee of

Albania's *Balli Kombëtar* party, Mitrovica had never been keen on the Italians, who imprisoned him in 1942. He did see, however, that the party had much to gain from a good working relationship with the Germans. In November 1943 he became head of the new German-sponsored government in Tirana.

There is no evidence that Kemp and Hibberdine ever learnt much about the Second League of Prizren during their time in Kosovo, other than that such a movement possibly existed. It was clear to them, however, that all Albanians they met in Gjakova sympathised with the League's primary aim. 'I should make it clear that the Irredentists do not form a single party', Kemp stressed later 'but rather a group, drawing all their support from all parties but the Communists'. They clearly formed 'the most powerful group' with support 'among every class, profession and occupation in the area'.³³ Hibberdine recorded in his diary in early January: 'Peter and I were discussing the people of Djakovica last night and came to the conclusion that it is not the large landowners in this part of the world who give the drive to the Irredentist movement, but the small people – shop owners, clerks, artisans; and these small people show a determination unlike any other Peter has seen in Albania'. Chatting days later with Ejub Binaku, their local bodyguard and guide, Hibberdine and Kemp were told: 'Rexhip Mitrovica is so far from being a collaborateur [sic] that if he came to Djakovica tomorrow Ejub would have no hesitation in taking us to his house'.³⁴

From their tortuous talks with notables in Gjakova, the two officers also came to see that few Albanians were prepared to put aside their fear of the future and risk all for the Allied cause. Hibberdine's diary provides something of the flavour of those discussions, with a long description of a meeting he and Kemp held in the town on the evening of 7 January. Sulejman Riza and Sulejman Bey Kryeziu, both influential and respected Kosovo notables, and Fuad Dibra, the colonel commanding the Albanian Army in Kosovo, were all present; so, too, was Ejub Binaku. Kemp and Hibberdine had stressed already their wish to leave Gjakova and explore the rest of Kosovo and suspected that these men, whose assistance they required to do so, were stalling. Hibberdine scribbled in his diary:

[The conference] started with promises to help us as much as they could, apologies for our prolonged stay here, and tales of the badness of the weather. We were told: it was only a matter of a

week of two before the Irredentist group declared against the Germans and came out into the open prepared to fight; meanwhile they were willing to commence small actions of violence and sabotage at once. A conference was to be held of the Irredentist group to decide their position, the Albanian army [in Kosovo] is to prepare plans for attacking the Germans as they withdraw from the Balkans and is to start training irregulars in the use of arms. So far so good. But their plans with regard to our immediate future were far less pleasing. The weather, the political situation, etc, all so many arguments which we could not easily rebuff because of our lack of information were used to persuade us to withdraw to Dega [Degë] until the weather cleared, and the political situation eased (although what exactly the political business is or has to do with it, I can't say). A great argument ensued, Sulejman Riza gesticulating wildly and pleading with us to have confidence in him... the Colonel silent except for an occasional spasm of laughter and one or two short phrases, Sulejman Beg [sic] looking like a prosperous butcher and saying nothing, Ejub scowling and obstinate and saying plenty, [and] Peter and I getting more and more angry... However we were beaten in the end, mainly by Sulejman Riza's generous gesticulating and calls for confidence. So now we are going to hang around the Kossovo area for a few days and then return to Dega. As one last concession they promised us to arrange a conference of all Kossovars willing to fight the Huns... Some hope. Peter wants to go home.

Other than the handful of Partisans at Degë, most Albanians in northern Albania and Kosovo who confessed to be willing to fight offered to do so only when the Germans began to leave. Men like Ejub Binaku, who promised 'immediate and effective action on the part of his men', were rare and not nearly enough. Ejub's offer 'was most refreshing', Hibberdine noted, 'but we considered immediate action too premature'.³⁵ The gendarmerie and army commanders from Pejë (Pec) with whom Kemp held discussions were more typical: both promised to keep him 'furnished with information about the Germans, but neither would commit themselves to any military action prior to a German withdrawal or Allied invasion'.³⁶

Kemp became convinced that 'no real military action' could be achieved 'without some sort of declaration from the Allies, to the effect that the people of Kosovo would be able to decide their own fate and form of government after an Allied victory, by free plebiscite... under Anglo-American supervision'.³⁷ Nevertheless, he and Hibberdine remained impressed by the pro-Allied sentiment of the Kosovo Albanians they met, the pledges of support, albeit conditional, that they received and

the risks run by their hosts in sheltering and protecting them. And on 9 January, sitting in Hasan Kryeziu's house in Gjakova, the two officers composed a long message to SOE Cairo summarising the results of their talks. Hibberdine copied the text into his diary. Extracts read:

[The] irredentists [are the] strongest group [in] KOSOVO with reps and sympathisers [in] all parties except... communists [who are] few and unpopular due [to widespread] distrust of TITO's policy [towards] KOSOVO... TITO wants KOSOVARs as [an] ALB minority in JUG or [with] autonomy [only] within [a] JUG federation... all classes here want KOSOVO [as an] integral part [of] ALBANIA... all tell us our presence boosts pro-BRITISH feeling here as [they] now feel [they are] not forgotten... [The] greatest fear [here is of the] SERBS... [An A]llied assurance [that the Allies will] restrain SERB forceful entry here pre-allied control [of Kosovo would] greatly increase [the] effect [of] anti-Hun action... KOSOVARs won't fight for return [of] JUGS under whom worst oppression [occurred] as evidence shows... [In] summary [we] much hope [to] organise anti-Hun resistance here...³⁸

That hope then received a dramatic boost when the pair sat down to their meeting with Gani Bey Kryeziu and his brother, Said, on the evening of 22 January in a village on the Albanian side of the old border.

Kemp describes in his memoir how he and Hibberdine found Gani and Said in poor health but good spirits, keen to arrange the trip that the officers wanted around Kosovo and 'impatient to go into action with us against the Germans'.³⁹ The brothers explained how they had escaped from prison amid the confusion of Italy's surrender in September 1943, reached Gjakova only days before and set off at once into the mountains to find Kemp's mission. Hibberdine's diary reads:

Our meeting was enthusiastic on both sides and we were soon in serious conversation... Gani showed himself keenly interested and very enthusiastic about our work. What he said can be summed up in this remark: "We will make your journey. Give me five or six days to get things ready. There is nothing I won't do for you"...

[They are] eager to do all they can to unite all parties in the struggle against the Germans. We'll let them try. I don't think they realise just how opposed to each other some of the parties are.⁴⁰

But Kemp and Hibberdine had high expectations of Gani. He was widely respected as a leader and talented politician and impressed Kemp as a ‘shrewd and careful planner’ who ‘would make up his mind quickly and carry out his decisions with speed and vigour’.⁴¹ He had also served as an officer in the Yugoslav army. ‘Almost everybody with whom I had talked in Kosovo, of whatever political opinions, had stressed the influence of Gani which was second to none’ Kemp reported later. ‘Moreover, though he had his enemies, almost everyone admitted his ability, integrity and sympathy towards the Allies’.⁴² Gani and the SOE officers went to work quickly. ‘Over the raki and goats cheese we talked late into the night – of suitable targets for attack, of the stores we should need, of a joint battle headquarters for the Kryezius and ourselves, of dropping grounds and arms caches’.⁴³ Gani told Kemp he already had a hundred armed men but could easily raise ‘ten times that number’ and ‘reiterated his willingness to help us and co-operate to the most of his power’. He agreed, too, on a plan for a general insurrection in Kosovo ‘in one front against the enemy’. Although an avowed Albanian nationalist, Gani also made no request for any Allied pronouncement on Kosovo’s future.⁴⁴ Back at Degë, on the morning of 24 January, Kemp and Hibberdine transmitted the following message to Cairo: ‘Saw GANI and SAID KRYEZIU who [have] escaped [from] ITALY... and [are] now in [the] hills [with us]... [They have] promised [to give us their] fullest help and fix our journey within [the] week’.⁴⁵

The order that Kemp sever all his contacts in Kosovo reached Kemp and Hibberdine later that day. But while Kemp, in his memoirs, implies that that order had been influenced by news of the encouraging contact he and Hibberdine had made with Gani, this seems unlikely. Hibberdine noted in his diary that he and Kemp had drafted one earlier message, on 19 January, in which they reported they were ‘trying [to] arrange a meeting’ with Gani after hearing of his presence in Gjakova. But given the time taken to encipher, transmit and decipher messages and then send them up to the proper authorities, no one in Cairo would have known the result of that meeting or learnt that Gani had ‘taken up arms’ before the order was despatched telling Kemp to pull out. Indeed, Hibberdine’s diary, in which the full text of the incoming message is recorded, confirms that the Kryezius were not mentioned by name in the order. (Hibberdine’s reference to that order as a ‘bombshell’ does suggest he felt the same shock as Kemp at its receipt.)⁴⁶

As SOE records now reveal, however, the earlier report the pair drafted in Gjakova on 9 January had had a very significant impact in Cairo. Sent by runner from Gjakova to Degë for onward transmission by Andy Hands (Kemp and Hibberdine had had no w/t set with them), it was received and decrypted in Cairo by 18 January. Stressing the strength of anti-Serb and anticommunist feeling and that the future of any meaningful resistance to the Germans could only lie with the Albanian irredentists, it shed considerable light for observers there on the current state of ethnic division in Kosovo. It also included an appeal from the two officers for a 'directive' to guide them in their work.⁴⁷ On its receipt, Philip Leake drew up a short paper for submission to higher authority in which he set out the essence of the political and resistance scene and the state of SOE's contacts in Kosovo as reported from the field. He also requested guidance on how to respond. On 21 January, Leake sent the paper to the Head of SOE Cairo's Balkan Sections, explaining that Kemp and Hands had established contact in Kosovo 'with Nationalists and Partisans respectively' and stressing that, 'owing to the delicate nature of the situation, a directive is urgently required'.⁴⁸

Leake's paper stands as an accurate summary of the reports about Kosovo that Kemp and Andy Hands had transmitted to Cairo throughout the winter. In it Leake emphasised that the situation was 'extremely delicate owing to the existence of strong racial as well as ideological feeling'. He explained that 'Irredentist feeling' was 'predominant and the majority of the population belongs to Nationalist groups', though these were 'reluctant to take immediate action against the Germans, as they wish to reserve their strength for the post-war defence of Kosovo'. Nevertheless, several leaders had promised to assist with propaganda and intelligence, while action by Albanian military and gendarmerie forces 'at the time of the German withdrawal' was still possible. On the other hand, SOE support for the nationalists was likely 'to cause difficulties with the Yugoslav partisans', while support for the Kosovo partisans was likely 'to produce action but if injudiciously supplied will precipitate civil war'. The nationalists were 'anti-Partisan' but as yet there had been 'no fighting between the two factions'.

No one in SOE Cairo had the authority to issue the directive Leake requested. Thus the future of SOE's activities in Kosovo came up for discussion the following day at a working meeting in Cairo of the Special Operations Committee (SOC). It was

this committee that decided to order Kemp's withdrawal. And it is the existence of this committee that stands as a measure of how successfully the Foreign Office had reasserted its influence on SOE operations in the Balkans by the end of 1943. The Foreign Office had always been meant to exercise political control of SOE activities through SOE's main headquarters in London while full operational control lay in Cairo with the local military command, GHQ Middle East. In early 1943, however, Whitehall began to complain that SOE Cairo, on the encouragement of GHQ Middle East, was supporting communist and anti-royalist guerillas in Greece and Yugoslavia at a level unacceptable to Foreign Office policy. In September, after great debate, often at the highest levels, it was agreed that the 'main policy for SOE' was to be settled in London, between the Foreign Office and SOE with reference if necessary to the Prime Minister and War Cabinet. GHQ Middle East would retain 'sole control and direction' of 'the execution of the SOE policy' in Greece, Yugoslavia and Albania since they were 'operational theatres', but receive political guidance about operations in those countries from a newly created committee, based in Cairo. This would act as 'the normal channel' through which the Foreign Office would express its views.⁴⁹ That committee was the SOC. Its members included local representatives of SOE and GHQ Middle East and the British Ambassadors to Greece and Yugoslavia. In this way, although SOE Cairo now received its orders directly from GHQ Middle East, the Foreign Office was able to keep a close eye on SOE's Balkan activities and play a direct role in discussing and approving the policy that guided them. By January 1944 the SOC's number also included Christopher Steel, a career diplomat and former Counsellor in the Cairo Embassy who was then working as the permanent political adviser to SOE Cairo. In line with that appointment SOE had agreed that Steel would be granted 'completely free access to [SOE Cairo] files and... kept as fully as possible in the picture in regard to all activities in the countries with which he is concerned'. He had also been specially authorised by the Foreign Office to act for Albania on the SOC 'in the same way as the Ambassadors to Greece and Yugoslavia' giving him a unique ability to comment on policy and ensure that the interests of the Foreign Office were upheld.⁵⁰

As the minutes of the working committee's 22 January meeting record, it was Steel that played the decisive role in recommending that Kemp's activities in Kosovo come to an end.

Mr Steel referred to the position of KOSSOVO which was a bone of contention between the Serbs and the Albanians, and which had been handed back by the Germans to Albania. We had at present a LO [Liaison Officer] both with the Nationalists in that area and with the Albanian partisans. It was important that we did not get involved in any disputes over this territory, especially in view of its sentimental value to the Serbs, and it was therefore proposed to withdraw the LO with the Nationalists.⁵¹

The committee agreed with Steel that the 'LO with the Nationalists should be withdrawn'. SOE complied with the ruling. Kemp received the bad news two days later. Neither Leake's paper nor his appeal for a directive was specified in the minutes as under discussion. However, Steel's comments, together with his correspondence with Leake during this period, suggest he and Leake worked together so closely that it is impossible to believe he had not seen Leake's paper or discussed the matter with him before the meeting.

Subsequent decisions confirm that Steel and the SOC agreed that British interests had something to gain from maintaining healthy relations with Partisan units in and around Kosovo. Days after Kemp was told to sever his contacts with nationalists and irredentists, more orders followed for Andy Hands, again authorised by the SOC, instructing him to remain in touch with the Kosovo Partisans.⁵² Steel, in his role as SOE's political adviser, also personally approved an increased subsidy for them of 1000 sovereigns. On 7 February the SOC's working committee then minuted its agreement with all points raised in a paper by Philip Leake recommending continued contact with the Kosovo Partisans.⁵³ Drawn up at the SOC's request, this paper had stressed that the Partisans were few, poorly armed and unpopular 'owing to the strong nationalist and conservative feeling which prevails in North Albania and particularly in the Kosovo area'. It had also conceded, however, that there were several advantages to be had from continued contact with them. These included the desirability of having a friendly route out of northern Albania into Yugoslav partisan territory and the value of having friendly forces on hand to attack the chrome mines, harass the Germans and provide intelligence in northern Albania and Kosovo. Moreover, Leake felt, severing contact with them might well have 'a disagreeable impression' on Tito's partisans. By contrast, there was 'no risk of this contact embroiling us with [the] Jugoslavs over the Kosovo question' since the Kosovo

partisans 'represent Yugoslav as well as Albanian interests and are largely under Yugoslav control'.⁵⁴

Yet decision-makers in Cairo were also aware in January 1944 of the priority the Foreign Office had long given privately to assuaging Yugoslav claims to Kosovo. This is implicit in Steel's reference to the 'importance' of recognising Kosovo's 'sentimental value to the Serbs'. It is also illustrated by the fact that Steel and the SOC's working committee, rather than the main SOC, authorised Kemp's withdrawal and did so without pause to analyse the competing claims to the province or even refer the issue to London. The main SOC had been established 'to consider what changes were necessary in policy which had already been laid down'.⁵⁵ The working committee, on the other hand, was 'a daily committee, under the SOC, charged... with co-ordinating day to day operations in accordance with HMG's policy in Greece, Albania and Yugoslavia'. It 'was not intended to deal with matters of policy but to ensure that appropriate action in accordance with agreed policy was taken on important matters arising out of signals received by SOE'.⁵⁶ And in this case, recent discussions in Cairo had underlined for diplomats and other observers the importance of avoiding any clash with Yugoslavia over Kosovo.

Those discussions had taken place in October 1943 and been precipitated by another, earlier, appeal from Peter Kemp. In late September, weeks before setting foot in Kosovo but anxious to maximise his mission's chances of success, Kemp requested Cairo to secure an official declaration on the province's future. From discussions in Albania since August, he reported later, he had come quickly to appreciate 'the urgent importance of the Kossovo question to all Albanians' and the potential value to SOE of securing such a declaration:

It is no exaggeration to say that it was a burning anxiety in the minds of all I met – even of people living a long way from Kossovo; people of such widely differing views as Enver Hoxha, Mustafa Gjinishi⁵⁷, Ymer Dishnica⁵⁸, Vasil Andoni⁵⁹, Halil Maci⁶⁰, to name a few of them, all agreed on the importance to Albania of a just settlement of the Kossovo problem – which they all agreed could only be secured by a return to Albania of Kossovo. They all pressed me to obtain from the Allies a simple declaration, not that Kossovo would be returned to Albania, but simply that the future of Kossovo would be settled by plebiscite held under Allied supervision in the area; alternatively they requested a declaration from the Yugoslav Government in London that they would consent to such a plebiscite.

All of them impressed upon me that without such a declaration the work of any BLO [British Liaison Officer] in Kossovo would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.⁶¹

Kemp discovered that the Atlantic Charter, issued by Churchill and Roosevelt in August 1941, was not enough for Albanians. The Charter proclaimed 'certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world'. These included respecting 'the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live' and the establishment of a peace 'which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want'.⁶² But Albanians wanted greater assurance as to the state of Albania's post-war borders, Kemp felt. On 29 September he transmitted to SOE Cairo a message 'requesting a declaration by the Yugoslav Government that the people of Kossovo would be allowed [a] free choice between a JUG or ALBANIAN Government in accordance with the Atlantic Charter'. SOE's Albanian Section in Cairo received Kemp's appeal on 2 October. Judging it a matter of potential effect to policy, it accordingly drew up a paper 'requesting that an approach be made to the Yugoslav Government asking them to issue a statement that the people of Kossovo should be allowed to decide after the war whether Kossovo was to be part of Yugoslavia or Albania'. That paper was passed to the relevant decision-making body in Cairo, the main SOC, which duly pronounced the fate of Kemp's appeal after considering it on the morning of 13 October.⁶³

As the minutes of that October meeting show, Kemp's request for a declaration was dismissed out of hand after the briefest of discussions. Only Ralph Stevenson, the British Ambassador to Yugoslavia, spoke, and that to say simply 'that it was unlikely that the Yugoslav Government would accede to such a request, nor was it desirable that such a request be made. It had already been made clear that any questions regarding frontiers would have to wait until the peace conference'. The committee 'agreed that no approach should be made to the Yugoslav Government concerning the future of Kossovo'.⁶⁴ SOE transmitted to Kemp the bad news: 'Regret that prospect obtaining declaration from HMG or JUG GOVT regarding future KOSOVO or other disputed districts at present absolutely nil. You should therefore take line that such problems outside your competence as you are concerned with

military matters only'. The message was repeated to 'Trotsky' Davies: 'SOC rpt SOC has ruled that there is no rpt no prospect of any declaration by HMG or JUG GOV'T regarding KOSOVO district'.⁶⁵

As Foreign Office records reveal, Stevenson's comments were wholly in line with the importance Whitehall had attached for some time to avoiding any commitment to recognising any of Albania's borders even before Kosovo had been shorn from Yugoslavia. In 1940 the Greeks had opposed much of what SOE was planning in Albania, fearing that such activity, backed by Britain, might jeopardise claims to what the Greeks termed Northern Epirus, the southernmost part of Albania. The Albanians with whom SOE was working hoped for some kind of assurance that their country, once free of the Italian occupier, would remain intact after the war. But the Greeks were judged to be the more vital allies and, to please them, the Foreign Office deferred to their concerns and turned down SOE's appeals for a statement on Albania's borders. As Philip Nichols of the Southern Department minuted in February 1941: 'it has long been a cardinal point in our policy over Albania to march in step with the Greeks'.⁶⁶

That perceived diplomatic need for a non-committal policy on Albania's frontiers was reinforced when the Axis incorporated most of Kosovo into Albania in 1941. In June 1942, Lord Glenconner, the Head of SOE Cairo, passed an appeal from Margaret Hasluck for some form of declaration on Albania's independence. The Foreign Office, however, now conscious of Yugoslav desires to reclaim Kosovo, refused to move. Hasluck had hoped a favourable declaration might again give encouragement to Albanians to resist.⁶⁷ Pierson Dixon of the Southern Department replied that while the government looked favourably on the idea of an independent Albania after the war 'we do not feel that the moment [for a declaration to that effect] has yet arrived'. He concluded: 'the SOE angle is not in itself sufficiently weighty to justify us in making such a declaration now'.⁶⁸ Sir Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-secretary of State, shared Dixon's concern. He wrote in July: 'if we make a declaration of policy we are likely to stir up a small hornet's nest, for the Greeks and the Yugoslavs will, whatever reservations we may make, feel that they must not miss the opportunity for staking out their claims... The most it could do would be to enable SOE to enlist a few more agents... On the whole therefore I should be inclined to leave the declaration alone for the moment'. The Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden,

minuted his agreement. Even when a statement was finally made in late 1942, after more SOE pleading and the Foreign Office having conceded that Britain was 'now on the offensive in the Mediterranean', it carefully avoided any reference to Albania's future borders.⁶⁹ While Britain wished to see Albania 'freed from the Italian yoke and restored to her independence', Eden announced in December, 'His Majesty's Government regard the question of the frontiers of the Albanian State after the war as a question which will have to be settled at the peace settlement'.⁷⁰ And when 'Trotsky' Davies, on the eve of his departure for Albania, appealed for a fresh official statement of encouragement and praise for the Albanian guerillas the opportunity was taken to reaffirm the official line.⁷¹ 'The policy of HMG remains as explained by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in his statement on 17th December 1942', Churchill declared to the House on 4 November 1943; 'that is to say, we wish to see Albania freed from the Axis yoke and restored to her independence. The frontiers will of course be considered at the Peace Settlement'.⁷²

This remained British policy towards Albania's borders for the rest of the war. And although interested diplomats and desk officers were neither blind to the issues at stake nor unsympathetic to Albanian claims, few had doubts as to Kosovo's probable post-war fate. In July 1943, Arnold Toynbee's Foreign Research and Press Service (FRPS), part of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, completed a study entitled 'The Albano-Yugoslav Frontier. This conceded that the border created by the Germans in 1941 'did approximate justice from the ethnic point of view'. In February 1943, however, the FRPS passed to the Southern Department a draft of its study 'Albania as an International Problem'. It contained a brief passage on the Albanian-Yugoslav frontier that concluded: '[i]t is very probable that at the end of the war a reconstructed Yugoslavia will reclaim the territory lost to Albania in 1941'.⁷³ Denis Laskey, the Southern Department's Albanian desk officer, highlighted that sentence and minuted in April: 'In paragraph 11 it is said that Yugoslavia will "very probably" reclaim the territory lost to Albania in 1941. I should have thought that this could be regarded as virtually certain'.⁷⁴ Douglas Howard, Head of the Southern Department, agreed, and incorporated Laskey's minute when replying to the FRPS with his formal comments on the draft.⁷⁵

Suspecting that the Allies had it within their power to secure the allegiance of a people whose paramount concern was for a future free from Yugoslav domination, Kemp lamented the absence of any declaration. He recalled in April 1944:

In several signals I impressed upon Cairo the urgency of this problem and the importance of a declaration, but each time I received the same reply – that there was no prospect of any declaration on the future of Kossovo either from HMG or the Yugoslav Government, and that I must take the line that such problems were outside my competence as a soldier. Such a directive could only have been given by people wholly unfamiliar with the situation in the field. This political problem was so bound up with the military situation that neglect of it rendered sterile any attempts at military action...

I believe that the chances of organising some military activity against the Germans in Kossovo may still be good, given some Allied encouragement to the Kossovars on the lines... suggested... True, the Irredentists would prefer to sit on the fence and do nothing until the Germans began to withdraw or the Allies to land in the Balkans but I think that, given such a declaration, we could have forced them into action. Without it we can expect nothing, since we are offering them nothing to fight for, and so we are leaving the field open for German propaganda to convince them that, if the Allies win, they will revert to Yugoslav rule.

Cairo's advice that he 'tactfully avoid' questions concerning Kosovo's future was pointless, he believed, for 'it was quite impossible to avoid them, as they were invariably the first questions put to me by everyone I met in the area – of whatever party. I hedged as best I could, calling to my help the already overworked Atlantic Charter, but although I avoided committing HMG in any way I could not succeed in swaying the Kossovars on to our side sufficiently to take up arms for us. They did not trust our post-war policy towards them'.⁷⁶ That distrust was fair enough. That Kemp was ever allowed to proceed to Kosovo had everything to do with the fact that diplomats and other observers never realised the full state of tension there until after he crossed the border in December 1943.

Kemp's conviction that a pro-Partisan policy had been at work was also reasonable, given that Cairo had told him on 24 January that his contacts were having an 'undesirable... effect on JUG partisans'. It added two days later: '[our r]elations with JUG partisans [have] overriding importance'.⁷⁷ But this explanation for his withdrawal was misleading. For one thing, British sensitivity to the Kosovo 'issue'

clearly predated the emergence of Tito's Partisan movement. But it is also now apparent that Kemp's withdrawal was effectively accompanied by a ban on all SOE operations in Kosovo, whether in support of nationalists or Partisans. Neither SOE nor the SOC in Cairo proved themselves in favour of encouraging resistance in Kosovo for its own sake. That is, neither recommended blind support for the Partisans regardless of its impact on local tensions. In his 21 January paper on the state of SOE's contacts in Kosovo, Philip Leake advised strongly that the whole situation be handled 'with utmost caution and all support and contact... be cut off at the first sign of civil war'.⁷⁸ At their 22 January meeting, Steel and the SOC 'agreed in discussion' that the presence of *any* liaison officer in Kosovo 'was not essential either for intelligence or military purposes'.⁷⁹ And Kemp fails to acknowledge in his memoir that the instruction despatched to him to keep out of Kosovo applied equally to Andy Hands. The full text, recorded in Hibberdine's diary, reads:

No ops in KOSOVO area [are to be carried out] against ALLATINI mines or other targets [as we] consider [them] inadvisable owing [to the] danger [of] starting civil war. For HANDS and KEMP also continued contact with ALB Nationalists and Irredentists [in the] same area [is considered] undesirable in view [of its] effect on JUG partisans. KEMP [is] to break tactfully with Nationalists etc and return to SPINSTER HQ.⁸⁰

When Hands duly received orders to remain in touch with the Kosovo partisans, he was instructed to 'break off contact at the first signs of further political complications' and placed under strict orders to operate only 'within the old Albanian border'.⁸¹

Although contact was renewed with Gani Bey Kryeziu later in 1944, the ban on SOE operating in Kosovo remained in place for the rest of the war. Noel Malcolm writes that '[t]he British policy of cold-shouldering the Kryezius remained in force from January until June 1944, when contact was renewed and plans for organizing resistance in Kosovo were formed once again'.⁸² This is incorrect. No plans for encouraging resistance among Albanians inside Kosovo were ever revived. In April, the British Military Mission in Serbia reported a statement from Tito that Kosovo's future would be settled by plebiscite after the war. The report had no obvious impact on the policy guiding SOE in Kosovo.⁸³ That SOE ever re-established contact with Gani owed something to Billy McLean's return to Albania in April and his new

Foreign Office-approved directive to encourage nationalists in northern Albania to work with the Partisans and fight the Germans. It also owed something to the dramatic stance that Gani was prepared to take against the Germans, which saw him qualify for Allied arms. But Gani's decision to base himself in northern Albania rather than Kosovo was also important. When Major Tony Simcox began receiving drops for Gani, he remained 'restricted' to operating only inside Albania's pre-1941 borders.⁸⁴

In the summer of 1944, Gani opened a guerilla campaign against the Germans in a corner of northern Albania and south-western Kosovo that provides an important coda to Kemp's activities there the previous winter. It was certainly not a general revolt of the kind that SOE had planned in 1940-41 and that some of its officers, as shall be shown in subsequent chapters, had hoped for in 1944. Pre-occupied with the threat posed by the Partisans and unwilling to risk damaging reprisals, no other Albanian nationalist leader in northern Albania proved himself prepared to join Gani and gamble on fighting the Germans in the way that the Allies wanted. Indeed, compared to the efforts of the Albanian Partisans to the south and Yugoslav Partisans to the north, Gani's campaign was tiny in scale. In consistency and commitment to Allied war aims, however, his efforts rivalled those of any Balkan guerilla and impressed all on the Allied side who saw or heard of them. For some observers, it also seemed to confirm the promise SOE had identified earlier both in Kosovo and in him.

Contemporary reports confirm that all SOE officers who worked with Gani agreed he was pro-British, prepared to serve the Allies unconditionally and hoped, by doing so, to win their approval and a degree of recognition for Albanian claims to Kosovo. On being evacuated to SOE headquarters in March 1944, Kemp had pressed his view that Gani was 'the outstanding political figure' in Kosovo, 'very pro-British and seems a most able and intelligent man with a sound grasp of statecraft. I think he could do a great deal for us as he has great influence... and – what is rare in the Balkans – a high degree of integrity'.⁸⁵ When McLean and his mission contacted Gani again in June, as Reginald Hibbert writes, 'they heard from an Albanian nationalist what every BLO in the north had long been waiting to hear – an unqualified declaration of readiness to fight the Germans at once in whatever way the Allied C-in-C might direct'.⁸⁶ McLean reported after their meeting:

GANI BEY KRYEZIU, with his brothers SAID and HASSAN, is in

the mountains West of DJAKOVA. His influence is considerable, on both sides of the border... though it is not certain whether he could raise the 2,000 rifles at which he used to be valued. The KRYEZIUS live as outlaws, publicly denounced by the HUNS against whom they have recently fought two actions, killing seven and wounding four: they are thus the only NATS now fighting the HUNS. As NATS and landowners they have refused to [join the Kosovo Partisans]... but... are on excellent terms and actively collaborating with [them]... They have used their influence with the peasantry to provide the Partisans with a safe harbour which otherwise they might not have found, given the anti-Partisan attitude of the region. At present GANI has mobilised one hundred men, lacking means to maintain more for any length of time. He has however agreed to mobilise all he can if other NATS take the field and till then to undertake alone operations in proportion to aid supplied by us. Meanwhile he has agreed to begin immediate sabotage... In general his attitude is most satisfactory and his written propaganda at which he is most industrious both intrinsically good and in tune with our own.⁸⁷

Gani asked McLean for a British officer to be attached to him. McLean gave him the experienced Tony Simcox, a twenty-six year old veteran of Dunkirk, Tobruk, the retreat from Burma and seven months with SOE in Albania.⁸⁸

Simcox spent more time with Gani than any other SOE officer and became as convinced as Kemp and McLean of his qualities. 'Gani, as an individual, has a most striking personality', he reported later, 'and gives one the impression of genuineness and honesty. He is well educated, has travelled the world and is a perfect gentleman... What has really happened is that a very influential, well educated person has called together the true patriots... for the purpose of fighting the Germans in order to free his country, and at the same time gain for his country the right to receive a hearing in the Peace Conference'.⁸⁹ Gani had even issued and circulated the following declaration to all Albanians in Kosovo, and asked McLean to have the British broadcast it in his name:

You have been misguided by leaders who have told you that Hitler and Mussolini are the friends of Albania and that the Tirana Government has its conduct agreed by our Allies. The Germans have declared Albania independent but how can this be while it is controlled and administered by Germans? Our friends are the Allies and the only way to gain their favour is to fight now. In no other way can we hope to gain future independence and inclusion of KOSOVA [sic] in Albania. Let us unite regardless of party, clan or

religion to show the world that we want our independence by helping the Allies to fight those nations who wish to domineer the smaller nations.⁹⁰

‘He has a genuine faith in... British Foreign Policy’, Simcox commented later. ‘[L]ittle does he know his own fate’.⁹¹

Simcox also found himself in the midst of a small but escalating guerilla war. Again, this was exactly what Kemp had hoped for in January and McLean in June. ‘G.B. [Gani Bey] is very active’ Simcox wrote to another SOE mission in northern Albania on 8 July, ‘and has killed some Huns in offensive raids and there is no doubt that he ought to receive some assistance. In the meantime he is spending his own fortune in supplying and maintaining about 100 men... It is difficult for him to carry out another raid until he can get the munitions (the last raid used all the rounds for the Bren and the men were forced to buy from the villagers of Deg[ë] a further supply...).’⁹² All arms duly dropped to Simcox were collected safely by Gani’s men – a notable feat in northern Albania where looting from dropping grounds was commonplace – and used only against the Germans. By the end of July Gani was continually in action and Simcox calling in regular airdrops and reporting a ‘series of planned and successful actions which not only proved Gani’s genuineness but also gave him widespread publicity’. Raids and ambushes grew in scale, German reprisals ever more brutal. Attempts to overrun Simcox’s dropping ground and destroy Gani’s mountain base were repulsed with German losses of over seventy.⁹³ A thousand Albanian volunteers and several hundred troops of the all-Albanian SS ‘Skanderbeg’ division were brought in by the Germans but apparently refused to fight him.⁹⁴ Simcox, with the assistance of Gani’s men, blew up several bridges, including one in Kosovo on the main Gjakova-Prizren road when eighteen German soldiers were killed as their lorry crossed at the moment his explosives detonated. In August, Gani’s force overran the chrome mines at Kepenek and Kam in northern Albania, destroyed the facilities, killed or captured over fifty German and quisling troops, and freed over seven hundred Serb slave-workers forcibly employed in the mines. The Germans responded by sweeping through the area burning hundreds of houses to the ground. Hostages were taken from villages along the old Kosovo-Albanian border and hanged in Gjakova. And all the time Gani’s band grew in number, volunteers arriving daily from towns and villages all over Kosovo and many deserting from quisling units,

including the 'Skanderbeg' Division.⁹⁵

'Ultra' decrypts and captured documents, together with records held at the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA) in Freiburg, confirm that the Germans considered Gani a genuine and active threat. A German report compiled as early as mid-April placed him and his estimated 300 supporters at the top of a list of 'Hostile Bands'.⁹⁶ On 16 June, an SOE officer pulled a recent review of the Albanian situation from a German staff car ambushed north of Tirana. Written by the commander of the German 297 Infantry Division, the document described Gani as 'a pro-British leader who had attacked their troops north of the Drin [river]'.⁹⁷ A decrypted Abwehr message sent from Tirana to Berlin on 29 June reported a rumour that Gani was preparing 'to destroy the chrome mines near Gjakova'; the SS 'Skanderbeg' Division and three hundred quisling troops were being employed 'to liquidate the guerilla band'.⁹⁸ On 16 September Billy McLean reported the contents of a bag of documents captured on the night of 11/12 September from a small German convoy ambushed on its way south from Scutari (today's Shkodra) to Tirana. Included was a report from the Sicherheitsdienst in Scutari of information, from its sub-unit in Prizren in southern Kosovo, that warned of an imminent attack by Gani on Gjakova.⁹⁹

In mid-September he did indeed lead his force, which Simcox estimated then as over 1,500 strong, in a significant assault on his hometown of Gjakova. On the night of 10-11 September, from his bases in northern Albania, Gani and three hundred men began the attack by over-running the strategic German camp at Zogaj, close to the frontier with Kosovo. 'It was a very brave advance (such as I could not before credit the Albanians for) under very heavy enemy mortar and M.G. fire' Simcox reported, 'and had the effect of causing the enemy to withdraw in disorder'. Gani's brother Hasan and three hundred other men then stormed and held the mountain pass at the Cafa Prusit border-crossing; at dawn on 12 September, Gani and the rest rushed down on to the Kosovo plain, captured all the villages between the mountains and Gjakova and within hours were at the town's edge. Enemy outposts were bombarded using captured mortars and artillery and the German barracks and petrol and ammunition dumps were all attacked and set ablaze. Only German reinforcements and a shortage of ammunition forced Gani to fall back with his men into northern Albania.

The attack on Gjakova proved to be Gani's last offensive action, however. Albanian partisans, on the heels of the German withdrawal from southeast Europe,

now arrived in northern Albania and set about liquidating Gani and his movement. After retiring from Gjakova, Gani made for the mountains to rest his men and plan for a second assault; Simcox left for his own camp nearby to prepare and call in more supplies before rejoining the attack. But Albanian Partisans then arrived unannounced at Simcox's camp and he and his w/t operator were disarmed and arrested.¹⁰⁰ Said Kryeziu, taken alongside, was fortunate to escape with his life: Simcox's interpreter was summarily tried as a renegade communist, then stripped and flayed to death in front of him.¹⁰¹ Simcox managed to send one message to SOE headquarters 'in defiance' of the Partisan commander who had arrested them:

[On] Sept 19 [this mission] less [Lieutenant Roy] Bullock [was] captured by Ptsns... [f]orced to load [our own] mules and move by forced marches. Could gain no reason from Comd Ptsns and was merely told that he had received orders to remove me from circulation. We are treated quite abominably by Ptsns who [have] refused [to] allow us to control [our] HQ kit with [the] result [that] part [of the] wireless [was] lost and [the] batteries [were] removed by Ptsns to prevent communication with you... [We] know nothing of [the] fate of GANI KRYEZIU. We still remain prisoner of Ptsns.¹⁰²

Said and the British pair were marched south into central Albania where they were turned over to SOE officers who saw them evacuated safely to Italy. And with Simcox out of the way the Partisans went after the remaining Kryeziu brothers. Hasan was murdered in Kosovo in early 1945; Gani's fate for a while remained unclear. Only in April 1945 did a rumour filter through to the British Military Mission in post-occupation Tirana that Gani was being held a prisoner of the Yugoslavs in Pristina.¹⁰³

The Foreign Office response to Gani's plight underlines the limited willingness and ability of British diplomats to confront the Yugoslavs over Kosovo. Ralph Stevenson, by then the British Ambassador in Belgrade, pressed Tito for information on Gani first in April and again in May. Stevenson emphasised Britain's interest in his fate, then extracted an ominous statement in early June. Admitting for the first time that Gani was indeed in prison, the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry stressed that, as a Kossovar, he was technically speaking a Yugoslav. The implication was clear: the British should mind their own business in what was an internal Yugoslav affair.¹⁰⁴ This was spelt out to Stevenson in July. 'I have discussed the question of

Gani Kryeziu on a number of occasions with Dr Subasic,' he telegraphed the Foreign Office on 23 July. 'He informed me today that [the] Yugoslav Government regards the matter as a purely internal one. Gani Kryeziu is a Yugoslav subject and it is difficult for [them] in these circumstances to admit that a foreign government has any right to intervene. The only answer which [the] Yugoslav Government could return to my representations would be on these lines and they wish to avoid if possible sending such an answer to His Majesty's Government. In these circumstances do you wish me to press the matter any further?'¹⁰⁵ Stevenson was also conscious of why the Yugoslavs might be keener to keep him in prison. The following day he telegraphed again: 'My own view is that, although there is no doubt about the question of Gani Kryeziu's record of resistance to the Germans, we do not (repeat not) know what his activities may have been during the early part of this year. We do know that the Yugoslav Government have had a good deal of trouble in that part of Kosovo where Gani Kryeziu is influential and there is at least a possibility he may have been concerned in it. In these circumstances I do not think we can do more than express to Yugoslav Government the hope that his record of resistance will be taken into consideration at his trial'. But although the seriousness of Gani's plight was slowly becoming clear, Whitehall was reluctant to leave him to his fate. 'It is certainly possible that Kryeziu has been working for the return of Kosovo to Albania,' Laskey of the Southern Department minuted on 26 July, 'but this need not stop us asking the Yugoslavs to deal with his case promptly and to formulate any charges that they wish to bring against him'.¹⁰⁶ Douglas Howard telegraphed Stevenson the following day:

I agree that extent to which we can intervene is limited but I do not wish to abandon Kryeziu's case without making a further effort on his behalf. Unless you see objection you should therefore speak to Dr Subasic on following line.

We certainly do not claim any right to dictate to the Yugoslav Government how they should treat a Yugoslav citizen. This is, as Dr Subasic has stated, an internal Yugoslav matter. Nevertheless, Kryeziu has rendered us considerable services and we know that he has worked wholeheartedly for the Allied cause. We cannot remain indifferent to his fate since it is not our practice to abandon our friends. We hope therefore that his case will be dealt with promptly and that if the Yugoslav authorities have charges to make against him these will be investigated without delay and that his record will be taken into account in his favour'.¹⁰⁷

Months passed before news emerged that Gani was to be tried on trumped up charges of murdering Yugoslavs in 1941, collaborating with the Germans and causing unnecessary Partisan deaths during his assault on Gjakova in September 1944. In November 1945 British diplomats received word that Gani had been tried, found guilty and 'sentenced to five years hard labour and the loss of civil rights for five years'.¹⁰⁸ The Foreign Office protested, drawing on evidence provided by Tony Simcox and other SOE officers that challenged every charge against Gani.

Foreign Office files give no indication that Tito's government ever reconsidered Gani's case, however.¹⁰⁹ In May 1946, the Belgrade embassy, having received no response, informed the Foreign Office that 'particularly in view of the Yugoslav Govt's official statements about "intervention" which the Mihailovic trial has occasioned, we are very doubtful of success'.¹¹⁰ One desk officer in London minuted: 'At the present rate of progress, Kryeziu will have finished his sentence of 5 years imprisonment before we get a reply out of the Yugoslav Govt'.¹¹¹ At the end of May the British embassy learnt that 'it was probable that in about six months or a year's time Kryeziu would be amnestied'.¹¹² The Foreign Office resolved to 'return to the attack in six months' and did so, and returned to it again twelve months later.¹¹³ In February 1948, however, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister informed the British Ambassador that Gani was not, in fact, going to be amnestied.¹¹⁴ The embassy informed Whitehall in October: 'We fear that in present circumstances, when the Yugoslavs are out to prove they are more Communist than Moscow, any further direct approach from us is more likely to do harm than good to Kryeziu. Such an approach would certainly not, at the moment, have any hope of attaining a revision of Kryeziu's sentence'.¹¹⁵ References to Gani in Foreign Office files die away at that point and no one on the British side appears to have been certain of what happened to him after that. 'Gani was in jail when I came to Belgrade as No. 2 in our embassy in March 1945' Sir William Deakin recalled over fifty years later. 'I was instructed to declare a British interest, and request his release – a step that possibly led to his liquidation'.¹¹⁶ But in Kosovo it is thought that Gani lingered on in the notorious prison of Sremska Mitrovices until as late as 1951.¹¹⁷ His family in Gjakova believes he was executed on the last day of his sentence.¹¹⁸

Gani's record of resistance and fate may have helped colour the judgement of SOE officers who called for greater Allied support for him in 1944. Tony Simcox

argued that, when the Albanian Partisans opened their summer offensive against the nationalist north, the supply of Allied arms to the Partisans should have ceased. 'We have let the Nationalists of Albania down', he wrote in late 1944, 'especially Gani Kryeziu, who has fought well and is sacrificing more than any communist... Allowing the communists to kill, attack, or provoke their political enemies with our supplies is as bad as doing it ourselves'. He added:

It is a little late now, but our policy should have been to stop supplies to the FNC [Albanian Partisans] the moment they used them against their political enemies and then increased supplies to people like Gani Kryeziu. In a very short while, the nationalists of the north would have ranged themselves behind Gani, fought the Germans well without interfering with the FNC and then claimed to be recognised as a government. This war has helped communism due to the large scale destruction, but there is no need for the British and Americans to help it even further!¹¹⁹

Such arguments, however, fail to acknowledge the strength of the grounds on which British policy-makers sought to focus on military gain and remain aloof from becoming embroiled in internal Balkan disputes. David Talbot-Rice, Head of SOE London's Balkan and Middle East, was one observer better placed than SOE officers in the field to appreciate those grounds and the value of the Partisans in the war against Germany. He wrote on reading Simcox's report: 'there is no doubt that Kryeziu was a far more attractive individual than were most of the FNC [Albanian Partisan] leaders and he was prepared to take action without any long term political ends in view but we should, I think, consider the big picture of successful FNC Partisans operating in the south... and of Tito and his Jugoslavs, operating to the north. This, I think puts the situation into a truer perspective, however one may sympathise with Simcox's attitude'.¹²⁰ Simcox was not alone, of course, in claiming that an important opportunity had been missed. Peter Kemp believed that a chance to foster resistance in Kosovo with Gani at its head had, a few months earlier, been passed over simply to keep the Yugoslav Partisans on side. But the decision in January 1944 to bring SOE's presence in Kosovo to a close was no less pragmatic than the decision to continue supporting the Albanian Partisans that summer. It was true that the Foreign Office was conscious of Tito's value at that time. But the end of

SOE's involvement in Kosovo reflected considerably more sensitivity to local tensions and territorial claims than has previously been recognised.

- ¹ This spelling, the most familiar with the English-speaking world, is used throughout this chapter rather than the Albanian Kosova/Kosovë and the full and official Serbian Kosovo-Metohija.
- ² P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest*
- ³ N. Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1998) p.307; R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle*; B. Fischer, *Albania at War*
- ⁴ W. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume 5: Closing the Ring* (London: Cassell, 1952) p.357, 416
- ⁵ F. McLynn, *Fitzroy Maclean* (London: John Murray, 1992) pp 176-7; W. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume 5* p.416
- ⁶ 'Plan for the Advance Mission to Albania', Major N.L.D. McLean to Col G. Tamplin, 29 March 1943, PRO HS 5/66
- ⁷ w/t message, CONCENSUS to Cairo, 29 July 1943, McLean papers, IWM
- ⁸ w/t message, CONCENSUS to Cairo, 12 August 1943, McLean papers, IWM
- ⁹ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.100
- ¹⁰ Report by Squadron Leader A.G. Hands, 1944, PRO HS 5/138
- ¹¹ w/t message, CONCENSUS to Cairo, 8 August 1943, McLean papers, IWM
- ¹² 'Albanian memorandum' by Major N.L.D. McLean, 4 April 1943, PRO HS 5/66
- ¹³ 'SOC Directive to Brigadier E.F. Davies', October 1943, PRO HS 5/59
- ¹⁴ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.154
- ¹⁵ Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144
- ¹⁶ E. Davies, *Illyrian Venture* p.70
- ¹⁷ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p. 215-6
- ¹⁸ M. Djilas, *Wartime* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977 pbk) pp.368-70
- ¹⁹ F. Maclean, *Eastern Approaches* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949) pp.413-6
- ²⁰ w/t message, Hunter to Cairo, 17 January 1944, Yugoslav Operational Signals Log 'In', PRO WO 202/143
- ²¹ E. Barker, 'Some Factors in British Decision-Making over Yugoslavia, 1941-4' in P. Auty and R. Clogg, *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* (London: Macmillan, 1975) p.40-41
- ²² T. Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge* (London: Yale UP, 2000) pp.30-31
- ²³ N. Malcolm, *Kosovo* p.315
- ²⁴ Major P. Leake to SOE Yugoslav Section, Cairo, 18 January 1944, PRO HS 5/79
- ²⁵ Captain J. Hibberdine diary. I am grateful to Felicity Hibberdine-Fairhurst for access to her father's papers.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ 'Balkan sitrep', cipher telegram, C-in-C Middle East to War Office, 19 January 1944, PRO HS 5/82
- ²⁸ Captain J. Hibberdine diary
- ²⁹ N. Malcolm, *Kosovo* pp.298-9. Major John Sehmer's NERONIAN mission, for example, had joined Major Radoslaw Djuric's Chetniks in south-eastern Serbia in April with orders to open lines into Albania and attack the Allatini chrome mines and the Trepca lead-zinc mine and metallurgical plant. Although 'initial contacts' with the Chetniks were 'excellent' no meaningful contact with Albanians appears to have been made and no mines were attacked. (S.W. Bailey, 'British Policy towards General Draza Mihailovic' in P. Auty and R. Clogg, *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* p.80). Before Kemp arrived in Kosovo one promising incident does seem to have occurred when Captain Mike Lees of FUGUE mission crossed 'the new Albanian frontier' in August and contacted, as Lees describes in a post-war account, a group of around 150 armed Albanians. They proclaimed themselves 'followers of the exiled King Zog' and 'appeared to have considerable potential'. They also told Lees that they could 'call on another 1,000 to join in one or two days... 4,000 within a couple of weeks and eventual reserves of up to 40,000'. The numbers were clearly 'wishful thinking' but Lees still considered the group 'significant'. Encouraged by their willingness to fight and having witnessed them in action against Bulgarian troops, Lees, from late August until his w/t set 'went out of action' in late October, asked SOE repeatedly to send one drop 'which could have been instrumental in starting an important resistance movement'. SOE Cairo promised to send a planeload

'two or three times' but nothing, in fact, was ever sent. He wrote later of his disappointment: 'Here was a group eager to build a resistance movement... already armed... without a political ax to grind... just asking for a lead. What more could [SOE] ask for?' Lees recalls the incident in his book *The Rape of Serbia: a furious and unscrupulous attack on Britain's decision to abandon Mihailovic, in which he implies that dark goings-on at SOE headquarters deprived the Chetniks and other Balkan guerillas of the support they deserved.* (M. Lees, *The Rape of Serbia: The British Role in Tito's Grab for Power, 1943-1944* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990) pp.169-71.) Whether pro-Partisan subterfuge, adverse flying conditions or supply shortages explain the lack of support accorded to Lees remains unclear. The records of the Special Operations Committee, which first sat in September 1943, do not suggest that the merits or otherwise of Lees' appeal ever came up for discussion. The identity of his Albanians (Lees called them Arnautis, a curiously antiquated term) also remains a mystery, although their activities may explain the rumours of Kosovar resistance passed to McLean by Cairo in August.

³⁰ Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144

³¹ The most notorious form of collaboration was the creation of the SS 'Skanderbeg' Division, an all-Albanian volunteer unit recruited by the Germans in Kosovo in 1944. Critics of NATO's actions over Kosovo in 1999 drew vague associations between the division and the Kosovo Liberation Army (see, for example, C. Hedges, 'Kosovo's Next Masters?' in *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1999 pp.24-42). The comparison was apt in at least one respect: recruits to both were motivated overwhelmingly by hostility to the Serbs.

³² N. Malcolm, *Kosovo* pp. 305-6

³³ Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144

³⁴ Captain J. Hibberdine diary

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ Captain J. Hibberdine diary

³⁹ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.213

⁴⁰ Captain J. Hibberdine diary

⁴¹ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.212

⁴² Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144

⁴³ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.213

⁴⁴ Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144

⁴⁵ Captain J. Hibberdine diary

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Force 133 (SOE Cairo) Daily Sitrep, 18 January 1944, PRO HS 5/158; Captain J. Hibberdine diary

⁴⁸ 'Kosovo Region', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 21 January 1944, PRO HS 5/66

⁴⁹ W. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE* pp.507-514; SOE War Diary, PRO, HS 7/271

⁵⁰ Cipher telegram, SOE London to Force 133, 24 November 1943, PRO HS 5/66

⁵¹ Minutes to SOC (W) (44) 10th Meeting, 22 January 1944, PRO WO 201/2860

⁵² Minutes to SOC (W) (44) 20th Meeting, 7 February 1944, PRO, WO 201/2860

⁵³ 'Subsidy for Kosmet (Kosovo-Metohija) Partisans', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 30 January 1944 and hand-written annotations by C. Steel, 30 January 1944, PRO, HS 5/66; minutes to SOC (W) (44) 20th Meeting, 7 February 1944, PRO WO 201/2860

⁵⁴ 'Liaison with the Kosovo-Metohija (Kosmet) Partisans', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 5 February 1944, PRO HS 5/79. In the event, a German offensive forced Hands and his mission away from the region by March and SOE lost all contact with the Kosovo Partisans.

⁵⁵ Minutes to SOC (43) 11th Meeting, 11 November 1943, PRO WO 201/2790

⁵⁶ Minutes to SOC (43) 7th Meeting, 20 October 1943, PRO WO 201/2790

⁵⁷ Mustafa Gjinishi: prominent member of the Communist Party of Albania and Partisan Central Council

⁵⁸ Dr Ymer Dishnica: founder member of the Communist Party of Albania

⁵⁹ Vasil Andoni: prominent member of the Balli Kombëtar

⁶⁰ Halil Maci: prominent member of the Balli Kombëtar

⁶¹ Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144

⁶² W. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume Three: The Grand Alliance* (London: Cassell, 1950) p.393

- ⁶³ 'Inflation No.12 of February 4', Major P. Leake to 'G.Ops' and C. Steel, 5 February 1944, PRO HS 5/79; minutes of SOC (43) 6th Meeting, 13 October 1943, PRO WO 201/2790
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid*
- ⁶⁵ w/t messages, Cairo to SPINSTER and SPILLWAY, 21 October 1943, recorded in memorandum, Major P. Leake to Brig. W. Stawell, 5 February 1944, PRO HS 5/79
- ⁶⁶ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.32
- ⁶⁷ Lord Glenconner to P. Dixon, 2 June 1942, PRO, FO 371/33112
- ⁶⁸ P. Dixon to Lord Glenconner, 10 June 1942, PRO, FO 371/33112
- ⁶⁹ E. Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1976) pp.174-5
- ⁷⁰ A. Eden, 17 December 1942, Hansard, Vol. 385, HC Debates, Fifth Series, Col. 2114
- ⁷¹ Major P. Leake to Major E. Boxshall, 9 October 1943, PRO, HS 5/65
- ⁷² 'Albanian Guerillas', speech to the House of Commons, quoted in R. Rhodes James, *Winston Churchill: His Complete Speeches 1897-1963 Vol. VII 1943-1949* (London: Chelsea House, 1974) p.6873
- ⁷³ 'Albania as an International Problem', draft paper by the Foreign Research and Press Service, sent under note to D. Howard, 26 February 1943, PRO FO 371/37135
- ⁷⁴ Minute by D. Laskey, 9 April 1943, PRO FO 371/37135
- ⁷⁵ D. Howard to B. Wall (of the Foreign Research and Press Service), 9 June 1943, PRO FO 371/37135
- ⁷⁶ Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144
- ⁷⁷ Captain J. Hibberdine diary
- ⁷⁸ 'Kosovo Region', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 21 January 1944, PRO HS 5/66
- ⁷⁹ Minutes to SOC (W) (44) 10th Meeting, 22 January 1944, PRO WO 201/2860
- ⁸⁰ Captain J. Hibberdine diary
- ⁸¹ 'Liaison with the Kosovo-Metohija (Kosmet) Partisans', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 5 February 1944, PRO HS 5/79
- ⁸² Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo* p.308
- ⁸³ 'The Frontiers of Albania' by the Foreign Office Research Department, 30 June 1944, PRO FO 371/43567
- ⁸⁴ w/t message, Bari to CONCENSUS II, 19 August 1944, McLean papers, IWM
- ⁸⁵ Report by Major P.M.M. Kemp, 1944, PRO HS 5/144
- ⁸⁶ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.163
- ⁸⁷ w/t message, CONCENSUS II to Bari, 12 June 1944, McLean papers, IWM
- ⁸⁸ Information from Mr H. Clement. I am grateful to Mr Clement and the late Phyllis Simcox for their help and advice and for permitting me to quote from Mrs Simcox's late husband's papers (hereafter 'Simcox papers').
- ⁸⁹ Report by Major A.C. Simcox, 1944, PRO HS 5/135
- ⁹⁰ w/t message, CONCENSUS II to Bari, 12 June 1944, quoted in Major E. Boxshall to A. Smyth, 16 November 1944, PRO HS 5/73
- ⁹¹ Report by Major A.C. Simcox, 1944, PRO HS 5/135
- ⁹² Major A.C. Simcox to Squadron Leader P.A.B. Neel, 8 July 1944, Simcox papers
- ⁹³ Report by Major A.C. Simcox, 1944, PRO HS 5/135
- ⁹⁴ SOE weekly review, 10-16 July 1944, NARA RG 226, A 3304, Roll 94
- ⁹⁵ Report by Major A.C. Simcox, 1944, PRO HS 5/135
- ⁹⁶ 'Erlaeuterungen zur Bandenkarte v. Albanien', 14 April 1944, BA MA, RH 19 XI 10b, folio 64
- ⁹⁷ 'Gani Bey Kryeziu', memorandum by Brig. D.E.P. Hodgson, 20 May 1945, PRO HS 5/73
- ⁹⁸ Decrypt no. 11428, Group XIII/89, Tirana to Berlin, 29 June 1944, PRO HW 19/246
- ⁹⁹ w/t message, CONCENSUS II to Bari no. 13, 16 September 1944, McLean papers, IWM
- ¹⁰⁰ Report by Major A.C. Simcox, 1944, PRO HS 5/135
- ¹⁰¹ Simcox papers. Simcox's interpreter was Lazar Fundo, who had spent time in Moscow and on missions in Europe and Asia before becoming disillusioned and apparently turning to 'Social-Democracy'. Arrested by the Italians in Albania, he had met and become a close confidant of Gani's during his own imprisonment in Italy. He accompanied Gani and Said back to Gjakova in late 1943 and met Kemp and Hibberdine in January 1944.
- ¹⁰² w/t message, COLDWATER to Bari, 1 October 1944, PRO HS 5/72
- ¹⁰³ Cipher telegram, P. Broad to H. Macmillan, 15 April 1945, PRO HS 5/73
- ¹⁰⁴ Cipher telegrams, Sir Ralph Stevenson to Foreign Office, 25 April, 5 May and 2 June 1945, PRO HS 5/73
- ¹⁰⁵ Cipher telegram, Sir Ralph Stevenson to Foreign Office, 23 July 1945, PRO HS 5/73

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- ¹⁰⁶ Cipher telegram, Sir Ralph Stevenson to Foreign Office, 24 July 1945, PRO HS 5/73; minute by D. Laskey, 26 July 1945, PRO FO 371/48110
- ¹⁰⁷ Cipher telegram, Foreign Office to Belgrade, 27 July 1945, PRO HS 5/73
- ¹⁰⁸ Major E. Boxshall to D. Laskey, 22 October 1945, enclosing personal telegram, Said Kryeziu to Major S.E. Watorus, 19 October 1945, PRO HS 5/73; cipher telegrams, F.W. Deakin to Foreign Office, 26 October and 2 November 1945, PRO HS 5/73
- ¹⁰⁹ 'Gani Bey Kryeziu' by Major A.C. Simcox, PRO HS 5/73; Major E. Boxshall to A. Smyth, 16 November 1944, PRO, HS 5/73; F.W. Deakin to General Velebit, 12 December 1945, PRO HS 5/73
- ¹¹⁰ Cipher telegram, Chancery to Foreign Office, 16 May 1946, PRO FO 371/58472
- ¹¹¹ Minute, A. Smyth, 24 May 1946, PRO FO 371/58472
- ¹¹² Chancery (Belgrade) to Foreign Office, 31 May 1946, PRO FO 371/58472
- ¹¹³ Minute, A. Smyth, 14 June 1946, PRO FO 371/58472; Southern Department to Chancery, Belgrade, 3 December 1946, PRO FO 371/58472
- ¹¹⁴ Yugoslav Foreign Minister to British Embassy, Belgrade, 21 February 1948, PRO FO 371/72110
- ¹¹⁵ Belgrade to Foreign Office, 18 October 1948, PRO FO 371/72110
- ¹¹⁶ Sir William Deakin to author, 30 March 1998
- ¹¹⁷ U. Butka, *Ringjallje* (Pristina: Phoenix, 2000), p.113
- ¹¹⁸ Interview with Myzafere and Luan Kryeziu, sister-in-law and nephew of Hasan Kryeziu, Gjakova, 11 November 2000
- ¹¹⁹ Report by Major A.C. Simcox, 1944, PRO HS 5/135
- ¹²⁰ Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice to Colonel D. Keswick, 1 December 1944, PRO HS 5/75

Chapter Four

Philip Leake, SOE and British policy towards the Albanian resistance

December 1943 to June 1944

At five o'clock on the morning of 7 June 1944, a pair of German Dorniers flew down the Lunxhëri valley in southern Albania and attacked an SOE mission camped outside the Partisan-held village of Sheper. An SOE officer present reported later that Lieutenant-Colonel Philip Leake, the Head of SOE's Albanian Section, 'who was proceeding to the coast that day [for evacuation and] was the only person out of bed at the time', was the only casualty, 'killed by the first bomb. He was buried with Partisan military honours the same morning in the Greek Orthodox Churchyard at Shepr'.¹

Critics of Britain's support of Albania's Partisan movement in 1944 highlight the death of Leake, who had left his desk job a month earlier to drop into the country, as a tragic turning point. Peter Kemp sees it as 'a most fortunate accident for the Communists'.² David Smiley feels Leake's loss dealt 'a bad blow to our mission'.³ In June 1944 Smiley had been in Albania as a member of an SOE team trying to persuade certain anticommunist nationalists to fight the Germans. Had Leake not been killed, imply Smiley and Kemp, those Albanians might have been allowed more time and space in which to fight and prove their worth, won British support for their cause and saved Albania from communism. Instead, so the argument goes, British policy-makers became so biased towards the Partisans that the nationalists were unnecessarily and unfairly neglected and, ultimately, left to be defeated by a Partisan army equipped with British weapons.

This chapter illuminates Leake's views on policy and resistance in Albania between December 1943 and the early summer of 1944. It seeks to demonstrate that Smiley, Kemp and others distort and exaggerate his influence on the decision-making process and his support for the policies they advocated. Leake, throughout that period, maintained that Britain should support all Albanians who were committed to fighting the Germans but avoid any kind of political commitments. Taking sides in domestic Albanian squabbles, he felt, would only aggravate local tensions, damage relations with genuine resisters and hamper the Albanian war effort. On these grounds, Leake argued, the Partisans deserved continued support for as long as they fought the

Germans. He was also certain that the Partisans could never be reconciled with the nationalists and foresaw that any British attempt to forge an agreement between them would only complicate matters. In 1944, however, SOE's ability to affect policy in Albania was slight. Leake's concerns were not shared by the Foreign Office, which proceeded to over-commit Britain to the nationalist side.

'Anyone who knew Philip Leake would have liked him and been impressed by his grasp of affairs and objective and unbiased approach' remembers Marcus Lyon, who worked with the Albanian Partisans throughout 1944.⁴ All accounts support that assessment; Leake was very highly regarded. Born in 1906 and educated at Dulwich College and Oxford, where he read Modern History as a scholar at Corpus Christi, he then taught for a time at Dulwich College Preparatory School, where his father had been headmaster. For a time, the son, too, ran the school, but he did not warm to the job and, when war broke out, was living in Southampton and working as Education Inspector for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.⁵ Bickham Sweet-Escott, who had a long career on the SOE staff, then recruited his 'oldest friend' directly into the organisation in June 1940. Leake received an automatic commission into the Intelligence Corps and three years later became Albanian Section Head.⁶ 'A gentle, kindly person with a nice sense of humour, a dry, cynical wit and that "transcendent capacity of taking trouble" which Carlyle equated with genius', Kemp writes, 'he was a most capable officer, well fitted for his post as head of the Cinderella of the Balkan Country Sections'.⁷

Leake had no specialist knowledge of Albania but the post of Section Head called more for a man with experience of SOE staff work and he certainly had plenty of that. For his first year he had worked in its Baker Street headquarters in London, assisting first the Head of the Balkan Section and then the Head of the African Section who sent him overseas.⁸ SOE's War Diary locates him in Lagos in September 1941 working in its West African office.⁹ While there, according to Kemp, Leake may have been involved in some capacity with Operation POSTMASTER: SOE's dramatic capture of two Italian ships off Fernando Po in January 1942.¹⁰ Another SOE officer, however, places Leake that month on board a troopship leaving the United Kingdom for Durban. From South Africa, according to that officer's memoirs, Leake was involved in some capacity in Operation IRONCLAD: SOE's effort to spearhead the British capture of Diego Suarez.¹¹ In any event, Leake had certainly arrived in South

Africa by the spring of 1942 and became assistant Head of SOE's East African mission there.¹² The War Diary puts him in Durban, working for that mission, in May.¹³ His SOE Personal File puts him in Madagascar in January 1943, promoted major and working with SOE's sub-mission there, which, for a time, he commanded. And in May, after a spell running a joint intelligence centre in Cape Town, he was posted to SOE's Cairo headquarters where he took charge from Margaret Hasluck of its fledgling Albanian Section. Some weeks had passed since the first SOE mission went into the country; more were planned and Leake set about recruiting a small staff and running the Section along more regular lines.¹⁴ 'He was extremely well organised [with]... a very quick... logical and linear mind' remembers Jon Naar, whom Leake recruited in Cairo in November 1943 to become the Section's military intelligence officer. 'The thing that amazed me most about Philip was that he had the ability to compose a fairly long memorandum to London or wherever in his head. He never seemed to have any written notes but he would sit there for forty-five minutes and simply dictate to one of the secretaries. I was very impressed by that'.¹⁵

With the recent release of SOE's records, such memoranda now reveal Leake's opinions on policy at critical points and do much to confirm his qualities, his aptitude for the role of Section Head and his judicious and careful handling of reports from the field. 'Leake was a schoolmaster by profession and in character' recalls Naar, 'tending to be academic but eminently fair in his judgements'.¹⁶ His response to the receipt of Trotsky Davies' proposals of 17 December 1943 is a case in point. Given the historical significance that Albanian political parties attach today to those proposals, it is also a case worthy of detailed examination.¹⁷

Davies had reported that it was 'imperative' the Allies declare openly for the LNC Partisans and denounce the puppet government, the Zogists and the *Balli Kombëtar*. The BK and Zogists, Davies stressed, had failed to fight the Germans despite repeated promises and opportunities to do so and were employing Britain's failure to denounce the Regency government as evidence of Allied sympathy with their anti-Partisan stance. Mixed German and BK forces, meanwhile, were now attacking the Partisans. According to Margaret Hasluck, Leake's initial reaction to Davies's proposals was to suggest that SOE would have to obey them 'loyally'. This response may have been in line with the chain of command but did not reflect Leake's personal opinions at that moment. When sharing his thoughts officially with higher

authority days later, Leake agreed with Davies that the Partisans deserved continued support but also argued that it was too soon for Britain to come out in sole support of them.

Leake's grounds for opposing Davies' call for exclusive support of the Partisans are set out in a paper he prepared on 24 December for the Special Operations Committee (SOC). The SOC was the body of local diplomatic and military representatives in Cairo which advised GHQ Middle East, the command that controlled and directed the execution of SOE policy in the Balkans, and discussed all matters arising out of SOE's operations that were considered of possible affect to that policy. In his December paper, Leake gave an appreciation of the military value of Albania, which he considered to be slight at present given the current state of civil war and that the Partisans were mostly occupied in trying to survive. He also summarised the pros and cons of Davies's recommendations. One advantage was that continued co-operation of the Partisans would be secured, which was 'essential to the effective execution' of SOE's 'operational tasks'. Another was that Britain's support shown to be genuine; the BK, he noted, were now definitely collaborating. On the negative side, Leake considered that breaking with the BK and Zogists would end all hope of a general, widespread uprising at the war's end and frustrate important intelligence-gathering and other operations in nationalist regions of northern Albania and along the coast. He also warned that by supporting only the Partisans 'we shall be committed to a policy of intervention in a purely Albanian conflict and to the support of a movement whose ultimate success and popular backing are uncertain'. Leake recommended that no break should be made with the BK or Zogists. The Partisans, however, should be given ongoing assistance, 'increased publicity' and official assurance that the BK and Zogists would be supplied only if they 'openly adopt a policy of active hostility to the Germans'.¹⁸

Leake's recommendations met with the approval of the SOC. Discussing Davies' message in Cairo on 29 December, the committee agreed with the reasoning in Leake's paper and his suggestion that it would be unwise to break with the BK and Zogists.¹⁹ In London, to where all policy proposals had to be referred for approval, the Foreign Office, the War Office and SOE all fell in with the SOC.²⁰ A Foreign Office telegram was duly sent to Cairo concurring with the SOC's recommendation. It was

duly confirmed as policy on 24 January in the following directive from GHQ Middle East:

Military support to Albanian guerillas and the actions of British Allied Liaison Officers in Albania, will be governed by the following policy:

- (a) No declaration will be made in favour of, nor will any open break be made with, any particular Albanian party or guerilla band.
- (b) The maximum financial and material assistance which, having regard to other British commitments, can be made available for Albania, will be given to all guerilla bands, irrespective of their political allegiance, which are actively resisting the Germans or are genuinely prepared to do so.
- (c) Increased publicity will be given... to the resistance efforts of all bands resisting Germans.

In accordance with this policy, Allied personnel in Albania were instructed to 'maintain contact with all guerilla bands and individuals actively resisting the Germans, or who may be induced to assist the Allied war effort in any material degree'.²¹ That policy remained in place and unchanged long into 1944. In practice, it meant that SOE remained in touch with the BK, Legality and other nationalists and kept working on them to fight the Germans even though the Partisans were the only movement actually doing any fighting.

Reginald Hibbert argues that the failure to stand by Davies's proposals was a critical error in the development of British policy. 'Davies [had] put his finger on the essence of the situation' Hibbert writes, 'the civil war had already begun in earnest and, from the point of view of the Albanian "nationalists", the Germans were acting in it as the nationalists' instrument for the destruction of the LNC. Unfortunately for the LNC, for Britain's relations with Albania and perhaps too for Albania itself, the Brigadier's mission in Albania virtually ended with this [message]'. A German offensive had forced Davies off the air and on the run two days after sending his message. He never qualified his proposals before being ambushed and captured on 8 January, and his disappearance, Hibbert believes, prevented observers outside Albania from appreciating that civil war had 'irrevocably started'. The autumn and early

winter of 1943 had seen the first half of the conflict; if the Partisans survived that winter's German offensive 'there was no way in which the second part could be prevented in 1944'. Based on the belief that they were not yet locked in a fight to the death, later British attempts to bring certain nationalists and the Partisans back together were always going to fail. Hibbert concedes that 'a recommended change of policy with far-reaching implications could not possibly be accepted in Cairo, and even less in London, on the basis of a single, summary telegram'. He is scathing, however, about the 'would-be non-interventionist' view: 'by sending BLOs [British Liaison Officers] to Albania, Britain had already committed itself to stirring up resistance... and must expect to be taken over by events if it tried to become non-committal'.²²

Declaring all-out for the Partisans in December 1943, as Hibbert suggests, may well have been better for Britain's future relations with Albania, given the extraordinary growth in size, strength and influence the Partisans underwent in the spring of 1944 and the fact that most nationalists would never fight the Germans. Yet Hibbert underestimates the sense of uncertainty surrounding the future of Allied operations in Albania. He also underestimates Leake's ability to make a well-reasoned appraisal of the picture as it appeared at that point. SOE's records suggest that Leake's desire to remain aloof from any exclusive commitment to the Partisans reflected an accurate assessment of how SOE could best do its job, without aggravating the political situation, based on the information then available to him.

Recent reports from Davies and other officers in the field had suggested that the decline in Partisan resistance was almost terminal. As Leake stressed to SOE London in a long paper on 14 December, three days before Davies issued his policy proposal: 'little in the way of operations can [now] be expected from the partisans and none from the Ball[i] Kombetar'. Partisan strength stood at just three tiny brigades, 'each about 200-600 [men] strong', and was confined to a shrinking corner of southern Albania. These units had conducted virtually no offensive operations against the Germans since the beginning of November; no evidence existed to suggest they would even survive the winter, let alone recover and return to the attack. If SOE was to achieve anything in Albania, it had to keep its options open.²³ Davies himself had stressed in mid-November that SOE 'must be active' even if the Albanians failed to take any action.²⁴ Leake echoed that recommendation in his 14 December paper:

The principal operational task of the Mission should be to prepare a scheme of widespread action to be carried out on the [German] withdrawal... or an Allied invasion. The dispositions of the enemy should be carefully observed and plans laid for hindering their retreat, directing tactical bombing and causing the maximum disorganisation. One can but hope that when the Germans finally leave the country the Albanians will be prepared temporarily to sink their differences in order to speed the enemy on his way.

It follows that there can be no question of withdrawing the Mission either wholly or in part... It is essential that Albania is covered by parties capable of maintaining and working up the proper contacts in order that full advantage may be taken of any operational opportunities... at the time of the inevitable German retirement.²⁵

These views remained essentially unchanged, though condensed, in the paper Leake submitted to the SOC two weeks later. He repeated them in a telegram to SOE London in early January. The civil war, currently 'in full swing', was 'undoubtedly precipitated' by the Partisans who did 'not possess the same popular support as in Yugoslavia' and whose 'ultimate success' was 'by no means assured' and 'influence... virtually limited to Southern Albania'. He concluded:

It appears therefore that [the] adoption [of] Trotsky's recommendations would politically involve us in [an] Albanian civil war possibly on the wrong side and from [the] military standpoint necessitate [the] abandonment [of] important nationalist contacts in Northern Albania...

In view of [the] above we felt obliged to advise SOC that no... open political declarations should be made unless considered absolutely essential for the continued existence of the Mission... Before reaching this conclusion we should of course normally have referred back to Trotsky but as you are aware contact with him was lost on December 19th.²⁶

Only in the spring of 1944 did SOE begin to appreciate that the Albanian Partisans who survived the winter were capable of establishing a movement able to inflict substantial damage on the Germans and secure considerable popular support. A situation report drafted by Leake in late February again refers to the Partisans as 'in decline': those in the mountains near Tirana were 'dispersed'; the remainder was confined to the southwest and 'seriously threatened by persistent German drives'.²⁷

Today, with a greater understanding of the conditions in which his mission was living and operating in Albania in mid-December 1943, grounds can be made out on which to question the objectivity of Davies' judgement at that time. In his memoir, *Illyrian Venture*, he neither mentions sending his 17 December message nor his grounds for wanting a break. But his mission's War Diary miraculously survived the disasters that subsequently befell Davies and his men, being carried to safety by Captain Alan Hare, the only officer from the group to survive both the ambush and the rigours of being on the run for weeks in freezing winter conditions. In February 1944 Hare passed the Diary to Major George Seymour; later that year it was brought out safely from Albania and passed into the possession of SOE's Albanian Section in Bari. Since the end of the war the Diary has been in private hands and, until viewed by the author of this thesis in 2002, had not been seen by any writer since Davies' death in 1952. The document records the movements, discussions and deliberations of Davies' mission and sheds important new light on why he recommended all-out support for the Partisans at the end of 1943. It also details Seymour's subsequent work in early 1944.

By mid-December 1943, the Diary confirms, the Germans had been surrounding Davies, his mission, Enver Hoxha and the Partisan command for two weeks. This was 'affording us a valuable opportunity of getting to know the members of the [Partisan] Council and they us' recorded the Diarist, Colonel Arthur Nicholls. But by 17 December the mission was in desperate straits, expecting to be on the receiving end of an imminent German offensive from which it was far from convinced it would emerge unscathed. It was also despairing at the absence of Allied broadcasts that encouraged the Albanians to resist. Extracts from Nicholls' entries for 15, 16 and 17 December read:

Wednesday, 15 Dec 43...

Eden's speech in the House listened to with interest on the wireless. Once again Jug and Greece are plugged but no mention of Albania. It's very heartbreaking and discouraging and each time our stock, so carefully built up, is sent crashing down. Distant sounds of MGs firing...

1400. E.F.D. [Davies] has long walk and talk in the winter sunshine with Enver Hoxha. A good deal of ground is covered and E.F.D. stresses the vital necessity of his getting out [to Cairo] soonest poss...

Thursday, 16 Dec 43...

Our appreciation is that the Hun will attack here any minute... There is virtually nothing between us and the Boche except some half-baked village idiots. The 2nd [Partisan] Bde and the Italians have withdrawn... and the remnants are dispersed all over the countryside and have lost such coherence as they ever possessed. E.F.D. holds a late Council of War and issues his orders [for]... Battle Stations and Stand-to tomorrow at first light. Sten guns and grenades, newly arrived by air sortie are cleaned and issued. We should be able to give some account of ourselves at least.

Friday, 17 Dec 43...

0600 Stand-to... Country almost uncannily quiet...

0800 Stand-down. Lovely sunshine but very cold. Every effort to be made to get and maintain max contact with CAIRO over next few days. Much to say which it is essential should be recorded in case we are killed or put in the bag.²⁸

Frustration and fear of his mission's imminent extinction may well have compelled Davies to suggest that day to Cairo that he felt the Partisans deserved continued and exclusive support and better recognition. There was no guarantee that he would ever reach Cairo to be able to make such an appeal in person.

German pressure, then, may have partly determined the timing of Davies' proposals to Cairo in mid-December 1943. However, given that there was no guarantee that the Partisans would survive such pressure either, it may be wondered whether Davies had not taken his eye momentarily off the ball. In mid-November, he had advised continued support for those actively fighting the Germans, impartial treatment of all sides, pending proof condemning those who were accused of collaboration, and non-intervention in the civil war.²⁹ A month later, when he advised that policy-makers condemn the BK and Zogists, it was clear that the Partisans still deserved continued support in view of their anti-fascist stance and the concerted German efforts being made to destroy them. There was also no question that the BK was working with the enemy: the mission could see and hear them fighting with the Germans against the Partisans. But by mid-December Davies could not have been sure that, if the Partisans were wiped out, the Zogists and other Nationalists could not be persuaded to turn on the Germans. Certainly nothing in the War Diary or in Davies' reports or memoir suggests he believed that the Zogists, who were not yet engaged in civil war, or even the BK were wholeheartedly pro-German. Indeed, fighting all

around them had prevented Davies and his mission from having any direct contact with any Nationalist leader for over four weeks. It is also interesting to note the reaction of other SOE officers in northern Albania to Davies' proposals. In early February 1944 the dying Arthur Nicholls, who had escaped the ambush of 8 January but suffered terribly while on the run, came up again on air. George Seymour had found Nicholls hidden and being treated by a friend of Abas KUPI, the Zogist leader. Impressed with KUPI's professed pro-Allied stance and apparent potential, Nicholls reported that he felt Davies' December proposals were 'out of date'.³⁰ Seymour, too, recorded and reported his own 'consternation' on hearing news of the proposed policy.³¹

The sidelining of those proposals met Leake's desire to see Britain remain uncommitted in Albania. However, it also marked the last point at which Leake was fully behind an important policy decision. No sooner had the SOC's decision to overrule Davies been accepted, than a new Foreign Office-backed initiative to work out some form of agreement between the Partisans and KUPI began to emerge. The idea had first been mooted after Major Billy McLean and Captain David Smiley, the two senior members of the four-man mission that had first gone into Albania in April 1943, were evacuated from the coast in mid-November after seven months in the field. In Cairo at the end of that month they expressed their view that to abandon all Nationalists at that stage would be hasty and, since it appeared to them that the Partisans had precipitated civil conflict, unjust. They also suggested that the civil war might be stopped if certain nationalists could be persuaded to fight alongside the Partisans. 'Our policy should be to back the Partisans with all possible material aid as they are the only military force worth backing in the country' McLean reported. 'At the same time, we should maintain contact with the Nationalist groups, and, if possible, try to stop the Civil War. We should try and ensure that the more anti-German Nationalists should either collaborate with or enter in the LNC movement'.³²

After discussions with McLean in London, the Foreign Office expressed support for his proposal that Abas KUPI be encouraged to align himself with the Partisans.³³ A gendarmerie officer before the war, KUPI proclaimed himself a loyal supporter of King Zog and hailed from the king's own region of Mati in northern Albania. He had also had put up a brief but spirited resistance to the Italian invasion in 1939, been one of Oakley-Hill's irregulars in 1941 and subsequently joined the

Partisans, a record that so enhanced his reputation that he was appointed one of the few non-communists on the movement's central council. In late 1943, however, he had split from the Partisans, ceased fighting and, in the mountains of Mati, established a pro-Zog party, *Legaliteti* (Legality). Soon he opened talks with the anti-Zogist but fiercely anticommunist *Balli Kombëtar*. But if Kupa could be persuaded to rejoin the Partisans, McLean thought, he might provide a rallying point for other nationalists prepared to resist the Germans, and thus make the Partisans more representative of Albanian opinion and reduce the scale and intensity of civil conflict.

Leake shared the view that important military grounds existed for maintaining contact with Kupa. Although Kupa had not fought the Germans since September 1943, reports received from George Seymour suggested the situation might change: Kupa claimed to be planning a national army, many thousands strong. And given his recent orders to plan for Operation Underdone, a response to what was rumoured to be an imminent German withdrawal from the Balkans, Leake was especially anxious to discover what exactly Kupa had to offer.³⁴ In a letter of 7 February to Christopher Steel, the Foreign Office's adviser to SOE Cairo, Leake wrote:

According to our latest information Kupa, while still not definitely off the fence, is planning a national force embracing his own Zogists, the BK and moderate members of the LNC... An offensive plan is under consideration for a concerted attack on selected targets. Kupa has impressed the various BLOs who have met him differently but the consensus of opinion is that he is an upright patriot who would never collaborate with a foreign occupying power... In the interests of our BLOs, I should be grateful... that in pursuance of our tightrope policy, we go as far as we can to please Abas Kupa without committing ourselves. He is a figure of great importance for intelligence and operational purposes.³⁵

Leake repeated this assessment in a paper to the SOC on 12 February. Describing the situation as 'valuable but requires careful handling', he advised against granting Kupa's requests for arms, 24,000 sovereigns, Allied recognition of a Zogist government in exile and a broadcast by Zog urging unity of resistance:

It is impossible to depart from our existing policy of political impartiality by declaring for Zog without seriously embarrassing BLOs attached to the Partisans who continue to be the only organisation fighting the Germans. The BBC is considered in

Albania to be the mouthpiece of the Government. A broadcast utterance by Zog would certainly be regarded as a mark of official support.

Instead, Leake suggested, Kupa should be sent 4,000 sovereigns, some token arms but otherwise a non-committal response, and that McLean and Smiley be recalled from London for attachment to Kupa at the earliest opportunity.³⁶

Yet Leake would never be convinced of the wisdom of trying to forge any kind of reconciliation between Kupa and the Partisans. His first assessment of the idea was in December 1943, days after McLean had arrived in Cairo from Albania:

It has been suggested that it would be practicable to attempt to widen the base of the LNC by inducing Abas Kupa and the Zogists to make common cause with the movement, and if possible, to persuade Zog to put pressure on Kupa for the purpose. If a really sincere and effective rapprochement were possible, the prospects of a speedy end to the civil war would be greatly improved and once this was accomplished, there is little doubt that both factions would be prepared to fight the Germans. However, it is more likely that, though Kupa might comply outwardly in deference to Zog's wishes and the partisans in their present plight be ready to accept him, in fact no concrete result would be achieved.

Though the nationalists of Kupa's party are not actually members of the Ball[i] Kombetar, their views and interests are practically identical and their support for Zog is due to his value as an effective counter balance to the growing strength of the partisan movement. It is possible, therefore, that the sole outcome would be endless procrastination and prevarication, leading to mutual recriminations and disputes. The opposition between partisans and nationalists is too deep and fundamental to be overcome by an artificial 'combine'.³⁷

Two weeks later, when SOE London suggested that Cairo support Davies' proposals on the grounds that German policy was to stoke the flames of civil war, Leake replied emphasising that the situation was more serious than London could see. 'Even moderate nationalists such as Abas Kupa are strongly and probably irreconcilably opposed to the partisans'.³⁸

Despite news in January of Seymour's encouraging contacts with Kupa, Leake summoned little enthusiasm when informed by Christopher Steel of London's support for McLean's plan.³⁹ The Foreign Office had sent for Steel's views. As the initiative

came from London it was not discussed by the SOC, but Steel still asked Leake for his thoughts. He replied to Steel on 8 February:

I do not consider it likely that Kupa would return to the LNC: it has far too strong a communist tinge and has openly declared against the Ball[i] Kombetar nationalists with whom Kupa is in close sympathy. Kupa may and probably will succeed in detaching non-political elements from the LNC... [but] I am not quite sure how this will help us. The LNC will be reduced to a 100% communist organisation and the contrast between left and right be given added emphasis. Kupa may conceivably be able to negotiate a truce or *modus vivendi*... [but] it would be a very uneasy affair owing to the blood that has been shed and the sharp opposition of outlook and interests. In short, my view is that the left versus right contest must be fought out in Albania – the communists do not compromise.⁴⁰

Replying to the Foreign Office on 12 February, Steel's comments were closely in line with Leake's. 'I also have discussed [the] political situation in Albania with Major Maclean [sic] and am familiar with his views', Steel's telegram to London began.

We all here regard him as exceedingly intelligent and level-headed but... his scheme to broaden the LNC... is now only wishful thinking.

[Recently] Abas Kupa... has made... proposals of a superficially most encouraging nature for the creation of a national guerilla movement. Nevertheless although he now appears seriously to contemplate active hostilities against the Germans... there is absolutely no evidence that Kupa would collaborate with the LNC... He is a staunch anti-communist and I am advised that he would be much more likely to attract the remaining non-Communist elements from the LNC to his own organisation... than to re-enter the former...

I do not think we could attain any results by an ambitious political manoeuvre such as Maclean proposes which would be commensurate with the political difficulties into which we should be drawn.⁴¹

But at a meeting at the Foreign Office on 18 February these warnings were brushed aside. McLean, who was present, considered that there was some force in the objections but felt there was a fifty per cent chance of his plan succeeding and that things could hardly get much worse than they were already. The Foreign Office did

not disagree and wheels were put in motion for McLean's return to Albania to work with KUPI.⁴²

Steel was right, however. Nothing reported from the field had suggested that KUPI or the Partisans could or would be reconciled. Tension between the BK and Partisans pre-dated the Italian armistice; SOE officers had reported open and widespread conflict between them since. Although it had so far refrained from fighting the Partisans, there was no doubt that Legality, like the BK, had been formed, as Leake wrote in December, 'largely... to counter-balance the influence of the partisans' and that its supporters' policy was 'to remain aloof and consolidate their strength'. SOE officers had found KUPI 'affable and friendly, but unwilling to commit himself to any positive line of action'. Leake conceded that KUPI had 'impressed Brigadier Davies as a sincere patriot and his earlier record supports this judgement'. But even Davies, Leake wrote, had reported in mid-November that he believed the 'Zogists under Abas KUPI' might yet come to the BK's aid against the Partisans.⁴³

While convinced that the outlook for any kind of agreement was bleak, Leake was also conscious of the difficulties SOE had experienced when trying to intervene in similar situations elsewhere in the Balkans. In March he wrote to Major Eddie Boxshall, who dealt with Albanian matters for SOE London, that, 'while we want to keep the two parties apart, it is important BLOs [British Liaison Officers] should not be manoeuvred [sic] into the position of mediators. Experience in Greece shows what little effect the intervention of a British officer has on the course of Balkan politics'.⁴⁴ In Greece, in 1942-43, SOE had found itself supporting EAM/ELAS, the communist-dominated and anti-royalist guerilla movement, and EDES, the royalist guerillas. SOE had worked hard to persuade these rival groups to fight the Germans instead of each other and eventually negotiated the 'National Bands' agreement, by which EAM/ELAS and EDES agreed to co-ordinate their actions with the plans of GHQ Middle East. It did not last. Civil war erupted again, and escalated. By the end of 1943, as William Mackenzie writes in his Cabinet Office history of SOE, '[a]lmost every liaison officer was on bad terms with the local ELAS command and was continually on the run in order to avoid German activity or the movements of the civil war: the danger of being caught by the Germans was probably less than that of random murder by one of the contending Greek parties. Activity against the enemy was at a standstill'.⁴⁵

Leake and Steel were not alone in their uneasiness about McLean's plan to reconcile the Partisans and Kupa. Officers in SOE London, wary of becoming over-committed again to rival guerilla movements, shared Leake's concerns. David Keswick, Director of SOE's operations in the Mediterranean, wrote to Colin Gubbins, the Head of SOE, on 14 February likening the 'pattern of disunity' in Albania to that seen in Yugoslavia and Greece. If Kupa were armed, he warned, 'we might... find ourselves tied to the same policy of backing the restoration Right Wing party and the Left Wing simultaneously with exactly the same results'. He added:

Both Maclean [sic] and his companion Smiley seem to be very able and level headed men, but they are very young, and are soldiers at present serving as BLOs with SOE without any experience or background of politics, and more especially Balkan politics. I am anxious that we should avoid, if possible, the difficulties we have experienced in Yugoslavia and Greece, and that our BLOs should not be given an intricate political task which they are not fully qualified to perform.⁴⁶

W.E. Houston-Boswall, a regular Foreign Office official who had been on loan as Political Adviser to SOE London since August 1943, looked back to the days when SOE's support for EAM/ELAS on military grounds had clashed with longer-term considerations. Churchill, the Foreign Office and even SOE's Minister, Lord Selborne, had come out strongly in support of the monarchists on one side, while SOE and the military pressed the EAM/ELAS case on the other. But while EAM/ELAS may have been 'the most effective resistance movement in Greece' as the Chiefs of Staff pointed out in February 1944, ultimately the strategic value of Greek resistance was judged to be less important than considerations of post-war politics.⁴⁷ Caught in the middle of this was SOE, which became a scapegoat for the Foreign Office who held it responsible for supporting EAM/ELAS to unacceptable lengths. 'We do not want a repetition of Greece', Houston-Boswall wrote to Gubbins on 28 February, 'nor do we want our officers to be blamed for showing too much sympathy to one particular resistance group... We should, I submit, tactfully put our point of view as strongly as we properly can to the Foreign Office indicating what we see to be the risks of allowing ourselves to be carried away by the enthusiasm and romanticism of Major Maclean [sic]'.⁴⁸

Even Leake's 12 February suggestion that Kupa be sent some arms and 4,000 sovereigns went too far for some. On 25 February David Keswick in London wrote to Gubbins and other high-ranking SOE staff officers stating that he was 'not at all happy about the trend of policy with regard to Albania'. If Kupa was armed 'we may well have created just such another situation in other Balkan countries – an especially close parallel is Greece – and may well have fomented an acute civil war without in any way increasing the discomfiture of the enemy – if anything on the contrary... I suggest that our policy should rather be continuance of some slight support to the LNC... combined with a policy of ignoring [all]... other... movements completely'. Keswick, one of many bankers recruited by SOE London during the war (in peacetime he worked for Jardine Matheson), concluded:

I imagine that if one makes an initial payment of 4,000 sovereigns to an Albanian, that Albanian continues to behave as he imagines his benefactor would wish him to behave, in the hope of further reward. He is likely to continue to do so until he has reached the bottom of the stocking, but what his action will then be is quite another matter. In business this is called an advance without security, and it has always been bad business.⁴⁹

Others, however, were a little less concerned. On 28 February, the Foreign Office approved the SOC's recommendation that Kupa be told that McLean and some funds were on the way.⁵⁰

Given the strength of opposition in SOE's headquarters in London and of its own representative in Cairo, it might be assumed that the Foreign Office had hidden political grounds for persisting in supporting a plan that even its author admitted had only a fifty-fifty chance of success. 'It was never quite clear whether the main motive behind the effort to mobilise Kupa was political or military', as Elisabeth Barker concludes from her study of British wartime policy in the Southeast Europe, 'but on balance it seems to have been political'.⁵¹ Even Leake commented to Steel in February 1944 that he thought there were 'pro-Zog influences at work' in London on policy. But Steel disagreed, and was right to do so.⁵² Lord Selborne, SOE's minister, was a staunch anticommunist and quite possibly this influenced his 'very keen' interest in McLean's plan despite the misgivings at SOE Headquarters.⁵³ As Reginald Hibbert has shown, however, there is no evidence available to suggest that the Foreign Office

'had at that time any specific intentions at all in relation to Albania, other than to encourage resistance to the Germans in any way that might be effective'.⁵⁴ It was naturally uneasy about helping a communist-dominated organisation to seize power, but at the same time had no intention of coming out in support of King Zog. The principal hope was that, by working with Kupa, Britain could merely effect some sort of solution to the civil war, maximise resistance that way and perhaps prevent Albania from ripping itself apart. That the Foreign Office remained 'rather taken' by McLean's plan despite many others' concerns was little more than a mark of loose and wishful thinking and of a belief that Britain had little to lose by trying to bring Kupa and the Partisans back together.⁵⁵

Yet the concerns expressed by Leake and others were prophetic. No progress towards an agreement was ever made before the Partisans launched their offensive against Kupa and the Nationalist north at the end of June. Kupa knew from George Seymour, the senior British officer in the north after Arthur Nicholls' death in February, that he had to commit himself to open and unconditional warfare against the Germans to be sent Allied arms. But from February onwards he never displayed any serious intention of moving either wholeheartedly against the Germans or towards reconciling himself with the Partisans. Seymour's growing frustration with what he saw as Kupa's deliberate stalling and inaction is now clear from entries in Davies' War Diary, for which Seymour had assumed responsibility after being handed it by Alan Hare. Of his dealings with Kupa in March, when SOE Cairo was pressing on its officers in the field the importance of immediate unconditional action, Seymour wrote:

Wednesday, 8 Mar 44

G.S. [George Seymour] again sends message to A.K. [Abas Kupa] for urgent meeting. Why is it that one cannot find a single Albanian who appreciates the value of "now"? They all pin their faith on "tomorrow" and act accordingly...

Saturday, 11 Mar 44

2200 Colonel Hyar Cha Ci [Colonel Yahya Chachi, commandant at Kupa's headquarters] arrives on behalf of Abas Kupa and says latter has been called away and won't be back for 10 days!

G.S. furious and spends much of the night wondering what to do... Cairo will be screaming for plans which cannot be given.

Sunday, 12 Mar 44

Col. H.C.C. arrives at 2230 hrs for discussion but finds that it is not a discussion so much as a monologue by G.S.

Opening remarks include fact that A.K. made many promises in past which he has failed to carry out; that A.K. is known to be at least in touch with "bad" elements even if he is not actively working with them. G.S. points out that A.K. is an object of acute suspicion to the Allies and that only A.K. himself can allay those suspicions by prompt action. G.S. warns that if there is a sudden German withdrawal A.K. will be left in a queer position and promises of what he intended to do will carry no weight at all...

Monday, 13 Mar 44

0230 Col. H.C.C. departs with a worried frown and copious notes promising to his utmost...

Friday, 17 Mar 44...

Letter from A.K. saying he will come and see G.S. on 22 March...

Wednesday, 22 Mar 44...

Today is the great day of the big conference with Abas KUPI. It is rather spoilt by the fact that A.K. does not arrive and sends no word...

Saturday, 25 Mar 44...

A.K. comes in again in the evening [after visiting Seymour briefly the previous day]. We hope that this time we are really going to hear all his plans. We ought to have known better!! We hear that whilst A.K. is now ready to fight he will do nothing unless the Allies recognise Zog and permit him to form a "government" outside the country. G.S. keeping a firm hold on his temper tells A.K. that he is a B.F. to try and issue an ultimatum to [the] Allies and asks A.K. what he intends to do when the demand is refused as G.S. predicts it most certainly will be. A.K. says he will do nothing except look after the BLOs in his territory. G.S. now feels that A.K. has made this move as an excuse for not fighting and intends to wait for an opportune moment – when the Huns leave – to grab power by a coup d'etat.⁵⁶

Seymour reported the result of this conference to Cairo in early April, adding his belief that KUPI's real aim was to remain militarily inactive and then seize power once the Germans had gone. He also reported a rumour to the effect that a pact of non-aggression between the Zogists and Germans had been signed on KUPI's behalf.⁵⁷ On 19 April, Seymour then held another conference with KUPI, but chose to adopt 'a lighter tone' since he had given him 'such a strafing' last time.

[T]he conference was one long roar of laughter, jokes and badinage... Results as usual negative. A.K. says he will not fight unless Allies recognise Zog...

After real conference finished A.K., G.S. [and] A.H. [Captain Alan Hare]... go into "huddle" and A.K. being in exceptionally good form permits the cat to peer furtively out of the bag twice. He says:

- (a) He is preparing for Civil War after the Germans leave.
- (b) That there will shortly be a change or changes in the [puppet] Govt as [Rexhep Mitrovica] the present P.M. is considered by other Ministers (all Ballists) to be too lenient to the Partisans (Communists). The new P.M. is [to be] Fikri Din[e] who is A.K.'s man.⁵⁸

Although the Zogist-German pact may have been nothing more than a rumour, there is no doubt today that Kupa had, at the time, been playing both sides and working to coordinate a broad coalition against the Partisans. German records and ultra decrypts confirm that, by the end of March, Kupa was in constant contact with the puppet government and planning with its members to replace Mitrovica, the Prime Minister, with Fiqri Dine, a Zogist through whom Kupa believed he could effect a more anti-Partisan policy. Dine was installed eventually in July.⁵⁹ The Germans still considered Kupa unreliable, as they had since the previous autumn, but by May their opposition to the inclusion of Zogist representatives in the government had waned. Decrypts implicate Kupa's party at the end of that month in supporting German plans for an imminent offensive against the Partisans. Messages sent by the Abwehr in Tirana to Berlin reveal that, after 'successful' negotiations between the Zogists and other Nationalists, the Germans expected these groups 'to take part' in 'a major action by German formations... to take the Communists in the south by a pincer movement'.⁶⁰

After dropping into Albania on 19-20 April and opening discussions with Kupa at the end of the month, even McLean saw the holes in his January plan. In early May he reported that Kupa was now insisting he would fight only if the Partisans recognised the Legality party; a few days later Kupa told him he would fight if Zog sent him instructions to do so. Kupa was 'very anti-communist', McLean reported, 'and has stated unofficially several times that it is only his unwillingness to quarrel with the Allies that prevents him from attacking LNC immediately'. McLean was

‘very doubtful of the possibility of a real rapprochement’ and feared that ‘abortive talks now would only widen the breach’.⁶¹

McLean’s mission considered the situation so desperate that it came to recommend that the Allies adopt a new policy towards the nationalists. Such was the vulnerability of nationalist society to reprisals, the mission argued in signals drafted largely by Captain Julian Amery, who had dropped in with McLean in April, that leaders like Kupa were not suited to a large-scale and sustained campaign that risked severe retaliation. As the mission explained in a long report of 18 June, tribal chieftans could not contemplate a large-scale rising unless they knew that it would succeed. There was an extremely personal system of power: if a rising led to reprisals they could lose the confidence of local populations and their positions would become untenable. The leaders, therefore, would not risk embarking on such a venture if they felt that defeat and everything that could flow from that might be the outcome. A last minute general rising by the nationalists as the Germans withdrew, the mission suggested, would be ‘a more productive use of Nationalist strength’ than ‘small-scale action’ and the immediate campaign demanded by Allied policy. The mission felt that if support were obtained from Kupa and other prominent leaders, including Muharrem Bajraktar and Gani Bey Kryeziu, the rest of the nationalist north would follow. ‘As a military venture I have no doubt the insurrection would be value for money but of course it raises political issues which I am not competent to judge’ McLean/Amery concluded. ‘I would, however, hazard opinion that unless there is a Nationalist insurrection and the Nationalists derive its consequent moral and material advantages they will stand little chance of preventing the LNC from seizing power by force of arms in the Civil War which after the German defeat only foreign intervention may avert’.⁶²

That assessment of the nationalists’ position was about right. As Reginald Hibbert writes, the 18 June report ‘deserves to be on record as a very good analysis of the position of the nationalist chieftans in the north’.⁶³ But having realised that the Partisans and nationalists would never reach some form of agreement, McLean’s mission was effectively suggesting that the British encourage the nationalists to fight a last-minute campaign against the Germans on the highly political grounds that it could save Albania from communism. If Leake had not been killed on 7 June, imply David Smiley, Peter Kemp and Julian Amery in their memoirs, greater sympathy from

British policy-makers for the nationalists' plight and cause might have been forthcoming. And it is certainly likely that Leake would have shared the 18 June assessment of the pressures on the Nationalists to stay neutral, for their steadfast refusal to resist the Germans or ally with the Partisans was clear enough. But it also seems likely that Leake would have preferred the policy the British continued to pursue in Albania: the continued arming of Albanians who were genuinely committed to fighting the Germans without regard to their politics. SOE papers show that, in the weeks preceding his death, Leake became progressively more convinced of the precariousness of the nationalist position but never recommended that Britain should intervene to protect it.

Even Hibbert assumes that Leake, before he arrived in the field, believed 'the future lay with a nationalist or Zogist rising' to be achieved by persuading the Partisans 'to accept their own limitations and think in terms of coalition and not in terms of domination'.⁶⁴ Yet Leake's last letter to SOE London, written on 9 May and summarising his final thoughts on the situation before leaving for Albania, demonstrates that he had weighed reports of Partisan strength and intentions against those of nationalist weakness and inactivity and recognised the implications for Albania's immediate future. And it confirms both his growing expectation of greater civil conflict and his steady conviction that Britain should not become involved politically once it began. 'In my opinion we are now embarking on the final phase in Albania – the end of German resistance and the beginning of [renewed] civil war' Leake wrote from Bari, to where SOE's Albanian Section had relocated from Cairo. 'As the pressure of the Germans is relaxed, so the offensive attitude of the LNC towards the Zogists and the Nationalists in the North will increase'. He considered the Albanian Partisans well placed, militarily and politically, to exploit the situation.

The military quality of the German troops in Albania has recently declined considerably. The LNC have shown a corresponding expansion and now apparently feel in a strong enough position to attempt to impose their will on the whole country. On the military side they are beginning to organise divisions. On the political side they are preparing to form a provisional Government. In both these actions, they are, as always, keeping closely in step with the Yugoslav Partisans.

Kupi, Leake went on, would therefore find himself in 'an extremely awkward position'. It now appeared that he had grossly exaggerated the size of his forces; in the face of the Partisans, he would either have to collaborate with the Germans or find himself isolated. Since Kupi was 'unlikely to collaborate, except in the last resort', for it would discredit Zog's cause in the eyes of the Allies, he might now agree to a reconciliation with the Partisans, but whether the Partisans would agree to reconciliation with him was quite another matter. Leake's letter concluded:

Our problem is of course, to decide what policy we are to follow in view of the situation which is now developing. In my opinion we are in an extremely strong position to put pressure on Kupi to induce him to make an approach to the LNC regarding a possible *modus vivendi*. Such an approach would place the LNC in a slightly embarrassing position as if they refuse they will show their hand as fomenters of civil war, and accordingly strengthen our position in relation to them. On the other hand they may be susceptible to the argument that an understanding with Kupi is worth while since, by broadening their political base, they are more likely to obtain definite political supremacy and possibly even recognition. It would then be up to them to liquidate the Zogist party, if they felt so inclined, at a later stage... This, for what it is worth, is the line we are proposing to take.

Leake's final thoughts were on policy once civil war escalated. 'I feel that the time has come for us to reduce to a minimum our personnel in the field, so that if civil war breaks out and the military effort of the LNC and Zogists is devoted wholly to slaying Albanians, we can withdraw from the scene easily and gracefully'.⁶⁵ Despite Hibbert's scepticism of the non-committal policy that emerged in January, pulling out of Albania might not have seemed an unrealistic option at the time. By March 1944 all SOE missions had been detached safely and successfully from Draza Mihailovic's Chetniks in Yugoslavia. It was clear that, if the will was there, SOE could execute the logistics of a large-scale withdrawal with the minimum of discomfort to its own side.

That appreciation of Partisan strength may have contributed to Leake's decision, taken sometime in mid-April, to visit southern Albania and the Partisan command. Julian Amery, in *Sons of the Eagle*, writes that Leake dropped in 'to mediate' between the Partisans and Nationalists and 'secure' Hoxha's 'agreement' to negotiations with Abas Kupi.⁶⁶ David Smiley claims that Leake went 'mainly because he thought it was his duty, as the staff officer responsible for sending officers into the

field, to see for himself the conditions under which they worked'.⁶⁷ Peter Kemp, who was in Bari in April and early May, suggests it was a combination of those two reasons. On the one hand, Leake went 'in a last effort to persuade Enver Hoxha to sink his differences with his political opponents and call off the civil war'. On the other, Kemp recalls Leake explaining why he felt he personally had to go: "'Peter", he sighed, "for a year now I've been sitting on my bottom, sending other people into the field. Now I feel I must go in myself – and apologize"'".⁶⁸

However, as Hibbert writes, 'Partisan fortunes had seesawed so violently that there was a very strong case for having them appraised by someone authoritative from Bari who was acquainted with the wider war panorama'.⁶⁹ And in the light of reports from SOE officers working with the Partisans, SOE and the Foreign Office's representatives in Italy seem to have felt, too, that some gesture of encouragement to Hoxha was both needed and deserved.⁷⁰ News from McLean of KUPI's continuing intransigence had only complemented reports that told of the Partisans' growing resentment of British policy – and of the damaging effect that McLean's presence with KUPI was having on SOE's relations with them: another unhappy result that Leake had predicted. By the spring of 1944, as Major Victor Smith reported, the Partisans had long been disappointed at the lack of official Allied recognition of their fighting record. To Smith and other officers they pointed out angrily that both Greece and Yugoslavia had representatives in Italy and that 'Trotsky' Davies had promised them similar representation as long ago as November. Moreover, the Partisans had had a 'General'⁷¹ attached to them then but now the highest-ranking British officer with them was a major. This was Alan Palmer, who had taken over in April from Lieutenant Colonel Norman Wheeler as the senior SOE officer with the Partisans. Palmer kept SOE headquarters well informed of all developments and complaints and worked hard to stay on good terms with Enver Hoxha and his staff (or *Shtab*⁷²). But relations became considerably more strained when the Partisans learnt of the decision to drop Billy McLean to KUPI. 'This was the signal for a furious onslaught on us by all members of the LNC', Smith recalled.

Our defences were obviously weak – an insignificant amount of material was being sent to the Partisans; the propaganda effort... was shockingly poor; and (most important of all), the existence of a Lt Col in the North, whereas our Senior Officer was a Major...

[Major] Palmer, and, in his short absence on operations, myself, were attacked constantly and vigorously from all directions. We resisted to the best of our ability, our personal relations with individual members and especially military commanders remained good, but finally... [Major] Palmer realised that a serious breakdown was inevitable unless HQ policy changed radically.⁷³

By 1 May, as SOE Bari informed SOE London, it had been decided that, while the evacuation of representatives for political discussions was 'out of [the] question since [it is] not our concern [to] interfere [in] Alb[anian] internal politics', Leake would be infiltrated 'in person to explain our policy'.⁷⁴ Harold Macmillan, Resident Minister at Allied Forces Headquarters, agreed a few days later that it was still unwise to receive a Partisan delegation but felt that perhaps someone from SOE Bari could be dropped in to report generally on the situation and meet Enver Hoxha.⁷⁵ Philip Broad, who had taken over from Christopher Steel as the Foreign Office's adviser to SOE's Cairo/Bari headquarters, informed Macmillan that Leake was already earmarked to go. 'I know the officer in question personally and feel sure he will successfully carry out [all] functions suggested by you'.⁷⁶

According to Smith, news of Leake's imminent arrival and Palmer's official appointment as senior officer with the Partisans helped ease the situation.⁷⁷ It was still far from resolved, however, when Leake parachuted to Palmer's dropping ground in southern Albania on the night of 10-11 May. Only six days earlier, Major John Shaw had dropped also to Palmer, at once been introduced by Victor Smith to the members of the *Shtab* and found them still aggrieved at their lack of recognition and suspicious of British activities in the north. 'They appeared to be intelligent and reasonable in their views' Shaw reported later, '[but] they then pressed their cause for two and a half hours with Major Smith on the following lines, which involved constant repetition which I found somewhat tiresome':

1. When were they going to be allowed to send delegates to the Allies
2. What was the object of Lieut Col McLean being infiltrated to the North when they were the only party fighting the Germans⁷⁸

Leake would have found the *Shtab* in a similar frame of mind, but Smith reported that when Leake arrived, holding the acting rank of lieutenant colonel and bringing

permission for Palmer to assume the same rank locally, relations with the Partisans 'took an immediate change for the better'. He also observed that Leake's 'obvious grasp of the situation impressed the LNC greatly'.⁷⁹

Though Leake's views underwent some modification on arriving in Albania, they did not change as much as Hibbert suggests or become as considerate towards the nationalist cause as Amery, Smiley and others suppose. Within days of his arrival, Leake had confirmed the dramatic growth in Partisan numbers and anti-Axis activity and his fear that the future was indeed grim for Kupa and the nationalist north. Shaw records that soon after Leake's arrival the British mission held 'two long conferences' with the *Shtab*: one along political lines and the other along military ones.⁸⁰ On 15 May, Leake then informed SOE Bari that from meeting SOE officers and the *Shtab* it was now 'clear' to him that the 'value' of the Partisans had 'greatly increased since last year'. Their 'fighting qualities and skill' had also 'greatly increased', as shown by recent operations witnessed by British officers, and they were 'now capable [of] resisting [enemy] drives and undertaking co-ord[inated] offensive action'. Due to the collapse of the BK the 'bulk of fighting' was now concentrated against the Germans and owing to the increased area under Partisan control they were now able to effectively threaten the enemy's lines of communication. Furthermore, Partisan numbers were 'rapidly increasing' and they were now supported by the whole of southern Albania.⁸¹ And on 20 May Leake recommended to Bari that Britain prepare to make a policy change. The 'chief factor' he had identified since arriving was the 'rapidly increasing strength' of the Partisans, which made a 'clash with Kupa likely [in the] near future' and would destroy the possibility of any agreement between Kupa and the Partisans. He proposed that the Allies condemn the collaborationist Albanian government and demand that Kupa and all other Nationalists sever all connections with the puppet government and 'openly' fight the Germans. If they failed to comply with these demands then the missions with them should be withdrawn.⁸² Days later Leake and Palmer recommended that Kupa be forced to fight by setting him a time limit within which he had to act. They thought the end of June a suitable deadline.⁸³

That ultimatum again illustrates Leake's steadfast belief that Britain should not interfere in internal Albanian affairs except to help those Albanians committed to fighting the Germans. By early June, as Palmer wrote later, he and Leake and Captain Tom Stefan, the senior OSS officer with the Partisans, 'were all agreed' that the

Partisan 1st Division was being prepared by Hoxha for a direct assault on the Zogists.⁸⁴ (In fact, the attack would be aimed both at the Germans and Kupa, a deliberate double thrust to demonstrate that the Partisans were not focused solely on civil war and thereby assure themselves of continued Allied support, which it did.) Leake had never been under any illusion as to the chances of any real reconciliation being achieved; as he had suggested to London in May, perhaps the most that might be hoped for was that, if the Zogists fought the Germans, it might embarrass the Partisans. But by the end of the month Leake could see that the situation was now far more serious than that. Kupa had to act at once: after the Partisans hit him it would be too late. So weak were his resources that it was impossible to expect him to fight a meaningful campaign against the Germans while trying simultaneously to defend himself from the Partisans.

While despairing of Kupa's future, Leake's continued planning of future operations against the Germans with Palmer and the Partisan *Shtab* underlines the strictly military factors on which he was basing his deductions and decisions. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that Leake's enhanced view of the Partisans' military 'value' was based on discussions with both Palmer's mission and the Partisans. One strand of the argument that British policy was wrong to support the Partisans as extensively and exclusively as it did is that SOE officers attached to them were themselves part of the problem. Julian Amery and others suggest that these officers were overly and unwittingly biased towards the Partisans and helped persuade the higher levels of the Allied command that the Partisans should be backed to the full.⁸⁵ And SOE's records confirm that the Partisans' strength and potential did impress many officers in southern Albania. Leake's briefing by Palmer on arrival would have been similar to that given to John Shaw, who had arrived at Palmer's base a few days before Leake. Victor Smith had quickly brought Shaw 'up-to-date with the situation... along the following lines':

- (a) That our HQ [in Bari] were out-of-date with the situation.
- (b) That the Partisans were the only party fighting the Germans.
- (c) That their strength was about 10,000 men and that nothing could stop this figure increasing.

- (d) That the Partisans fought well and that, if they were given full support and material aid, their war effort would include driving the Germans out of Albania.
- (e) That the Partisans were not communists, but that they had a genuine desire to free their country from the Nazis and that, after the war, they would allow the people to choose their own Government.
- (f) That they were, in the near future, setting up a Provisional Government in Southern Albania, chosen by the people.⁸⁶

SOE reports later that month put Partisan numbers even higher, at 20,000 men organised in twelve brigades plus miscellaneous battalions with 'numbers growing'. Yet the officers who made these estimates and saw the Partisans in action were often experienced soldiers. And several with whom Leake held discussions, including Palmer and Smith, had been with the Partisans since before the winter and could appreciate the reality of the enormous growth the movement had undergone since its days as a small collection of scattered and hunted bands. Even if some officers were misled by claims that all Partisans were 'not communists', such considerations were in any case irrelevant. SOE was still under strict orders to support any Albanian, regardless of his politics, just as long as he was committed to fighting the Germans.

That Leake gauged the Partisans simply by their military record and potential may be qualified by how unlikely he was to have warmed to the character and temper of the Partisan leaders with whom he had to deal. Like all other SOE officers, Leake found negotiating with the Partisans tedious and difficult. On 14 May, having met Hoxha the previous day, Leake described him to Bari as 'more temperamental than systematic' in his 'complaints [and] demands'. The following day he commented that the *Shtab* was inclined to be 'dilatatory and oriental'.⁸⁷ Marcus Lyon noted in his diary of more discussions on 18 May: 'Leake and Alan go up and have trying morning with Stab [sic]'.⁸⁸ Indeed, Leake's policy suggestions came at a time when relations with the Partisans had again started to sour. After the first few meetings, the Partisans began to demand immediate satisfaction of a number of requests. According to Victor Smith, who was present, these were as follows:

- (1) Withdrawal of all missions from the north (they did agree, however, that one or two officers were necessary for intelligence purposes).
- (2) Acceptance of their representatives in Italy.
- (3) Written evidence that:
 - (a) Lt Col Leake was the accredited representative of Allied HQ.
 - (b) Lt Col Palmer was in command of all sub-missions in LNC territory.

At the same time, Leake and Palmer were pressing the *Shtab* to agree to certain demands of their own:

- (1) [LNC] co-operation in Allied strategy, i.e. destruction of Ls of C and constant harassing of the Germans.
- (2) LNC agreement... [to a] meeting between them and Kupi and, subsequently, [to a] military pact with Kupi providing that he attacked the Germans.
- (3) The LNC... [to allow] Lt Cols Leake and Palmer to meet Lt Col McLean...

Smith reported later that, as a result of this deadlock, the Partisans forbade Leake and Palmer from leaving their Headquarters until the official accreditation demanded by the *Shtab* was produced. Palmer advised Bari to suspend all supplies to the Partisans until freedom of movement was restored. Leake refused an invitation to the Congress of Permet, at which the Partisans proclaimed their new provisional government and renamed the movement the *Fronti Nacional Clirimtarë* (FNC). When Hoxha and the *Shtab* left for Permet and the Congress on 21 May, in Smith's words, 'things looked pretty black'.⁸⁹

Relations improved, however, with the arrival by parachute of official letters confirming Leake and Palmer's positions of authority. Signs of the impending German offensive, planned in May, then caused the FNC to climb down rapidly from its other demands. The British mission's first meeting with the new government took place in

Permet on 5 June; Leake, Palmer and Smith were all present, and Smith recorded that 'agreement was reached on the following points':

- (1) Missions would have complete freedom of movement.
- (2) Specific military targets as given by Lt Col Palmer, conforming to Allied strategy, would be attacked.
- (3) Lt Col Leake should return to HQ [in Bari] and would later visit Kupa in order to put certain suggestions to him.
- (4) Amplifying... (3), LNC [sic] agreed to union with Kupa, providing he fought the Germans (...one or two actions were not to be sufficient... continuous warfare by Kupa against the Germans [was] essential if union [was] to be agreed).

The 'suggestions' in point (3) were likely to have included mention of the conditions imposed on union by the FNC in (4) and, perhaps, the setting of a deadline, assuming the idea would be seconded by the British authorities. It may be noted that the Partisans' appeal to have military representatives in Bari was left untouched in this rather rushed agreement. But although Leake and Palmer lacked the authority to agree to military representation without reference to policy-makers outside Albania, it is possible that Leake did promise the Partisans he would raise the matter on his return to Bari. Victor Smith observed how the Partisans, after impressing on Leake their strength, 'did... gain satisfaction on the questions of representatives and the bogey of the North'.⁹⁰ With the meeting concluded and the German offensive fully underway, the British mission at Permet broke up. Leake, en route to the coast for evacuation back to Bari, arrived at John Shaw's camp that evening. He was killed there two mornings later.⁹¹

On the eve of his death, Leake had clearly believed there might still be time for a last effort at encouraging Kupa to fight the Germans before all-out conflict between the Partisans and the Zogists broke out. Reports by Victor Smith and John Shaw confirm Amery's claim that Leake wished to visit McLean's mission and speak with Kupa as soon as possible. Shaw observed, too, that Leake had 'accepted all recommendations and statements put to him by the FNC and Missions with him, but refused to give any decisions before he had seen Northern Albania'.⁹² Leake had also expressed support for a proposal of McLean's that Zog personally send Kupa

instructions to fight, although Leake requested that 'no public announcement' be made until he had briefed Bari on the 'present position'.⁹³ Nevertheless, it is clear that Leake also saw that a Partisan attack on the north was imminent and felt that KUPI's time was almost up. And when the Partisans opened their offensive against the nationalists at the end of June, KUPI and other Nationalists, as Leake had expected, were indeed compelled to muster their resources for use against the northward Partisan advance. With the exception of Gani Bey Kryeziu, none ever came out to fight the Germans wholeheartedly.

It is impossible to know how Leake would have responded to the Partisans' dual assault on both the Germans and the nationalists in June. There is no record in SOE's files of any contingency planning by him in preparation for such a development. Possibly he may have wanted to withdraw every SOE mission from Albania. Possibly, after appreciating the 'value' of the Partisans at first hand, he may have sought to maintain a limited supply of arms to those Partisan units still in action against the Germans: the policy Alan Palmer recommended strongly in July. Certainly Leake and Palmer worked together closely and well. 'A word about Philip' Palmer wrote to SOE Bari a week after Leake's death. 'It was one of the greatest tragedies in the rather tragic history of B8 [SOE's Albanian Section]. He did splendidly here and I got on extremely well with him. We were in agreement on all points and he fell in most readily with any points I had'.⁹⁴ But given Leake's long aversion to interfering in internal Albanian affairs it is very hard to believe that he would have supported the new policy CONSENSUS II suggested. Arming the nationalists before they had fought and building them up to counter-balance the Partisans were highly political proposals. To have taken issue with the Partisans' ideological agenda in that way would have marked a complete departure from the policy Leake had long advocated of impartial treatment of all sides and arming only those committed genuinely to fighting the Germans. Certainly, in early June, it is apparent that he believed KUPI should be sounded out a final time, but it is difficult to believe that Leake would have recommended supporting him on anything other than convincing military grounds.

¹ Report by Major J.K.H. Shaw, 1944, PRO HS 5/140

² P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.253

³ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.120

⁴ M. Lyon, unpublished memoir

⁵ Information from Mr Kenneth Martin Leake. I am grateful to him for his help and advice and for permitting me to see correspondence received by his family expressing sympathy for his brother's death.

⁶ B. Sweet-Escott, *Baker Street Irregular* (London: Methuen 1965) p.33

⁷ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* pp.75-76

⁸ Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO

⁹ SOE War Diary, September 1941, PRO HS 7/220

¹⁰ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.78

¹¹ Papers of Major H.J. Legg, Department of Documents, IWM

¹² Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO

¹³ SOE War Diary, May 1942 (Vol. 2), PRO HS 7/233

¹⁴ Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO

¹⁵ Interview, J. Naar to author, 12 December 2000

¹⁶ Correspondence, J. Naar to author, 9 September 1999

¹⁷ In February 1992, the former Communist Party newspaper *Zëri i Popullit* reproduced the text of Davies' 17 December 1943 message in an attempt to besmirch the modern *Balli Kombëtar* and *Legaliteti* parties. (Review by B. Baldwin of R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle*, in *Intelligence & National Security* 7/4, 1992). For its part, *Legaliteti* blames Davies for all its subsequent troubles, arguing that he had failed to understand that the revolutionary nature of the Partisans had precipitated civil war.

¹⁸ 'Allied Military Mission: Albania. Proposed Policy Change', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 24 December 1943, PRO HS 5/79

¹⁹ Minutes, SOC(43) 16th meeting, 29 December 1943, PRO HS 5/145; cypher telegrams, C. Steel to Southern Department, London, 1 January 1944, PRO HS 5/66

²⁰ 'Albania', memorandum by Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice to Colonel D. Keswick, 17 January 1944, PRO HS 5/11

²¹ GHQ Middle East Directive No.195, 24 January 1944, PRO HS 5/11

²² Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* pp.77-78; p.133

²³ 'Albania: Appreciation', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 14 December 1943, PRO HS 5/67

²⁴ E. Boxshall to P. Nichols, 26 November 1943, PRO HS 5/11

²⁵ 'Albania: Appreciation', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 14 December 1943, PRO HS 5/67

²⁶ Cipher telegram, Major P. Leake to SOE London, 1 January 1944, PRO HS 5/12. With hindsight, it is difficult to believe that a publicised break with the BK and Zogists would not have jeopardised the future of all Allied intelligence, propaganda and other military activities and accentuated the extent of nationalist collaboration that did take place as the Partisans grew in strength in 1944. Only one Albanian nationalist, Gani Bey Kryeziu, ever put up genuine, unconditional and committed resistance to the Germans. Yet SOE would have been in a poor position to encourage, arm and support him if it had not had missions present in northern Albania in the spring of 1944. Nor would SOE have found it possible to gather intelligence, bring in arms for the Partisans and evacuate personnel at points along the coastline that were in BK territory. Similarly, Andy Hands may have found it impossible to carry out his extraordinarily successful attack on the chrome mines in northern Albania in February if the local nationalist chiefs had been more hostile to his mission's presence. For more on local tensions, conditions and difficulties experienced by SOE in these areas, see reports by Major A.C. Simcox on Gani Bey Kryeziu (PRO, HS 5/135) by Major J.A. Quayle on SAPLING mission's experiences on the coast south of Valona (PRO, HS 5/141) and by Squadron Leader A.G. Hands on northern Albania (PRO, HS 5/138).

²⁷ 'Sitrep', Major P. Leake to B6 (SOE Greek Section), 23 February 1944, PRO HS 5/116

²⁸ SPILLWAY mission War Diary. I am grateful to Major Robin Bruford-Davies, son of the late Brigadier E.F. Davies, for permission to quote from his father's papers (hereafter referred to as 'Davies papers').

²⁹ Major E. Boxshall to P. Nichols, 26 November 1943, PRO HS 5/11

³⁰ 'Resume of recent proposals regarding Policy in Albania' by SOE London, 16 February 1944, PRO HS 5/68

³¹ SPILLWAY mission war diary, Davies papers.

³² 'Memorandum on Albania' by Major N.L.D. McLean, McLean papers, IWM

³³ D. Howard to Lt Col D. Talbot-Rice, 3 February 1944, PRO HS 5/11

- ³⁴ 'Appreciation and Plan for "Underdone"' by Major P. Leake, 29 January 1944, PRO AIR 20/8378; 'Albania: Support of Major Kupi's Legitimacy Movement', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 12 February 1944, PRO HS 5/79
- ³⁵ 'Abas Kupi's Personal Message', memorandum by Major P. Leake to C. Steel, 7 February 1944, PRO HS 5/9
- ³⁶ 'Albania: Support of Major Kupi's Legitimacy Movement', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 12 February 1944, PRO HS 5/79
- ³⁷ 'Albania: Appreciation', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 14 December 1943, PRO HS 5/67
- ³⁸ Cipher telegram, Major P. Leake to SOE London, 1 January 1944, PRO HS 5/12
- ³⁹ w/t message, 13 January 1944, SLENDER mission (Major G. Seymour) to Bari, PRO HS 5/68
- ⁴⁰ Major P. Leake to C. Steel, 8 February 1944, PRO HS 5/66
- ⁴¹ Cipher telegram, C. Steel to Foreign Office, 12 February 1944, PRO HS 5/12
- ⁴² Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* pp.134-5
- ⁴³ 'Albania: Appreciation', memorandum by Major P. Leake, 14 December 1943, PRO HS 5/67; Major P. Leake to Chief of Staff, SOE Cairo, 15 November 1943, PRO HS 5/66
- ⁴⁴ Major P. Leake to Major E. Boxshall, 13 March 1944, PRO HS 5/68
- ⁴⁵ W. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE* p.471
- ⁴⁶ Colonel D. Keswick to General C. Gubbins, 14 February 1944, PRO HS 5/11
- ⁴⁷ R. Clogg, "'Pearls from Swine": the Foreign Office papers, SOE and the Greek Resistance' in P. Auty and R. Clogg, *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece* p.199
- ⁴⁸ W. Houstoun-Boswall to General C. Gubbins, 28 February 1944, PRO HS 5/68
- ⁴⁹ Colonel D. Keswick to General C. Gubbins, 25 February 1944, PRO HS 5/11
- ⁵⁰ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* pp. 158-9
- ⁵¹ E. Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War* p. 180
- ⁵² Major P. Leake to C. Steel, 17 February 1944, and hand-written annotation by C. Steel, 18 February 1944, PRO HS 5/66
- ⁵³ Lt Col D. Talbot-Rice to D. Howard, 3 February 1944, PRO HS 5/11; Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice to D. Howard, 7 February 1944, PRO HS 5/7
- ⁵⁴ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p. 142
- ⁵⁵ D. Howard to Lt Col D. Talbot-Rice, 3 February 1944, PRO HS 5/11
- ⁵⁶ SPILLWAY mission war diary, Davies papers
- ⁵⁷ 'Comments on Report by Lt Col McLean DSO, Major Smiley MC and Capt Amery dated Nov 28 1944' by Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, c. early December 1944, PRO HS 5/126
- ⁵⁸ SPILLWAY mission war diary, Davies papers
- ⁵⁹ B. Fischer, *Albania at War* p.211
- ⁶⁰ Decrypts 11087 and 11103, 24 and 26 May 1944, Knoesel to Kaiser, PRO HW 19/244. It is interesting to note that the German view of Kupi's strength and intentions did not differ substantially from that of SOE. In mid-April the Abwehr compiled a long list of Albanian bands under three headings: 'Hostile Bands', 'Bands biding their time' and 'Security Groups and bands co-operating with the Wehrmacht'. 'Hostile Bands' included those of Gani Bey Kryeziu, Myslim Peza and Muharrem Bajraktar and the Partisan brigades. 'Security Groups and bands co-operating with the Wehrmacht' included government forces and most of the BK bands. 'Bands biding their time' consisted entirely of Zogists, described as under the leadership of Abas Kupi, whose supporters were numbered at anywhere between 500 and 3000. 'Erlaeuterungen zur Bandenkarte v. Albanien', 14 April 1944, BA MA, RH 19 XI 10b, folios 64-66
- ⁶¹ Major E. Boxshall to D. Howard, 17 May 1944, PRO HS 5/11
- ⁶² Cipher telegram, CONCENSUS II to Bari, 16 June 1944, CONCENSUS II 'out' log, McLean papers, IWM.
- ⁶³ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.166
- ⁶⁴ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p. 149
- ⁶⁵ Major P. Leake to Major E. Boxshall, 9 May 1944, PRO HS 5/68
- ⁶⁶ J. Amery, *Approach March: A Venture into Autobiography* p.356
- ⁶⁷ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.120
- ⁶⁸ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.241
- ⁶⁹ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.122
- ⁷⁰ Cipher telegram, B8 (SOE Albanian Section, Bari) to SOE London, 1 May 1944, PRO HS 5/68; cipher telegram, P. Broad to H. Macmillan, 5 May 1944, PRO HS 5/77

⁷¹ This was Brigadier Davies. In *Illyrian Venture*, Davies explains that '[Major Billy] McLean had decided I must be called General, as Brigadier in Albanian, French and Italian conveyed a Police Corporal, and General-Major is the German equivalent of Brigadier'. (E. Davies, *Illyrian Venture* p.52.) Thereafter, the Partisans referred consistently to Davies as 'General'. Enver Hoxha was still doing so when writing his own memoirs.

⁷² The Albanian term for the Partisan general staff.

⁷³ Report by Major W.V.G. Smith, 1944, PRO HS 5/129

⁷⁴ Cipher telegram, B8 to SOE London, 1 May 1944, PRO HS 5/68

⁷⁵ Cipher telegram, H. Macmillan to P. Broad, 9 May 1944, PRO HS 5/77

⁷⁶ Cipher telegram, 12 May 1944, P. Broad to H. Macmillan, PRO HS 5/77

⁷⁷ Captain M. Lyon diary entry, 30 April 1944; report by Major W.V.G. Smith, 1944, PRO HS 5/129

⁷⁸ Report by Major J.K.H. Shaw, 1944, PRO HS 5/140

⁷⁹ Report by Major W.V.G. Smith, 1944, PRO HS 5/129

⁸⁰ Report by Major J.K.H. Shaw, 1944, PRO HS 5/140

⁸¹ W/T message, Major P. Leake to B8, 15 May 1944, PRO HS 5/68

⁸² W/T message, Major P. Leake to B8, 20 May 1944, PRO HS 5/68

⁸³ Cipher telegram, B8 to SOE London, 4 July 1944, PRO HS 5/11

⁸⁴ Lt Col A. Palmer to Major E. Watrous, c.15 June 1944, PRO HS 5/39

⁸⁵ See, for example, J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* pp.233-234

⁸⁶ Report by Major J.K.H. Shaw, 1944, PRO HS 5/140

⁸⁷ W/T messages, Major P. Leake to B8, 14 and 15 May 1944, PRO HS 5/68

⁸⁸ Captain M. Lyon, diary entry, 18 May 1944

⁸⁹ Captain M. Lyon, diary entry, 21 May 1944; report by Major W.V.G. Smith, 1944, PRO HS 5/129.

Reginald Hibbert claims that Leake may have wanted to refuse the invitation on political grounds anyway. The British, he writes, were in 'the difficult position' of knowing that Enver Hoxha and the LNC planned to establish a provisional government at the Congress but 'could not bring themselves to condone it by allowing a British officer to be present... Given the way British policy had evolved, it was logical that the British mission should boycott the Permet Congress; but it was unfortunate for Leake that he should have had to convey the unwelcome message during his brief stay'. Hibbert adds that, because 'American policy was unformed and no US mission had discovered Abas Kupa or other nationalist leadership candidates' (in fact, Lieutenant Jack Taylor of OSS had contacted Kupa in April), the OSS Liaison Officer working alongside Palmer's mission, Lieutenant Tom Stefan, was able to go to Permet and thus 'gratify the Partisans'. Afterwards 'it was possible to see that his presence had not committed the US to anything'. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.148. OSS records confirm Hibbert's account. On 25 May 1944, Harry T. Fultz, Head of the OSS Albanian Section in Bari, wrote to Stefan: 'I understand that our cousins had no one present [at the Congress] for fear of being compromised... I see no way in which a strictly neutral observer... can be compromised particularly if we are guarded in our comments and respect the confidence reposed in us when the permission to attend was granted'. H.T. Fultz to Lieutenant T. Stefan, 25 May 1944, NARA RG 226 Entry 154 Box 17 Folio 237.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Report by Major J.K.H. Shaw, 1944, PRO HS 5/140

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Cipher telegram, SOE Bari to SOE London, 27 May 1944, PRO HS 5/11

⁹⁴ Lt Col A. Palmer to Major E. Watrous, c.15 June 1944, PRO HS 5/39

Chapter Five

SOE and British policy towards the Albanian resistance

June to November 1944

In postwar memoirs, several former SOE officers who had worked during the war with Albanian nationalists claim that, after the death of Philip Leake in early June 1944, British policy in wartime Albania took an alarming turn for the worse. Some of these writers argue that the headquarters staff of SOE's Albanian Section, in Leake's absence, starved the nationalists of adequate sympathy and support. Some accuse these HQ officers of having suppressed reports from the field that spoke well of Abas Kupa, the Zogist leader. In this and other ways, so the arguments go, the staff helped secure Allied backing exclusively for the Partisans, who were thus better able to seize power at the end of 1944.¹

This chapter begins by outlining those charges in greater detail, then re-examines them, partly in the light of recently released SOE files. These records confirm that the Albanian Section became increasingly opposed to maintaining an SOE mission with Kupa as 1944 wore on. They also suggest that attempts may have been made to suppress reports from that mission. But the charges levelled against the Section exaggerate the ability of junior SOE staff officers to influence policy. The key decisions in favour of the Partisans were taken above the heads of the Section and reflected short-term strategic needs and the military situation in Albania. Moreover, junior staff officers in SOE did not prevent decision-makers from appreciating the reality of that situation. The chapter suggests that writers who propagate the conspiracy theory lack knowledge of the decision-making process and distort the grounds on which SOE staff officers wished to break with Kupa. The most convincing explanation is that, for most officers on the staff, the continued presence of a mission with him was merely an unnecessary encumbrance to Albania's war effort.

The main tenets of the 'conspiracy theory' began to emerge in print in 1948 with the publication of Julian Amery's memoir *Sons of the Eagle*.² This recounted the activities of Billy McLean's second mission to Albania in 1944. McLean, who had led the first SOE mission into Albania the year before, parachuted back in April. Now a lieutenant colonel, he was accompanied by Amery, then a captain, and David Smiley,

now a major. As discussed in the previous chapter, their mission had Foreign Office-approved orders to persuade Abas Kupa, the Zogist leader, to resume resistance in harness with the Partisans.

Within days of opening talks with Kupa, the mission realised, Amery writes, that the chances of forging an alliance between the Zogists and Partisans were poor. Kupa professed intense hostility to the Partisans and the mission became convinced that he wished to preserve his energies for an eventual showdown with the Partisans and not waste them against the Germans. Yet Amery also recalls that the mission remained confident it could fulfil its directive. He and McLean were impressed by Kupa's military strength and potential and felt that, if Kupa fought and other nationalist leaders in northern Albania followed his lead in a general revolt against the Germans, wider civil war and communist victory might yet be avoided. Such a revolt, according to Amery, might have caused the Partisans to 'hesitate before attacking so popular and strong a leader'. Moreover, it would also have strengthened the hand of what Amery describes as his mission's 'Headquarters' in the Italian port of Bari, just across the Adriatic. '[O]nce Abas Kupa was at war, our Headquarters would be justified in bringing the strongest pressure to bear on the Partisans in favour of reconciliation with the Zogists.... [A] general revolt offered the best, perhaps the only, means of bringing the [nationalist chiefs in northern Albania]... to fight the Germans and of averting civil war'.³

In June the mission secured a verbal commitment from Kupa finally to attack the Germans. Allied policy stated that no arms could be sent to Kupa before he fought: he had to attack the Germans first and thus commit himself to fighting. All that was needed now, the mission felt, was for Kupa to prove he was sincere and then receive supplies to conduct a larger campaign. On the night of 21-22 June, David Smiley and a party of Kupa's men then blew up Albania's third largest bridge at a spot called Gjoles on the main road north from the capital, Tirana. The Germans had been sending 500 trucks over the bridge every night; they were now forced to use a longer route more vulnerable to Allied air attack. Amery writes that the mission was content the operation met the conditions for Kupa to receive arms and confident he would use them to open a wider campaign and attract more nationalists to his side. To the mission, it seemed the first step to averting civil war and uniting the nationalists of

northern Albania had been taken. Plans were drawn up with Kupa; appeals were transmitted for 'Headquarters' in Bari to drop arms to his men.

Those arms were never sent. Within ten days of the Gjoles action, the Partisans in southern Albania, where the movement's bases lay and support was at its strongest, opened an assault on Kupa's forces in the nationalist north. McLean's mission shelved its plans with Kupa as he mustered all his resources to fight the Partisans. And at first, Amery recalls, the mission was gratified by the even-handed response forthcoming from 'Headquarters' to this escalation in civil war. All supplies to Albania, whether earmarked for the Partisans or Kupa, were suspended. But in early August the mission learnt that drops of arms and ammunition were once again going to the 1st Partisan Division. This unit was reported to be in action against the Germans and short of ammunition; but it was also the one that had spearheaded the Partisan assault on Kupa. Amery writes that he and his mission considered the resumption of supplies to the Partisans tantamount to British intervention in an Albanian civil war on the Partisan side.

Nor was the mission impressed by an apparent 180-degree change of opinion at 'Headquarters' when Kupa finally opened a small campaign against the Germans in September. Days later the mission received instructions from Bari that it must now do nothing to encourage Kupa to fight. Soon afterwards the mission was sent further instructions to break with Kupa and leave the country. If 'Headquarters' had no intention of supporting Kupa even when he fought, the mission wondered, why had he not been broken with much earlier?

Amery also records his mission's further dismay when 'Headquarters' refused its request to bring out Kupa and some of his followers when the mission left Albania in October. The mission was convinced that the assistance and hospitality it had received from these Albanians justified British support in their time of need. Partisan victory in the civil war was just weeks away and the mission wished to save them from liquidation. On returning to Bari, Amery and McLean secured permission from Harold Macmillan, the British minister at Allied Forces Headquarters in Italy, and Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, to have Kupa evacuated. In the event Kupa managed to flee Albania under his own steam; but here was a clear example, the mission felt, of the excessive displeasure felt with Kupa at 'Headquarters'. Indeed, Amery claims to have detected on arriving in Bari a distinct and unwarranted bias

there towards supporting the Partisans. A 'genuine enthusiasm' for communism pervaded and 'responsible staff officers revelled with indecent, almost masochistic, glee' at the demise of nationalist forces. He found 'alarming... the strange distortion of men's minds. Never before had there been so many British observers in the Balkans, and yet never can responsible Englishmen have cherished so many misconceptions and illusions about the problems of that blood-stained region'.⁴

Other officers who had worked in Albania in 1943-44 reaffirm these sentiments. Peter Kemp and David Smiley agree with Amery that, by backing the Partisans, the British had condemned Albania to a future of communist rule.⁵ Some writers go further, point fingers at SOE's Albanian Section in Bari as having been in some way responsible and speculate over the influence of communist and leftwing staff officers there. 'While some of the officers in the Albanian section of the SOE office were well-intentioned, if led astray by insidious Communist propaganda', Smiley writes, 'others were Communist agents'. As evidence of their activities, Smiley states that these officers suppressed personal messages that his mission sent from the field for onward transmission to Anthony Eden. He notes, too, the hostile reception he received from the Albanian Section in October 1944, recalling how he was called 'fascist' for having worked with the nationalists.⁶ Alexander Glen asserts that the influence of the staff was the crucial factor in the decision to drop more arms to Hoxha's communists and thus in bringing them to power. He also writes darkly of unnamed 'colleagues' of Kim Philby who had worked to see nationalists like Kupa 'betrayed'.⁷ Billy McLean later condemned Major Eliot Watrous, the officer who replaced Philip Leake as head of the Albanian Section, for having had 'very progressive views... [W]e felt he was supporting the communist cause against the nationalists at every level'.⁸

In postwar accounts, only three officers on the Section staff are identified by name: Philip Leake, Eliot Watrous and John Eyre. SOE's records confirm that Watrous did indeed become Head of the Section after Leake's death; they also show that several other officers worked on the Section staff in 1944. Leake, soon after taking command the previous spring, was joined first by the thirty-one year-old Lieutenant Frank White. An insurance claims inspector in peacetime, White came to SOE after service on the headquarters staff of the Sudan Defence Force. At the end of July 1943 he was appointed the Section's first conducting officer, responsible for

overseeing the movements of other officers before and after they went on operations. His chief duties were to ensure they attended the proper courses, briefings, and interviews, were escorted safely to departure points for infiltration into Albania and were picked up promptly after evacuation. Remarks on White's SOE Personal File indicate he did his job well: 'Lively personality. Mixes well. Energetic and enterprising. Most satisfactory'. He became the Section's Staff Captain in February 1944.

Watrous was next to join, to assist in the planning and support of operations. Only twenty-one years old, he had been commissioned into the Royal Artillery aged eighteen in 1940. In August 1943, after Staff College in Palestine and two and a half years at GHQ Malta Command, he joined the Albanian Section on being posted to SOE Cairo. In November he moved from Cairo to Bari to help run the Albanian Section's Advance Headquarters, taking charge of sea sorties to the Albanian coast, the holding and briefing of SOE personnel awaiting infiltration and all liaison with other organisations in Italy.

In October 1943, Captain James Herratt and Lieutenant George Campbell were posted to the Section. Herratt, twenty-six years old and recruited originally for operations, became the Section's welfare officer when no field employment was found for him. Campbell, eight years older, was an economics graduate of London University and a teacher before the war in County Durham. He was to work under Herratt. Their duties, as their title implies, were to deal with the welfare of operational personnel. They sent out books, mail and other comforts to the missions in Albania, censored personal mail meant for home and tried to deal with endless minor crises like finding and despatching new spectacles to replace pairs broken in the field. When the Albanian Section moved to Bari, Campbell was left in Cairo as its liaison officer with SOE's Greek Section.

Two more officers, Captain Bill Squires and Captain George Cowie, joined the Section staff in November 1943. The twenty-six year-old Squires had been in the army from the age of sixteen, after joining the Royal Tank Corps as an enlisted boy in 1934. He entered Sandhurst in January 1939, was commissioned into the Royal Tank Regiment in February 1940 and, by the time he was posted to SOE, had seen two years' active service in the Middle East. He assumed responsibility for overseeing all sea operations between Albania and SOE's supply bases on the Italian coast:

specifically, the sending in of stores and the infiltration and evacuation of personnel. Squires, like Herratt, appears to have been fresh to staff work. In October 1944 he was sent into Albania to work as a liaison officer with the Partisans.

George Cowie's credentials for an SOE staff appointment were strong. Thirty-two and a Scot, he had been educated at Banff Academy, Robert Gordon's College and the University of Aberdeen before qualifying as a solicitor in 1936. He had joined the army from the post of Assistant Secretary of Aberdeen University (after the war he would be for many years Secretary of Queen's University, Belfast). Commissioned immediately into the Royal Artillery, he had spent eighteen months as Intelligence Officer and Adjutant of 126 (Highland) Field Regiment, followed by another eighteen months as a battery captain in Britain and the Middle East. After a six-month posting to the headquarters staff of 51 (Highland) Division, during which he took part in the invasion of Sicily, he joined SOE. Cowie's Personal File contains nothing but consistently good reports. He was 'good humoured', 'careful and conscientious', 'intelligent' and so on. He worked with Watrous on the operations side and, after Leake's death, took charge of that area of the Section's work.

In the latter months of 1943, the Section also took on another full-time conducting officer: Lieutenant Hugh Munro, another Scot. Like Herratt, Munro had been earmarked for operations; like Squires, he was eventually sent on them, being parachuted into southern Albania to work with the Partisans in August 1944.

In December 1943 and February 1944, two intelligence officers were appointed to the Section staff. The first to arrive was Lieutenant Jon Naar, who assumed responsibility for the collection and distribution of all military intelligence coming out of Albania and for its use in planning operations. Naar's appointment was followed by that of Lieutenant John Eyre, who assumed responsibility for the similar collation of political intelligence. Both Naar and Eyre were promoted to captain after a few months in their respective posts. Eyre's background and military and SOE career are dealt with in some depth in the next chapter. Naar, for his part, was twenty-three and, as might be expected of an intelligence appointment, was already experienced in that role. Born in Hendon in May 1920 he had been educated at Mill Hill, the Sorbonne and the Universities of Vienna and London where he read Psychology, French and German. He was then commissioned into the Royal Artillery in February 1941. In May, after responding to a notice for French-speaking officers for secret

work, he was attached to Australian troops fighting in Syria and Lebanon. There his duties at various times included liaising with the Free French, directing propaganda against the Vichy French, acting as a political adviser to the commander of the 7th Australian Division and being employed on counter-intelligence work. Later he was sent to interview refugees from Eastern Europe on the borders with Turkey. From the end of 1941 until volunteering for SOE in November 1943, Naar was mostly in Egypt, planning post-occupation resistance until Rommel's advance was reversed, seeing some action in the Western Desert and teaching for several months at the intelligence school at Helwan, outside Cairo. At SOE's Cairo headquarters, as indicated in earlier chapters, he worked closely with Margaret Hasluck and Philip Leake. In January 1944 he left Cairo to move to Bari to join the Section's Advance Headquarters. The few comments on his Personal File read: 'Quiet personality. Slow but thorough. French fluent. German fluent. Italian fair. Very satisfactory'.

In March 1944 there were two more newcomers to the Albanian Section staff. One was Captain Bryan McSwiney. Twenty-three years old and an old boy of Ampleforth, McSwiney's medical studies at St Thomas' had been interrupted by the war and he arrived in SOE via a commission in the King's Royal Rifle Corps and a three-month course with the Political Warfare Executive (PWE). He became another conducting officer. The other officer to arrive was Captain John Stubbs. Twenty-eight, Stubbs had been an accountant in peacetime and had held various platoon, transport and headquarters posts with the Royal Army Service Corps' infantry brigade company before joining SOE. He took charge of all matters concerning air support of SOE's Albanian efforts: he was to help plan and prepare drops of personnel and supplies, for example, liaise with the various Allied air forces and co-ordinate air attacks called in by missions in the field.⁹

Such was the roll call of officers on the staff of SOE's Albanian Section by the early summer of 1944. A Section Head; a staff captain; an intelligence sub-section of two officers; an operations element, with designated officers charged with air and sea respectively; two welfare officers; a clutch of conducting officers; and one officer in Cairo.¹⁰ But throughout that summer, Eliot Watrous, as Philip Leake had been, was the Section's principal mouthpiece, its representative with whom higher authority chiefly dealt and corresponded. And SOE files confirm that, throughout the very period when the Section was under his leadership and is accused of having adopted an

excessive pro-Partisan stance, Watrous was indeed keen to see policy move away from supporting Abas Kupa.

During the summer of 1944, much of Watrous' correspondence with higher authority spoke disparagingly of Kupa's worth and potential. Policy proposals drawn up on 1 June illustrate the growing emphasis placed by him on Kupa's shortcomings. Passing on Leake and Alan Palmer's recommendation that Kupa be set a time limit within which he would have to fight, Watrous warned of the implications of arming Kupa even if he acted in time. In five months Kupa had failed to build up an organised political and military party; his forces were weak and his support and influence poor. 'His contacts are extremely doubtful and in some cases include members of government proved to be collaborating with the enemy'. Watrous also emphasised the problems that the policy of maintaining a mission with Kupa had already created. The Partisans were aggravated as 'they now mistrust our motives and consider that the Allies desire the return of King Zog'. Continued attempts to persuade Kupa to fight would 'further provoke' the Partisans and increase the probability of civil war between the two. Six days later, SOE London was sent a telegram by the Albanian Section recommending that Kupa be abandoned and the Partisans given full support. Backing Kupa, the Section considered, was 'not worth while now'.¹¹ A letter that Watrous sent to Boxshall the same day confirms that the gist of the telegram reflected Watrous' views. 'The LNC have, without doubt, increased enormously during the last few months; they now represent a strong, well-equipped and well-organised guerilla force, capable of taking offensive action on a scale hitherto not thought possible... Further attempts to support Kupa's movement would lead possibly to civil war and certainly cause the Partisans to discontinue operations against the Germans'.¹²

SOE files also suggest that the Bari office may have checked the progress to higher authority of some reports received from the field. In April, SOE London instructed the Albanian Section to forward to London by immediate telegram all w/t messages, with the exception of those dealing with very routine matters, sent out of Albania by McLean. In June, McLean transmitted a number of messages that praised Kupa's potential and urged decision-makers to understand why nationalist Albanian society was best suited to a last-minute revolt as the Germans withdrew. Instead of forwarding these messages to London by telegram, however, the Albanian Section only sent them by 'slow bag' (that is, paper copies sent by air). On these occasions,

instead of the usual delay of two or three days between McLean sending his messages and SOE London reading them, the delay lasted over a fortnight.

The first 'slow bag' reached SOE's London headquarters on 4 July. It was sent under a covering letter dated 26 June and enclosed McLean's long appreciation of 18 June in which, as seen in the previous chapter, he gave his assessment of the pressures at work on Albanian nationalists to stay neutral. McLean had also urged that a policy decision on whether to encourage a nationalist rising at the right moment, which he considered 'a more productive use of Nationalist strength than small-scale action', should be reached as soon as possible.¹³ The Albanian Section explained the eight-day delay since its original transmission as due to checking corruptions in the message.¹⁴ This excuse is perfectly feasible, particularly when given its length and the workload of the SOE cipher staff. But it fails to explain why it had not been forwarded to London by telegram.

A second 'slow bag' reached London on 11 July. The covering letter, which George Cowie signed for Watrous, was dated 1 July and the bag enclosed four more messages from McLean, one of which had been transmitted from Albania as far back as 5 June. Each message expressed McLean's hope in the possibility of fomenting a late rising among the nationalists. In his 5 June telegram, McLean had repeated a request for a message of encouragement from Zog to KUPI and again had stressed its importance. KUPI now considered action against the Germans the 'only sane solution' McLean felt, 'and [he] will adopt it provided we obtain personal instructions from Zog as requested'. Failure to obtain those instructions, McLean considered, would give KUPI the impression that Zog did not want action against the Germans. KUPI, he warned, might side with the Germans if attacked by the Partisans and not backed by the British. McLean's second telegram, dated 10 June, was based on word he had received from Tony Simcox of the Gani Bey Kryeziu situation. McLean now had 'every confidence of [a] NAT rising' but little could be achieved, he felt, 'without material and financial help'. On 21 June McLean had reported that KUPI now agreed in principle to fight 'and begin large scale ops as soon as sufficient material available'. Talks with him had broken down several times over the formula of no supplies before action 'but eventually KUPI agreed [to] initiate sabotage now and then develop ops proportionate to aid supplied'. The fourth and final telegram, dated 24 June, reported McLean's views on the significance of the Gjoles bridge operation. He pointed out

that the bridge's destruction was the 'first action undertaken by KUPI's forces since last September and fulfils his promise to undertake sabotage'. But he added that it did not alter 'the fundamental proposition' that KUPI's forces were 'not suited to operations beginning on [a] small scale with consequent reprisals' but 'rather... to [a] general rising in certain districts carefully prepared'. McLean conceded that KUPI's assistance in blowing the bridge had been 'mainly prompted by [a] desire to prove his willingness to fight [the] Hun to allay [the] mistrust he feels is implied in our no arms before action policy. But he will not fight until he receives supplies'. The telegram also reported that that the 'upshot of our latest talks has been a firm offer from KUPI [to] organise 8 Bns [of] first line troops each of 250 men to form [a] hard core for [an] initial rising around which [the] bulk of [the nationalist] forces will be grouped'.¹⁵

SOE London was not impressed by the time it had taken these messages to reach its Baker Street headquarters. Major Edward Boxshall, responsible for Albanian matters at London's end, wrote to Bari on 12 July:

We cannot but express our surprise that you should not have repeated to us at an earlier date Lt Col MacLean [sic]'s telegrams dated 5, 10, 21 and 24 June. Whilst appreciating that parts of these might have been corrupt and that you had to ask for repetition, we believe that you could have passed the gist on to us, which was of considerable interest at the period you received them. Would you please in future make every endeavour to repeat such telegrams from MacLean to us by telegram. We would refer you also to our telegram to you... of 25 April in which we asked you to repeat by telegram all signals of interest received from MacLean until further notice.¹⁶

Previously, copies of all of McLean's messages had been cabled to London within one or two days. This was therefore a clear departure from what, until June, had been normal procedure and flew in the face of a direct request from London. No explanation or apology from Bari can be found in SOE's files.

It is possible that these were the messages that David Smiley alleges in his memoirs were sent by his mission and suppressed in Bari.¹⁷ Smiley actually claims that that suppression took place later in the year and involved two messages sent for the attention of Anthony Eden. However, his 1944 diary suggests that the reliability of the source of that allegation may have been somewhat shaky. Four days after arriving in Bari from Albania, Smiley wrote:

October 29...

I have got a lot of dirt out of the office, chiefly from one of the civilian secretaries, a very nice girl at whom Elliot [sic] Watrous was trying to make a pass but when he failed was quite bloody to her, so there is not much she did not tell me – amongst other things that our messages for transmission to Anthony Eden and other important people in London were deliberately not sent.¹⁸

Smiley appears to embroider this hearsay in his memoirs. He writes that in late August a personal telegram sent by McLean to Eden pressing for arms and support for KUPI was 'deliberately destroyed by one of the officers in the SOE office in Bari'. Then, on the eve of the mission's evacuation in October, having twice had their request turned down for KUPI to be brought out with them, 'we availed ourselves of a personal signal to Anthony Eden. As on the previous occasion it found its way into the wastepaper basket in the Bari office'.¹⁹

As its signals log now confirms, Smiley's mission, during its entire time in the field, had transmitted two messages to Bari for forwarding to Eden. But neither of these was sent in August and neither was delayed or suppressed. The first was despatched to Bari on 23 May and asked Eden whether King Zog, then still living in Britain, might be asked to send a personal message of encouragement to KUPI.²⁰ The Albanian Section passed the appeal at once to SOE London, which then sent a copy to the Foreign Office.²¹ Philip Broad, the Foreign Office's representative in Bari, was also informed by SOE there. He, too, sent a copy to Whitehall.²² The Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff, reluctant to commit to Zog, turned the request down.²³ The second message, transmitted to Bari from Albania on 25 October, was indeed a last-minute appeal urging the Allies to evacuate KUPI to save him from the Partisans' clutches.²⁴ But again SOE's files confirm that it was passed at once to Broad who, on 27 October, then sent it to Macmillan to forward to Eden who was then in Rome.²⁵ It was not the fault of Broad or SOE that Eden did not reply until after the mission was withdrawn.²⁶ Exhaustive cross-checking of all messages in the signals log with those passed, 'as received', by SOE Bari to London and other commands and departments suggests that, with the exception of those sent by 'slow bag' in June, all other messages were dealt with swiftly and appropriately in Bari. But while Smiley's source cannot be

accepted as absolutely sound, it is certainly not impossible that she was referring to the fate of the messages sent by his mission in June.

SOE files also reveal that another SOE officer recorded concerns about the pro-Partisan stance of the Albanian Section after he arrived in Bari from Albania in 1944. Major George Seymour had spent almost a year in the country and shared much of McLean and Amery's sympathy for the nationalists' plight. He was never to publish an account of his Albanian experiences and was killed in Malaya in 1953. But in 1944 he did write a long and detailed debriefing report that was released in 1997 at the Public Record Office. This now suggests that Eliot Watrous, fearing that Seymour might upset policy by speaking well of the nationalists, had sought to prevent him from proceeding to London. Seymour's report concludes:

[When] I returned to Base at Bari [in July]... I found the entire Albanian section biased to an unbelievable extent on behalf of the Partisans. They were not even prepared to listen to the Nationalist case and views. I attempted to explain this case but when in the office I was called a Fascist I realised that the position was hopeless. I applied to be sent home to state my case there and was informed by Major Watrous, the head of the Albanian section, that I would be sent home but not immediately, because at that time a policy was being decided in London and, if I went home then, it might alter the whole policy. A truly remarkable statement to be confronted with after one had spent eleven months working with and studying both Partisans and Nationalists. That we achieved but little is hardly surprising.²⁷

Passing on Seymour's report in early 1945, Lieutenant Colonel David Talbot-Rice, Head of SOE London's Balkans and Middle East desk, drew the attention of his superior, Colonel David Keswick, to that paragraph. 'You will remember that at the date to which it refers', wrote Talbot-Rice, 'when Seymour complains that the Bari office adopted a rather dictatorial attitude, we were complaining bitterly at this end of the lack of information which we received from our overseas headquarters'.²⁸

But even if SOE London had been better informed, if the delayed messages had arrived on time and Seymour been able to press his views in person at that moment, it is impossible to believe that they would have had any significant bearing on policy. SOE's files now confirm that even Watrous and Seymour, in their apparent

concern about the impact of Seymour's report in London, exaggerated the importance attached by key decision-makers to political considerations.

By the summer of 1944, changes in Allied command arrangements had seen SOE – both in Bari and in Baker Street – increasingly subordinated to the regular military authorities and sidelined in the decision-making process. As has been seen in previous chapters, the first significant change had occurred in the latter months of 1943, when SOE Cairo was placed directly under the operational control of GHQ Middle East. One of the main reasons for this was precisely because SOE Cairo was thought to have had far too much influence and independence already. Lord Glenconner, a civilian, had been in charge of SOE Cairo since September 1942 and it was largely a reaction to the power that he and others had wielded that brought these changes and forced his departure. Major-General William Stawell, a former Deputy Director of Intelligence at the War Office, replaced him.²⁹ Stawell and SOE Cairo now received their operational directives from GHQ Middle East and much closer guidance on policy from the Foreign Office, both in London and through its representatives in Cairo.

SOE's Balkan activities were harnessed more closely to Allied strategic needs in 1944. In January, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, who had succeeded Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean at Allied Forces Headquarters, assumed responsibility for GHQ Middle East and SOE's Balkan activities. In March Wilson received orders from the Chiefs of Staff to take control from GHQ Middle East of all special operations in Yugoslavia and Albania and transfer Stawell, the senior SOE officer in the Mediterranean, from Cairo to a more central location. Stawell moved to Italy and in April, close to Bari, opened a new command, Headquarters Special Operations Mediterranean (HQ SOM) to co-ordinate all British and American special operations in the Mediterranean. Now Wilson's control of SOE's Albanian and Yugoslav Sections went only through Stawell's new HQ SOM. Both Sections had already opened advance headquarters in Bari at the end of 1943 to be nearer their respective theatres. By April each had moved most of their staffs over from Cairo and was close to full establishment.³⁰

The final significant change in command took place in June, and further reflected the ever-increasing rhythm of Allied activity in the Balkans and especially the substantial commitment being made to supplying Tito's Partisans in Yugoslavia.

Perceiving a need for tighter organisation of all Balkan operations, the Chiefs of Staff granted Wilson permission on 10 June to establish immediately a new command to co-ordinate the planning and execution of all air, sea, land and special operations across the Adriatic. In line with Wilson's earlier recommendation that the 'Air Forces must have the major part' in those operations, the new body was named the Balkan Air Force and Air-Vice Marshall William Elliot given command.³¹ Elliot, a career RAF officer, was considered a sound, suitable choice as commander. As the Balkan Air Force's in-house history reads, he had

long experience of inter-service planning in Whitehall on the staff of the War Cabinet Office and, as a member of the Joint Planning Committee, had attended many of the important inter-Allied conferences between Churchill and Roosevelt. He was accordingly well versed in inter-service matters and the interplay of military and political problems essential for waging war in the Balkans. Moreover, from his attendance at the inter-Allied conferences, he was necessarily familiar with the outline of Allied world strategy and how the Balkan theatre fitted in to the general design.³²

'He will do the job well' noted Harold Macmillan in his diary, after Elliot visited him en route to assuming his new command.³³

By the end of June 1944, responsible to Wilson and based in Bari, Elliot and the Balkan Air Force were in firm operational control of SOE's Albanian activities. To discuss questions of policy thrown up by SOE's operations, Elliot chaired and was advised by a policy committee, as GHQ Middle East had been since late 1943 and HQ SOM since April. This new committee included local representatives of Allied Forces Headquarters, the Foreign Office, the US State Department and SOE. And at a meeting on 17 June to draw up the committee's terms of reference, it was agreed that SOE's operations in Yugoslavia and Albania would be placed under its direct supervision.³⁴

It was to be the Balkan Air Force policy committee that chose to halt and resume supplies to the Partisans in July and refrain from supplying the Zogists throughout the summer. It also recommended in September the withdrawal of McLean's mission and agreed in October that Kupi and various others should not be evacuated. When accounts of SOE's wartime operations in Albania criticise decisions made by 'Bari' after Philip Leake's death, the distinction is rarely made that, in

practice, the Balkan Air Force was the responsible authority there, not SOE. As David Stafford writes, SOE Bari was now 'firmly subordinated to the regular military and... in fact, now no longer bore any responsibility for operational policy governing supplies to the partisans, although SOE channels continued to be used for this purpose'. Having slipped rungs steadily since 1943, it was now confined almost 'exclusively to technical assistance and advice'.³⁵

SOE retained some input into the deliberations of the Balkan Air Force policy committee. Eliot Watrous occasionally attended meetings to give background information or explain a certain point. But the only SOE representative to sit on the committee was Lieutenant Colonel the Lord Harcourt, Head of SOE Bari. A veteran SOE hand, Bill Harcourt was thirty-six years old, Eton- and Oxford-educated and a managing director of Morgan Grenfell. He was also very familiar with SOE's operations in Albania. Sent out to work in its Cairo Headquarters after joining SOE in 1941, he became Deputy Director of SOE Cairo's Balkan Section in January 1943 and was appointed MBE the following month. In October he went to run SOE's Advance Headquarters in Bari.³⁶ By May 1944 he was chairing HQ SOM's weekly policy committee meetings on Albania; in June he took overall command of SOE Bari.³⁷ Throughout the summer and autumn of 1944, Harcourt was more deeply involved in decision-making over Albania than anyone else in SOE. Indeed, to judge by the Albanian Section's correspondence and the recollections of SOE officers in Bari at the time, Harcourt shouldered much of the burden of running it after the death of Philip Leake. All policy papers and proposals put up by the Section had to be seen and approved by him. He worked closely with staff officers in Bari and with officers returning from the field. 'He has a very thorough grasp of the political background in the Balkans, particularly Greece and Albania', wrote Stawell of Harcourt in late 1944; 'a very definite and forceful personality and commands respect'.³⁸

Neither Harcourt, nor AV-M Elliot nor Philip Broad, the Foreign Office representative who sat on the Policy Committee, appears ever to have been described in print as 'communist' or leftwing. From the moment Harcourt and the new Balkan Air Force assumed control of SOE's operations in Albania, however, they had inherited the Foreign Office-approved policy that had guided those activities since January 1944. The emphasis of that policy was on killing Germans, not curbing the spread of communism. Elliot's directive laid down that his 'primary object' was to

'contain and destroy as many enemy forces as possible in the Balkans'. And as summarised in its in-house history, the tasks of his new command in relation to Albania were:

- (a) To endeavour to unite the resistance movements in Albania to take concerted action against the Germans
- (b) To afford such air support as was possible for operations by the Albanians against the Germans
- (c) To carry out a series of harassing raids by British forces on the Albanian coastline...
- (d) To continue sending supplies to Albania by air and... by sea

As the minutes of its meetings make clear, a desire to inflict the maximum damage on the Germans in Albania was always uppermost in the Policy Committee's minds. So too was a diminishing hope of achieving task (a) and a growing appreciation that SOE's continued efforts to persuade Kupa and other nationalists to fight were undermining the Balkan Air Force's 'primary object'.³⁹

These considerations dictated the response of the Balkan Air Force to the Partisan assault on Kupa at the end of June. When the Partisans opened their offensive, the Policy Committee halted the supply of arms to them and appealed to Hoxha to refrain from fighting Kupa.⁴⁰ But the fact that certain Partisan units were soon in action against the Germans once again, and in trouble and in need of ammunition, saw the Committee agree to despatch limited supplies to those units 'immediately' and 'without prejudice to the future', to quote from the Balkan Air Force history. The decision was also taken to allow a Partisan delegation to proceed to Bari to negotiate directly with the Allied authorities on military matters.⁴¹

At the time, Billy McLean's mission wondered why, if the Allies were serious about effecting some kind of reconciliation between the Partisans and Kupa, the authorities in Bari did not seek to restrain the Partisans further. Amery claimed later that decision-makers had been merely 'drifting before events', unable to control the Partisans.⁴² Others would imply that it reflected the pro-Partisan influence of junior staff officers in Bari. The real explanation lies partly in the realistic assessment, which even McLean's mission had made in May, that no reconciliation between Kupa and

the Partisans was likely. But it lies principally in the fact that a reconciliation was meant merely as a step towards achieving united action against the Germans, not saving Albania from Partisan domination. The Balkan Air Force did not wish to inflame the intensity of civil conflict in Albania, which was precisely why supplies were only sent selectively to Partisan units proven to be genuinely fighting the Germans. But nothing in its directive stated that it was required to take issue with the Partisans' political aims. As Bill Harcourt wrote in December 1944, 'it was decided, on the information available from all sources, that the value of the FNC actions against the retreating Germans was such as to render the cessation of all supplies to the FNC impolitic... The absence of British support for Kupa was not the British inability to control FNC but the considered opinion of all members of the Policy Committee, Balkan Air Force, that it would be against the military requirements of the situation to withhold supplies from FNC and that to supply Kupa with arms at that particular time could only lead to an intensification of a civil war'.⁴³

It is now clear that the decisions taken in favour of the Partisans in 1944 reflected a realistic view of what the Partisans could do for Allied commanders. By June, events had proved without doubt that the Partisans could cause the Germans considerable discomfort. One of the Partisans' most significant military achievements of the war was the bridgehead they had, by then, carved out on the coast. This allowed them to receive sea-borne supplies from Italy and harass the coastal roads connecting Albania with Greece. Its existence soon saw them on the receiving end of a major German offensive. One unit involved was the 1st Mountain Division, widely regarded as the finest German formation in Southeast Europe.⁴⁴

It is also clear that SOE officers attached to the Partisans kept Bari well informed of these developments. Some, like Philip Leake, did so in cables from the field. But others, including several senior officers who had spent many months with the Partisans, were evacuated during May, June and July to Bari where they were able to make detailed reports and deal with Harcourt, Elliot and others in person. One such officer was Alan Palmer, senior British officer with the Partisans from May 1944 until the end of the war. Palmer never published any account of his wartime work in Albania. But in 1962, at a conference in Oxford on wartime resistance movements, he did speak a little about his time in Albania. He recalled of the Partisan war effort:

If one is looking to see what effect on the war the activity of the [Albanian] partisans had, I think they had their greatest compliment paid to them [when]... the Germans had to return to Albania one of their crack divisions – the 1st Mountain Division... and mounted a very rapid and effective operation against the partisans... [T]hey cleared the whole of the southern part of the country in a short time and closed the bridgehead. But partisans being formed militarily the way they are, they disperse, disappear, reform. And so it was only a month or less after that operation that they were again formed up again in groups and being once more supplied by air in greater quantities and operating still.⁴⁵

Contemporary reports by Palmer, Leake and other officers successfully impressed on Bari the scale and value of the Partisan war effort, and the rapid growth it had undergone since the winter. On the eve of the Partisan offensive into the north, there was little disagreement among observers in Italy that, at a time when the German withdrawal from the Balkans appeared imminent, strong grounds existed on which to maintain and support that effort. An appreciation by Harcourt of 20 June stressed that the Albanian Partisans were ‘the only party which has continuously fought the Germans’ and deserved Allied support as they were ‘organised, pro-Allied, and willing to take offensive action’.⁴⁶ A paper by Stawell’s HQ SOM of 22 June noted that ‘the fact that the enemy has seen fit to launch an offensive on a considerable scale against the Albanian partisans is proof of the value of their operations and of the importance which the enemy attaches to the elimination of their br[idge]head, the disruption of their forces, and the reopening of the two main routes North from Epirus’. It recommended continued support for the Partisans ‘for from a military point of view it is paying a good dividend’.⁴⁷

Captured German documents confirm that the Partisans maintained effective pressure on the Germans. One example is this desperate order of 5 July, issued by the headquarters in Tirana of the German 21st Army Corps:

Supplies sent to the guerillas by the Allied Air Force have recently been on a scale which cannot be permanently tolerated. In view of the decisive significance which a stoppage, or even interruption of the regular air borne supplies to the guerillas would have on their organisation and fighting powers, Second Armoured Army has ordered that a co-ordinated drive against the guerilla air supplies be carried out with every possible means and by every suitable branch of the army...

[A]ll soldiers must be convinced of the importance of the operation so as to encourage their co-operation. Every suggestion from whatever source will be reported to Corps, tested, and, if suitable, carried out. Mobility, imagination and constant change in methods are necessary. Keeping to one method is generally useless even if initially successful.

In August a copy of the captured German order was circulated at the most senior levels of SOE London 'as an important testimony of the value of the work we have been able to do in Albania'.⁴⁸ SOE missions in the field also made detailed reports on the two-month battle for Dibra, probably the Partisans' largest single action of the war. The Germans lost as many as four hundred killed by the time the town fell to the Partisans at the end of August.⁴⁹

The attitude adopted by decision-makers towards KUPI during the summer of 1944 was a logical extension of that desire to kill Germans while trying to minimise civil war. Neither Harcourt nor anyone else in Bari shared McLean's confidence in a nationalist rising led by KUPI, whose poor military potential and pre-occupation with the Partisan threat had been clear for many months. The Zogists had last moved against the Axis in September 1943. Nothing had occurred since to suggest the situation would change. 'The arrival of a Mission headed by a Lt Col gave an unexpected but considerable stimulus to the Zogist movement' Bill Harcourt noted in December 1944, 'but in spite of this, little effort appears to have been made by Abas KUPI to place his organisation on a full military basis'. Harcourt and other decision-makers in Bari were considerably less impressed than McLean by KUPI's contribution to the Gjoles bridge operation. They doubted whether it was more than a token act or that it really committed him to open war against the Germans. 'The action at Gjoles Bridge on 21 June was carefully considered by all authorities concerned in Italy' Harcourt recalled, 'but the conclusion was reached that it could not be considered a whole-hearted attempt by KUPI to throw in his lot with the Allies. Whilst in no way detracting from Major Smiley's outstanding success in this operation, it must be noted that KUPI refused to allow either his or the name of his organisation to be in any way connected with the action and that the Zogist Commander of the Bridge area refused at first to permit the operation to be carried out'.⁵⁰ When KUPI finally fought a handful of small actions against the Germans in September 1944, the Policy Committee

dismissed them as a last-gasp attempt at insuring with the Allies and unworthy of any attention.⁵¹

It was also apparent that KUPI had consistently exaggerated the size of his forces. Reports of how many men he claimed he could put into the field varied wildly over the months, from 40,000 down to a few hundred.⁵² In February 1944, George Seymour informed Bari that KUPI claimed he could raise 25,000 men.⁵³ In May, Julian Amery reported that he felt KUPI could raise 5,000 poorly armed men from Tirana, Mati and Kruja, his principal regions of support.⁵⁴ In July, McLean then asked Bari for arms to supply 2,000, none of whom had yet taken the field.⁵⁵ To onlookers in Italy this did not look impressive and compared poorly with the tens of thousands of Partisans reported already to be under arms in the south.

Added to this picture of weakness and prevarication were strong indications throughout the spring and summer that KUPI was turning to the Germans for help against the Partisans. There has never been any doubt that KUPI associated with Albanians who collaborated with the Germans. Nor has there been any doubt that that association became a military alliance after the Partisans advanced into the north. A broad based front was formed in which KUPI allied himself with Gjon Markogjoni (who had collaborated with the Italians), Mustafa Kruja (who had collaborated with both the Italians and the Germans), and Fikri Dinë (the leading member of the German-backed Council of Regency). But there has long been disagreement over how far KUPI went in his dealings. Smiley writes that 'the BLOs attached to the Partisans, repeatedly told by them that KUPI was collaborating with the Germans, had absorbed these lies and signalled them to Bari. We all knew that at no time did KUPI collaborate'.⁵⁶ As shown in the previous chapter, however, decrypts and captured German documents do now confirm that, albeit through intermediaries, KUPI dealt with the Germans.

For their part, SOE records confirm that Bari certainly suspected KUPI of, at the very least, indirect collaboration. Commenting on Partisan reports from as early as February 1944 that accused KUPI of direct collaboration, Bill Harcourt wrote later:

It is no more than possible that he personally never conversed with a German, but collectively his organisation, which boasted the inclusion of high-ranking Officers of State, was tending more and more to collaboration. One statement which led to accusations by

the [Partisans] was made by a German deserter, Gefr. Forster who claimed to have seen in a German HQ a document purporting to be a pact of non-aggression signed on behalf of both Kupa and the German Commander. This statement was made by Forster on the 13 April [1944] and supported a rumour to the same effect which had been reported by Lt Col Seymour on 3 April.

Harcourt also noted the 'coincidence' in June of a major German drive starting against the Partisans 'at an opportune moment for Kupa'. This was especially interesting, Harcourt considered, 'in view of the meeting which Kupa had had, just prior to that date, with Mustafa Kruja and representatives of Fiqri Dine and Mehdi Frasheri [Dine's predecessor as Regent]. Dr Sadedin, head of the Albanian Red Cross in Tirana and not himself a Partisan, recently stated that such a drive was in fact proposed to the Germans by Kupa's Committee'.⁵⁷

SOE records also indicate that word of Kupa's dealings with collaborators and Germans reached SOE earlier, and from sources more reliable than deserters and Partisan propaganda. According to 'most secret sources', reads a note of 7 June 1944 in SOE London's files, discussions had been held in mid-May 'between Abas Kupa and other prominent Albanians regarding the formation of a new Government. It appeared that the German authorities including [SS General Josef] Fitzthum [Fitzthum], the head of the *Sicherheitsdienst* [SD] in Albania, were participating. It seems that the objective was the establishment of some political agreement which would provide the basis for more effective collaboration between Albanian puppet troops and the Germans'. The note adds that in mid-February 'friends of Abas Kupa had given the Germans assurances that in the event of an English landing he would find some excuse for not taking action against the Germans'.⁵⁸ Another note, dated 13 July, states that 'it is reliably reported... that the German military authorities in Tirana were very recently approached by [Mehdi] Frasheri [head of the puppet Council of Regency], on behalf of Abas Kupa. The latter was in danger of attack by the LNC, and it was desired that a force of some hundreds of his supporters should be allowed to pass through Tirana to reinforce him. The Germans granted this request'.⁵⁹ A note from Section V of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), dated 22 July and marked 'TOPSEC "U"', states that, according to 'most secret sources', in mid-July 'Wehbi [Vehbi] and Ragib [Raquip] Frasheri, both prominent pro-Axis Albanian politicians

[and sons of Mehdi Frasher], were negotiating with Abas Kupa in an attempt to persuade him to fight the Communists'. The note continues:

Kupa is said to be willing, and the Frasheris ask for German support. The SD at Tirana advise that Kupa is to be regarded with suspicion until he breaks with the English Military Mission and actually starts hostilities against the Communists. He is to be asked to visit Tirana for negotiations and to accept a German liaison staff. He is not to receive ammunition except under control.

All these notes are present only in SOE London's files. Yet there is reason to believe that the intelligence they contained was available also to SOE officers in Bari. Air-Commodore Archie Boyle, Assistant Chief of SOE, commented to David Keswick when passing him the 22 July note: 'It is certain that similar information will be in possession of our people in Italy'.⁶⁰

These considerations compounded the fact that, for as long as SOE missions remained with Kupa, the Albanian war effort risked being seriously jeopardised. It had been obvious since the spring that the Allies had much to gain from remaining on good terms with the Partisans. There was no doubt that they were more popular, better organised and possessed the greater potential to harass the Germans than any other guerilla group. Hoping to release that potential, SOE officers attached to Partisan units had bombarded Bari with reports and signals asking not only for supplies but also for more exclusive support. These officers were convinced that the presence of other missions with Kupa and other nationalists, though in accordance with British policy, was hampering the Partisan war effort. Feelings ran high. Captain Brian Ensor, for example, spent February until September 1944 with the Partisans and subsequently reported:

My briefing before infiltration... consisted of a statement that on all possible occasions I was to use British material and Partisan manpower to kill Germans...

The Partisans were, and would always be, the most effective fighting machine, provided they were not deprived of weapons and supplies to continue their fight against the Germans to the advantage of any doubtful resistance elements whose only claim to recognition consisted of empty promises and idle boastings... It is easy enough to be wise after the event, but my signals of April and May prove that I was always a staunch supporter of an immediate change of

policy, because it was not possible to carry out my orders properly... For a long time we were... held responsible [by the Partisans] for a policy with which we did not agree and which was inhibiting Partisan resistance to the Germans and preventing us from carrying out our briefing orders, i.e. harassing the Germans.⁶¹

Many SOE officers evacuated to Bari during the spring and summer were able to voice such opinions forcefully and in person. They included Lieutenant Colonel Norman Wheeler, who had been in Albania since December 1943 and the senior British officer with the Partisans since February 1944. He was evacuated with Major Bill Tilman, who had spent nine months with the Partisans, in late May. On their arrival in Bari, Wheeler reported:

It has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Tirana [puppet] Gov[ernmen]t, and the Balkom are collaborating actively against the Partisans with the Germans, and the rest of the country, by sitting on the fence, are collaborating passively. It can be appreciated, therefore, that it is exceedingly difficult to explain to the Partisans the reason why the Allies not only do NOT denounce these collaborators but give them supplies... and continue to maintain Military Missions with them. During the past six months, together with Major Tilman and [Lieutenant Colonel] Palmer, I have asked for a change in policy and submitted recommendations accordingly. The position has remained unaltered.⁶²

In his own report, Tilman expressed similar views:

I was as convinced when I left as I had been for some months previously that our policy of backing the LNC [Partisans] was honest and expedient, they being the only party in Albania with the same war aims as our own, who are willing to make sacrifices for them... They realised we were doing our best to help them materially, but the good effect of that was more than offset by our helping equally other parties, if not with money or material, then with encouragement.⁶³

Within days of joining Alan Palmer's mission at Enver Hoxha's headquarters in May, Philip Leake also transmitted reports of how impressed he was by Partisan strength and the need for policy-makers to appreciate its implications. Signals sent before his death confirm Leake was convinced by then that the Partisans – estimated then at being 25,000-strong – deserved continued support and that the time had come to force

Kupi to fight.⁶⁴ 'Until the entry of the late Major Leake into Albania', Brian Ensor concluded, 'the [level of] support BLOs received to help them to gain the full co-operation of the Partisans was criminal. The knowledge that the cries of the two most senior BLOs with the Partisans [Wheeler and Palmer] were falling on deaf ears filled us with despair... [I]t seemed to us that until the latter months our efforts were being deliberately hindered by our own countrymen'.⁶⁵

Conscious of the urgent need to resolve this issue, Bill Harcourt showed no hesitation in recommending the proposals passed on by Leake and Palmer that Kupi be set an ultimatum. Kupi's movement, he wrote in an appreciation of 20 June which echoed Eliot Watrous' 1 June proposals, appeared 'immature and without support' and did not yet constitute 'a military factor'. Moreover, Kupi was still 'unwilling to show his hand either on one side or the other' and had prevaricated when any attempt had been made by SOE officers to persuade him to fight the Germans. The time had come 'to force Kupi's hand' or 'drop him', Harcourt suggested that Kupi be told 'immediate action' coupled with 'a declaration of wholehearted sympathy and non aggression to other resistance movements' was essential if he was to receive continued Allied support. If Kupi agreed, he should be warned that 'any signs of sliding back into a collaborationist policy will cause the immediate abandonment of all support and the withdrawal of all Allied officers with him'.⁶⁶ In correspondence with Harold Macmillan that month, Philip Broad reported that, after 'full discussions' with SOE Bari, he 'agreed' that Kupi should now be set a time limit within which he would have to carry out 'a specific military operation... as was done in the case of General Mihailovic'. Since Kupi's movement was 'much weaker than was originally believed' and the Partisans were 'the only party in Albania at present offering any active resistance to the Germans', it was time to 'intimate clearly' to Kupi 'that unless he is prepared to do something we shall not continue to support him'.⁶⁷ That no ultimatum was authorised owed everything to the shared concern of the Foreign Office and its minister at Wilson's Headquarters over the potentially unfortunate consequences should Kupi actually meet any time limit set. As Macmillan suggested to Broad, Britain might then find itself committed to supplying Kupi with weapons that he would 'probably' use against the Partisans. He concluded that a Kupi-Partisan agreement was an essential precondition before any decision was taken to arm Kupi.⁶⁸ The Foreign Office in London supported Macmillan's grounds for caution. It

acknowledged, too, that 'experience' of setting Mihailovic a similar test was 'not encouraging' and agreed that the 'first aim' should still be the reconciliation.⁶⁹

By then, however, few SOE officers in Bari or with the Partisans in southern Albania believed a reconciliation was possible. Towards the end of June, but before the outbreak of wider civil war between Kupa and the Partisans, Bari passed Alan Palmer details of a recent appeal of McLean's that Kupa be sent arms to allow him to attack the Germans. Palmer also learnt that McLean had stressed again to Kupa that he had to attack at once and thereby reach 'a basis of understanding' with the Partisans. 'It is felt Kupa will fight the Germans when supplies are sent, after which there will be a good chance of collaborating with FNC', McLean had reported. Palmer, at that moment, was on the coast awaiting evacuation to Bari, with the German summer offensive against the Partisans pressing in from all sides. His comments on McLean's efforts and appeal were blunt but prophetic:

Cannot believe Kupa has been asked to re-enter FNC. Think First Partisan Division expressly formed to attack Kupa and if his troops resist the Partisans will attack and succeed rapidly if there is no German drive [against them]. Any understanding between FNC and Kupa is out of the question at such a late date even if he fights the Germans. At the end of May Leake and myself recommended targets for Kupa and a time limit end of June... It is too late now...

Arms must not [now] be sent [to] Kupa as they would only be used against the Partisans and aggravate the situation. Surely by now Kupa's unwillingness to fight the Germans is clear. There is no time for Kupa to take action against the Germans before he is attacked by the Partisans.

Palmer concluded by recommending the 'immediate withdrawal' of missions with Kupa. 'Their retention can only aggravate the civil war and be a real danger to BLOs there'.⁷⁰ In the event, the Foreign Office prevaricated until almost the end about breaking with Kupa. McLean's mission remained with him until October. By then, the Partisans had established control over most of the country and become deeply suspicious at Britain's continued contact with royalist Albanians with such an insignificant record of resistance.

Frustration in Bari at out-dated or unrealistic views that threatened to fuel that prevarication, and thereby continue to prejudice support for the Albanian war effort, may well be enough to explain why certain reports were obstructed from making their

way from the field to London. Indeed, other SOE officers who knew Eliot Watrous do not, in their recollections, echo Billy McLean's disparaging comment that he supported 'the communist cause against the nationalists at every level'. Marcus Lyon, who spent over a year in Albania with SOE and came to know Watrous well, recalls that in 1944 he was 'very pleasant, enthusiastic and helpful... quite clever too'.⁷¹ Reginald Hibbert remembers 'a mild man, less commanding perhaps than some might have wished, but in so far as his views were progressive they were somewhere in the centre, in a general sense liberal. He was advocating support (ie supplies) for the Partisans, the National Liberation Army, not for "the communist cause"'.⁷² Even Peter Kemp's impression from meeting Watrous briefly in Bari that spring was of nothing more than 'an amiable young American with a commission in the British Army who took endless pains to ensure my comfort and peace of mind'.⁷³

In fact, Watrous was naturalised British, born in Johannesburg to an American father and a New Zealand-born mother; but he was certainly young: still only twenty-two when appointed Section Head.⁷⁴ To some in SOE this seemed a relatively tender age at which to be given such responsibility, even when given the demands of the war, but it seems to have been a considered and logical appointment. Documents in his SOE Personal File confirm that his qualities and commitment impressed his superiors and give no indication that he was ever regarded as in any way difficult or a problem. A note dated 17 January 1944 in his SOE Personal File describes him as 'a staff officer of exceptional energy and enterprise and well suited by his abilities for a Grade II appointment'. Bill Harcourt echoed that assessment in a confidential report in April: 'Captain Watrous has a pleasant personality and is a very keen, reliable, energetic and intelligent GSO III [i.e. General Staff Officer, Grade III] of well above average ability. He is willing and capable to accept responsibility and will make an excellent Grade II Staff Officer in any capacity'.⁷⁵ He was duly made up to GSO II when Philip Leake left for Albania in May.

Nor is there any evidence, in the correspondence or papers produced by Watrous prior to Leake's departure, to indicate that his views ever conflicted with Leake's. In a letter of 4 March, for example, to Christopher Steel, then still the Foreign Office adviser to SOE, Watrous had objected roundly to recent recommendations received from Norman Wheeler for a change to be made in policy. The BK should be officially denounced, Wheeler had suggested, and the BBC should

identify the LNC by name and refrain from using 'loose terms such as Patriot and Nationalist'. Writing, apparently, as temporary Section Head in Leake's absence, Watrous was firmly in favour of the policy of persevering with attempts at fostering resistance from all possible quarters. Wheeler's proposals, Watrous wrote, would create 'an impossible situation' for SOE officers still working with the BK.⁷⁶ The LNC, 'although the only movement at present actively co-operating', was also weak and in no position to take over the areas now occupied by the BK. The BK's 'Nationalist and Conservative outlook', Watrous considered, was 'more representative of Albanian opinion than the left view of the LNC'; their denunciation would merely increase the hostility between the two parties. Furthermore, Abas Kupa had 'strong ties' with the BK. A declaration against them would 'certainly affect our present relations with Kupa which, at the moment, are of paramount importance'. Other than denouncing BK leaders proven to have collaborated, Watrous suggested, no further action should be taken. Watrous' comments echo Leake's when the latter had resisted 'Trotsky' Davies' call for exclusive support for the Partisans in December 1943; they were also wholly in line with the views of other observers in SOE and GHQ Middle East in the spring of 1944. As Steel scribbled on Watrous' 4 March letter, 'I entirely agree with the arguments and the proposed action. It is exactly what we have all felt here before'.⁷⁷ As 1944 wore on, Watrous' views changed. But so, too, did Leake's, as he began to appreciate the rapidly evolving reality and implications of the great Partisan recovery. Indeed, Watrous' papers and proposals during the summer of 1944 display the arguments of Leake, Wheeler, Alan Palmer and other officers with the Partisans openly and consistently. And limits to Watrous' sympathy for the Partisans can certainly be detected in SOE's papers. In August 1944, for example, he resisted strongly the idea that a permanent Partisan mission be established in Bari. '[I]t would be both difficult and awkward for [SOE]... here and the Senior BLO in the Field if there is to be a permanent delegation' he wrote to Harcourt, 'since they will certainly try and check everything that does not exactly suit the wishes of the LNC'.⁷⁸

After Leake's death, however, it seems possible that Watrous became worried about the possible impact that inaccurate, pro-nationalist reports might have in London. SOE records suggest that few in its overseas headquarters shared for long the confidence apparent in London in Billy McLean's mission's chances of success. Certainly not Philip Leake, Bill Harcourt or the Foreign Office's successive

representatives at that headquarters, Christopher Steel and Philip Broad. That Watrous openly desired a policy change in line with recommendations received from the field is also clear. 'Papers, which Philip would have told you about, have now been put up' wrote Watrous on 8 June to Alan Palmer, referring to the policy proposals, including the recommendation that KUPI be set a time limit within which he had to act, that the Section had submitted to Broad and Harcourt on 1 June and passed to SOE and the Foreign Office in London a few days later. '[W]e now have to wait for the big brains above us to absorb and digest them before final decisions are reached' Watrous added. 'I am pressing daily for decisions and hope shortly to have authority to hold the pistol to KUPI's head'.⁷⁹ A growing anxiety that London should not act on reports that bore little relation to Allied strategic concerns and the reality of the situation in Albania may well have compelled Watrous to then tamper, apparently, with the flow of information from the field. But the accusation that he acted from ulterior motives, determined to sabotage McLean and KUPI, and without regard to the facts, appears unconvincing and unfair. As he had been instructed to do, Watrous placed the emphasis on war-fighting considerations, distinguished between what was urgent (operational imperatives) and what was increasingly irrelevant to actual operations, and submitted his assessments to higher authority. It was not the fault of the staff that McLean's messages, like KUPI's position, were becoming increasingly irrelevant to the exigencies of the situation on the ground. Even Bill Harcourt, as noted in a letter from him to SOE London in September, personally and deliberately chose not to send certain documents to London that summer detailing discussions with Partisan representatives in Bari, 'as they could not have failed to be extremely misleading'.⁸⁰

Jon Naar's recollections of life and work in Bari may reinforce this picture. After moving there from Cairo, his own duties as military intelligence officer were chiefly to 'debrief... bodies who came back from the field, translate and evaluate captured documents, and then co-ordinate this information with BLOs who were beginning to start operations in the field'. Most of Naar's 'firsthand contacts' were with British officers arriving in Bari from working with the Partisans in southern Albania. 'Almost all of them were extremely helpful and interested only in getting the job done of attracting and pinning down as many German divisions as possible in the Balkans'.⁸¹

Yet there was indeed a 'schism between the pro- and anti-Kupi factions' in Bari, Naar remembers.⁸² And what certainly contributed to this were the personalities and personal politics of individual officers.

In [the] Albanian Section, as in [the] Greek and Jugo[slav Sections], there was a sharp dichotomy between those of us who supported or opposed the Partisans. Altho[ugh] the crucial issue was which resistance groups would fight (or were fighting) the Italian or German occupiers of the 3 countries, our own political sympathies played an important role in our evaluations of the reports sent in from the field and our own personal contacts with resistance leaders, BLOs, and others who came out of the field to Cairo and Bari.

Most of us on the staff and in the field were open as to our political sympathies. [James] Klugman[n of the Yugoslav Section] was a communist... Peter Kemp fought for Franco, and Julian Amery... was very rightwing... John Eyre [of the Albanian Section] was pro-communist, but so in the spirit of popular front coalition building were most of us at that time. Personally, I was openly pro-socialist as were almost all of us who had served in the Eighth Army.⁸³

Naar's own politics were not simply a product of his time in the desert. In October 1936, as a young Jewish sixth former at Mill Hill, he had fought Mosley's fascists in Cable Street. Later, as an undergraduate in London, he had joined the University Labour Federation and marched in protest against German and Italian territorial aggressions. After Spain, Naar recalls, he had little time for communism. But in any case, he stresses, in the context of SOE's Albanian operations the post-war 'polarizing' of people in Bari 'as pro- or anti-Communist' in 1944 is 'totally misleading'.

The pro-nationalist group didn't have much support on the staff not because we were Communist sympathizers (Klugmann and Eyre were, of course) but because we had contributed to the pro-pzn [sic] policy adopted by Churchill and its corresponding support for Hoxha in Albania on the grounds that it made sense from the military viewpoint...

Did the Pzns in Albania indulge in terrorism and other civil war operations against their enemies within what was originally a common front? Of course, they did. But on balance and when it counted... the Albanian resistance was 90 per cent or more Partisan-supported and organised at great personal loss to themselves.

As it became clear that the Partisans were politically in the ascendant, Naar recalls, he personally found it possible to identify other grounds on which to support them. He remembers distinctly voicing to colleagues in 1944 his opinion that, 'by supporting the [emergent] Partisan forces (and therefore, movements) in the three Balkan countries', Britain might secure the rise of a 'national', westward-leaning Communism which could 'represent a significant threat to Soviet hegemony'.⁸⁴

Naar considers surprising the postwar allegation that Eliot Watrous was a communist, a charge that he cannot substantiate. He can also recall no instance in Bari of mismanagement aimed at manipulating the picture presented to London of events in Albania. 'If there was a Communist conspiracy in Bari, as alleged by Amery and his supporters, it certainly fooled me'.⁸⁵ But, while he thinks a conspiracy unlikely, Naar does not rule out the possibility that some attempts at minor 'manoeuvring' could have occurred. Certainly his own reports, now declassified, do not suggest Naar distorted, for outside observers, information received from missions in the field.⁸⁶ But he recalls vividly the resentment with which Julian Amery's politics and contacts in London came to be viewed in Bari. It was well known, Naar remembers, that Amery was decidedly conservative in his views, that his father was a cabinet minister and that the decision to send McLean to Kupa in 1944 had been taken with the full backing of the Foreign Office. 'Amery and company had their own anti-Partisan, anti-Communist agenda... and very strong connections with the FO (rather than with SOE London) and were able to continue for some months with a policy that was very divisive'.⁸⁷ Watrous, meanwhile, according to Naar, was something of an 'enigma': a poor manager, secretive and possibly capable of withholding certain information in the ways suggested by SOE's records. 'He didn't seem to trust anyone'.⁸⁸

Records also suggest that Amery and McLean's working methods contributed to the tension between their mission and SOE's Bari headquarters. In September 1944, Bari learnt that McLean, without authorisation, had allowed Amery, a captain, to put on major's crowns and proclaim himself to locals as Randolph Churchill's 'counterpart' in Albania. Churchill, the Prime Minister's son, had been sent recently to work with Tito as a semi-official envoy of his father's; the decision to send Amery to Kupa, however, had had no such diplomatic impulse or authority behind it. An exchange of w/t messages between Bari and McLean resulted, in which Bill Harcourt told McLean directly that his conduct had undermined the efforts of SOE officers

working with the Partisans. 'Comparison [of Amery] with Churchill [is] unfortunate as [the] Partisans have taken his presence as [meaning British] political support [for] Kupa', Harcourt transmitted, pointing out that Amery was just a 'straightforward' BLO. 'By telling Amery to assume [his] majority you have exceeded your powers and he must revert to his proper rank' Harcourt added. 'This action on your part has made work of ALOs [Allied Liaison Officers] with [the] Psns extremely difficult'.⁸⁹ No memoir or published account of SOE's Albanian activities refers to this incident.

Nor has anything been acknowledged before of the abrasive effect that Amery, in particular, had on other SOE officers whom McLean's mission encountered in the field. Major Richard Riddell, an experienced regular officer, crossed paths with him in northern Albania. It was Riddell who reported, informally, the incident of the major's crowns, and he recalls that he 'disliked' the forthright Amery 'almost on sight'.⁹⁰ Reginald Hibbert, then Riddell's second-in-command, writes: 'They [McLean and Amery] traded heavily on the fact that Julian's father was a Cabinet minister; and Julian was put forward, and put himself forward, as an especially well informed sort of political guru with a thorough understanding of the communist menace and Britain's strategic interests in keeping it at bay. The rest of us were treated as common soldiery who thought that fighting the Germans was all that counted and did not understand the higher subtleties which made the Soviet Union and the CP's of eastern Europe the real, long-term enemies. Everyone was allowed to understand that Billy McLean had a right of direct access to the Foreign Secretary [who had agreed that McLean could send him a personal message 'in time of need']. It was this special character which... [McLean's] mission gave itself while committing itself wholly to Kupa which riled the ANLA [Partisan] high command... and convinced them that, whatever Palmer and others said, Britain was against them'.⁹¹

However, if Watrous or other Section officers feared that jaundiced reports would precipitate support in London for an eleventh hour rising by the Nationalists, they need not have worried. It was true that few policy-makers relished the prospect of a communist regime coming to power in Albania. 'Another King gone down the drain!' wrote Churchill, while in Moscow in October 1944, in a recently declassified note to Eden after learning of the likely ascendancy of the Albanian Partisans. 'We did not mention Albania the other night' he added, referring to the infamous 'percentages' meeting at which he and Stalin had divided up Eastern and Southeastern Europe into

postwar spheres of influence, 'but personally I think we should insist upon a fifty-fifty arrangement with the Soviets'.⁹² It was also true that Churchill had expressed concern for some months about whether Britain should, as he wrote to Eden in early May 1944, 'resist' or 'acquiesce in the Communisation of the Balkans'. In a memorandum submitted to the War Cabinet early in June, the Foreign Office acknowledged that the Partisan leaders in Albania, like those in Yugoslavia and the leaders of EAM in Greece, 'were spreading their doctrines in the areas under their control'.⁹³ But from the moment the Albanian Partisans attacked them at the end of June, there was never much likelihood that the Allies would, before the war was out, intervene decisively on behalf of Zog's supporters in Albania. Until the moment the Germans finally left in November, the policy guiding SOE and the Balkan Air Force still gave priority to maximising the military effort only of Albanians genuinely fighting. And during June, before the Partisans attacked the nationalist north, Wilson in Italy and the Chiefs of Staff in London had all agreed that Abas Kupa should not be armed unless an agreement could be arranged between him and the Partisans.

That month, the Foreign Office had approached the Chiefs with the proposal that Zog be asked to send Kupa a personal telegram urging 'full collaboration' with the Allies. Reluctant to waste on the Zogists supplies that 'might be more profitably used elsewhere', the Chiefs summoned little enthusiasm for the plan. SOE in London, they noted, 'consider best policy is to continue support of LNC'.⁹⁴ Wilson, when asked by the Chiefs for his thoughts a few days later, confirmed their conclusion that no encouragement should be given to Kupa along the lines suggested by the Foreign Office. Wilson considered that such encouragement 'would involve us in military support of and supply to' a party 'whose main characteristics are loyalist Albanian patriotism and antagonism to the Communist Partisans'. The latter, he noted, 'are rapidly growing in strength and organisation and are already an effective instrument for action against the enemy in the south where his main commitments (the defence of vital road communications from Greece) are placed'. Unless a reconciliation between the Partisans and Kupa could be arranged, he felt, arms sent to the Zogists 'would mainly encourage civil war'. Wilson considered that such an agreement had to be 'an essential prerequisite before any military aid is given to [the] Zogists'. But it was 'doubtful', he concluded, whether one would be realised.⁹⁵

Senior officers in SOE London concurred with Wilson's reasoning. 'I am against increased support for Abas Kupa' Colonel David Keswick wrote to Major-General Colin Gubbins, Head of SOE, on 8 July. 'Our political unwisdom has got us into the most unholy mess in the Balkans... We do not want bigger and better civil wars, and this eternal tinkering with both sides in order to match them up one against the other will in my opinion prove disastrous'.⁹⁶ Gubbins agreed. Support for Kupa, he wrote on 12 July, was 'not warranted'.⁹⁷ 'While we are in agreement with the view expressed by [the Foreign Office]... as regards the desirability of persuading Abas Kupa and LNC to come to an agreement', SOE London submitted to the Chiefs that month, 'we are very doubtful of its practical possibilities. Lt Col Maclean [sic]... has been endeavouring for several months to bring such an agreement, but with complete lack of success... [W]e continue to hold the view that the only useful line of action at the moment in Albania is to continue giving wholehearted support to the LNC who are fighting the Germans with a considerable degree of success'.⁹⁸

From June onwards no support was voiced by the military or SOE for Kupa. And *after* June, as predicted by Leake and others, all likelihood of an agreement being forged with the Partisans evaporated, as Kupa proved unable to find the time, space and resources to put up meaningful resistance to the Germans while refraining from fighting the Partisans.

Though continuing to maintain that Kupa might still be supported if he came to an agreement with the Partisans, the Foreign Office accepted, too, that Kupa did not, on military grounds, justify that support. From Bari, Philip Broad kept the Foreign Office well enough informed of events in the field.⁹⁹ As a result, Whitehall knew that Kupa's resistance record and potential stood in stark contrast to that of the Partisans, that his many months of inaction and prevarication were obvious and undisputed even by the SOE mission attached to him. A minute in August by Denis Laskey, the Albanian desk officer, confirms that this reality at least was appreciated in London. 'From the military point of view, this would be no great loss' he remarked of the possibility that SOE might have to draw to a close its contact with Kupa. 'LNC are the only organisation which has ever done any serious fighting against the Germans and the value of the Nationalists, even if they came out openly on our side, would be problematical. Politically, however, it is doubtful whether we want to assist LNC to gain control over the whole of Albania... I still think it might be in our interests and

also in those of Albania itself if King Zog were to return after the war... I can, however, see no way of bringing this about'.¹⁰⁰

That McLean was not withdrawn until October had everything to do with the vain but prolonged hope entertained by the Foreign Office in London that continued contact with KUPI might yet prove valuable by yielding an agreement between the Zogists and Partisans. A report on the situation sent by Eden to Churchill on 23 July provides a typical illustration of the Foreign Office position that summer. Days before, Churchill had seen a telegram of Broad's from Bari that reported an imminent German drive on Dibra and that the situation was 'no longer a straight issue of civil war'. The Partisans were facing 'a definite German threat' and, in the opinion of Alan Palmer, could expect 'severe losses in the coming fighting'.¹⁰¹ Churchill had minuted to Eden: 'Let me have a note on this, showing which side we are on'.¹⁰² Eden replied correctly that the Partisans were the only organisation doing any serious fighting but added that their influence was confined to the south and reconciliation with KUPI was still a possibility.¹⁰³ Eden's paper, as Reginald Hibbert writes, 'considerably overstated' KUPI's position, 'understated' the Partisan one and was 'far too optimistic in its suggestion that reconciliation between the two was still conceivable'.¹⁰⁴ In August, when Broad reported that the situation might necessitate the withdrawal of McLean's mission, the Foreign Office remained rooted in the past. 'At this stage of the war we don't want to commit ourselves too deeply to one side or the other and I am against withdrawing the BLOs from KUPI' minuted Armine Dew of the Southern Department. Sir Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-Secretary of State, minuted his agreement.¹⁰⁵ Only in September did Eden finally concede that the Foreign Office had nothing to gain from maintaining a mission with the Zogists. 'KUPI clearly doesn't intend to do anything' he minuted. 'Surely it is asking for trouble to leave our officers with him. Better get them out'.¹⁰⁶

It is a measure of the strength of opinion about KUPI among observers in Bari that the controversial decision not to evacuate him, and the steps taken to ensure that McLean's mission complied with the order, were insisted on by the Foreign Office's Bari representative. Given the mission's conviction that junior staff officers in Bari were responsible, it is also a measure of how localised in 1944 were the viewpoints of SOE officers who have become so critical of this and other decisions. Writing to Harcourt on 27 October, Philip Broad felt it 'quite possible that McLean, when he is

brought out of Albania, may attempt to bring out with him either Abas KUPI himself or one or more of his followers'. These evacuees 'may cause more trouble than they are worth', considered Broad, with an eye on improving relations with Albania's probable new masters, and it would be 'a very wise precaution' to telegraph McLean with 'categorical instructions... that under no circumstances whatever is he to bring anyone out. At the same time orders might be given to the officer in command of the naval craft concerned in the operation not to allow any Albanian on his vessel without previously having obtained our approval'. Broad also suggested that, to avoid a *fait accompli*, Harcourt seek the support of Air Vice-Marshal Elliot.¹⁰⁷ This was secured. Harcourt informed the captain of the boat the same day that 'on the orders of AOC BAF... no Albanian of any sort is to be evacuated' when picking up McLean.¹⁰⁸

Broad's dim view of KUPI is confirmed in a telegram sent to Macmillan the following day, in which Broad passed on his personal thoughts on McLean's appeal to evacuate the Zogist leader. Broad was not convinced by McLean's argument that KUPI had been of 'considerable service to the Allied cause'. KUPI's 'record' over the last few months, Broad told Macmillan, 'has not been such as to justify us in saying that he has been of any help whatever to us'.

He has consistently failed to carry out requests for action against the enemy. It was only when it became clear to him that [the] Germans were to withdraw from Albania that he gave any indication at all of being prepared to take any action against them. Such action as he did take amounted to a few minor rebuffs of no practical importance... On the other side of the balance sheet there are reports that certain of his lieutenants have been working with the Germans.¹⁰⁹

Broad's comments echoed those expressed in Bari for some months. When word of McLean's appeal reached Eden, however, the Foreign Secretary, who had been content to see McLean withdrawn, expressed some sympathy for KUPI's plight. He replied to Broad on 31 October in support of McLean's request. Inevitably, Eden's knowledge of the case was not so intimate as Broad's, and the grounds he laid down for KUPI's evacuation remain debatable. KUPI was a man whom Britain had supported, Eden considered, 'and against whom the most serious charge is that of inactivity against the enemy'. While it was 'undesirable that HM Government should be identified with steps to rescue Abas KUPI, I do not think we can escape the moral

responsibilities'. Eden instructed Broad 'to consult with McLean [who had been evacuated from Albania on 28 October] as to ways and means of getting Kupa out of the country without it appearing that HM Government have been involved in the operation'. This was to prove unnecessary, however, as Kupa would succeed in fleeing Albania under his own steam.¹¹⁰

Julian Amery later referred to Bari as 'an instrument of Enver Hodja [sic] in the British camp'.¹¹¹ Today it appears that staff officers were indeed anxious to support the Partisans at the expense of Abas Kupa and that some were sympathetic to the sort of new order the Partisans might deliver and seemed to deserve, too, given the sacrifices they were making. It also seems possible that, to some degree, an officer, or officers, on the Section staff may have been prepared to suppress information; and, as will be shown in the next chapter, it seems likely that one was a communist. For most SOE officers returning from northern Albania, however, direct, first-hand experience of Bari's command structures was relatively fleeting. It also occurred either long before or some time after the summer of 1944: the key period of events and decision-making. For, in fact, SOE's Albanian Section in Bari was not responsible for taking the decisions in favour of increased and exclusive support for the Albanian Partisans; nor did those decisions reflect whatever ideological sympathy might have been felt in Bari for the Partisan cause. They were taken on strong military grounds, after careful consideration, to meet the requirements of policy-makers determined to inflict substantial and immediate damage on the Germans.

¹ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* pp.152-3; P.Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* pp.231-2; A. Glen, *Footholds Against a Whirlwind* p.157. See also N. Bethell, *The Great Betrayal* chap.1 passim

² J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* chaps. 3-7 passim

³ *Ibid.*, p.172

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.298, 334

⁵ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* pp.231-2

⁶ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.152-3, 134; see also X. Fielding, *One Man in His Time* p.51

⁷ A. Glen, *Footholds Against a Whirlwind* p.157

⁸ Nicholas Bethell, *The Great Betrayal* p.16

⁹ Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO. Confirmation of certain details was given personally by Bryan McSwiney, Hugh Munro and Jon Naar and obtained from the families of Eliot Watrous and George Cowie.

¹⁰ Three more joined subsequently, two of them in August 1944: Lieutenant Nora Galbraith, a South African FANY, as another Welfare Officer, while Captain Robert Stevenson was put to work assisting the provisioning and operations side of sea and air operations. Educated at Fettes College and the Universities of Edinburgh and London, Stevenson was twenty-nine years old. A graduate of Classics and Archaeology, he had worked as an assistant with the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh and, when called up in 1942, was an assistant Administration Officer with the Department of Health in Scotland. After being commissioned into the Intelligence Corps in February 1943, he had spent over a

year working as an Italian interpreter in Sicily and mainland Italy. Last to join the Albanian Section staff was Captain W.G. Bisset, who arrived in September as another Conducting Officer. Bisset was thirty, another former accountant and yet another Scot, who had been educated at Melville and Stoneyhurst Colleges and the University of Edinburgh. Service with the Territorial Army Coastal Artillery since 1934 had led to three years with the Coastal Artillery in Malta, from April 1941 until the summer of 1944. For his final year on the island he had commanded the Coastal Artillery's Gun Operations Room. Although it was split for a time between Cairo and Bari in the early part of 1944, none of the Section's officers was posted out of the Section before the fighting in Albania was at an end. Tragically, however, not only would Leake die but also Jim Herratt, who was rushed to hospital in September 1944 dangerously ill with poliomyelitis but succumbed five days later. It may also be noted that the Section's clerical and secretarial staff became increasingly numerous in 1943-44. By 1944 and in various capacities, ten FANYs and other NCOs were working for the Section. Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO.

¹¹ 'Recommendation of Policy', memorandum by Major E. Watrous, 1 June 1944; cipher telegrams, SOE Bari to SOE London, 6 and 7 June 1944, PRO HS 5/11

¹² Major E. Watrous to Major E. Boxshall, 7 June 1944, PRO HS 5/68

¹³ Major E. Watrous to Major E. Boxshall, 26 June 1944, enclosing w/t messages, CONCENSUS II to Bari, 18 and 19 June 1944, PRO HS 5/82

¹⁴ Minute, Major E. Boxshall to Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice, 15 July 1944, PRO HS 5/35; Colonel D. Keswick to General C. Gubbins, 8 July 1944, PRO HS 5/11

¹⁵ Captain G. Cowie to Major E. Boxshall, 1 July 1944, enclosing w/t messages, CONCENSUS II to Bari, 5, 10, 21 and 24 June, PRO HS 5/69

¹⁶ Major E. Boxshall to SOE Bari, 12 July 1944, PRO HS 5/10

¹⁷ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.152; see also X. Fielding, *One Man in His Time* p.51

¹⁸ Smiley diary, 29 October 1944, McLean papers, IWM

¹⁹ D. Smiley, *Irregular Regular* p.107, 111

²⁰ w/t message, CONCENSUS II to SOE Bari, 23 May 1944, McLean papers, IWM

²¹ Cipher telegram, SOE Bari to SOE London, 26 May 1944; Major E. Boxshall to D. Howard, 28 May 1944, PRO HS 5/11

²² Cipher telegram, P. Broad to Algiers and London, 26 May 1944, PRO HS 5/11

²³ A. Dew to SOE London, 26 June 1944, PRO HS 5/11

²⁴ w/t message, CONCENSUS II to SOE Bari, 25 October 1944, PRO HS 5/72

²⁵ Cipher telegram, P. Broad to Caserta, 27 October 1944, PRO HS 5/71

²⁶ Cipher telegram, Foreign Secretary (in Rome) to Foreign Office, 31 October 1944, PRO HS 5/77

²⁷ Report by Major G. Seymour, 1944, PRO HS 5/123

²⁸ Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice to Colonel D. Keswick, 5 January 1945, PRO HS 5/123

²⁹ W. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE* p.514

³⁰ C. Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East, Vol VI: Victory in the Mediterranean Part I 1 April to 4 June 1944* (HMSO, London 1984) p.389; H. Wilson, *Eight Years Overseas* (London: Hutchinson 1950) pp.204-5

³¹ *Ibid.* pp.401-3

³² 'History of the Balkan Air Force', PRO AIR 23/1508

³³ H. Macmillan, *War Diaries: Politics and War in The Mediterranean January 1943 – May 1945* (London: Macmillan 1984) p.460

³⁴ C. Molony, *The Mediterranean and Middle East, Vol VI: Victory in the Mediterranean Part I* p.404;

R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.169

³⁵ D. Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance* p.170

³⁶ Information provided by the SOE Adviser

³⁷ R. Joyce to Commander Green and H. Fultz, 22 May 1944, NARA RG 266, Entry 154, Box 14, Folio 181; information provided by the SOE Adviser

³⁸ *Ibid.* Harcourt was elevated to CBE in 1945. After the war he returned to Morgan Grenfell and became chairman in 1968. After periods in the United States as economic minister in the British embassy and head of the Treasury delegation, he became United Kingdom executive director of the International Monetary Fund. *Dictionary of National Biography, 1971-80* (Oxford: OUP, 1986) pp.378-9.

³⁹ 'History of the Balkan Air Force', PRO AIR 23/1508

⁴⁰ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* pp.171-3

⁴¹ 'History of the Balkan Air Force', PRO AIR 23/1508

- ⁴² J. Amery, *Sons of the Eagle* p.234
- ⁴³ 'Comments on Report by Lt Col McLean DSO, Major Smiley MC, and Captain Amery' by Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, undated (c. early December 1944), PRO HS 5/126
- ⁴⁴ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* pp.121, 151-2; B. Fischer, *Albania at War* pp.207-8
- ⁴⁵ Proceedings (unpublished) of a conference on British and European resistance, 1939-1945, held at St Antony's College, Oxford, December 1962. I am grateful to St Antony's College library for allowing me access to this document.
- ⁴⁶ 'Appreciation on Special Operations in Albania' by Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, 20 June 1944, PRO HS 5/77
- ⁴⁷ 'HQ SOM Intelligence Appreciation No.5: The Importance of the Albanian Partisans', 22 June 1944, PRO, HS 5/90
- ⁴⁸ Translation of captured German order of 5 July 1944, circulated under covering note, Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice to Colonel D. Keswick, 9 August 1944, PRO HS 5/71
- ⁴⁹ B. Fischer, *Albania at War* p.218
- ⁵⁰ 'Comments on Report by Lt Col McLean DSO, Major Smiley MC, and Captain Amery' by Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, undated (c. early December 1944), PRO HS 5/126
- ⁵¹ Minutes, BAF Policy Committee Meeting, 14 September 1944, PRO HS 5/72
- ⁵² 'Comments on Report by Lt Col McLean DSO, Major Smiley MC, and Captain Amery' by Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, undated (c. early December 1944), PRO HS 5/126
- ⁵³ Report by Major G. Seymour, 1944, PRO HS 5/123
- ⁵⁴ w/t message, CONCENSUS II to SOE Bari, 23 May 1944, McLean papers, IWM
- ⁵⁵ w/t message, CONCENSUS II to SOE Bari, 24 June 1944, McLean papers, IWM
- ⁵⁶ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* pp.133-4
- ⁵⁷ 'Comments on Report by Lt Col McLean DSO, Major Smiley MC, and Captain Amery' by Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, c. December 1944, PRO HS 5/126
- ⁵⁸ 'Copy of 2457 from L/B', 7 June 1944, PRO HS 5/68
- ⁵⁹ 'Report No. 2514', 13 July 1944, PRO HS 5/113 Mehdi Bey Frasheri, the senior regent of Albania 1943-44
- ⁶⁰ Note marked 'TOPSEC U', dated 22 July 1944, under covering note by Air Commodore A. Boyle to Colonel D. Keswick, 24 July 1944, PRO HS 5/11
- ⁶¹ Report by Captain B. Ensor, 1944, PRO HS 5/136
- ⁶² Report by Lt Col T.N.S. Wheeler, 1944, PRO HS 5/127
- ⁶³ Report by Major F.W. Tilman, 1944, PRO HS 5/128
- ⁶⁴ w/t messages, Major P. Leake to SOE Bari, 14, 15, and 20 May 1944, PRO HS 5/68; Major E. Boxshall to M. Rose, 26 May 1944, PRO HS 5/90
- ⁶⁵ Report by Captain B. Ensor, 1944, PRO HS 5/136
- ⁶⁶ 'Appreciation on Special Operations in Albania' by Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, 20 June 1944, PRO HS 5/77
- ⁶⁷ Cipher telegram, P. Broad to H. Macmillan, 10 June 1944, PRO HS 5/77
- ⁶⁸ Cipher telegram, H. Macmillan to P. Broad, 14 June 1944, PRO HS 5/77
- ⁶⁹ Cipher telegram, Foreign Office to H. Macmillan, 4 July 1944, PRO HS 5/77
- ⁷⁰ w/t messages, Lieutenant Colonel N. McLean and Lieutenant Colonel A. Palmer to SOE Bari, late June 1944, quoted in copy of cipher telegram, SOE Bari to SOE London, 4 July 1944, PRO HS 5/11
- ⁷¹ M. Lyon to author, 28 April 1998
- ⁷² R. Hibbert 'The War in Albania and the Conspiracy Theory' p.3
- ⁷³ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.242
- ⁷⁴ R. Watrous to author, 14 July 2001
- ⁷⁵ Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the FCO
- ⁷⁶ Skender Muço, the BK commander of the Valona area, had approached Major Anthony Quayle in mid-February with a proposal to fight the Germans if the Allies promised to restrain the Partisans. Although Quayle was convinced of Muço's sincerity, the Foreign Office, which was pledged to supporting only Albanians who were prepared to fight unconditionally, refused to play. The BK was also judged to have become too closely identified with the enemy.
- ⁷⁷ Captain E. Watrous to C. Steel, 4 March 1944, PRO HS 5/66
- ⁷⁸ Major E. Watrous to Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, 4 August 1944, PRO HS 5/2
- ⁷⁹ Major E. Watrous to Lieutenant Colonel A. Palmer, 8 June 1944, PRO HS 5/39

⁸⁰ Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt to Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice, 19 September 1944, PRO HS 5/71

⁸¹ J. Naar to author, 6 September 1999

⁸² J. Naar to author, 30 September 1999

⁸³ J. Naar to author, 3 September 1999

⁸⁴ J. Naar to author, 30 September 1999. Available records do not suggest that such an argument played any part in the decisions taken in favour of the Albanian Partisans in 1944. But certainly, as the prospect of a Partisan victory became more certain, the Foreign Office did identify diplomatic advantages to be had from remaining on good terms with the Partisans. On 2 October 1944, the Foreign Office informed Harold Macmillan and Philip Broad in Italy why it now agreed that McLean's mission should be withdrawn and relations improved with Hoxha. 'As we see it,' the Foreign Office's telegram read, 'FNC have now won such a strong position that, in the event of an early German withdrawal, there will be no effective opposition to them and they will soon gain control of the whole country. Kupa and the Nationalists are, it is true, now anxious to reinsure with us and to this end they may agree to undertake action against the Germans. But it is unlikely that such action would be of any substantial military benefit to us or that they would be strong enough to dispute the control of Albania with FNC after the Germans withdraw. It does not appear, therefore, that it is within our power to prevent the emergence of an FNC Government in Albania after the war. Owing to the political views of the FNC leaders, it may be expected that this Government will look to Russia rather than to this country for support... Our interests in Albania are strictly limited, but we certainly do not wish to see the country pass completely into the Russian orbit. We must, therefore, aim at strengthening our position with FNC now in order that after the war we may be able to influence the FNC Government'. Cipher telegram, Foreign Office to H. Macmillan and repeated to P. Broad, 2 October 1944, PRO PREM 3/41

⁸⁵ J. Naar to author, 1 September 2000

⁸⁶ See, for example, the chronological record of Partisan military achievement detailed in the Albanian Section History, PRO HS 7/70. Although the History, completed in February 1945, was compiled anonymously and signed off by Bill Harcourt, Naar's authorship of that record is confirmed by him and by contemporary documents in his possession.

⁸⁷ J. Naar to author, 30 September 1999

⁸⁸ J. Naar to author, 1 September 2000

⁸⁹ w/t messages, CONCENSUS II to Bari, 25 September 1944, and Bari to CONCENSUS II, 21 September and 2 October 1944, McLean papers, IWM

⁹⁰ R. Riddell to author, 26 April 2000

⁹¹ R. Hibbert to author, 20 May 2001

⁹² Memorandum, Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary, 11 October 1944, PRO PREM 3/41

⁹³ Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary, 4 May 1944, and memorandum, Foreign Office to War Cabinet, 7 June 1944, quoted in L. Woodward, *History of the Second World War: British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* Vol III pp. 115-6, 119

⁹⁴ Cipher telegram, Chiefs of Staff to AFHQ, 8 June 1944, PRO HS 5/11

⁹⁵ Cipher telegram, General H. Wilson to Chiefs of Staff, 16 June 1944, PRO HS 5/11

⁹⁶ Colonel D. Keswick to General C. Gubbins, 8 July 1944, PRO HS 5/11

⁹⁷ Circular, General C. Gubbins to All Directors, Regional and Country Section Heads, 12 July 1944, PRO HS 5/35

⁹⁸ SOE London to Colonel C. Price, 11 July 1944, PRO HS 5/11

⁹⁹ It is important to note that, like Steel, Broad received regular copies from the Albanian Section of most messages received from the field. A copy of McLean's 18 June report, for example, which was sent by slow bag on 26 June to SOE London, where it arrived on 4 July, had also been passed to Broad, who sent a copy to the Resident Minister at Algiers by slow bag on 30 June. That copy finally arrived in London on 14 July. But on 27 June Broad had also telegraphed a copy to London, so that, in fact, the Foreign Office there received McLean's report one week earlier than did SOE London. Attached to McLean's report were Broad's own comments, which further minimise the significance of the time taken to pass along McLean's incoming message. Broad praised McLean's 'excellent description' of Kupa's position but warned of the consequences of arming Kupa before a working agreement between him and the Partisans was reached. Arming him beforehand would have an adverse effect on relations with the Partisans, Broad believed, and prejudice the chances of a united resistance movement in Albania. Denis Laskey of the Southern Department minuted later that his own views, after reading those telegraphed comments, did 'not differ substantially from Mr Broad's'. P. Broad to Algiers, 30 June 1944, and minute by D. Laskey, c.14 July 1944, PRO FO 371/43551

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- ¹⁰⁰ Minute by D. Laskey, 11 August 1944, PRO FO 371/43551
- ¹⁰¹ Cipher telegram, P. Broad to Algiers and London, 18 July 1944, PRO PREM 3/41
- ¹⁰² Minute, Prime Minister to Foreign Office, 19 July 1944, PRO PREM 3/41
- ¹⁰³ Foreign Secretary to Prime Minister, 23 July 1944, PRO PREM 3/41
- ¹⁰⁴ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.175
- ¹⁰⁵ Minutes, A. Dew and Sir Orme Sargent, 13 August 1944, PRO FO 371/43551
- ¹⁰⁶ Minute, Foreign Secretary, 8 September 1944, PRO FO 371/43553
- ¹⁰⁷ P. Broad to Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt, 27 October 1944, PRO HS 5/80
- ¹⁰⁸ Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt to Lieutenant Staniscievsky, 27 October 1944, PRO HS 5/72
- ¹⁰⁹ Cipher telegram, P. Broad to H. Macmillan, 28 October 1944, PRO HS 5/77
- ¹¹⁰ Cipher telegram, Foreign Secretary (in Rome) to London, 31 October 1944, PRO HS 5/77
- ¹¹¹ J. Amery, *Approach March: A Venture into Autobiography* p.405

Chapter Six

The Strange Case of Captain John Eyre

In the Italian port of Bari in February 1944, two months before his twenty-sixth birthday, Lieutenant John Eyre joined the headquarters staff of SOE's Albanian Section. A photograph pinned to his SOE Personal File shows a pale, fair-haired and thin-lipped young man in steel-rimmed spectacles and crumpled battledress. He was to work as the Section's political intelligence officer until its closure, three months after the Germans pulled out of Albania, in February 1945. By then he was a captain.¹

It is Eyre's presence on the Albanian Section staff, as Reginald Hibbert writes, that 'conspiracy theorists' cite as 'the chief piece of evidence' that 'British leftists' in SOE condemned Albania to communism.² David Smiley, for example, alleges that Eyre was so aligned ideologically with the communist-led Albanian Partisans that he abused his SOE post to manipulate policy in their favour.³ Other writers label Eyre a mole and Soviet agent.⁴ Hibbert, however, sees little weight in these charges, arguing that Eyre, whatever his politics and Communist Party affiliations, was irrelevant to the evolution of British policy in Albania.

This chapter suggests that many of the accusations levelled at Eyre after the war further illustrate the conjecture and confusion that characterises one side of the debate over why British policy in wartime Albania developed as it did. By drawing on a variety of sources that illuminate Eyre's life and politics and have escaped the attention of earlier writers or have until now been unavailable, it also seeks to demonstrate the care that must be taken not to dismiss every charge levelled against him. Although he was unlikely to have been a Soviet agent, Eyre does seem to have sympathised with communism in 1944. Fresh light thrown on his subsequent service in the Far East indicates that he may also have been prepared, during his army service, to subvert British policy on ideological grounds. The chapter concludes with a fresh examination of similar allegations levelled against two other officers, Ormond Uren and James Klugmann, who worked for SOE's Hungarian and Yugoslav Sections respectively. Perhaps the best-known cases of SOE personnel working in the interests of the communist cause, both serve to underline the gravity of the charges against

Eyre. They also illustrate how those charges merit consideration as part of a wider phenomenon of post-war speculation over the influence of communists in SOE's Balkan Sections.

Eyre makes his first appearance in print in Peter Kemp's memoir, *No Colours or Crest*, published in 1958. Kemp had been evacuated from Montenegro to Bari in the spring of 1944. In his latter months in the field he had worked, as has been seen, with nationalist elements in northern Albania and Kosovo. In *No Colours or Crest* he recalls meeting in Bari 'a newcomer' to the Albanian Section, Lieutenant John Eyre, 'a serious young Communist whose courteous manner could not altogether conceal his disapproval of my Albanian record. Like his co-religionist, James Klugman [sic], he was his Section's Intelligence Officer, and like Klugman and so many other Communists he had great sincerity combined with charm'. Kemp adds that he 'saw little' of Eyre in Bari but 'heard a great deal about him later, when I was in Java [in 1946]. There, while attached to the 5th Indian Division in Soerabaja, he landed himself in trouble for editing a seditious newspaper for the troops; in consequence he was sent home by the GOC, General Mansergh'.⁵

Eyre appears next in David Smiley's memoir *Albanian Assignment*, published in 1984. Smiley, who encountered Eyre after being evacuated from Albania in October 1944, claims that 'one' of the 'Communist agents' in SOE's Bari headquarters 'was an officer in the Albanian Section, and I was told he stood as an unsuccessful Communist candidate in the 1945 election. It was not surprising that on our return I overheard him refer to our mission as 'Fascists'. I was told by one of the secretaries that it was he who had prevented further transmission of McLean's signal to Mr Eden, and that he had deliberately disposed of the message'.⁶ In a subsequent memoir, *Irregular Regular*, Smiley identifies Eyre as the 'unacknowledged' communist and repeats the claim that he 'stood in the next election' as a communist candidate.⁷

Other writers elevate Eyre to the position of official communist and Soviet agent. None, however, produces evidence to support either charge. In *The Great Betrayal*, an account of the postwar attempt by MI6 and the CIA to undermine Enver Hoxha's communist regime, Nicholas Bethell claims that SOE's Albanian Section was split into opposing pro- and anti-'Stalinist' camps. He places 'James [sic] Eyre' firmly in the former.⁸ M.R.D. Foot, in his popular history *SOE*, goes further. After

quoting Kemp's description of Eyre, he states explicitly that Eyre, like Klugmann, was a communist mole.⁹ In *The Secrets of the Service*, a study of British intelligence and communist subversion, Anthony Glees reproduces Foot's description of Eyre. In *Secret War*, a popular history of SOE published in 1992, Nigel West writes that 'according to Professor M.R.D. Foot, John Eyre was... working for the NKVD'. Neither Glees nor West challenges Foot's claim.¹⁰

According to two accounts published in the early 1990s, Eyre, in 1944, was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Xan Fielding's biography of Billy McLean repeats the charge that one of McLean's signals addressed to Anthony Eden 'had been deliberately suppressed in the SOE office'. Fielding adds that 'at least' one officer on the Albanian Section staff 'was a member of the British Communist Party and the rest had left-wing views'.¹¹ The second reference to Eyre is by Reginald Hibbert, who dismisses claims that the ideology of individual SOE staff officers influenced British policy in Albania. In *Albania's National Liberation Struggle*, Hibbert tries to tone down the charges that post-war writers have levelled at Eyre, stressing that Eyre 'was only a junior staff officer in Bari with the rank of Captain and... wielded no significant power'. Hibbert concedes, however, that Eyre was a CPGB member.¹²

Thus the case presented in print against Eyre is not particularly strong. It consists entirely of office gossip; a few choice phrases that he apparently fired at certain SOE officers; his supposed CPGB membership; and some stories that he caused some trouble in the Far East and stood as a communist candidate in a post-war general election.

However, that Eyre was sympathetic to communism in 1944 can, in fact, be found confirmed in print by Eyre himself. The existence of *The God Trip: The Story of a Mid-century Man*, a slim memoir he had published in 1976, has escaped the notice of all other writers on SOE. This is not difficult to explain given its principal subject matter. Just five pages of *The God Trip* deal with the first fifty years of Eyre's life. The rest (in his words) recounts the subsequent experiences

of a middle-aged professional man who brought his marriage to an end after twenty years and dropped out of society. For the past six years I have been travelling through different countries following the hippie trail, living in caves in Crete, in drop-out colonies in

Israel... After a year roaming around India... I ended up barefoot and in rags...

I have earned my way unloading rolls of barbed wire off lorries, selling my blood, painting houses, teaching English, mending people's clothes. I have entered the world of psychedelics and hallucinogens, acid trips and pot, mysticism and UFOlogy.

Eyre describes his book as 'putting together factually a series of paranormal events which started for me in 1967... a case-history of interest to both believers and disbelievers'. Still, in the few lines he devotes to his earlier life experiences 'as a way of indicating the yardsticks for measuring the phenomenon of my existence', Eyre presents a straightforward account in which he makes no secret of his politics and activism during and after the war. He also notes some of the formative experiences that influenced his growing political and self-awareness in the 1930s.¹³

In *The God Trip*, Eyre presents his childhood and youth as unhappy, dislocated and 'curiously Victorian'. He reflects that as a result of 'broken relationships' he had 'broken free from the grip of my own class background at a very early age'. His father's family were 'linked to the most solid upper crust': cousins to the Crosthwaite-Eyres of Bradshaw. His mother was the daughter of Thomas Rome, 'chairman of the Mersey Dock and Harbour Board'. But she died when Eyre was six months old and his father, a vicar, on remarrying moved from a rich Liverpool parish to a mining village near Burnley 'where class distinctions killed friendships'. Eyre was sent to live with an aunt, who dictated that he should be kept apart from his sister from the age of three. He was then sent to boarding school and in 1931 won a Foundation scholarship to Marlborough. He remained unsettled. Twice during his teens he ran away from home 'leaving a suicide note on my pillow to frighten them'. At seventeen he ran as far as Paris, at the time of the Great Exhibition. At eighteen he was 'persuaded' to enter St Peter's College, Oxford, to train as a priest 'but dropped out to go to the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich to become an actor, an aborted priest'. Soon 'I had my first bed-sitting room in London and was finding my own independent way to the Unity Theatre, run by left-wing political militants in Mornington Crescent'.¹⁴

It is in the context of his evolving politics that Eyre refers to his time with SOE. He writes:

I came to accept the class basis of society during the war years when I was working with Special Operations Executive responsible for economic and political intelligence coming from our missions in occupied Albania. I was trained in parachute jumping and sabotage, preparatory to being dropped into Greece, but the plan was abandoned. Instead, on the staff of the Albanian country section I saw the Marxist-Leninist thesis working out under my very eyes. Julian Amery and [Billy] Maclean [sic], my colleagues in conspiracy, were battling against the winds of change while I and others in our wisdom or ignorance helped to stir up the hurricane. I had the honour of drawing up the list of Albania's quislings.

Eyre also confirms that he did indeed join the CPGB, but only on returning to Britain after completing his military service in the Far East. In London he began speaking on street corners as 'a complete scientific and dialectical materialist'. He stood in North Kensington as a communist at local elections. He also stood in a general election, but in 1951, he says, not 1945. Eyre adds that as the CPGB's official parliamentary candidate he was 'one of only twelve throughout Britain... In my own manor one in six of the people voted for me'.¹⁵

Given the subject and self-satisfied tone of his book, it may be tempting to approach Eyre's recollections with care. But in 1936, according to the Oxford University Calendar, a John Lorimer Rashdall Eyre did go up to St Peter's College, Oxford.¹⁶ A year later, according to the records of the Maddermarket Theatre, he did turn up in Norwich and begin to act.¹⁷ And in a by-election in North Kensington in November 1949, according to *The Times*, a 'Major John Eyre' stood unsuccessfully as a communist candidate.¹⁸ A 'J.L.R. Eyre' also stood in the same constituency as a communist in a general election, though in 1950, not 1951. In February 1950 he won 551 votes, slightly over one per cent of all those cast in his constituency, and lost his deposit.¹⁹ Aspects of Eyre's deepening interest in spirituality and mysticism can also be found confirmed independently in print.²⁰

For their part, SOE records suggest Eyre's brief description of his education and SOE career is substantially accurate. According to his SOE Personal File, John Lorimer Rashdall Eyre was born on 14 April 1918 and educated at Marlborough and St Peter's College, Oxford, where he studied English Literature for a year (1936-37) and won a blue at fives. Next, the file states, he became a schoolmaster and published three novels. (Eyre makes no reference in *The God Trip* to school teaching or writing and the British Library catalogue has no record of other publications in his name.

Quite possibly he exaggerated his *CV* a little when volunteering for SOE, not unheard of among other applicants. Indeed, there is no mention on his Personal File of acting.) In December 1939 Eyre then joined the army (whether he was called-up or volunteered is not specified). In September 1940 he was commissioned into the Royal Artillery; in January 1941 he was posted to an anti-tank regiment, with which he served in India, the Western Desert, Iraq and Syria before finally joining SOE in August 1943 in Cairo. Possibly he had responded to one of the circulars SOE posted periodically on regimental bulletin boards calling for volunteers for hazardous operations, for he spent the last two months of 1943 undergoing parachute, paramilitary, civil affairs and signals training. But on 12 February 1944, instead of being sent on operations, Eyre joined the headquarters of SOE's Albanian Section as a grade three staff officer. His chief duties were to collate information received from its missions on political conditions, developments and personalities in Albania and help circulate it to other interested commands and departments. He remained in that role until the Section was closed down in early 1945.²¹

SOE's records reveal something, too, of Eyre's views on British policy in wartime Albania. In early August 1944, for example, Bill Harcourt, Head of SOE Bari, asked Eliot Watrous, the young head of SOE's Albanian Section, for a paper recommending action to be taken now that Abas Kupa was embroiled in war with the Partisans. The paper that Watrous produced recommended that Billy McLean's mission should be withdrawn, Kupa's movement publicly condemned for collaborating and 'all uncompromised Nationalists' advised to join the Partisans. As the paper explained, little meaningful resistance could now be expected from Kupa. Moreover, the position of McLean's mission was now 'becoming untenable' as elements of Kupa's movement were 'undoubtedly collaborating on an increased scale' with the Germans, the puppet government and other collaborators. Once McLean's mission was withdrawn, Allied approval of the Partisans' 'military effort' would be 'clear' and then other nationalists might join them.²² Contact should be maintained, however, with the Kosovar leader Gani Bey Kryeziu, Watrous urged, 'since he has continued to resist the Germans'. Subsequently, to the Balkan Air Force Policy Committee, Harcourt put forward proposals to withdraw McLean's mission on these grounds. In the event, the continued Foreign Office insistence that 'for the moment there must be no question of withdrawing our BLOs from [Kupa]' postponed any

decision.²³ Loose among SOE documents released inadvertently among War Office files thirty years ago is a sheet of key points supporting the argument in Watrous' paper. Some are typed; others are in Eyre's handwriting. 'Hang on to this please – we may yet have another Kupa crisis' Watrous has scribbled to Eyre across the top of the page.²⁴

An incident is also recorded on Eyre's Personal File that suggests he was capable of being rather intemperately critical of military authority, which may have some relevance to the lack of respect he allegedly showed officers arriving from the field in 1944. That summer the Army Pay Office had informed Eyre that steps were being taken to recover an over-issue of pay into his home bank account. He replied that, since he was in no position to examine his statements, he strongly objected to that course of action and had instructed his bank manager to advise him should there be any deduction in the pay going into his account. The charm Kemp attributes Eyre had clearly deserted him when finishing his letter: 'your assumption of guilt without defence appals me, and the fact that you have apparently already commenced docking makes me want to vomit'. Due to the 'highly improper tone' of Eyre's correspondence, the War Office instructed Allied Forces Headquarters in the Mediterranean to 'take such action as you may consider appropriate'. Land Forces Adriatic, the command responsible for all Allied land forces engaged in the Balkans in the summer of 1944, was instructed 'to bring home to this officer the highly injudicious phraseology of his letter, and to ensure that he does not again adopt such a tone in his official correspondence'.²⁵

However, officers who worked alongside Eyre in Bari in 1944-45, and knew him better than did Kemp or Smiley, paint a picture of a man whose prominence and deviousness and influence on policy have been exaggerated in print since the war. Bryan McSwiney, one of the Albanian Section's conducting officers, dimly remembers 'a thin, white-faced and fair-haired' young man who was certainly 'left-wing' but also quite 'distant'.²⁶ Jon Naar, the Section's other intelligence officer, remembers Eyre as 'doctrinaire in his socialism, leading one to think he was a communist'.²⁷ Naar is also certain of one thing: 'No one [in the Section], except possibly Eyre, would have called any of our BLOs Fascist, because we had too much respect for their courage even though at times we disagreed politically'.²⁸ But even he remembers Eyre chiefly as being 'rather odd... It's a terrible thing to say, but he

didn't wash'.²⁹ A training report from Eyre's paramilitary course describes him as 'sound and steady with plenty of common sense' but does not suggest a particularly dominant personality either. 'Not a leader but a good co-operator... Takes a good, quiet, sober interest in things. Not a ball of fire intellectually or socially but a solid, sensible, companionable man to have around. Good in a limited role'.³⁰

Denys Salt worked in Bari as the intelligence officer of Military Liaison (Albania), a joint British and American unit tasked with planning the eventual entry into Albania of Allied forces and aid. His memory of Eyre is somewhat clearer, for he had also been at school with him.

John and I were both at Marlborough together and for two terms, I think, in the same form. I was never a close friend but my recollection is of a lean, sinewy schoolboy, rather intense in looks and somewhat inclined to keep himself to himself. This being so, he was I believe not very keen on team games, which was the order of the day each afternoon. The obligatory alternative was to go on one of the school runs as exercise, which were all carefully graded according to distance, difficulty and timing. John had no problem in beating the required time for any run... I think he also played fives – again not a team sport.

He had a sharp quick mind – as evidenced on one occasion in class which took us all rather by surprise and which sticks in my memory today. He was having some difficulty declining a Latin verb, as far as I recall, when the classics master in some exasperation said "Come on Eyre, pull yourself together. You've got a mind like a sieve". Back came the rejoinder "But Sir, a sieve catches the important things and lets the rubbish through". There followed an awkward silence.

Ten years later Salt crossed paths again with Eyre at various intelligence meetings in Bari. 'I was not fully aware of his left-wing political views at the time [but]... his junior rank would not, I think, have influenced SOE [and] policy thinking much in relation to Albania'.³¹

SOE records support Salt's assessment. Junior SOE staff officers like Eyre did not deceive observers in Bari or London into recommending McLean's withdrawal or maintaining exclusive support for the Partisans. Some of the political reviews and summaries Eyre produced in 1944-45 did display a rather jaundiced view of the politics of the Partisan leaders. As one Southern Department desk officer commented of a six-page situation report drawn up by Eyre and passed by SOE to the Foreign

Office in July 1944: 'Rather too favourable to LNC, to whom no political objectives are attributed'.³² But as that comment suggests, it was clear enough to all observers by the summer of 1944 that the Partisans and their communist commanders wished to replace the old order. Moreover, to those with responsibility for deciding British policy in Albania, the political objectives of Albanians were of no great account anyway. Only the Partisans and Gani Bey Kryeziu's forces were fighting the Germans. Only the Partisans were capable of inflicting substantial losses. Even Billy McLean's mission argued that the only way for Britain to foment large-scale action by the Nationalists was by abandoning the policy of impartial treatment of all sides and taking issue with the Partisans' politics. But the scepticism apparent in Bari about the wisdom of supporting Kupa was widely shared. Military decision-makers, eager to maximise the Albanian war effort, saw little point in halting support to the Partisans and building up a rival force among Albanians who had demonstrated little capacity or taste for fighting the Germans. Even British diplomats came gradually to appreciate the wisdom of maintaining reasonable diplomatic relations with Enver Hoxha, since the Partisans increasingly seemed set to be in the driving seat politically once the war was over. Indeed, care must be taken not to exaggerate the significance of the occasional error or slant in Eyre's reports and correspondence. Factual inaccuracies in some of his early papers suggest an officer merely unfamiliar with his subject.³³ Eyre's later comments on political reports by officers returning from the field were invariably objective and sound.³⁴ By October, Bill Harcourt was impressed enough to earmark Eyre as political intelligence officer for the four-man SOE team, led by Alan Palmer, due to accompany an Allied force liberating the country.³⁵

It remains possible, however, that Eyre may have tried to influence policy and operations in Albania had he felt the situation demanded it. The short paragraph quoted above from *The God Trip* is all he writes of his time with SOE's Albanian Section. When describing his subsequent service in the Far East he is more expansive and writes openly of the subversion he conducted in that theatre, clearly considering it worthy of note. That account sheds important light on the nature and strength of Eyre's convictions by 1945-46 and the lengths to which he was willing and able to pursue them. It also seems to corroborate Peter Kemp's comment that Eyre, while in Java, 'landed himself in trouble'.³⁶

'Towards the end of the war', Eyre writes, 'quite independently and without any political affiliations, I began working secretly with the nationalist movements in Burma, India, Malaya and Indonesia, as indeed were many in the armed forces at that time. We were consumed with the vision of one world and one people, without exploitation of man by man, a world at peace'. In Burma he wrote 'a booklet entitled *Why Burma?*' which was 'circulated secretly by a friend among our troops. Its aim was to prevent our forces being used politically to crush the nationalist movement'. He also encountered several leading Burmese personalities:

For many evenings I sat in the rattan-walled home of Thakin Than Tun³⁷, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Burma, with his young wife and child while he picked pieces of wax from the guttering candle, moulding them into little cubes between finger and thumb as he formulated the building of a new society in his country. I knew Aung Gyi³⁸ who was murdered and General [sic] Aung San³⁹ who was assassinated. I smuggled Thakin Soe⁴⁰ into India as my interpreter to meet P.C. Joshi, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, in the days before Soe formed his own party.

It was in Indonesia, however, that Eyre felt he achieved 'the climax of these covert activities':

Here I was public relations adviser to Generals Christiansen⁴¹ [sic] and Mansergh⁴², master of all I surveyed in psychological warfare and Far Eastern publicity, answerable to no one. For a while I was in charge of Radio Djakarta, responsible for broadcasting programmes on two world wavelengths, with five different orchestras at my command. With a total monopoly in Surabaja – all the printing works, and newsprint stocks were in my hands; I was publishing all the newspapers; I had a radio broadcasting station built to broadcast exactly what I pleased – what was to stop me? I caused the mutiny of a British artillery regiment and the withdrawal of an Indian brigade. I published Mao Tse Tung's thesis on New Democracy in three languages from a copy smuggled out of China and given me by Stuart Gelder⁴³ when I met him in India. I spent half a million pounds of Japanese banana money in four months to help the cause.

I was aged twenty-seven and not even an official communist... My final venture was a daily Digest quoting world news picked out of the air by a radio-monitoring service manned by Dutchmen, Eurasians and White Russians whom I had found in the Japanese concentration camps. Every scrap of disastrous news, every report of a further collapse of the capitalist system in France, Holland, Italy, all round the world, I featured for the benefit of the

English-speaking officers, NCOs and headquarters staff. My Digest rattled with the sound of tumbrils and doomsday.

But Eyre found he had 'over-reached' himself. 'I was summoned by General Mansergh, who explained with the utmost courtesy and patience that sometimes democracy must be withdrawn in order to defend democracy. He ordered that from now on everything I was putting out must be censored first by himself'. This was 'too much' for Eyre. He was 'long overdue for demobilisation' and had plans to marry a girl he had met in Indonesia, the survivor of a Japanese concentration camp. There was also 'the world of social revolution and socialism in Britain to explore'. So he 'got hold of an aeroplane' and flew to Singapore where he married by special license and was demobilised 'in full honour since no one knew what I had been doing – subsequently receiving a silver medal inscribed with my name for my services in South-East Asia'.⁴⁴

It is outside the scope of this study to explore these claims in depth. Yet it may be noted that Eyre certainly appears to have been where he places himself during that period. His SOE file confirms that in April 1945, after some home leave, he arrived at the headquarters of Force 136, the cover-name of SOE's Far Eastern Section, in Ceylon. A report from June 1945 then has him as a grade three staff officer tasked with Political Warfare duties and 'at present on attachment to 12th Army'.⁴⁵ At that moment 12th Army was deployed in Burma in the Sittang and Irrawaddy valleys, preparing to harry the Japanese withdrawal.⁴⁶ 'This officer has made a good start' the report observed, and added that he seemed 'hard-working and conscientious' and suitable for 'Forward Propaganda'. Another note on his file, dated September 1945, records that he had recently been promoted major and was to be out-posted from SOE to take up a grade two 'Political and Propaganda' staff appointment with the 'P[sychological] W[arfare] Division team accompanying the SEAC Forces liberating Java'.⁴⁷

It is also apparent that Eyre had both the means and opportunity to seek to exploit the morale of British and Indian soldiers in Java and to press the cause of local nationalists. British forces had been sent there to disarm the surrendering Japanese forces, release imprisoned Allied soldiers and civilians and allow Dutch forces to enter and re-impose Dutch rule. Suspicions among local nationalists that the British were paving the way for the return of the Dutch turned quickly to violent resistance.

Bitter fighting broke out and British casualties were high. But as India's official Armed Forces historian remarks, the Indonesians proved more fortunate 'in gaining world estimation':

The American press was so outspoken in their favour that the Dutch had to assure America of their honourable intentions. The British newspapers called for the speedy withdrawal of British forces from the Netherlands East Indies while the Soviet Press criticised Dutch imperialism and urged the United Nations to intervene. Reports of strikes and demonstrations, sympathising with the Indonesians, continued to arrive from Australian ports.⁴⁸

In December 1945 Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander in South-East Asia, was compelled to telegraph London about the 'delicate' morale of some of the British forces involved:

Both by the Press and by letters from home the British troops are being made to believe that the imposition of Dutch authority by force of British arms is a wrong cause. They do not like fighting for this though they are quite ready to fight to secure the safety of European and Eurasian women and children.

The Indian troops are subject to Indonesian propaganda which is insidious and well directed. Neither British nor Indian troops like the Dutch and they despise the lack of discipline and the irresponsible behaviour of the Dutch troops with whom they have to come into contact...

Although all troops are still behaving magnificently, I must warn you that the longer we remain in Java and Sumatra the more morale will deteriorate.⁴⁹

One British unit operating in Java in 1945-46 was the 'Far Eastern Publicity Detachment' (FEPD). This is briefly referred to in a long contemporary report by Laurens van der Post reproduced in *The Admiral's Baby*, a memoir of his time assisting in the political administration of Java. The FEPD, according to the report, had formerly operated in Burma as the 'Unit of Psychological Warfare' and on arriving on Java been 'put in charge of the allied radio station in Batavia'. It also 'published an evening newspaper and generally supervised and co-ordinated press and propaganda activities'. This unit sounds very similar to the 'P.W. Division team' Eyre's SOE File has him set to join in September 1945; its official duties correspond closely to those for which Eyre claims in *The God Trip* to have been responsible. Van

der Post even recalls handing over charge of the Batavia radio station and its responsibility for transmitting propaganda to an unnamed 'young British major'.⁵⁰ Documents held in the archives of the Institute of Netherlands History in The Hague confirm that commanding Allied Forces Radio in Batavia from October 1945 was a Major J. Eyre of 'PWD'. These archives also support van der Post's assertion that PWD and the FEPD were criticised habitually by the Dutch authorities in Java for their apparent sympathy for Indonesian nationalism.⁵¹

On the evidence of the tone and stated purpose of *The God Trip*, there seems no outstanding reason to suppose that Eyre, for all the pride and relish with which he describes his wartime and post-war political activity, had any compelling reason to deliberately invent his story. 'I do not mind at all what people think of me' he writes. 'I am no longer hungry for success in any way. I have no ambitions. It makes no difference to me whether women like me or not. I have no fear if there is no money left for food... The fact is, I have nothing more to lose. And I have gained it all'.⁵² Indeed, if the openness with which he writes is a reliable judge, it may even be suggested that Eyre might not have resisted the temptation to mention if he had, at some point, worked for Soviet intelligence.⁵³ But stronger grounds exist on which to suggest Eyre was unlikely to have been in the same category as a Philby, Burgess or Maclean. An Oxford communist cell did exist in the 1930s with which he feasibly may have flirted, but a nineteen-year old actor in Norwich would seem poor material for pre-war recruitment. There is no outstanding reason to suggest that Eyre's communism was not, as he says, largely a product of the war years and that he did not join the CPGB until later. Of course, once in SOE, as an 'unofficial' communist he might have been of more interest to Soviet intelligence and prepared to do its bidding. And although evidence that Eyre sought to manipulate policy-makers is thin on the ground, it is feasible that he might have been prepared to disclose sensitive information. But by the summer of 1944 there were plenty of opportunities for Soviet soldiers and airmen in Bari to have learnt much about SOE and its operations and policies in the Balkans less covertly. Jon Naar recalls that the Albanian Section 'liased closely with the Red Air Force, who took part in drops to the BLO/Pzn teams, even when the US and RAF pilots would not fly because of bad weather conditions'. Naar remembers 'several boozy sessions at the *Imperiale* Hotel [in Bari] with our Soviet

comrades and the sharing of military and political information with them was what I would call “normal” and certainly not in any way subversive’.⁵⁴

The official SOE historian M.R.D. Foot plays down the influence on British policy in the Balkans of communists in SOE. He suggests that, because Britain and the Soviet Union were allies after 1941, communists in SOE could not have done much damage in any case. Of Eyre, Klugmann and Philby, who also worked for a short period for SOE, Foot writes:

What harm, at that moment, was any of them doing to the allied war effort against the axis? ‘Our gallant Soviet ally’, that phrase, reiterated from countless platforms and in countless broadcasts in 1942-43, was a great deal more than a phrase. It was only this solidly tyrannous lifebelt that kept the grand alliance of free peoples afloat through those two terrible years. Stalin’s and Beria’s iniquities have now become journalists’ commonplaces and were iniquitous indeed; yet hindsight, though it sometimes clarifies, can also distort. Had it not been for Stalin and Beria and their iron grip on the Soviet Empire... Great Britain would have lost the war against Nazi Germany.⁵⁵

Foot is right, of course, that the Soviet Union’s entry into the war in 1941 was crucial to Britain’s survival and that that was at the heart of much of the pro-Russian sentiment felt throughout the country. But he understates the danger posed to Britain by men so sympathetic towards a foreign ideology that they were prepared to share secrets with unauthorised parties and manipulate SOE’s functions in its interest, breaking the most fundamental principles of security and integrity. Eyre was likely to have been innocent of that kind of behaviour when working for SOE’s Albanian Section. The real and potential implications of the danger he posed, however, may be illustrated by the cases of Ormond Uren and James Klugmann.

Uren, a young captain on the staff of SOE London, was court-martialed, cashiered and sentenced to seven years in prison in October 1943 for passing secrets to Douglas Springhall, National Organiser of the CPGB. Although some attempts have been made in print to portray Uren as the worst kind of traitor, the picture that emerges from more sober accounts of his case is of an impressionable and naïve young man dangerously out of his depth. As David Stafford writes, he was ‘far from being some hard-bitten Soviet mole’.⁵⁶ Uren himself recalls:

I was not 'a communist'. I had read a certain amount of Marxist literature – The Communist Manifesto and some of the Left Book Club publications that were seen everywhere in 'progressive' homes in the 1930s. One that impressed me was a simplified outline of Marxist economics by Leo Huberman entitled *Man's Worldly Goods*. There was also *The Socialist Sixth of the World* by the 'red' Dean of Canterbury... I was very ignorant of history and economics and the picture these books and others painted seemed to me to make sense.

Also... I had grown up in the 1930s. My school, Ackworth, was a Quaker school and had already taken in some German Jewish children, early refugees from Hitler's persecution. I was passionately interested in Spain and everything Spanish and my sympathies had naturally been on the side of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War.

I wanted to join the Communist Party... I met Springhall... I told him where I was working, naturally, and he told me to put in writing an outline of the sort of work I was doing and he would pass it on to the proper people and they would decide whether I could be a member of the Party... [At a later meeting] I handed him this outline. And that is all... I did not look on Springhall as an agent of the NKVD⁵⁷. I took at face value his title of "National Organiser". I did not see myself as volunteering information to the Soviet Union, but as simply wanting to be integrated in this "great" movement. It was obvious that if I was to be of use to the Party they had to know what sort of work I was doing, but in the fantasy scenario in my head it did not go any further than that. So that when, that September, I was called into the office of Major Roche, the Security Officer, and confronted with an MI5 officer... who said something about "spying" I was seriously taken aback. In the fantasy I had been living it had never occurred to me that what I had been doing was "spying". What, precisely, I wrote [for Springhall] I cannot remember, but I do believe I was careful to keep it as general as possible, since, as I saw it, that was all that was required at that stage.⁵⁸

M.R.D. Foot feels sure enough to suppose that Uren knew 'a good deal less than Philby' about SOE and cannot have told the Russians 'anything they did not already know'.⁵⁹ Yet care must be taken not to minimise the significance of Uren's activities on those grounds. Even if the Soviets were unlikely to have learnt much from him that was new, what more might Uren have done, or been made to do, if he had not been caught until much later, as even he has pointed out?⁶⁰ And how secure from leakage and penetration were the CPGB and Moscow?

Indeed, despite Foot's apparent certainty that what was disclosed was of little account, confirmation of Uren's offence, as with Eyre's, has long been lacking.⁶¹

Previously unseen documents detailing Uren's *in camera* court-martial, however, have now surfaced among War Office files at the Public Record Office (they may well have been declassified by mistake). These shed considerable new light on the information he may have disclosed. A written document that Uren admitted to having passed Springhall had not been recovered by the time of the trial, but Uren submitted voluntarily to MI5 three handwritten statements in which he described his various meetings with Springhall and the nature of the information he had given him. These statements exist among the courtmartial papers and are recorded in the trial proceedings. Each was read aloud in court and it was entirely on the basis of the evidence contained within them that Uren was convicted. According to these statements, Uren had met Springhall on up to six occasions between April and June 1943, during which Springhall asked for details about the kind of work he did. Uren then drew up and gave him 'three typewritten foolscap sheets' in which he referred to SOE by name and briefly described the following: SOE's principle purpose and functions, including its work in neutral countries; the location of several of its overseas sub-sections and missions, from Cairo to Chungking; its broad 'lay-out' in terms of directorates (Operations, Intelligence, Security, Training, Communications and Supplies) and each directorate's general responsibilities; the relationship and 'close liaison' maintained with other government departments (which included the Ministry of Economic Warfare, the Foreign Office, the Chiefs of Staff, the Political Intelligence Division (PID), the BBC, SIS and MI5); SOE's relations with Allied Governments; and, finally, the nature of his own 'daily duties'. Uren also admitted to having told Springhall in conversation a few additional details about his own work and SOE generally, including the name of its then head, Sir Charles Hambro.⁶²

Something of how seriously SOE and MI5 considered this breach of security can be gauged by statements made to the court by a Major James Cussen, MI5's investigating officer, and Major The Hon. Thomas Roche, SOE's Assistant Director of Security. Asked by the prosecution to consider 'the possible repercussions, from the security point of view, of the divulging of information of this nature to a person like Springhall who was not a person authorised to receive it', Cussen replied: 'I view it as a most serious and appalling communication. Once information of that kind passes into the hands of an unauthorised person, such as Springhall, it is quite impossible properly to safeguard it, and as it is information which is of vital use to the enemy, it

is, in my view, a divulging of information which is prejudicial to the safety of the State’.

Roche, asked to ‘tell the court, from your experience as an officer in SOE, how you would regard the contents of that statement’, described them as ‘most highly secret... I have seldom seen so much information [of that nature] gathered together in one document. There are many people inside the organisation who know most of it, but I do not think a great many people in the organisation would know the whole of the information which is contained in those statements. I think there are very few outside the organisation who would know all those facts’. The prosecution’s questioning of Roche continued:

Q. How do you regard the disclosure of [the name of Sir Charles Hambro]?

A. It is a most closely guarded secret. There were special instructions that that was not to be mentioned outside and to facilitate that it was forbidden inside the organisation to refer to him by name...

Q. How do you regard the mention of the initials “S.O.E.” or the title “Secret [sic] Operations Executive” to an outsider?

A. That was forbidden because... it being a non-existent body, the mention of those initials was bound to cause comment as people would try to find out what it was.

Q. Have you any observations to make with regard to the mention in the... statement [about SOE’s activities]... in neutral countries?

A. ...No doubt the enemy might suspect activities were going on, but they have no proof. If you once put that in writing and it gets [in] to the hands of the general public, and were to reach the hands of the neutral or the enemy, the position would be extremely grave.

The prosecution then drew Roche’s attention to a passage of Uren’s statement that recorded the information concerning ‘Relations with Allied Governments’ that Uren claimed to have passed to Springhall. Uren had written:

There is close liaison on a low level with the various émigré Governments in this country, although the degree of confidence varies with the Government concerned. The Poles for instance conduct all their own operations to Poland, SOE merely assisting

them with facilities for training, with aircraft, etc. They have their own ciphers, which are not known to the British authorities. The position of the Czechs is somewhat similar to that of the Poles. In Yugoslavia and Greece, on the other hand, the work of supporting the guerrilla movements is almost entirely in British hands. The ciphers used are not known to the Governments concerned and their position is more or less that of an advisory body. I have little knowledge of what happens in Western Europe except that there are two French Sections, one of which sends agents under British command and one which sends agents... under the discipline of the Fighting French.

‘Would you... indicate to the court your views with regard to the statement as to the operations conducted in Poland and the Liaison with the countries mentioned?’ Roche was asked. ‘It is a very serious matter to mention to anyone, otherwise than in the course of duty, the distinctions between the degrees of co-operation between allies’, he replied. ‘Nothing can be more likely to promote disaffection and lack of concord than to disclose any distinction between degrees of co-operation. I see also the mention of the cipher department. That is, of course, a very, very closely guarded secret. There are not very many people within my organisation who are fully aware of the cipher positions with regard to various bodies’. Summing up, the Judge Advocate emphasised Roche’s evidence and the fact that ‘the defence themselves’ accepted that the ‘vital information’ communicated to Springhall ‘was calculated to be or might be directly or indirectly useful to an enemy’. Even ‘the defendant... realised’, he declared, ‘as indeed everybody in this court must realise, the danger involved to agents who were actually engaged in foreign countries if such information reached enemy hands’.⁶³

Uren’s case, then, suggests ways in which the security of SOE policy, plans and operations could be jeopardised by communist sympathisers. Klugmann’s, meanwhile, illustrates how plans and operations, if not policy, might have been influenced to benefit the cause. For while John Eyre is central to the conspiracy theory surrounding SOE’s Albanian activities, Klugmann is at the heart of a similar theory that explains why British policy towards the wartime Yugoslav resistance developed as it did.

When the first SOE mission to Yugoslavia arrived in September 1941, the plan had been to cultivate Draza Mihailović, leader of the royalist ‘Chetniks’. But from early 1943 that policy changed dramatically. In April the British Chiefs of Staff

authorised SOE to contact the communist guerilla leader Tito, with whose 'Partisans' the Chetniks were in open conflict. By May Britain was supporting Mihailović and Tito in tandem, with SOE missions attached to both. By the end of the year Churchill had resolved to support only Tito. In February 1944 the British formally abandoned the Chetniks in favour of all-out support for the Partisans. And to explain these policy changes it is claimed that staff officers in SOE's Cairo headquarters (SOE Cairo), from where its Balkan operations were launched and directed until early 1944, conducted a campaign of subterfuge that saw Mihailović unfairly denied the help, recognition and respect he deserved. By supposedly massaging reports and starving the Chetniks of supplies and propaganda, SOE Cairo is held to have sabotaged their cause and helped secure Tito exclusive British backing and post-war power. Klugmann, who joined SOE's Yugoslav Section as a private soldier in February 1942 and left as a major two and a half years later, is accused of playing a central part in the waging of that campaign.⁶⁴

To date, none of Klugmann's critics have ever produced a concrete case against him that confirms he manipulated, or tried to manipulate, policy. Even David Martin, the author at the forefront of attempts to pin on Klugmann substantial responsibility for the switch of support from Mihailović to Tito, conceded in 1990 that 'the proof of this is admittedly circumstantial'.⁶⁵ Instead, Martin and others highlight the fact that a leading British communist, a man from a very different mold to John Eyre and Ormond Uren, was present in SOE's Cairo headquarters when all key decisions over Yugoslavia were taken. In the early 1930s Klugmann had been a powerful force in communist circles at Cambridge, where he had been a friend and contemporary of the future Soviet spies Kim Philby, Anthony Blunt, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean. In the late 1930s he worked in Paris as Secretary of the Comintern-linked World Student Association. Recent research has revealed that in 1937 he assisted Soviet intelligence in the recruitment of John Cairncross, the so-called 'Fifth Man'.

Klugmann's accusers also point to strong evidence that suggests SOE Cairo was not always impartial in its policy proposals and handling of reports from the field. They point to the posts Klugmann filled, to imply that he had the opportunity to massage and mishandle signals to and from SOE's missions in the field. They also underline colleagues' recollections that testify to Klugmann's open communism, his

popularity and intellect and the long hours he put in, to emphasise his dedication and prominence on the staff.⁶⁶ Many authors latch on particularly to the memoirs of Basil Davidson, Head of SOE's Yugoslav Section from the autumn of 1942 until the summer of 1943. Davidson writes openly of the pro-Partisan sympathies of officers in SOE Cairo. He also describes how he and his staff, including Klugmann, had embarked on a campaign from the autumn of 1942 to persuade higher authority to lend the Partisans British backing. They felt frustrated by 'high policy' that determined only the Chetniks could be supported. They were impressed by what they had heard of the Partisans and convinced they merited Allied help. They also felt that the Chetniks, these agents of 'kings and governments-in-exile' with whom Britain naturally sympathised, would never inflict as much damage on the Germans as left-wing resistance movements focused on 'national liberation'. But some officers also possessed strong ideological sympathy for the Partisan cause. "You've got to see that this war has become more than a war *against* something, against Fascism" Davidson recalls Klugmann arguing. "It's become a war *for* something, for something much bigger. For national liberation, people's liberation, colonial liberation". Davidson's praise of his friend's ideals and intellect is often held to confirm Klugmann's prominence and influence on minds in SOE Cairo.⁶⁷

With the recent release of SOE's Yugoslav files, reports by SOE Cairo to higher authority that were directly at variance with reports from Yugoslavia can now be traced, for the first time, directly to Klugmann's pen. A striking example is a four-page paper of December 1943 concerning the withdrawal of SOE missions from the Chetniks. This document presents a record of Chetnik achievement against the Axis that bares only partial resemblance to that reported to Cairo by missions in the field. Conspicuous by its absence is any acknowledgement by Klugmann of the destruction by Chetnik forces of an important bridge and 250 Germans at Višegrad in October 1943.⁶⁸ Shortly after that action, SOE missions with the Chetniks had been shocked to hear the BBC attribute it to the Partisans. Strong protests were transmitted to SOE Cairo urging the BBC to get its facts right.⁶⁹ But if this had been a mistake that SOE Cairo was prepared to rectify, why did Klugmann not acknowledge or correct it in his paper in December?

Also revealing is Klugmann's MI5 file, released in four parts at the Public Record Office in May 2002. One document contained within is a verbatim report of a

conversation Klugmann had in August 1945 with Bob Stewart, a senior member of the CPGB's executive committee and controls commission. The source of the report, described by MI5 as 'very sure', was considered of 'extreme delicacy' and unspecified.⁷⁰ But Soviet records reveal that, after leaving MI5 in October 1945, Anthony Blunt warned Moscow that MI5 listening devices in the London headquarters of the CPGB had recorded a conversation in which Klugmann 'boasted of secretly passing classified information to the Yugoslav Communists'.⁷¹ If this was the same conversation as that for which a transcript is now available, it is clear Klugmann had boasted of much more than that.

The conversation consisted principally of details given by Klugmann of his SOE career and subsequent work in Yugoslavia with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). And of his time in SOE, he spoke at length about how, from the autumn of 1942, he had conducted 'two years' of concerted 'political work' to secure support and recognition for Tito's Partisans at the expense of the Chetniks. He described how he had sought to control and manipulate the intelligence gathered and reported by SOE missions in the field. This, he said, he had been able to do in three ways. Firstly, he was able to influence the selection and destination of British personnel, being careful to ensure the best ones went to Tito and that 'certain Fascist and really bad elements' were 'always sent to the Chetniks'. Secondly, once he was appointed 'Captain Regional Officer', he was able to brief agents before they left for the field. '[T]hat was particularly useful because everybody who went to the field had to go through me and I had to tell him what he would find, and you know that people often find what they expect'. Thirdly, he sought to filter the intelligence coming out of the field to help ensure that an overall picture emerged that was favourable to the Yugoslav Partisans. He organised other 'pro-Partisan people' in SOE and its sister agencies 'to act as a sieve... to see that what got back was satisfactory... to bring propaganda to aid arms; intelligence to aid propaganda'. Klugmann also admitted to passing information to Tito's Partisans 'as guidance on general tactics vis-à-vis the British'. Had SOE sent him later to China, he added, he would have sought to do again 'what we had been trying to do in Yugoslavia' and 'switch official support from Chiang to the special areas'.⁷²

To MI5, everything Klugmann had told Stewart seemed as significant as it did authentic. On 29 August 1945, Sir David Petrie, MI5's Director, informed SOE, the

Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), the Political Warfare Executive and the War and Foreign Offices about the transcript's existence. He highlighted Klugmann's 'betrayal of information' and 'most unforgivable offence... his efforts to secure that only Intelligence was obtained from the field which supported his policy of recognition for the Partisans and the discrediting of the Chetniks'. As for the 'sieve' Klugmann claimed to have organised in Bari, '[w]e therefore have what is very nearly a Party cell established on the traditional basis, and engaged on a Party task'.⁷³

Klugmann's claims also fit the campaigns SOE Cairo is held to have waged in 1942-43 and several of the specific charges of manipulation that have been levelled at him since. Indeed, given the certainty with which several writers have made those allegations, it seems possible that the existence and something of the content of the MI5 transcript might have leaked into certain circles since 1945.⁷⁴ Yet care must be taken not to exaggerate the influence of Klugmann's apparently meticulous effort to promote the Partisan cause. That writers like David Martin and Chapman Pincher see him as an important 'agent of influence' is a mark of the confusion that has long existed over the factors at work on British policy in wartime Yugoslavia.⁷⁵ Since the release of Foreign and War Office papers in the 1970s, it has become increasingly clear that the key decisions over wartime Yugoslavia were taken at the highest levels and on strong military grounds. Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff wanted strategic gain against Axis forces in the Balkans. That desire went a very long way to over-riding concerns about the political consequences of supporting the Partisans. Conservative-minded British officers like Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, Churchill's personal representative to Tito, advocated extensive and exclusive support for the Partisans in reports that were based on first-hand experience and went straight to the top without going through SOE Cairo.⁷⁶ These were complemented by top-secret decrypts of enemy radio traffic, which ensured the decisions taken in favour of the Partisans reflected the extent of Chetnik passivity and collaboration and the superiority of the Partisan war effort.⁷⁷ As Archie Boyle, SOE's Director of Security, commented on learning of Klugmann's revelations: 'Petrie's letter of course is rather one sided and one would think if one did not know the facts that Klugmann has been responsible for the futility of Mihailovitch [sic] and, against the better interests of the Allies, had brought Tito into power'.

As the cases of Klugmann and Uren suggest, care must be taken not to underestimate the potential of communist officers to pursue their own private agendas. Yet rumours about Klugmann, plus revelations about British spies like Philby, very probably explain the postwar conjecture that John Eyre was a Soviet spy who abused his position to manipulate British policy in wartime Albania. Certainly, Kemp and Smiley's remarks about Eyre's politics, Far Eastern activities and postwar CPGB candidacy do appear to possess a basis of truth. But whatever ideological sympathy Eyre may have felt for the Albanian Partisans, no evidence has ever been produced to confirm that he exploited his position to their advantage. A good gauge of how strongly rumour has taken a hold is the absence of any indication in SOE's files that suggests a message from Billy McLean to Anthony Eden was suppressed in Bari, as David Smiley and others allege. Certainly, further research may be required to confirm conclusively that Eyre never worked for Soviet intelligence. But enough is known today about British wartime strategy and decision-making to dispute any claim that he ever had significant input in to the formulation of British policy in Albania in 1944. Still, other intriguing questions about Eyre remain. What influence, for example, might Klugmann, who worked for six months in the same headquarters as Eyre, have had on his communism and willingness to exploit his later work in the interests of the cause? And what did Eyre really get up to in Burma and Java in 1945-46, and with what effect? If Eyre is able to provide answers, however, there are few clues as to where he might be. Geoffrey Ashe, lecturer and writer on all things Arthurian, met Eyre in Glastonbury in 1975. The last Ashe heard of him was in January 1978, when he received a signed copy of *The God Trip* and a programme of lectures Eyre was giving to the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain. At that point the trail goes cold.⁷⁸

¹ Information provided by the SOE Adviser to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office

² R. Hibbert, *Albanian's National Liberation Struggle* p. 150

³ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.152; D. Smiley, *Irregular Regular* p.107

⁴ M.R.D. Foot, *SOE* p.146

⁵ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* pp. 242-3

⁶ D. Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* p.152

⁷ D. Smiley, *Irregular Regular* p.107

⁸ N. Bethell, *The Great Betrayal* p.16

⁹ M.R.D. Foot, *SOE* p.146

¹⁰ A. Glees, *Secrets of the Service: British Intelligence and Communist Subversion 1939-51* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985) p.137, 141; N. West, *Secret War* p.83

¹¹ X. Fielding, *One Man in His Time* p.52

¹² R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.150; R. Hibbert, 'The War in Albania and the Conspiracy Theory' p.3

¹³ J. Eyre, *The God Trip – The Story of a Mid-century Man* (London: Peter Owen, 1976) pp. 7-9

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.17-18, 23, 44

¹⁵ According to *The God Trip*, Eyre helped found the Ex-service Movement for Peace during the Korean War 'which snowballed to a membership of some 20,000 within a year. The Government was planning to call up the Z reserve and we killed the idea stone-dead'. For four years he became a postman 'in furtherance of my ideals'. He finally left 'the orbit' of the CPGB 'at the time of the Soviet intervention in Hungary'. By 1966, when he 'dropped out' of society, he was an assistant editor of a London-based architectural magazine. By the summer of 1967 Eyre was attending courses run by the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain and experimenting with various narcotics. *Ibid.*, pp.23-26

¹⁶ *Oxford University Calendar, 1937* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937)

¹⁷ Maddermarket Theatre to author, 22 May 2001. Eyre acted in several productions at the theatre between September 1937 and May 1938, playing, among other parts, Octavius in *Julius Caesar* and Bolingbroke in *Richard II*.

¹⁸ The full result was: Mr Jack Cooper (Lab), 14,197 votes; Mr Ian Percival (Conservative), 13,100 votes; Major John Eyre (Communist), 464; Miss Crystal Gates (Commonwealth), 135. 'Labour Victory in Kensington', *The Times*, 5 November 1949

¹⁹ The full result was: G.H.R. Rogers (Lab), 21,615 votes; L. Caplan (Conservative), 17,991; R.R.C. Evans (Liberal), 2,552; J.L.R. Eyre (Communist) 551. Of the 100 communists (of whom ten were official CPGB candidates) who stood for parliament on 23 February 1950, none was elected and only three retained their deposits. F.W.S. Craig (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results 1950-1973* (London: Parliamentary Research Services, 1983) p.26

²⁰ In his 1970 book *Mysterious Worlds*, the journalist, author and psychic investigator Dennis Bardens writes about Eyre at some length, employing him as a case study when discussing telepathy, 'astral projection' and out-of-body experiences. He describes him as a 'writer who has long been interested in a wide variety of mystical experiences'. Eyre, according to Bardens, spent much of 1968 and 1969 learning and practising advanced forms of Yoga. Bardens also notes that Eyre was the father of two children and the husband of a Dutch woman whose brother was tortured and shot by the Japanese in Malaya. D. Bardens, *Mysterious Worlds: A Personal Investigation of the Weird, the Uncanny and the Unexplained* (London: W.H. Allen, 1970) pp.170-181

²¹ Information provided by the SOE Adviser

²² 'Recommendations on policy to be adopted towards Major Abas Kupi and the Movement of Legality', memorandum by Major E. Watrous, 14 August 1944, PRO HS 5/2

²³ R. Hibbert, *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* p.196

²⁴ Untitled document, c. early August 1944, PRO WO 204/9428

²⁵ Information provided by the SOE Adviser

²⁶ Interview, B. McSwiney to author, 28 January 2000

²⁷ J. Naar to author, 6 September 1999

²⁸ J. Naar to author, 1 September 2000

²⁹ Interview, J. Naar to author, 11 January 2000

³⁰ Information provided by the SOE Adviser

³¹ D. Salt to author, 18 April 2000

³² Minute by D. Laskey, 25 July 1944, to 'Albanian Background: June 1944', memorandum by Captain J. Eyre, sent under note, P. Broad to the Foreign Office in London, 18 July 1944, PRO FO 371/43551.

³³ See, for example, 'Kosovë', memorandum sent under covering note, Lieutenant J. Eyre to PWE London, 5 March 1944, and comments and corrections by Captain V. Robinson of PWE's Albanian Section sent under covering note, Miss E. Barker to Lieutenant J. Eyre, 25 March 1944, PRO WO 204/9428

³⁴ See, for example: comments by Captain J. Eyre on reports by Major Simcox, 1944, PRO HS 5/135, and Major Riddell and Captain Hibbert, 1944, PRO HS 5/142

³⁵ Lieutenant Colonel W. Harcourt to Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice, 20 October 1944, PRO HS 5/71

³⁶ P. Kemp, *No Colours or Crest* p.243. Kemp arrived in Surabaya for a briefing at General Robert Mansergh's divisional headquarters in February 1946, en route to handle the Japanese surrender in Bali. P. Kemp, *Alms for Oblivion* (London: Cassel, 1961) p.83

³⁷ Thakin Than Tun (1911-1968): minister in Dr Ba Maw's puppet government but active later in the war in the anti-Japanese resistance and *de facto* leader of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) after

1945. General Secretary of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League May-August 1946, he took the CPB underground in March 1948 and was elected the first party chairman in 1950.

³⁸ Possibly, Brigadier Aung Gyi: CPB representative at the British Conference in London in 1947 and the Second Congress of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Calcutta in 1948; number two in the 'Revolutionary Council' after General Ne Win seized power in 1962. Although ousted in 1963, Aung Gyi remained one of the Burmese dictator's staunchest supporters. Still alive in 1990s.

³⁹ Thakin Aung San (1915-1947): commander of the Japanese-sponsored Burma Independence Army (BIA) in December 1941, he joined Ba Maw's puppet government and was appointed Minister of Defense in 1943. Later he contacted the British and in 1945 officially turned against the Japanese. After negotiating Burma's independence with the British in January 1947 he was assassinated with six of his cabinet on 19 July 1947.

⁴⁰ Thakin Soe (1905-1989): secretary of the CPB who was active in the anti-Japanese resistance from 1943-45 and appointed leader of the Anti-Fascist Organisation (AFO) in 1944. After splitting with the main CPB and setting up the Communist Party (Red Flag) in August 1946, he went underground to conduct guerilla operations against the British.

⁴¹ Lieutenant General Sir Philip Christison: Commander, XV Corps, November 1943 to October 1945; Commander, Allied Forces Netherlands East Indies (AFNEI), October 1945 to February 1946

⁴² Major General Robert Mansergh: Commander, 5 Indian Division, February 1945 to April 1946; promoted lieutenant general and succeeded Lieutenant General Sir Montagu Stopford as Commander, AFNEI, in April 1946

⁴³ Stuart Gelder: *News Chronicle* journalist; author of *The Chinese Communists* (London: Left Book Club, 1946) and translator of *Mao Tse Tung: Selected Works* (Manchuria Publishing House, 1948)

⁴⁴ J. Eyre, *The God Trip* pp.24-25

⁴⁵ Information provided by the SOE Adviser

⁴⁶ S. Woodburn Kirby, *History of the Second World War: The War Against Japan, Vol V – The Surrender of Japan* (London: HMSO, 1969) p.36

⁴⁷ Information provided by the SOE Adviser

⁴⁸ R. Singh, *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-45: Post-war Occupation Forces – Japan and South-East Asia* (Orient Longmans, 1958) pp.232-3

⁴⁹ Cipher telegram, Mountbatten to Chiefs of Staff, London, 3 December 1945, PRO, WO 203/6178

⁵⁰ L. van der Post, *The Admiral's Baby* p.251

⁵¹ S. van der Wal, P. Drooglever and M. Schouten, *Officiële Bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen 1945-1950* (NIB 1) (Den Haag, 1970-1996), Volume 3 p.137, p.141. I am grateful to Alex Bouwhuys for help with translation.

⁵² J. Eyre, *The God Trip* p. 16

⁵³ It is possible, of course, that such an admission in print might have led to awkward inquiries. Given the self-confidence that is evident throughout his account, however, it is hard to imagine that Eyre would have feared such attention. It may also be wondered whether the authorities would ever have given serious consideration to confronting such an easily discreditable figure as Eyre had become. His book was written in 'a bare little room' in Glastonbury while he listened to 'a guitar, Bob Dylan's voice on *Blood on the Tracks*, the inevitable sound of a flushing toilet'. He had grown 'long silky hair to the shoulders and an enormous grey beard', and wore 'flared jeans, a little torn and faded, with a pentacle adorned in colour on one knee to hide a hole'. *Ibid* p.44, p.16

⁵⁴ J. Naar to author, 21 September 1999

⁵⁵ M.R.D. Foot, *SOE* p.204

⁵⁶ D. Stafford, Secret Agent pp.227-8

⁵⁷ *Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del* (NKVD): the Soviet Union's secret police

⁵⁸ O. Uren to author, 18 April 2002

⁵⁹ M.R.D. Foot, *SOE* p.203

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 10 November 1981; *The Listener*, letters, 11 February 1982

⁶¹ Only the verdict and the vaguest details were reported in the newspapers at the time. In 1981-2, acrimonious exchanges, about precisely what information Uren might have passed to Springhall, took place between Uren and the writer Nigel West in the letters pages of *The Times* and *The Listener*. This correspondence provided little in concrete detail. West, repeating unsupported claims made in his 1981 popular history of MI5, asserted that the information included 'several secret policy decisions concerning SOE and the Balkans and internal SOE matters'. (*The Times*, letters, 18 November 1981; N. West, *MI5: British Security Service Operations, 1909-1945* (London: The Bodley Head, 1981) pp.279-80.) Uren responded that, in fact, 'what Springhall... asked me for, and what I gave him, was an outline

of the work I was doing in SOE. This naturally involved describing the work of the department in which I was employed and the functions of SOE as a whole'. Uren did not deny that 'the very existence of SOE was highly secret at the time and in terms of the Official Secrets Act, the offence was a serious one'. Nor did he object to the weighty sentence he had received. Indeed, so openly has Uren discussed the case in recent years and so effectively has he distanced himself from 'the young man of 23 in 1943' that it is hard to believe that he has knowingly tried to conceal since then any aspect of his offence. (*The Listener*, letters, 7 January 1982; *The Times*, 10 November 1981.) 'What on earth could I have to lose at this remove if I were to admit that I had passed on much more information to "the Russians"?' he commented in 2002. 'If that were the case, I would be no more or less ashamed or reluctant to admit it than what I do admit'. (O. Uren to author, 18 April 2002.) Slips of memory may be the most likely explanation for the inconsistencies now apparent between Uren's recollections and the official record of his trial.

⁶² Court Martial Proceedings against Lieutenant (Temporary Captain) Ormond Leyton Uren, PRO, WO 71/1094

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ See, for example: D. Martin, Introductory Essay in *Patriot or Traitor: The Case of General Mihailovich* pp.117-9; D. Martin, *The Web of Disinformation* chap. 1 *passim*, pp.94-110; D. Martin, 'James Klugmann, SOE-Cairo and the Mihailovich Deception' pp.53-84; M. Lees, *The Rape of Serbia* chap. 1 *passim*, pp.206-7, 230-36; C. Pincher, *Too Secret Too Long* pp.397-401; R. Deacon, *The British Connection* pp.162-170.

⁶⁵ D. Martin, *The Web of Disinformation* p.9

⁶⁶ See, for example: D. Martin, 'James Klugmann, SOE-Cairo and the Mihailovich Deception' *passim*; M. Lees, *The Rape of Serbia* chap.1 *passim*; N. Beloff, *Tito's Flawed Legacy: Yugoslavia and the West, 1939-84* (London: Gollancz 1985) pp.87-95. See also J. Jakub, *Spies and Saboteurs: Anglo-American Collaboration and Rivalry in Human Intelligence Collection and Special Operations, 1940-45* (London: Macmillan 1999) chap. 5 *passim*.

⁶⁷ B. Davidson, *Special Operations Europe: Scenes from the Anti-Nazi War* (London: Gollancz 1980) pp.79-136 *passim*. Davidson's first-hand account of life inside SOE Cairo ends in the summer of 1943 with his departure on operations.

⁶⁸ 'Note on Evacuation of British Missions from Mihailovic Areas', memorandum, Captain J. Klugmann to Lieutenant Colonel Deakin, 21 December 1943, PRO HS 5/901.

⁶⁹ Cipher telegram, Brigadier C. Armstrong to SOE Cairo, 18 November 1943, PRO WO 202/140, quoted in D. Martin, *The Web of Disinformation* p.157.

⁷⁰ Sir David Petrie to Major General Sir Stewart Menzies, 29 August 1945, PRO KV 2/791

⁷¹ M. Carter, *Anthony Blunt* (London: Macmillan, 2001) pp.318-9; C. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin, *The Sword and The Shield* p.127

⁷² Untitled transcript of conversation between James Klugmann and Bob Stewart, 8 August 1945, PRO KV 2/791

⁷³ Sir David Petrie to Major General Sir Stewart Menzies, 29 August 1945, PRO KV 2/791.

⁷⁴ There are also intriguing similarities between the transcript and the account apparently rendered many years later by Kim Philby to Genrikh Borovik, a Moscow journalist, of Klugmann's links to Soviet intelligence and wartime work with SOE. See G. Borovik, *The Philby Files: The Secret Life of the Master Spy - KGB Archives Revealed* (London: Little, Brown and Co. 1994) p.300.

⁷⁵ C. Pincher, *Traitors: The Labyrinths of Treason* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson 1987) p.50, 85.

⁷⁶ See, for example: E. Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War* pp.157-67, 170-2 and D. Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance 1940-1945* pp.119-22, 126-7, 167-70.

⁷⁷ See, for example: J. Cripps, 'Mihailovic or Tito?' in R. Erskine and M. Smith (eds) *Action This Day* (London: Bantam 2001) pp.237-263; R. Bennett, *Behind the Battle: Intelligence in the War with Germany 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico 1999) pp.222-229 and *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy, 1941-1945* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1989) pp.334-47.

⁷⁸ G. Ashe to author, 17 May 1998. Inquiries have been made of several individuals and many organisations (including the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), the National Union of Journalists, the Findhorn Foundation, the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain) with which Eyre claims, in *The God Trip*, an association. None have any recent record of him.

Conclusion and Afterword

Not every element of the conspiracy theory challenged in this dissertation is a postwar fabrication. Contemporary diaries and reports confirm that, long before Philby, Burgess and Maclean were unmasked as Soviet spies, SOE officers evacuated from Albania in 1944 were concerned by the conduct, politics and influence of staff officers at SOE Headquarters in Bari. It is apparent that some staff officers, by their own accounts, were sympathetic to the idea that the Partisans might overturn the old order in Albania. Two officers, John Eyre and James Klugmann, were indeed communist. And it seems possible, to judge by recently released SOE and MI5 files, that some staff officers, both in Cairo and Bari, had sought to impress on their superiors the value of the Balkan Partisan movements in ways that were not always above-board.

Yet care must be taken not to exaggerate the significance of such conduct, or to assume that ideology motivated all officers who wished to secure British backing for the Yugoslav and Albanian Partisans. The policy decisions to support those movements were taken above the heads of junior staff officers in SOE Headquarters and on predominantly military grounds that reflected overwhelmingly the short-term interests of Allied strategists. They were also based on an accurate appreciation of the differing military capabilities of the various guerilla movements.

Over a period of forty years, however, officers who felt aggrieved by that policy and let down by their countrymen expressed their views in print and found them rarely challenged.¹ Part of the unfortunate legacy of the post-war prominence of those views can be detected in the work of leading historians of both SOE and European resistance, including M.R.D. Foot and Henri Michel. Had SOE's papers been publicly accessible at an earlier date, different conclusions may have been drawn. In 1948, William Mackenzie completed the Cabinet Office history of SOE that he had written with privileged access to SOE's own files; long classified, it was published finally in 2000. 'This was clearly a case in which a small but useful military diversion had been earned by limited investment in the guerilla movement' Mackenzie's chapter on SOE operations in Albania concludes. 'The evidence suggests that the Albanians fought well in the final stages of the German withdrawal'; while retreating north, elite German mountain troops were 'severely handled'. Mackenzie is also accurate when identifying those who were capable of doing, and did, the bulk of

the fighting. 'In 1944... action against the Germans was possible only through [the communist-led] FNC [Partisans], who recovered and expanded quickly after the setbacks of the winter'. The Balli Kombëtar party was 'hopelessly compromised' while the Zogist leader Abas Kupa was shown 'conclusively' to be 'too close to the verge of collaboration to be of any value'.² From comparing his account to SOE's surviving records, it is apparent that Mackenzie, when compiling his chapter on Albania, drew on the files of its Albanian Section and in particular the two-hundred-page History of the Allied Military Mission to Albania. Drawn up largely by the Section's staff officers, the History was checked, edited and signed off by Bill Harcourt, the well-informed Head of SOE Bari, shortly before the Section was closed down in February 1945.³

Erroneous claims that flawed policy and biased staff officers handed Albania to communism may have had consequences more serious than the mere inaccuracies found in the historical record. The abortive coup attempt of 1949-53 was very much based on such false premises, reflecting a poor assessment of the dynamics at work in wartime Albania that had facilitated the Partisan rise to power. This was the occasion when Britain and the United States embarked on a disastrous covert effort to undermine Enver Hoxha's new communist regime. The plan was to recruit and train Albanian exiles and then infiltrate them secretly to whip up a revolt that would bring the communists down. One recent analysis of the episode describes it as 'primarily an SOE, or, more accurately, an MI(R) operation, mirroring the unsuccessful 1941 venture, and featuring a number of Section D veterans'.⁴ Although failing to make the distinction between the MI(R), Section D and SOE phases of the earlier operation, the comparison is interesting, if not wholly apt. Both operations aimed to meet the strategic interests of countries other than Albania by removing or destabilising that country's ruling regime. And both did indeed involve a similar cast of characters. Julian Amery and Dayrell Oakley-Hill were brought on board for the later project, together with other former SOE officers, including Billy McLean, David Smiley, Alan Hare, John Hibberdine and Peter Kemp, who had worked in Albania in 1943-44. Abas Kupa and Gani Bey Kryeziu's brother Said were among the exiled leaders to whom MI6 and the CIA turned for support, as was Midhat Frasheri, wartime leader of the Balli Kombëtar. But the ambitious plans of 1940-41, laid in desperate times by under-resourced organisations effectively blind to wider strategic and diplomatic concerns,

never received the full go-ahead. By contrast, the later enterprise was sanctioned at the highest levels and, when finally abandoned in 1953, had proved a complete and costly failure. A majority, perhaps, of those infiltrated were killed or caught and executed; in waves of reprisals and show trials, the regime added to the toll by imprisoning or killing hundreds of locals. Agents that survived and made their way out told of ambushes, informers and fierce security, of locals everywhere being too afraid to offer help or even shelter. Hoxha survived with relative ease. He died of natural causes in 1985, still at the head of his country.

From *The Great Betrayal*, Nicholas Bethell's 1984 account of the 1949-53 operation, and certain contemporary records it is evident that Julian Amery lobbied hard in the late 1940s for the decision to move against communist Albania.⁵ In a letter to *The Times* in December 1948, for example, Amery asserted that the Albanian people 'are seething with discontent against their Communist masters, and it would not be difficult to raise a formidable rebellion among them'.⁶ The following month, in an article in the London journal *Time and Tide*, he claimed that 'in the face of a popular revolt the [present] regime [in Albania] would be hard put to defend itself'. And a key obstacle Bethell seeks to overcome is in finding a means of reconciling the disasters that overtook the enterprise to the confidence and apparently expert knowledge of men like Amery. For Bethell, who, when preparing his book, drew heavily on personal contributions from Amery, McLean and Smiley, these three 'were the... key figures of British involvement in [wartime] Albania'. Adding Alan Hare to their number, Bethell is convinced of their enthusiasm for the task at hand in 1949. 'The four musketeers were back in action' he writes. 'They had fought the Germans together, after which they had all been unceremoniously bundled out of Albania on the orders of men whose judgement and loyalty they nursed deep doubts, leaving a people they had come to admire in the hands of vicious dictators... They were delighted to be given the chance to resume the fray'. The main explanation Bethell puts forward for the failure of the enterprise is the alleged treachery of Kim Philby, whom he accuses of passing word of the plans to Moscow. Philby, he writes, 'gave the communists a crucial advantage' by alerting them to what was afoot.⁷

No evidence has yet arisen to confirm the nature or extent of Philby's betrayal of the plans. But while most records of the 1949-53 enterprise remain classified, SOE's records are now open to public inspection. And the latter certainly suggest that,

if it was to succeed, an operation to harness the support of local nationalist communities had to be a major undertaking, with substantial and overt Western backing and the promise of rapid and easily attainable rewards for any locals prepared to take part.

Plenty of reports in SOE's files, many made by officers with months of experience of working with nationalists in central and northern Albania, argue convincingly that the very bases of nationalist society precluded the likelihood of any large-scale or united rising. These reports all testify to the lack of patriotic feeling, the insular and parochial interests and the vulnerability to reprisals of wartime nationalist communities, presenting them as factors that bred disunity and an over-riding desire to seek salvation from danger. To understand this, stressed George Seymour, for example, in the summer of 1944, it was necessary to understand the 'natural independence of mountain chieftans' and the 'great rivalry and mistrust' that could exist between them. And to understand that, he went on, 'it must be appreciated that the northern and central districts of Albania are entirely feudal':

Villages and clans follow their own chief blindly. His political views are their political views and his enemies their enemies. They will however only follow the chieftan whilst he remains strong enough to retain his position. If he is usurped they will follow the new leader just as blindly. Blood feuds also are rife which prevents this part of the country being welded into a coherent whole.

Seymour illustrated his analysis by pointing out that, when the Partisans invaded the mountainous nationalist heartlands of Mati and Mirditë that summer, many locals, appreciating that 'the chieftans were not strong enough to protect them... joined the Partisans'.⁸

Other SOE officers, when explaining why nationalists were unwilling to come out to fight the Germans, drew similar conclusions. 'Everyone in North Albania, chiefs as well as peasants, identifies the interests of Albania with his own personal interests' reported Richard Riddell and Reginald Hibbert in late 1944. Both officers had spent nearly a year working with both nationalists and Partisans in north and central Albania.

The peasants will follow a chief who is successful, or who has powerful support which promises a success... At no time would they have followed any chief who made open war on Italians and Germans, and so brought upon his area the destruction and burning which has fallen on South Albania. Only Gani Kryeziu has made open war on the Germans, and he is enabled to do so only by the peculiar conditions of the Kosovo frontier area. If a chief wished to oppose the invader, he needed the support of a far larger organisation than his own immediate following. Without such support he would have been utterly destroyed...

'Throughout the whole "Nationalist" Movement there has been no organisation of any sort' the two officers added. 'Trying to work with them is always infuriating, as though they promise good intentions and results, they will immediately afterwards produce evidence and arguments for the impossibility of carrying on with the job... [A]ll "Nationalists"... think only of their own interests. "Nationalist" is a complete misnomer, as they have no feeling for their country at all'.⁹

The belief, in 1949, that a handful of young exiles, infiltrated to contact nationalist communities no less isolated or vulnerable than in 1939-44 and whose principal leaders had fled or were dead or in prison, could successfully encourage significant resistance, may have been a critical misjudgment. According to Bethell, Britons involved in planning to overthrow Hoxha claim, in their defence, that 'they could not [have] anticipate[d] that police control over the local people would be so tight and effective under communism, far more so than under Nazi occupation'.¹⁰ During the war, however, even Amery had identified precisely how optimistic was the expectation that traditional Albanian society was willing and able to put up resistance. In May and June 1944, for example, he and Billy McLean had taken pains to point out that the nationalists were only suited to a last minute rising as the Germans withdrew, which would accord them a good chance of avoiding reprisals.

Reports filed by Alan Hare, Bethell's fourth 'musketeer', confirm that he, too, was distinctly unimpressed by the nationalists' capacity for fighting either the Germans or the Partisans, and convinced that the latter were firmly in the ascendant politically. By the time of his evacuation from Albania that summer, Hare had spent many months working with both Partisans and Zogists. In a long debriefing report written in Bari that autumn, he expressed his view that, once the Partisans had survived the winter, 'Kupi and his movement were doomed to defeat and extinction

whatever action he had taken'. The 'very nature' of Kupa's organisation, Hare considered, 'made it incapable of fighting the Germans over a long period due to its inability to stand up to reverses and reprisals, except possibly with enormous monetary and political support from us'. Hare also believed that Britain now ought to face the reality of what was happening in Albania: 'it is obvious that in the present Balkan political situation, the chances of exerting political influence over Albania by peaceful methods in the next twenty years are slender' he concluded. '[B]ut one thing is certain... [I]f we persist in identifying ourselves with a system in Albania which is no longer even an issue... any chances of British influence are non-existent for forty years'.¹¹

Probably, by 1949, Hoxha's regime was indeed hated by large sections of the population. But he and his regime were feared, too, and their grip on the country was unlikely to have been loosened very much by the same conditions that had forced nationalist society into inactivity and collaboration just a few short years before.

A case might be made for arguing that, during the war, some British observers of events in Albania had little sympathy for, and understanding of, the factors that compelled non- and anticommunist groups to refrain from fighting the Germans. Certainly Margaret Hasluck believed that to be the case during the winter of 1943-44; Amery and McLean felt the same during the summer and autumn of 1944 and, seemingly, for a long time afterwards. And contemporary records do suggest that a number of SOE officers, both at Headquarters and in the field, had little time for the plight in which many nationalists found themselves. In June 1944, for example, Eliot Watrous, echoing sentiments expressed recently by Norman Wheeler, stressed in a letter to SOE London that nationalists like Abas Kupa were aiding the enemy merely by their neutrality. 'This war', he wrote, 'appears to have reached the stage when a neutral attitude, of assistance to the enemy, can no longer be tolerated; *vide* Turkey, Spain, Sweden. It is this attitude of Kupa's which the Partisans so strongly condemn, alleging that by it he is prolonging the war'.¹² Of course, as Watrous implied, an alternative route was open to Kupa: fighting the Germans in the way SOE demanded. This was the route taken by Gani Bey Kryeziu, the Kosovar leader, in the summer of 1944. But it is difficult to dispute McLean and Amery's analysis that nationalist society was not suited to large-scale, sustained action against the Germans, and that the nationalists perceived the Partisans to pose the most serious and immediate threat

to the survival of that society. And given the dominance of the Albanian and Yugoslav Partisans by the end of 1944, it is hard to believe that, had Kupa and other nationalists joined Gani and fought, the outcome of events in Albania and Kosovo and the fate of those nationalists would have been very different.

In the event, by deciding to ensure their survival by keeping in with the various collaborating factions, nationalists like Kupa excluded themselves from any serious claim to British support. As David Talbot-Rice of SOE London remarked to Eddie Boxshall in August 1944, 'if Kupa was really anti-German, he should have been able to find a way out. And if not really anti-German, why should we back him, except for reasons of internal politics?' Boxshall replied: 'Is it not an example of the eternal discrepancy between long and short-term policies? Judged by the standards of the latter I entirely agree with you'.¹³ With a clearer picture today of the grounds on which British policy in wartime Albania developed, however, it may be suggested that, even had more sympathy been felt for the nationalists' plight, a longer-term policy would not have emerged. A short-term desire to inconvenience Britain's enemies had seen MI(R) and Section D instructed to involve themselves in Albania in 1940. It had then seen SOE officers return to the country in 1943. And it continued to guide SOE's efforts in Albania until the end of the war despite the fact that, by 1944, Britain had found itself backing a new and revolutionary movement, several of whose leaders had their eyes fixed firmly on securing post-occupation power. Policy-makers were not blind to the possibility that the success of that movement might see a communist regime take power in Albania once the war was won. But any political commitment to Albania or its people, argued the Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff, especially after Kosovo's incorporation into Albania in 1941, risked upsetting Britain's wider strategy and diplomatic interests. Those policy-makers therefore proved reluctant to recognise any kind of Albanian government-in-exile, pronounce on Albania's borders or otherwise intervene in any other matter that might embroil Britain in Albanian politics and undermine more important relations with Greece and Yugoslavia. Beyond mild indications of interest in limiting civil conflict and the growth of communism, no evidence is available to suggest that the Foreign Office or the Chiefs would have adopted a policy in Albania that discriminated against the Partisans' politics. A better understanding of the strength of the nationalist desire to

stay neutral might, if anything, have seen those authorities agree to all-out support for the Partisans at an earlier date.

Until the spring of 1944, the situation in Albania was too confused to justify all-out support for the Partisans. But, by June, senior SOE officers in Bari (Bill Harcourt), in the field (Philip Leake, Alan Palmer, Norman Wheeler; even Billy McLean) and in London (Colin Gubbins, David Keswick, David Talbot-Rice) were all agreed that the Partisans were now the only Albanians capable of inflicting substantial damage on the Germans. The Chiefs of Staff in London and General Wilson and Air-Vice Marshall Elliot in Italy shared that view and never ceased to support SOE's continued contact and efforts with Hoxha's movement. These key decision-makers were also aware that the longer SOE maintained a mission with Kupa, the more irritated became the Partisans and the tenuous Britain's working relationship with them. But, as the picture began to clear, matters remained complicated by a vain belief entertained by a few British diplomats in London that Kupa might finally fight the Germans and thereby reach some form of *modus vivendi* with the Partisans. A reconciliation, the Foreign Office hoped, would maximise resistance and save Albania from a total descent into civil war; possibly, it might also save the country from communism. Only in September did the Foreign Office in London accept that Kupa was not going to fight and that it was time to permit SOE to withdraw McLean's mission.

Frustration with London may well explain why Eliot Watrous seems to have attempted to influence, by questionable means, the picture available to observers there during the summer of 1944. SOE officers both in Bari and in the field knew that McLean's mission considered itself to be well connected in London. They also knew that McLean and other officers urged greater sympathy and support, on political grounds, for the nationalists. But very few appear to have shared McLean's confidence in his ability to bring the Partisans and Kupa back together. Even McLean, after spending a few days with Kupa that spring, realised that his mission's chances of effecting a reconciliation were slim. McLean suggested subsequently that, by arming nationalists like Kupa, Britain might be able to counter-balance the Partisans and thereby diminish the communist threat. But, again, few observers appear to have believed by then that SOE would achieve very much by sharing the nationalists' pre-occupation with the Partisans' politics. Such a policy, as Leake, Harcourt, Palmer and

others argued at the time, would have diminished the Albanian war effort and undermined the fragile working relationship SOE had worked hard to build with Hoxha. These officers' concerns, and a conviction that support for such political intervention should not be forthcoming from London, were shared by many, from the Chiefs of Staff down. It is less certain, of course, whether anyone would have shared Watrous' apparent readiness to prevent that intervention by suppressing, albeit temporarily, impassioned reports from Albania that spoke well of Kupa.

¹ Before the publication of Sir Reginald Hibbert's *Albania's National Liberation Struggle* in 1991, only one published account argued the case for supporting the Partisans: Bill Tilman's *When Men and Mountains Meet* (Cambridge: CUP, 1946), of which a single chapter is devoted to Albania.

² W. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE* pp.491-2

³ 'History of the Allied Military Mission to Albania' PRO HS 7/70. Comparison with a draft copy of the History, found among Brigadier E.F. Davies' papers, suggests that Harcourt kept a close eye on the compilation of this document.

⁴ S. Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000) p. 363

⁵ N. Bethell, *The Great Betrayal* pp.33-48

⁶ J. Amery to *The Times*, 18 December 1948, McLean papers, IWM

⁷ N. Bethell, *The Great Betrayal* pp.34-5, 15, 48, 199

⁸ Report by Major G.V. Seymour, PRO HS 5/123

⁹ Report by Major R. Riddell and Captain R. Hibbert, PRO HS 5/142

¹⁰ N. Bethell, *The Great Betrayal* p.195

¹¹ Report by Major A. Hare, PRO HS 5/139. It is also to be noted that Hare, unlike Amery and McLean, had resisted the evacuation of Abas Kupa from Albania in October 1944. While Amery and McLean had, at the time, argued that, by not evacuating Kupa, British prestige and influence would suffer, Hare had argued exactly the opposite. 'If Kupa is evacuated' he wrote in his report, 'the [Partisan] propaganda that Great Britain still supports only the old order in Albania, represented by him and King Zog, will be effectively continued... until these two men are dead or till the last vestige of British political influence is eradicated from Albania by the FNC'. He also proposed that other gains might be made should Britain choose not to evacuate Kupa and even denounce him as a collaborator. '[T]he communist elements would no longer be able to couple the old order with Great Britain in their propaganda, and the non-communistic elements would feel free to collaborate with us without fear of losing their own gains in the revolution'.

¹² Major E. Watrous to Major E. Boxshall, 19 June 1944, PRO HS 5/69

¹³ Pencil notes, Lieutenant Colonel D. Talbot-Rice and Major E. Boxshall, on Major D. Oakley-Hill to Major E. Boxshall, 4 August 1944, PRO HS 5/71

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